# INVESTIGATING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES OF A PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY BRAND IN A B2B CONTEXT: A CASE STUDY OF THE EV CHARGING INDUSTRY

**Jyväskylä University**
**School of Business and Economics**

**Master's Thesis**

**2023**

Author: Sannimaija Jauhiainen
International Business & Entrepreneurship
Supervisor: Juha Kansikas

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

# ABSTRACT

| | |
|---|---|
| Author<br>Sannimaija Jauhiainen | |
| Title<br>Investigating customer experiences of a public limited company brand in a B2B context:  a case study of the EV charging industry | |
| Subject<br>International Business & Entrepreneurship | Type of work<br>Master's thesis |
| Date<br>27.5.2023 | Number of pages<br>94 |
| Abstract<br>A strong corporate identity provides the elements to create a unique corporate brand and differentiate in a constantly changing competitive business environment. Corporate identity also plays a crucial role in shaping and influencing brand strategy. Brand strategy in a business-to-business (B2B) context requires a deep understanding of industry dynamics and active collaboration with the entire network to deliver value to all actors in the network and drive business success.<br><br>The following study dives deep into public limited company's brand strategy and explores the elements that can strengthen corporate brand, market position and customer as well as stakeholder relationships in B2B context. The case company is a public limited company operating in the international electric vehicle charging industry. The research focuses on the position of the case company's corporate brand in the Italian market and how experiences of its B2B customer and partner companies' Managers and Owners fit into case company's brand strategy. Data were collected both through a review of existing academic literature and through a qualitative case study in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with five important international customer and partner companies operating in the Italian market.<br><br>The results of the study highlight the position of the corporate brand in the Italian market and the fact that active collaboration with network actors and the integration of new developments and future business strategies can strengthen the market position in Italy and drive the market towards case company's corporate vision.<br><br>The study provides the case company with the keys to success in the dynamic and competitive international electric vehicle charging environment in Italy, strengthening the company's customer and stakeholder relationships and corporate brand in an international B2B context. | |
| Key words<br>B2B, corporate identity, brand strategy, corporate brand, co-creation, collaboration, customer experience, high technology | |
| Place of storage<br>Jyväskylä University Library | |

# TIIVISTELMÄ

| Tekijä | |
|---|---|
| Sannimaija Jauhiainen | |
| Työn nimi | |
| Julkisen osakeyhtiön brändiä koskevien asiakaskokemusten tutkiminen B2B-kontekstissa: tapaustutkimus sähköautojen latausalasta | |
| Oppiaine | Työn laji |
| International Business & Entrepreneurship | Pro-gradu tutkielma |
| Päivämäärä | Sivumäärä |
| 27.5.2023 | 94 |

Tiivistelmä

Vahva yritysidentiteetti tarjoaa elementit, joiden avulla voidaan luoda ainutlaatuinen yritysbrändi sekä erottua jatkuvasti muuttuvassa kilpaillussa liiketoimintaympäristössä. Yritysidentiteetti on myös ratkaisevassa roolissa brändistrategian muotoilussa ja siihen vaikuttamisessa. Brändistrategia B2B-kontekstissa edellyttää toimialan dynamiikan syvällistä ymmärtämistä ja aktiivista yhteistyötä koko verkoston kanssa, jotta voidaan tuottaa arvoa kaikille verkoston toimijoille sekä edistää liiketoiminnan menestystä.

Seuraavassa tutkimuksessa sukelletaan julkisen osakeyhtiön brändistrategiaan ja tarkastellaan tekijöitä, jotka voivat vahvistaa osakeyhtiön yritysbrändiä, markkina-asemaa ja asiakas- sekä sidosryhmäsuhteita B2B-kontekstissa. Kyseessä on julkinen osakeyhtiö, joka toimii kansainvälisellä sähköautojen latausalalla. Tutkimuksessa keskitytään osakeyhtiön yritysbrändin asemaan Italian markkinalla ja siihen, miten B2B asiakas ja kumppaniyritysten johtajien sekä omistajien kokemukset sopivat kyseessä olevan julkisen osakeyhtiön brändistrategiaan. Tietoja kerättiin sekä olemassa olevan akateemisen kirjallisuuden tarkastelulla että laadullisella tapaustutkimuksella, jossa tehtiin puolistrukturoidut haastattelut viiden Italian markkinalla sekä kansainvälisesti toimivien tärkeiden asiakas ja kumppaniyrityksen kanssa.

Tutkimuksen tulokset korostavat yritysbrändin asemaa Italian markkinalla ja sitä, että aktiivinen yhteistyö verkosto toimijoiden kanssa sekä kehitysehdotuksien ja tulevien liiketoimintastrategioiden integrointi voivat vahvistaa markkina-asemaa Italiassa ja ohjata markkinoita kohti osakeyhtiön yritysvisiota.

Tutkimus tarjoaa kyseessä olevalle julkiselle osakeyhtiölle avaimet menestykseen Italian dynaamisella ja kilpaillulla markkinalla kansainvälisellä sähköautojen latausalalla ja vahvistaa osakeyhtiön asiakas- ja sidosryhmäsuhteita sekä yritysbrändiä kansainvälisessä B2B-kontekstissa.

| Asiasanat | |
|---|---|
| B2B, yritysidentiteetti, brändistrategia, yritysbrändi, yhteiskehittäminen, yhteistyö, asiakaskokemus, korkea teknologia | |
| Säilytyspaikka | |
| Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjasto | |

# CONTENTS

# LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

# 1   INTRODUCTION

A strong corporate identity can contribute to building a successful brand strategy. In today's constantly changing and competitive business environment, corporate identity and brand strategy play a key role in driving a company's success and market position, which is why this study focuses on both phenomena. The electric vehicle (EV) charging industry is growing rapidly (Goncearuc et al., 2022), driven by the global transition towards sustainable transport solutions (Ogryzek et al., 2020). As the demand for electric vehicles increases further, the challenge for electric vehicle charging companies is to differentiate themselves from their competitors and create a strong corporate brand. This single case study explores in depth the brand strategy of a case company in the B2B context of EV charging, focusing on a major international player in the industry. More specifically, this single case study focuses on the complex interplay between corporate brand, brand strategy, and the unique dynamics of the EV charging industry through customer experiences. The study explores the position of the case company's corporate brand in the Italian market and how experiences of its B2B customer and partner companies' Managers and Owners fit into case company's brand strategy. The aim is to identify the key factors that influence the success and market position of the case company's corporate brand and explore how these perceptions can be used to deepen customer and stakeholder relationships. The results of this research can enable industry operators to valuable insights to develop effective brand strategies, improve customer experiences and build a strong corporate brand, which will ultimately provide a competitive advantage in rapidly evolving markets.

## 1.1  Background of the research

This research is driven by Organization X's need to develop its international market and strengthen its international market position as well as business-to-business (B2B) relationships. The research is conducted anonymously, and the case company is described in this research report as Organization X. Organization X is operating in international market of electric vehicle (EV) charging industry in B2B world. The aim of the research is to find out how organization X brand is perceived by client companies operating in the Italian market and how it fits into the company's brand strategy in the international market of EV charging industry. This study focuses on the Italian market for organization X to find out how organization X brand is perceived by client and partner companies in a country where the organization X does not have a strong market position yet. Moreover, the Italian government is actively supporting the electrification of transport and Italian cities are investing heavily in EV charging solutions. Italy is seen as an important and valuable international market for the future of the organization X's international business. The research will also provide the Organization X with valuable insights into how brand experiences differ from those of countries with strong market position.

More specifically, the aim of this research is to find out what client companies consider to be the strengths of the Organization X brand, what works, what should be develop or changed and what improvements are desired for the future. The organization X's management believes that identifying the above factors and gathering customer experiences is currently to most essential for developing the organization X's international business in brand context, as the organization X has grown rapidly to become a strong player in the international market of EV charging industry. Organization X has also recently developed its brand strategy and wants to incorporate the brand experiences gathered from the field into the revised strategy. In addition, Organization X desires to enable customer companies to continue to success in the future. The study provides an interesting opportunity to dive deep into the experiences of client and partner companies Managers and Owners, compare their opinions and gain a holistic view of international business development in B2B environments in a brand perspective.

In the B2B context, brand strategies are based on a broad knowledge of the dynamics of the actors in the industry ecosystem, which creates opportunities for B2B companies to guide their actions in the right direction and to develop the interaction between the companies and their stakeholders (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011). Properly managed, corporate brands in a B2B context can respond in a balanced way to the needs of different actors while embracing and supporting

long-term strategic co-creation initiatives with business partners to build shared value across the diverse network of corporate brand and partnerships (Iglesias et al., 2023).

## 1.2   Research question

A positive customer experience, based on direct customer interaction with a company and corporate brand, has a beneficial impact on brand equity, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty in a B2B context (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010). While innovative technologies play an essential role, companies need to invest close relationships, especially to strengthen their position in international markets (Odlin & Benson-Rea, 2017). In addition, today's competitive business environment requires a vision of valuable and passionate brands, surrounded by a collaborative culture and a well-managed brand strategy (Kapferer 2008).

This research aims to find answers to the research question which is "How do customers experience PLC's brand in the international market of EV charging industry and how does it fit into the company's brand strategy?". This research question seeks to gain valuable insight into customer experiences of corporate brand and how those experiences fit into the brand strategy of a public limited company. In addition, the research question provides an opportunity to gather rich insights on organization X's position in the Italian market, customer satisfaction and brand awareness in the international B2B market and what should be developed in the future from a customer perspective. The above is expected to contribute valuable knowledge for the case company to strengthen its position in the Italian market and its customer and stakeholder relationships in the future.

## 1.3   The case company: Organization X

The case company targeted by the research is a public limited company (PLC) operating in the electric vehicle (EV) charging industry in international market. This PLC is market driven organization and operates in B2B environment. In general, Organization X's activities contribute to helping customers and society towards an emission-free future as well as long term actions support making the world cleaner and more sustainable. Organization X is part of a large network in the international market of EV charging industry which includes a wide range of different operators. According to (Röckle & Schulz, 2021) the main players in the

EV charging ecosystem are charging point operators, e-mobility service providers and location partners providing charging services to EV drivers. Cooperation and interaction between companies in the network is considered to have an impact on the quality of services. In other words, customer satisfaction is positively affected when the service provider considers the experience of the target user. Glynn (2012) adds that business-to-business brands have strong presence, especially in high technology sectors. Mariadoss et al. (2011) shows that sustainable strategies based on innovations in new technologies that can minimize a company's environmental impact or improve energy efficiency can be a significant source of cost benefits and contribute to a company's competitiveness.

## 1.4 The evolution of Organization X brand strategy

The Organization X's brand was created in the early stages of the company for international market from an industry perspective, with focus on quality. The history of Organization X was an important factor at the beginning of the original corporate brand and its creation. About a year ago, the Organization X's brand strategy was revised to differentiate the company from its competitors in the international market. In addition, due to strong market growth, Organization X wanted to change the focus of the brand from industry perspective to a broader corporate vision. In particular, the company's vision, mission and values were used to sharpen the new brand strategy of Organization X for the international market, while creating a framework for the company brand to emerge as a strong global player. In addition, to clarifying the focus, new brand attributes were created to add value to the brand strategy.

Corporate brand, combined with company's values, vision and market position, has a potential impact on the success of B2B companies brand and identity in the market (Ozdemir, Gupta, et al., 2020). Successful brand strategies in a B2B context require brand-oriented organizations and collaborative relationships and interactions between different actors in the network to deepen the complex relationships between market players and respond to the individual needs of companies (Cassia & Magno, 2019).

# 2 CORPORATE BRAND IDENTITY

A corporate brand identity is the result of continuous dynamic and social interaction with its stakeholders (von Wallpach, Voyer, et al., 2017). Identity can be seen as the most important part of the corporate brand and it contains the elements what makes corporate brand unique and different from its competitors in the marketplace (Iglesias et al., 2020; Balmer & Podnar, 2021). Identity means an expression of values that emerges because of social interaction and it can be interpreted in different ways, which by their nature can change over time (Gioia et al., 2000). In turn, values are the norms that guide a company's actions (Scott & Lane, 2000). However, the definition of corporate brand identity has been changed over time. According to Iglesias et al. (2020), a more traditional view of corporate brand identity has been the perception by company managers of what company stand for and the definition of organizational behaviour in terms of its characteristics and values. Iglesias et al. (2020), Ozdemir et al. (2020), Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones (2017) and Von Wallpach et al. (2017) agrees that a more advances definition of corporate brand identity is a multifaceted co-creation process involving multiple external in internal stakeholders. Looking at the definition of corporate brand identity from an even more goal-oriented perspective by da Silveira et al. (2013), the managers' perception of what they want the brand to be plays a crucial role. It also highlights the need for permanence in a more dynamic environment over time and the role of stakeholders in building and developing the brand.
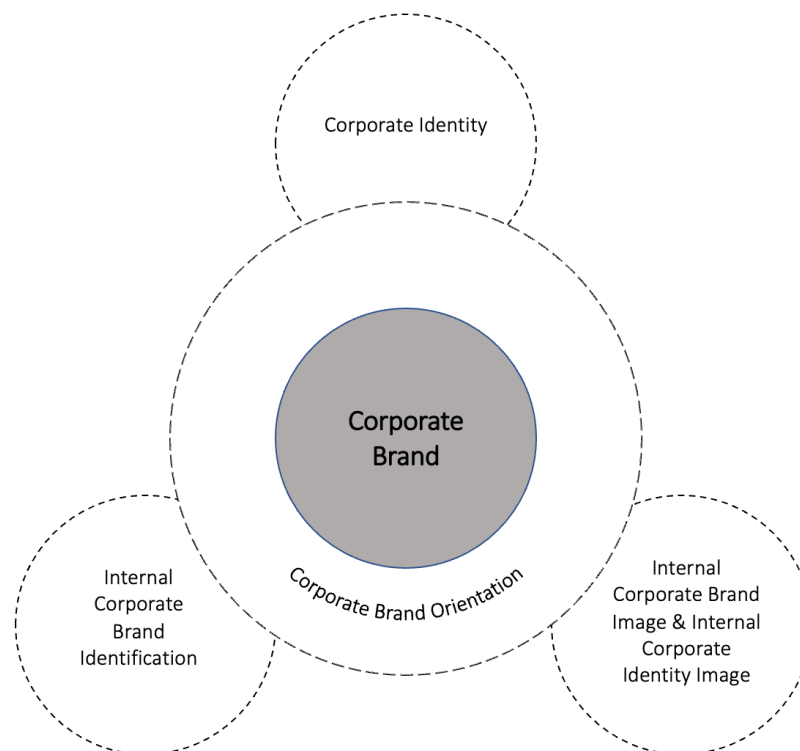
Figure 1 Corporate brand orientation (Balmer & Podnar, 2021, p. 732)

The figure above summarizes the corporate brand orientation. Balmer & Podnar (2021) shows that the corporate brand identity is an entity that embodies the company's brand and serves as a platform for communicating the brand promise and company's vision to other stakeholders. The corporate brand identity and the company brand must support and align with each other for the company to operate in a brand-oriented way. A company's brand identity can in practice be seen as the foundation of the organisation's brand and as an indication of the totality of the organisation's characteristics. Yin Wong & Merrilees ( 2005) and Balmer & Podnar (2021) that brand orientation has an impact on company's competitive advantage and market survival. According to Barney (1991) company can achieve a competitive advantage in business if the company can implement a value-creating strategy that it competitors cannot replicate at the same time.

Brand orientation refers to the approach in which various processes related to a corporate brand identity interact with company's key customers to achieve goals (Urde, 1999). The corporate brand orientation that it refers to the

importance of identifying the corporate identity, the image of corporate identity and the internal corporate brands as well as the acceptance of entity they create. Corporate identity plays an important role in communicating, differentiating, and competing in the marketplace. In addition, it lays to foundations for a company's reputation and the way it is built and plays valuable role in building stakeholder relationships (Balmer & Podnar, 2021). Hillman & Keim (2001) adds that primary stakeholders of a company can include capital providers such as shareholders, employees, other resources providers, customers and partners operating in the same environment. The above are actors whose existence has a significant impact on the firm's survival in the market. Yin Wong & Merrilees (2005) summarizes: brand orientation and corporate branding can be seen as the driving forces behind the core corporate brand. This force should guide decision-making and influence the chosen direction of the business. Whit the aim of keeping the brand in the minds of customers and convening the right image, the brand should be a common goal for the entire company. Another critical factor is overall mindset among company, which in turn requires all employees to understand what brand building is and means.
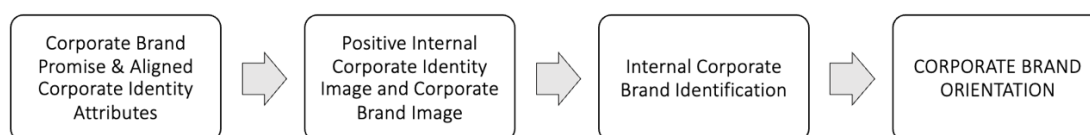


Figure 2 Relationships between corporate identity, internal corporate image/internal corporate brand image, internal corporate brand identification and corporate brand orientation (Balmer & Podnar, 2021, p. 734)

The Figure 2 presents a broader perspective about relationships that includes corporate identity, internal brand image, internal corporate identity, and internal brand awareness. All the above factors serve as practical prerequisites for corporate brand orientation. Researchers have also found that these dimensions are not yet sufficiently highlighted in the branding literature. However, it is shown that these factors are interrelated and together indicate the future direction of a corporate brand of the company (Balmer & Podnar, 2021).

## 2.1 Creating corporate brand identity

The corporate brand identity includes the characteristics of the organization. It combines the strategic guidelines of the company's management and the perception of the company's brand by external and internal stakeholders. An important task for company management is to model the company's brand identity as a whole that can be communicated and internalised to stakeholders (Urde, 2013). When the organization's management holistically understand the needs and desires of its customers and stakeholders, it creates meaning for the corporate brand and at the same time deepens the loyalty of these stakeholders to the organization (Balmer & Podnar, 2021). The process of creating a corporate brand is driven by the identity of the company, and it is through the perception of this identity that different people and networks are given the keys to creating strong corporate brand. It can be seen as the result of a complex social process. Molinillo et al. (2019) adds that the overall objective is to build consumer trust in the company's brand and to create an emotional connection between the brand and the customer, thereby increasing brand equity. Aaker (1991) clarifies that brand equity is sum of a brands assets and liabilities that determinates its value to consumers.
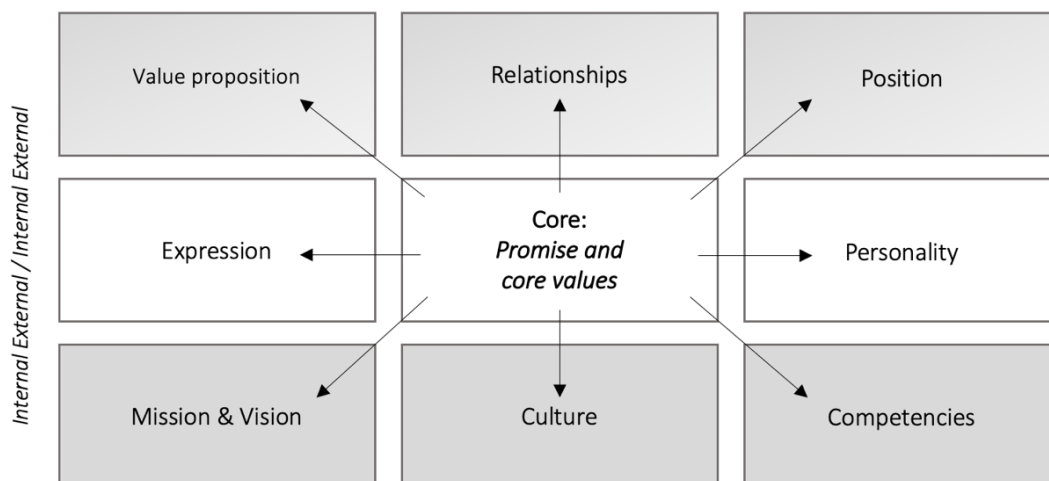


Figure 3 The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) (Urde, 2013, p. 750)

The figure above shows the factors that together express a corporate brand identity and provide the organization's management with a model for brand identity management. The bottom layer of the figure consists of the characteristics of the organization, namely its mission and vision, culture, and competencies. These also act as an internal mediator of the company's brand

14

identity. A company's mission plays a key role in corporate brand identity, as it expresses the meaning of the company's existence. On the other hand, a company's vision gives an even broader picture of the company's mission as it reflects the company's mindset about where it is going and what motivates it to act. In turn, the third part of the bottom layer, culture, describes the attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and values of the organization (Urde, 2013).

The factors in the middle layer are internal and external. These include personality, expression, and the core of the figure, which includes the company's brand promise and core values. A company's personality describes what kind of company it is, and its expression allows the brand to communicate both verbally and visually. A company's values are what the company's brand strands for what guides its actions. These values are also at the heart of the brand promise, which briefly describes the overall proposition offered to customers (Urde, 2013). More specifically, in practice, a company's brand promise can be redeemed as a result of a company's brand identity activity, and an essential part of making this promise a reality is the company's employees (Balmer & Podnar, 2021). Furthermore, the arrows pointing outwards from the centre of the figure show that these factors interact and are all part of a common process (Urde, 2013). The above-mentioned elements of a company provide a strong basis for creating the corporate brand identity in terms of internal factors if they are structured in a meaningful way in the organization and if there is an understanding of them among employees and stakeholders.

The corporate brand is an important connecting factor between organization, customers, and stakeholders. The top of the figure, the external part, is used to communicate the corporate brand identity to customers and stakeholders. A company's value proposition, relationships and positioning also encapsulate its orientation and characteristics in a specific market. The value proposition is addressed to the company's customers and stakeholders and illustrates the added value of the company's activities for the customers that is expected to lead to the customer's purchase decision. In turn, relationships in this context refer to the links between different actors, customers, or stakeholders that develop over time and can form wider networks. The third part of the layer demonstrates market position as well as the perceptions of it of the company's main customers and stakeholders. The top layer of the figure communicates the company's brand image and reputation to customers and stakeholders, which is why it is important that all elements of the figure are aligned (Urde, 2013). Business managers should have knowledge of how customers perceive the company's image in order to understand whether what the company is trying to achieve and what it stands for is being put into practice (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). The figure above summarises the key elements of a corporate brand identity and provides a tool for organizational leaders to manage corporate brand. However,

successful implementation of all elements of the figure in business requires a similar mindset from all employees and stakeholders. In conclusion, a corporate brand identity refers to the visual and verbal representation of the company's brand and the visual and communicative expression of the company's brand personality, values, and positioning, and serves as a visual cue to help customers and stakeholders identify and recognise the company.

## 2.2  Corporate brand evolution

Today's business is characterised by constant change, technological advances, and intense competition. As business is constantly evolving, so are corporate brands. Hatch & Schultz (2001) and Rindell & Strandvik (2010) agrees that corporate brand evolution refers to the development of a company's brand image and its attributes over time in a changing market.  Hatch & Schultz (2001) specifies that it is therefore important for a company to constantly gain knowledge how customers perceive the corporate brand over time and how changes in the corporate brand affect their experiences. Customers' perceptions of a company's brand may be based on different experiences, various social interactions with company representatives or experiences with the company's marketing.  In addition, Rindell & Strandvik (2010) believes that, in the context of corporate branding, evolution can also be seen as an enabler for building consumer or customer brand images, which in turn can be used by the company in its strategic actions. In the evolution of a corporate brand, one concept is also inheritance of a brand image, for example in the case of an individual corporate customer. The concept of image heritage includes the brand experiences of an individual that have been accumulated through various interactions with a particular corporate brand. Past experiences have been found to have a clear impact on the brand image formed by an individual.

Ballantyne et al. (2006) summarises that increased competition in the market has led to a significant change in the evolution of brands in general. Brands have evolved from inanimate to living entities that contain personality and provide an aesthetic, experiential and meaningful corporate brand identity. The key to successful brands of the future is to develop a brand image that incorporates elements of heritage and authenticity as well as is a trusted choice for the customer or consumer. In conclusion, the practical keys are to convey the "right" and clear brand image to achieve customer or consumer trust and symbolic and emotional attachment, and to build a unique brand that creates value for customers, consumers, and the organisation.

## 2.3   Brand identity in strategic planning

One of the key roles of managers in a brand context is to act as developers, promoters, and performance monitors. This involves supporting the overall corporate brand identity and social functions to add value to other employees as well as stakeholders and to promote collective performance (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger, et al., 2017). According to Kapferer (2008) today's competitive landscape demands a vision of rich, passionate brands surrounded by a culture and brand managers who support a sense of community. In practice, corporate brand identity can be seen as a management tool for effective brand management. The core of the corporate brand identity can be clarified by answering questions such as the following, so that the brand identity can be used in strategic planning. What it the corporate brand's vision and aim? How does it differ from competitors? What are corporate brand's values? What it its nature?

Key issues related to brand identity need to be approached strategically. If there is a gap between a corporate brand identity and brand image experienced by consumers or customers, it must first be identified so strategic actions can be taken. After this, an important stage is to fill this gap so that the whole brand is consistent. This reconciliation requires identifying the "intersection" of brand attributer, benefits, values, personality, character, expectations, and experiences of corporate brand. Identifying it will help the company to minimize the gap between the corporate brand and the corporate image (Roy & Banerjee, 2008).

A verbal model for brand integration

Integration process

Feed back

Brand Identity
*Benefits
Physical
Psychological

Brand Image
*Expectancy
Physical
Psychological
*Experience
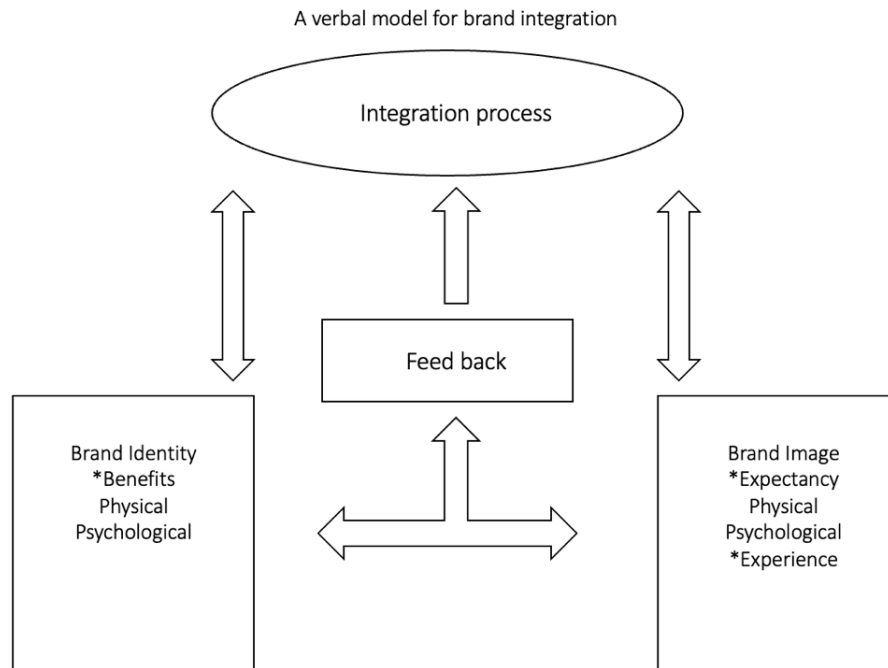
Figure 4 A verbal model for brand integration (Roy & Banerjee, 2008, p. 144)

The figure above "Brand Derby Matrix" describes a classification and decision matrix based on the "CARE-ing strategy". The figure adds value for a company to identify a potential gap between corporate brand identity and its brand image. In other words, more accurate identification allows for more successful integration. The figure also provides a tool for identifying market positioning in the brand context and shows direction for the company's future brand actions. The Derby matrix consists of a matrix format brand representation divided into a corporate brand and a brand image. In this model, brand identity is perceived by experts in the field. The brand image, in turn, is determined by the experiences and opinions of consumers. The result of these factors is a four-cell matrix describing the actions needed to build the foundation for the integration of corporate brand identity and brand image (Roy & Banerjee, 2008). In conclusion, according to above-mentioned factors, brand identity is an important part of strategic planning, as it helps define the direction of the company, its target audience, factors that influence competition, and marketing strategies. When strategic planning and brand identity are aligned, companies can create a clear and consistent brand experience that builds trust, loyalty, and differentiation in the marketplace.

# 3 BRAND IDENTITY AND CO-CREATION IN B2B CONTEXT

## 3.1 B2B Branding

Business-to-Business branding refers to co-development processes between several different actors. Business-to-business can be summarised as B2B. This context includes companies that do business with each other and marketing to other companies. The relationships between companies play an important role in B2B branding. Evolving in B2B branding and reaching the top requires the ability to create meaningful relationships that can also been seen as a mutual partnership. The key is to be able to do business in a way that adds value to each of the B2B network actors and considers their needs and objectives. In B2B context, value creation means that all social and economic operators involved in the exchange, such as other businesses and customers, are service providers and value creators (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). In general, the importance of corporate branding in a B2B context has clearly increased over time (Seyedghorban et al., 2016) However, according to Baumgarth (2010) it has been observed that less research has been done B2B branding than on other brand contexts, but researchers have been noticed that the results of B2B branding are based on customer's brand awareness and their brand perceptions.
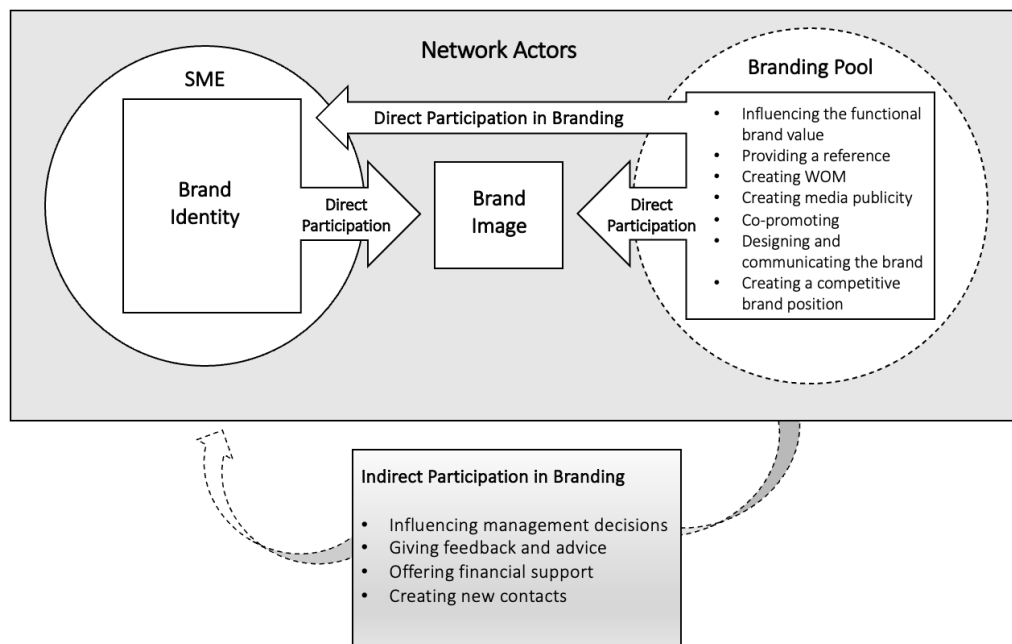
Figure 5 Network actors' participation in B2B SME branding (Mäläskä et al., 2011, p. 1149)

The figure above shows the valuable involvement of network actors in B2B branding and illustrates how the B2B brand is built in a networked environment. B2B branding essentially involves direct and indirect branding activities. The direct involvement of network actors contributes to the development of both brand image and brand identity in the B2B context. Indirect actors are descried by the concept of a brand pool, where these actors do not seek direct profit. Overall, the figure highlights the relationships between different organizations and networks in the B2B world. While all the relationships described in the figure play the major role, the study concludes there is still room for strategy development research in this context (Mäläskä et al., 2011).

According to Vargo & Lusch (2011), research have clarified that while everything in this market context starts from holistic understanding of B2B, it also essential to recognize that B2B world is an inherently continuous process of value creation. Seyedghorban et al. (2016) adds that in today's B2B world, there is an increasing emphasis on corporate brand strategies in B2B context. Especially, research gaps have been identified in the theoretical results related to the studies of B2B branding. The needs for this type of research have increased as competition in B2B markets has increased significantly and strong B2B brands are operating in the markets. It has been also observed that the number of B2B brand studies is low compared to the number of researchers. In addition, B2B

20

brand researchers often refer their own previous findings in B2B studies. In summary combining all the above-mentioned factors, B2B branding is the process of creating and managing a brand identity for business-to-business companies. B2B branding is an essential part of building a successful B2B business, as a strong and recognisable brand identity can create trust, credibility, and differentiation in the marketplace.

Successful branding has the potential to improve a company's competitiveness, customer loyalty and financial performance in the B2B market (Cassia & Magno, 2019; Seyedghorban et al., 2016). In addition, branding can give a company greater visibility and stronger profile in the business (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007) . A strong B2B corporate brand enables relevance and credibility as well as higher price-performance in the market (Ozdemir et al., 2020). Meaningful B2B branding can also deepen complex relationships between actors in the B2B market (Cassia & Magno, 2019). Mäläskä et al. (2011), Seyedghorban et al. (2016) and Ozdemir, Kandemir, et al. (2020) agrees that in B2B branding stakeholders and partners are extremely valuable and practically enable business actions in B2B context. Ozdemir, Gupta, et al. (2020) adds that successful B2B activities create value for many different operators in B2B network.

## 3.2 Managing B2B relationships

Researchers confirm that in the previous paradigm of branding have been an internal process of a company and its stakeholders were primarily seen as targets. However, the trend has changed from an organization-oriented approach to more people-oriented approach, where the network of the relationships is seen as an essential part of brand identity in B2B context. In this context, relationships between stakeholders add value to a company's resources and are an essential factor in competing in the market. By managing stakeholder relationships properly, a B2B company can reach the market potential in a meaningful way to achieve its goals (Mäläskä et al., 2011). Gulati et al. (2000) agrees that s company's strategic networks and their management are directly linked to company's performance in the market.

Strategic network management is based on networks in which companies are integrated and which have been found to play a valuable role in company performance and as a driving force. Factors influencing strategic networking include industry structure, industry position, resources and capabilities and potential network advantages and constraints (Gulati et al., 2000). According to Jones & George (1998) and Inkpen & Tsang (2005) a strong driver of collaborative behaviour between network actors is trust. Jones & George (1998)

specifies that trust combined with shared values, enables employees to commit to the team and all parties to work together towards a common goal.

Inkpen & Tsang (2005) points out that relationships between different companies can be described as strategic networks, based on permanence and fact that the companies in the network create value for each other. These links allow knowledge to be shared and new data to be created. In addition, the smooth flow of information affects the success of a company, and it can be argued that established relationships between companies are key to the flow of information. Information transfer in network relationships is most effective when companies actively invest in the creation and maintenance of social capital. Tsai & Ghoshal (1998) clarifies that social capital is an enabler of social interaction, involving a variety of trust relationships and a multidimensional social context. Cuypers et al. (2020) adds to above, that relationships, social capital, and networks have been found to have a positive impact on facilitating and deepening knowledge transfer and learning. Nevertheless, Hohenthal et al. (2014) mentions that empirical network understanding and knowledge of the importance of customers and competitors in the network have different effects on the value of business relationships in an international context. According to Arslan (2018) it is possible to create shared value for actors in the network and at the same time generate shared benefits for each other. In a situation, where the network has a high potential for common benefits, it is expected that the common benefits will also be more evenly distributed among the partners.

In an changing business environment, it is recognized that developing business together with stakeholders is challenging (Campbell, 2003; Fjeldstad et al., 2012; Ozdemir, Kandemir, et al., 2020). The challenge of managing network relations is to be aware of and consider the needs, objectives, and expectations of different stakeholders. Cooperation that serves all parties is the result of hard work and commitment. Smooth corporation between stakeholders has been shown to have a significant impact on a company's competitiveness and success in the market. In addition, successful collaboration with stakeholders can enable shared learning and new innovations (Ozdemir, Kandemir, et al., 2020). It is natural, that some B2B relationships are more relevant and valuable to the business. Jawahar & McLaughlin (2001) shows that the importance of stakeholders can also vary depending on the life cycle of the company, as the needs of the company can change as the market changes over time. The company must therefore be prepared to meet the needs of those stakeholders, that are especially relevant to its own activities.

Key of stakeholder management is interaction that creates mutual value, involves moral behaviour, fair trade, mutual investment, and commitment. As competition continues to intensify, companies are looking for advantages in their

business that they can keep as assets and cannot be easily copied by competitors. These advantages have been found to be clearly linked to relationships with key stakeholders. Companies should therefore invest in their stakeholders in a way that also adds value to their own operations in the long term (Hillman & Keim, 2001).

Priortisation:
• Dependency
• Strategic
• Saliance
• Actually

Total communication
•Leadership and performance
•Controlled communication
•Third party
•communication

Environmental factors
•Sallent issues
•Macro-economic factors
•Political climate Legislation

Identify the value of the relationship

Primary stakeholders

Second stakeholders

Identify relevant stakeholders

Identify the nature of the exchange

Relationship performance

Brand value

Functional

Symbolic

Hedonic

Outcomes:
• Profitability
• Reputation
• Loyalty
• Synergy
• Political
• Influence

Figure 6 The stakeholder-brand value model (Jones, 2005, p. 26)

Jones (2005) illustrates in Figure 4 that that brand value is the result of the interaction between a corporate brand and its stakeholders. The value creation process starts with identifying and enabling the needs and expectations of stakeholders, whatever the context of these expectations may be. Stakeholders are influences by the brand through the actions of the company's managers, and this has a significant impact on the stakeholders' perception of the brand. The figure above demonstrates generally important factors in creating brand equity and can be applied to more individualized use in companies. The figure emphasise the importance of a holistic communications, which also aim to

strengthen a company's brand reputation and deepen trust. Glynn (2012) agrees that in a B2B context, a company's brand reputation builds trust, loyalty, and brand credibility.

In conclusion, the ideal situation for managing B2B relationships is to build and maintain strong, long-term partnerships with other companies, suppliers, distributors, and customers as well as creates brand value. Effective B2B relationship management requires a strategic and collaborative approach that prioritizes clear communication, mutual value creation, relationship building, conflict resolution, continuous improvement, flexibility, and adaptability.

Customers are a company's most important asset, and customer loyalty is described as behavior towards a brand or company that goes beyond transactions (Verhoef et al., 2010). On the other hand, the customer experience can be defined as the user's interpretation of the overall interaction with the company's brand. Achieving a perfect customer experience is a highly desirable goal for organizations that want to improve customer loyalty and increase profitability. (Frow & Payne, 2007). A Positive customer experience, based on direct customer interaction with a company and its brand, has a positive impact on brand equity as well as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty in a B2B context (Biedenbach & Marell, 2010). However Youssef et al. (2018) shows that, customer engagement is multidimensional and has three different elements, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Customer satisfaction, commitment, trust, and involvement are the starting points of customer engagement, while customer wellbeing is a consequence of customer engagement. Especially in the B2B sector, customer relationships can be called the first strategic asset of a company. More specifically, buyers tend to limit their choices by committing themselves to an ongoing relationship with a company that is recognizable and differentiates itself by treating its customers well. Strong and lasting business relationships are based on factors that build trust with buyers and develop with sellers to enable customers to make decisions, save their resources and time for other activities. It also seeks to ensure that customers can feel personal recognition and social support.

In practice, customer experience is an internal and interpretative reaction that customers have to any direct or indirect contact. Customer experience covers all aspects of a company's offering, including the quality of customer service, advertising, product and service features, ease of use and reliability. It has also been found that a successful brand shapes the customer experience by incorporating a fundamental value proposition into all aspects of the company's offering. In a B2B context, a company helps a client company or partner to achieve its business objective by understanding where in the customer's value chain it can help or eliminate a business problem, and how and when it can do

so. The key is to be able to respond to the customer's needs efficiently and by adding value to the customer's value chain (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). In summary, the customer experience describes the overall impression and perception that customers have of a company or brand, based on their interactions, perceptions, and feelings throughout their journey with specific company. B2B customer experiences, on the other hand, are based on business-to-business interactions and often involve building and maintaining long-term relationships, providing value-added services, and responding to the unique needs and pain points of business customers. To improve the B2B customer experience, organizations can focus on understanding the unique needs and preferences of their business customers and building strong relationships and partnerships.

## 3.3 Development of corporate brand identity in B2B context

It has been observed that corporate brand identity development in B2B contexts is based on in a continuous dynamic process involving internal and external stakeholders. In turn, involving B2B customers in the development process can strengthen relationships of trust and customer loyalty. However it cannot be said that corporate brand identity development in this specific context has been extensively researched. Ozdemir et al. (2020) presented the fact that the challenge that new businesses face in building a strong brand identity is the lack of shared value base, culture, and history. In addition, the above factors make new firms more vulnerable to external influences.

The original brand identity of a company in B2B context is in many cases based on the vision and mindset of the company's founder, and the company's products or services play a strong role in the corporate brand identity. The above is particularly relevant in B2B companies where products and technology are in central. Entrepreneur's behaviour has been found to play an important role in the development process. The ever-changing business environment, the company's experience in the industry and especially the uncertainty of the future makes it necessary to change the original corporate brand identity of the company over time. It has been also observed that an alternative to the conscious definition of corporate brand identity is its inherent development through business of the company, which can be called as an evolutionary change (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). Iglesias et al. (2020) adds that even though the company's core values are at the heart of the company, many stakeholders interact with the company and create its corporate brand identity together over time.

Corporate brand identity is formed through a dynamic process of social interaction the company and key stakeholders (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020). In addition, researchers have been identified clear stages in the corporate brand identity development process. Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones (2017) shows that the development of a new B2B company and its corporate brand identity are closely linked. More specifically, it is possible to look at a specific period in the life of a B2B company and the meaning attached to the corporate brand identity during that period, which are internal and external drivers and functions. There are four successive stages in the development of a new B2B company and its corporate brand identity. The first stage is based on exploring market opportunities with specific corporate brand identity. This is because company does not yet have a broad understanding of market opportunities, which in turn poses challenges for improving its own brand identity. At this stage, investor support has been shown to have a positive impact on the credibility and trustworthiness of corporate brand.

The next step is to develop a corporate brand identity by identifying with its target. In other words, the company gains an insight into the needs and requirements of the market and clarifies its strategic direction. In addition, technology-focused companies operating in the B2B market will gain valuable insights into the value proposition from the market. The third stage is to align the crystallised corporate brand identity with the core customers. More specifically, through interactive process aimed at the target market, a company can deepen its knowledge of its own organization and improve its corporate brand identity. In the final stage, the aligned corporate brand identity is used to investigate new market opportunities (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017). In conclusion, developing a company's brand identity in a B2B context requires a strategic and holistic approach that considers all aspects of the brand's relationship with its customers and partners. A company must therefore constantly evaluate, refine, and adapt its activities to stay ahead of the competition and maintain a strong brand reputation based on retaining the trust of existing customers and partners.

## 3.4 Co-creation of corporate brand identity in B2B context

Co-creation can be defined as interactive creation in interactive system environments. This requires interactive platforms, which starts with interactive engagement between organisations (Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). Right from the start can be concluded that active collaboration is the dominant element in this process. In practice, according to Hatch & Schultz (2010) and Mäläskä et al. (2011) corporate brand co-creation is based on active stakeholder participation,

engagement and dialogue. Gyrd-Jones & Kornum (2013), Cassia & Magno (2019) and Iglesias et al. (2020) agrees that corporate brand co-creation processes can bring added value to consumers and strengthen relationships with the company stakeholders. Based on the findings of the above-mentioned researchers, understanding the role of stakeholders in the co-creation process is essential to enable value creation.  Ramaswamy & Ozcan (2016)  clarifies that stakeholders play a more active role in the co-creation of brand value, as they participate in the co-creation of brand value through their differences of opinion. This requires a personal and collective commitment from stakeholders to co-create brand equity. It can expand how a company connects brand value creation opportunities and brand resources in an interactive environment and increase the collective agency of experiential citizens. The above creates the conditions to deliver mutually valuable outcomes for all participants and stakeholders in the brand equity co-creation system. Gyrd-Jones & Kornum (2013) identifies that the most important elements of co-creation are based on the brand's core group in the organization and the interaction between the network of stakeholders. This interaction provides an opportunity for brand identity creation and at the same time deepens the value of the corporate brand.
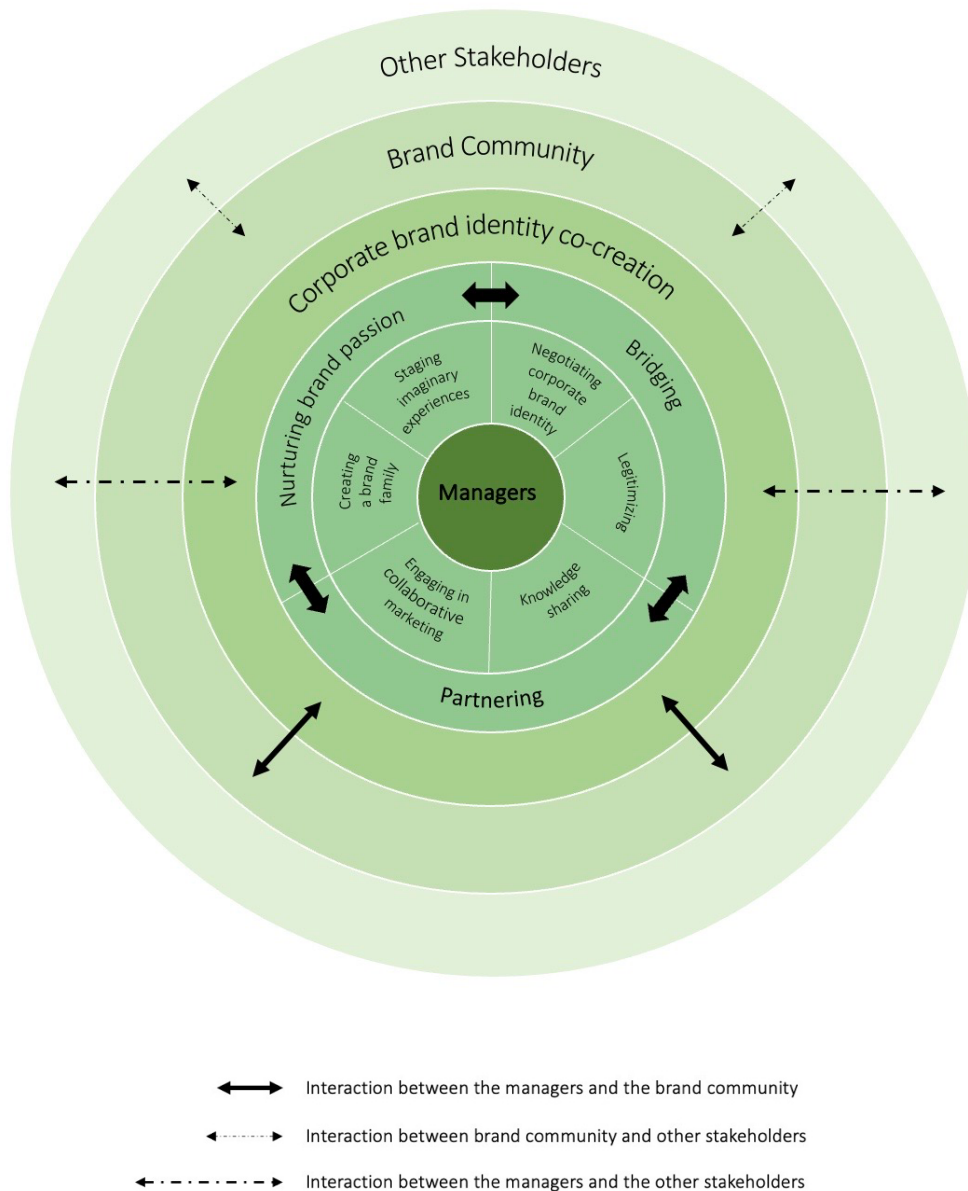
Figure 7 The dialectical process model of corporate brand identity co-creation (Essamri et al., 2019, p. 372)

The figure illustrates a general model of brand identity co-creation, which is an ongoing process involving managers and other stakeholders. This model focuses on brand managers and how they engage and collaborate with network communities in brand identity co-creation processes. The figure illustrates six key activities: creating a brand family, staging imaginative experiences, negotiating a company's brand identity, legitimisation, co-marketing, and

information sharing. In turn, these core activities support three types of co-creation processes through which managers collaborate with networks: 'nurturing brand passion', 'bridging' and 'partnering'. Cultivating brand passion involves communicating and nurturing brand passion among stakeholders and includes the key activities of creating a brand family and organising imaginative experiences. These activities also help to build brand awareness and trust and create emotional and cognitive brand experiences. Another process is "bridging", which involves negotiating and balancing the different meanings of a company's brand identity based on interpretations of stakeholders' experiences and perceptions. This is essential for the creation or subversion of new identities or their further development among stakeholders, in which it is also important for managers to participate and play the role of enabler. In this figure, the third key process in the co-creation of a company's brand identity is "partnering", i.e., working with the brand community on various marketing activities. This is facilitated by two key activities: 'participating in co-marketing' and 'sharing information'. In practice, collaborative marketing encourages and actively accepts critical feedback both externally and internally. Managers also have an important role to play in sharing brand information with the community to ensure that the right knowledge is communicated to stakeholders (Essamri et al., 2019, p. 372). In summary, the above-mentioned continuous co-creation process, which is driven by managers, can engage the brand community in co-marketing and knowledge sharing and provide stakeholders with the opportunity to play an active role as part of the process. The whole process enables the strengthening of partnerships, the raising of brand awareness across the network and the refinement of the corporate brand identity through the experiences of stakeholders. A similar type of stakeholder involvement and active engagement is also the basis for the co-creation process of brand identity in a B2B context, which is presented below.
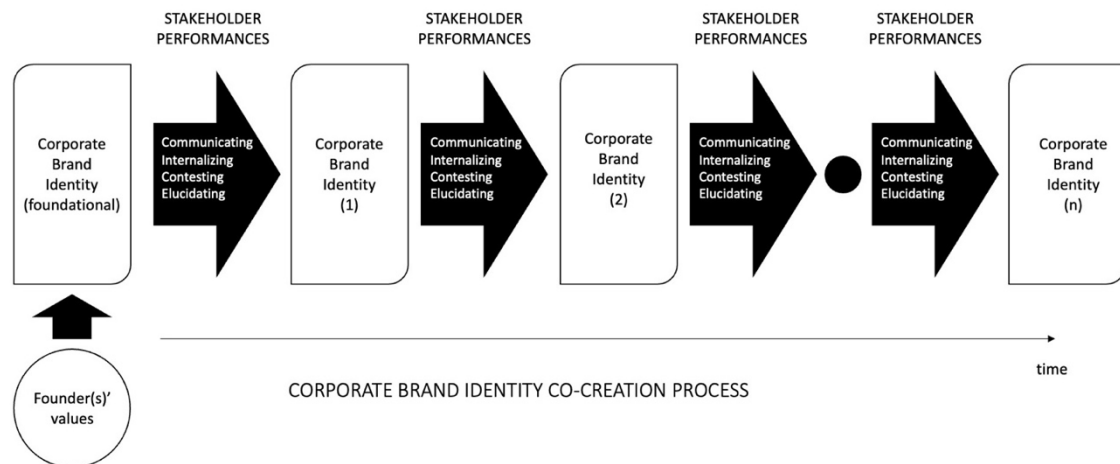
Figure 8 Corporate brand identity co-creation process (Iglesias et al., 2020, p. 40)

The general operating model of corporate brand identity in B2B context is a dynamic process and it is based on four different operational phases involving several stakeholders. These phases are communication, internalisation, contestation, and clarification within organizations. The aim of communication is to convey a company's brand identity to its stakeholders through a variety of activities. In summary, brand identity communication should be a collaborative process involving not only company managers but also employees and a wide range of stakeholders with the company and strengthening the company's brand identity in the marketplace and among other organizations. In turn, the next phase in "internalisation" is to bring the brand identity of the company to life in practice, which means embedding it into the day-to-day activities of the company. A corporate brand identity is best brought to life in company's routines if its employees internalise the brand identity holistically, including its values, and its interpretation is consistent. In addition, this level is supported by training of the company employees on the subject and the fact that the employee's own values are aligned with values if the company brand identity in the workplace. Enabling the above activities requires not only good recruitment and training, but also open networking between employees and stakeholders (Iglesias et al, 2020).

Researchers have found that stakeholder dialogue serves as an enabler for co-creation process of a corporate brand identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2010). It is also natural that a company's stakeholders have different perceptions of the company's brand identity. According to Iglesias et al., (2020) the next phase in the co-creation process is contestation, where stakeholders compare the company's brand identity with their own impressions of it. In other words, a

comparison is made between brand identity and brand image. If there is a significant difference between the two, stakeholders may question the brand identity of the company. This in turn may have a negative impact on the interaction between the network of the stakeholders and on the whole co-creation process. The final phase, company managers and stakeholders discuss the corporate brand identity, its presence, and perceptions. This is followed by a collaborative process aimed at creating a fundamental understanding of the brand identity among the managers and all stakeholders. It is important that the company's employees and customers also have a voice and can make suggestions for improvements, which in turn develops managers' understanding of the brand identity. It has been found that the co-creation process most often improves a company's brand identity while maintaining the company's core values. In summary, brand co-creation is a collaborative process where the company and customers work together to create value. Successful brand co-creation therefore requires a strategic and collaborative approach that puts the voice of the customer first and is based on innovation and a culture of continuous improvement. Despite this, researchers have been conducted a clear gap in the practicalities of creating a corporate brand identity in collaboration with multiple stakeholders. However, it is recognized that in a B2B context, the process of brand identity co-creation is based on long-term relationships between stakeholders and can be enabled by a process involving mainly both internal and external stakeholders.

## 3.5   Managing co-created brand

The co-creation process of corporate brand identify is the result of the interaction of a complex ecosystem of stakeholders (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). The concept of an ecosystem is used in overall strategic review of business in a competitive context, although the concept refers to the biological term (Adner, 2017). However in a B2B context, the ecosystem can be seen as a dimension that extends the framework of business networks as well as a perspective that influences business networks and updates and informs the current dimension (Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017). The successful co-creation processes require complementarity of values and cultures. If the cultures of the company and stakeholders differ significantly, the whole co-creation process can be jeopardised. It is also essential for the interaction process to seek complementarity between corporate cultures. Managing the co-creation process requires openness to the dedication of each stakeholder to create added value for the whole network. The key is to maintain strong corporate identities of

companies in a mutual respectful way, so that shared value is enhanced, and stakeholders maintain tolerant and fair interaction (Gyrd-Jones & Kornum, 2013). Veloutsou & Guzman (2017) agrees that companies should maintain to core of their corporate brand identity, while also investing in corporate brand co-creation. According to Balmer & Greyser (2002), also in the case of corporate identity management, the rapidly changing business and competitive environment drives the need for management to regularly review identity performance of company.

In general, co-creation processes can bring customers closer to the company. In addition, co-creation can raise brand awareness globally and help create meaningful innovations, so it is up to managers to promote an open organizational mindset where all stakeholders are seen as relevant potential partners. Those brands that have successfully adopted a strategic approach to co-creation can use it as a collaborative innovation method that can also support their competitive advantage. Customers and other stakeholders are involved at all stages of the co-creation process and are also seen as strategic long-term innovation partners. This highlights the brand as a relevant element of the network in management and the company turns co-creation into a strategic resource (Ind et al., 2017). That underlines the importance of collaboration with the right stakeholders. Kazadi et al. (2016) specifies that managers should be aware that successful co-creation projects require the deployment of capabilities at different points in time. The ability to identify and engage the right stakeholders for co-development is an important factor for successful co-development of competences. Companies also need to consider potential stakeholders for the future and have a clear vision of how and which external stakeholders will be involved in innovation processes. If the above elements are not improved, the company will spend too much time and resources interacting with stakeholders who may not be relevant to its innovation processes.

Although co-creation has been identified as being at the heart of the operation of a conscientious corporate brand, organisations face different challenges in co-developing a conscientious corporate brand. The main obstacle to strategic co-creation is a confrontational corporate culture that must be changed and overcome if the desired outcome is to be achieved. The key is to recruit, promote and support leaders who can adopt a transformational, accountable, empathetic, and inclusive leadership style. Transformational leaders seek to balance profit and purpose and are committed to using business to make a positive difference to society, the environment, and the competitive landscape. Responsible leaders can balance short and long-term goals. Empathetic leaders, on the other hand, are sensitive to the expectations and demands of their diverse stakeholders and add value through an inclusive leadership style that recognises the value of co-creation of strategies with key

stakeholders. It has also been identified that a major challenge is that too many organisations believe that strategic decision-making is the sole responsibility of internal experts and not a process that can benefit from the involvement of customers and other stakeholders. However, conscientious corporate brands understand the need to open and consider the perspectives of their stakeholders, as their input is valuable in building long-term stakeholder and partnership relationships. In addition to the above factors, companies are also looking for new governance models that integrate key internal and external stakeholders into strategic decision-making bodies and processes, so that key stakeholders are not excluded from the development process. Finally, conscientious corporate brands need to invest in key performance indicators to measure the realisation of the purpose of the corporate brand and its outcomes for different stakeholders (Iglesias & Ind, 2020). In summary can be concluded that managing a co-created brand therefore requires a strategic and collaborative approach to listening to the customer as well as stakeholders and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement. This in turn requires continuous engagement, analysis, and improvement to ensure that the brand remains relevant and responsive to customer needs and preferences.

# 4 THE ROLE OF STRATEGY IN B2B BRANDING

## 4.1 Corporate brand strategy in B2B context

The starting point for creating a corporate brand strategy in a B2B context is a broad knowledge of the dynamics of the players in the industry ecosystem. This creates opportunities for B2B companies to steer their activities in the right direction and develop the interaction between the company and its stakeholders. From a B2B market perspective, the key brand actors have been identified as business leaders, stakeholders, and consumers. In practice, brand strategy in driven by managers, brand meanings are created and developed by stakeholders and shaped by consumers (Vallaster & Lindgreen, 2011). In other words, brand strategy in B2B contexts is complex process and requires active interaction with the company's entire industry network. Vallaster & von Wallpach (2013) reminds that brand meaning is the dynamic result of a multidimensional process involving multiple interdependent stakeholders who interact simultaneously to co-create brand meaning.

It can be concluded that to achievement of a company's competitive advantage in the market is influenced by many strategic factors in B2B context. Adegbesan (2009) specifies that in practice, to achieve competitive advantage, companies can acquire valuable resources at a cost that is proportionately lower than their ability to create value. According to Abimbola (2001), competing strategies should consider creativity, innovation and ingenuity. Mariadoss et al. (2011) suggest that strategies that take environmental sustainability into account can contribute to company's competitive advantage and improve its economic performance in B2B context. Furthermore, it has been observed that technical and non-technical innovations resulting from the company's sustainable strategies

have a clear impact on the company's competitive advantage. Clatworthy (2012) and Odlin & Benson-Rea (2017) agrees on the importance of customer orientation in strategic actions. In addition, Witell et al. (2020) adds that business managers should engage customers according to their potential and the nature of the relationship.

Investing in committed business relationships with customers creates opportunities for co-creation and avoids direct competition with other companies in the sector. The above also keeps competitors out of this network position. Competitive success therefore depends on companies being customer-centric rather than technology centric. In the other words, innovative technology plays an important role, but companies need to invest close relationships, especially to strengthen their position in international markets (Odlin & Benson-Rea, 2017). Hannah & Eisenhardt (2018) have been identified a gap in research on how strategic use of networks is put in the practice in competitive markets, where companies collaborate to create value for consumers. In this type of ecosystem, the focus should be on successful corporation, managing the tension between corporation and competition, while adding value, rather than just focusing on competition. Ghodeswar (2008) concludes that company managers need to constantly monitor the competitive impact of their brands and how company's brands are performing in the marketplace.

Successful branding strategies in B2B context require brand oriented organizations. When it comes to creating B2B branding strategies, industrial markets are defined by the relationships between the different players and their interaction within the network (Cassia & Magno, 2019). Glynn (2012) adds that in strategic B2B branding, the emphasis must be also on the external actors to create added value for the company. Cassia & Magno (2019) continues that interactions are also the starting point for creating value for the consumers throughout the process. Indeed, one of the purposes of B2B brands is to deepen the complex relationships between market players. It is important to recognize that every market relationship is unique and therefore the brand strategies should be tailored to individual needs of businesses and consumers. In business it is not possible to manage several different strategies at the same time, and therefore companies operating in the B2B market should focus their branding strategies on the specific elements. The B2B market, which is service-oriented and serves many customers, also requires effective customisation, as there are many complex relationships in the market and a large amount of content needs to be varied for customers. The overall brand strategy can be a combination of different brand strategies. In turn, B2B companies that rely on standardised products for wider and more distributed customer base should emphasise product performance as a strong B2B brand in their brand strategy. Interaction with customer has also shown to be important, and strong B2B brand can partly

replace direct interaction. However, in addition to effective B2B brand strategies, B2B companies need to take holistic view of the market network in which they operate and invest relevant cross-sector collaboration. Adner & Helfat (2003) points out that business strategies and the decisions taken by business managers play a major role in the market.

In summary, the above factors suggest that a strong brand strategy in business-to-business is crucial to building trust, credibility and long-term relationships with customers and partners to create value for all parties in the network.

## 4.2   Managing B2B branding strategies

Brand management is generally understood as a method to accelerate the achievement of brand relevance in the marketplace (Pyper et al., 2019). In a B2B context, successful brand management is about reaching not only customers but also all stakeholders such as investors, employees, and partners. Brand building and successful brand management aim to create long-term intangible assets. The most important branding activities for B2B companies are increasing information efficiency, reducing risk, and creating a patriotic value and image. However, it is not self-evident that a company will reap immediate benefits once it has put in place a comprehensive brand strategy. Company managers need to consider a several factors in strategic brand management. In principle, a company's brand image should be aligned with its marketing strategy as well as brand management planning should be set both short- and long-term objectives for business development. It is also important to continuously assess the evolution of the brand image and market value by investing resources in brand management to make the brand one of the competitive advantages of the company (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). Bansal (2005) specifies that a firm's resources include tangible assets such as financial assets, physical equipment and raw materials, and intangible assets such as reputation, culture, and intellectual capital. Capabilities, in turn, describe skills that firms develop to produce and manage these resources.

It is important to be able to manage brand strategies in international markets in a way that takes into account the factors that are valued today.  Vesal et al. (2021) have found that incorporating environmental sustainability practices into a strategy can bring positive benefits to the brand image of B2B manufacturers, which in turn affects market performance. In addition, effective and value-added customer relationship management in a B2B context with corporate customers who have positive environmental attitudes strengthens the

pathway from sustainability practices to market performance. In turn, Beitelspacher & Getchell (2023) have noticed that the actions of a company's B2B partners affect the company's ability to achieve its own responsible management objectives. Assessing the importance of above-mentioned factors, Dyer & Singh (1998) highlights that a network between companies can develop relationships that provide a sustainable competitive advantage in market.

In conclusion, managing brand strategies in B2B context requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that considers all aspects of the relationship between a brand and its customers and partners. It requires constant evaluation, refinement, and adaptation to stay ahead of competitors and maintain a strong brand reputation.

## 4.3 Conceptual pre-understanding of the theoretical framework

In a competitive international B2B market, it is crucial to differentiate company from its competitors. This means identifying what makes corporate brand unique and communicating it clearly to target audience. In addition, knowing the target audience plays a significant role in developing an effective B2B brand strategy. Companies need to understand their customers' needs, preferences, and pain points to create communications and branding to meet customer's needs. To create a strong brand identity, businesses need to be consistent in their communications, visual identity, and everything else they do. Creating and strengthening corporate brand identity also requires the trust and credibility of the target audience. This, in turn, is made possible by a wide range of active efforts to build, develop, and nurture relationships with customers and stakeholders to deliver the desired added value to all actors in the network. B2B branding is therefore particularly about building long-term relationships with customers and other stakeholders who can together create a strong brand identity for the company through collaboration, while maintaining the company's values and shared vision. This requires a focus on customer experience and building trust through transparency and honesty.

The co-creation process of a brand identity can bring added value to the entire B2B network. Co-creation of brand identity in a B2B context refers to the collaborative process between a company and its customers, partners, or stakeholders in developing and defining a brand identity. It involves different stakeholders in creating and shaping the brand image, values, personality, and positioning in the market. In a B2B context, the co-creation of a brand identity may involve the input of several parties such as customers, suppliers, distributors, and other partners involved in the brand ecosystem. These stakeholders can

provide insights, feedback and suggestions that can help shape the brand identity and make it more relevant and attractive to the target market. Benefits of brand identity co-creation in a B2B context can include increased stakeholder engagement, better brand alignment with customer needs, increased brand loyalty and improved brand reputation. It can also foster a sense of ownership and pride among stakeholders as they feel that their input has been considered in shaping the brand identity. In summary, brand identity co-creation in B2B companies is a collaborative approach where stakeholders are involved in defining and shaping the brand identity together, which can lead to a more relevant and meaningful brand image in the marketplace.

Strengthening the brand identity and adding value to the different B2B customers, stakeholders and networks requires a strategic approach. B2B branding strategies should be adaptable to changing market conditions and evolving customer needs. In addition, it is important to be open to new ideas and ready to adapt them to company's strategy as necessary. Overall, a successful B2B brand strategy requires a deep understanding of the target audience, a focus on differentiation, brand consistency, thought leadership, relationship building and adaptability to change. In addition to value-added and relevant brand strategies, the right B2B culture management is needed. Leaders must be adaptive, accountable, value-adding, and responsive to customer and stakeholder needs. B2B context needs leaders who are committed to actively engaging with key stakeholders, who can remove barriers to customers and build valuable and trusting long-term partnerships as well as who are able to strengthen the brand identity of the company through their actions. In summary, it all comes down to building a strong B2B brand identity through collaboration, which is critical to building brand awareness, fostering customer loyalty, and driving business growth. The above enables a company to differentiate itself in a crowded market, build trust and credibility with its target audience and create a strong emotional bond with customers and stakeholders to create value for all participants in the network.

# 5 DATA AND RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter describes the qualitative approaches used to answer the research question. First, the qualitative case study methodology that was used with the case study company is presented, followed by an explanation of the data collection and analysis.

## 5.1 Qualitative case based research

This research has used the qualitative case study method. The qualitative case study method provides an opportunity to explore complex phenomena in depth in a specific context. In other words, case study focuses on studying a real-time phenomenon in its natural context, while recognising that context creates differences (Rashid et al., 2019). Given that the topic of this study is to improve PLC's brand through customer experiences in an international B2B context and compare the results with the company's brand strategy, qualitative research helps to explore and understand different individuals in this specific context. Baxter & Jack (2015) adds that the qualitative case study method helps to look at the phenomenon in a particular context, using different sources of information through different lenses, which in turn brings out different aspects of the phenomenon. This research method is particularly useful for developing theory, evaluating programmes, and developing interventions. Singleton & Straits (2018) specifies that when field observations are made in a natural environment, the observations tend to be less structured and the involvement of the researcher in the social environment being observed may vary depending on the study.

Case studies are characterised by a practical and descriptive approach to the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions, and illustrate the usefulness of a theory or approach in a particular company or situation (Dul &

Hak, 2008). The above is appropriate for this study, which takes a practical approach to the design, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of a particular case company. According to (Baxter & Jack, 2015) the case study method can be used to answer the "how" and "why" questions, while considering how the phenomenon is affected by the context in which it is located. This research method fits the research question of this study, but also offers the possibility of gaining a multi-faceted understanding of the case by collecting information from different sources and combining the data to gain a holistic understanding. Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, pp. 116–117) specifies that business-related case studies are often practical and their results can provide information on how to implement a successful project, for example, or how to avoid certain problems in a particular organisation. Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) highlights that case studies are complex empirical descriptions of specific cases of a phenomenon, typically based on a variety of data sources. Building theory from case studies is a research strategy. In this case, a single case study is used to build theoretical structures and meanings to create a medium-term theory from case-based empirical data.

## 5.2   Data

### 5.2.1   Data collection

In this case study, empirical data has been collected from a variety of sources, and the main source of data collection are semi-structured interviews as well as primary sources information and reports of case company in published form. According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, pp. 125–127) , in-depth interviews are often the primary source of empirical data in business research, while other sources complement the data and provide relevant evidence. Interviews were also used as a data collection method, as the information needed for the study is not available in published form. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. Eskola & Suoranta (1998, pp. 63–64) specifies that in semi-structured interviews, the main questions are the same for all participants, and participants answer the questions. The participants are asked to answer the questions freely according to their own views and opinions and are not given any response options. Guest et al. (2012, pp. 84–85) shows that in a semi-structured interview, the structure of the interview helps the comparability of the different participants and allows for clarifying questions to be asked during the interview if necessary.

Secondary sources of information were research articles as well as other sources in the form of published information and the case company's, i.e., Organization X's renewed brand strategy and annual report. These sources are listed in Table 2 and have not been formally published in the report to preserve the anonymity of the case study company. For the main data sources, i.e., semi-structured interviews, interviewees were selected with the expertise of the managers of the Organization X, to include the company's key customers and stakeholders in the interviews. For the selection of key customers and stakeholders, separate online meetings were organized with the Sales Managers of the Italian market of Organization X, who are the contact persons for customers on the side of Organization X in the target market. The company representatives selected for the interviews represented various managerial positions and business owners from a variety of leading international electric vehicle charging companies belonging to the B2B network of Organization X in the Italian market. The interviewees represented different customer segments and some represented partner companies to provide the most comprehensive results of the study on the different operators in the B2B network. A total of five international companies participated in the research.

Referring to an online meeting with another Italian Sales Manager on 18 January 2023, it was noted that reaching some selected customers can be challenging. This was because some company representatives may not be willing to participate in interviews, because of a recent customer relationship, or some international industry Leaders are very busy in a fast growing and developing market. The research questions were also discussed with the Managers of Organization X prior to contacting the interviewees. Following these meetings, the selected customers and stakeholders were informed on behalf of the Organization X of the possibility to participate in the study and the contact details of the selected company representatives were sent to the researcher. Managers and Owners of client companies operating in the Italian market were selected for the interviews to obtain the most diverse and in-depth insight from the responses, while deepening the relationship between stakeholders in B2B context.

Based on Organization X's revised brand strategy and literature review, the researcher designed the interview questions as planned with Organization X's Managers. The Managers of Organization X first reviewed the completed cover letter and interview questions, then the researcher emailed them to the interviewees so that they could prepare for the interview in advance. Each interviewee was contacted personally, and a TEAMS online meeting was scheduled for the interview. The interviews were conducted online in one-to-one meetings as semi-structured interviews and were recorded to facilitate analysis of the results. After each interview, the researcher uploaded the recording to the Office 365 streaming service and used it to transcribe the data by uploading the

transcripts of the recordings in English as text. The researcher then transferred the transcripts into separate Word files so that the researcher could further analyze the interview results and begin coding.

Totally, an invitation to interview was sent by email to 12 of the potential informants. Finally, six online face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. All interviewees were male. The interviews ranged in duration from 20 minute to one 35 minutes. The transcription resulted in approximately 55 pages of transcribed data material in Microsoft Word documents. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

Table 1 List of interviews

| Code | Interviewee role in the client company | Duration | Date |
|------|----------------------------------------|----------|------|
| PM1 | Product Manager | 30min | 20.2.2023 |
| O1 | Owner | 25min | 21.2.2023 |
| O2 | Owner | 35min | 24.2.2023 |
| BDM1 | Business Development Manager | 25min | 27.2.2023 |
| CPO1 | Chief Product Officer | 20min | 31.3.2023 |
| Code | Interviewee role in the Organization X | Duration | Date |
| CSO1 | Chief Sales Officer | 30min | 21.4.2023 |

Table 2 List of secondary data

| Code | Description of content | Length | Date |
|------|------------------------|--------|------|
| CR1 | Company Report of Organization X | 43p. | 15.08.2022 |
| AR1 | Annual Report 2022 of Organization X | 122p. | 09.03.2023 |
| BR1 | Business Review Q1 2023 of Organization X | 8p. | 20.04.2023 |
| BS1 | Brand Strategy of Organization X | 11p. | 02.06.2022 |
| WS1 | Organization X's website | | 2023 |

### 5.2.2 Data analysis

This study uses the Gioia method to analyse the research data. Gioia method is used to apply systematic conceptual and analytical rigour to generate plausible interpretations of the data and to ensure that the conclusions are plausible and defensible. The analysis starts with open coding, where the transcribed interviews are reviewed and coded for lower-level meanings. These first-level codes are used to produce easily understandable, informant-focused codes with words based on the informant. These first-order codes are then used to generate second-order themes, which in turn form the overall dimension. The second-order themes are more researcher-centered and abstract. The above-mentioned set of codes can be called a data structure. The data structure indicates the progression that is taking place. On this basis, a theory can be built (Gioia et al., 2013).

The Gioia method is used in this research to maintain workflow and create different customer profiles based on the results collected from the Italian market and the management team of Organisation X and compare them with each other. This also helps the reader to understand the process and what has been done in it. According to Gehman et al. (2018), the construction of the data structure is generally considered to be the most crucial step in this particular research method, as it shows how to move from raw data to first-order codes and second-order theoretical themes and dimensions, which is an important part of demonstrating the rigour of qualitative research. However, the data structure is only a static picture of a dynamic phenomenon that allows the researcher to explore the content of my informants' perceptions. The essential point of this research methodology is that grounded theory emerges by demonstrating the dynamic relationships between emergent perceptions. Properly executed, the translation from knowledge structure to grounded theory clearly illustrates the links between knowledge and theory.

# 6   RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter provides a practical counterbalance to the empirical findings presented in the literature review section, discussing important themes identified in the research to address the research question of this study. More specifically, this section discusses the results of the practical research interviews on how Organization X's customers and stakeholders in the Italian market perceive Organization X's brand and how these experiences and perceptions fit into the company's brand strategy in the international market of the EV charging industry. In addition, the chapter discusses the interview results from the perspective of the managers of Organization X and compares the results of other interviews. The insights of client company managers and business owners in the international electric vehicle charging industry are aimed to enable a practical perspective on strengthening corporate brand identity and B2B relationships in an international B2B context, as well as practical operational strategy elements to strengthen the Organization's X market position in the Italian market. In addition, from the perspective of the literature review, this chapter complements the understanding of the management perspective on the co-creation of corporate brand identity in B2B context for Organization X. The researcher also argues, in line with the literature reviewed earlier, that the co-creation of a corporate brand identity is an ongoing process involving managers and other stakeholders. Given this process perspective, the focus here is on the views of managers and owners of key customers and stakeholders in the B2B network of Organization X on how they perceive Organization X's brand in the Italian market and what elements the company should develop in the future to strengthen its brand identity, market position as well as stakeholder relationships.

## 6.1 Data structure of corporate brand identity elements in B2B context in international EV charging industry
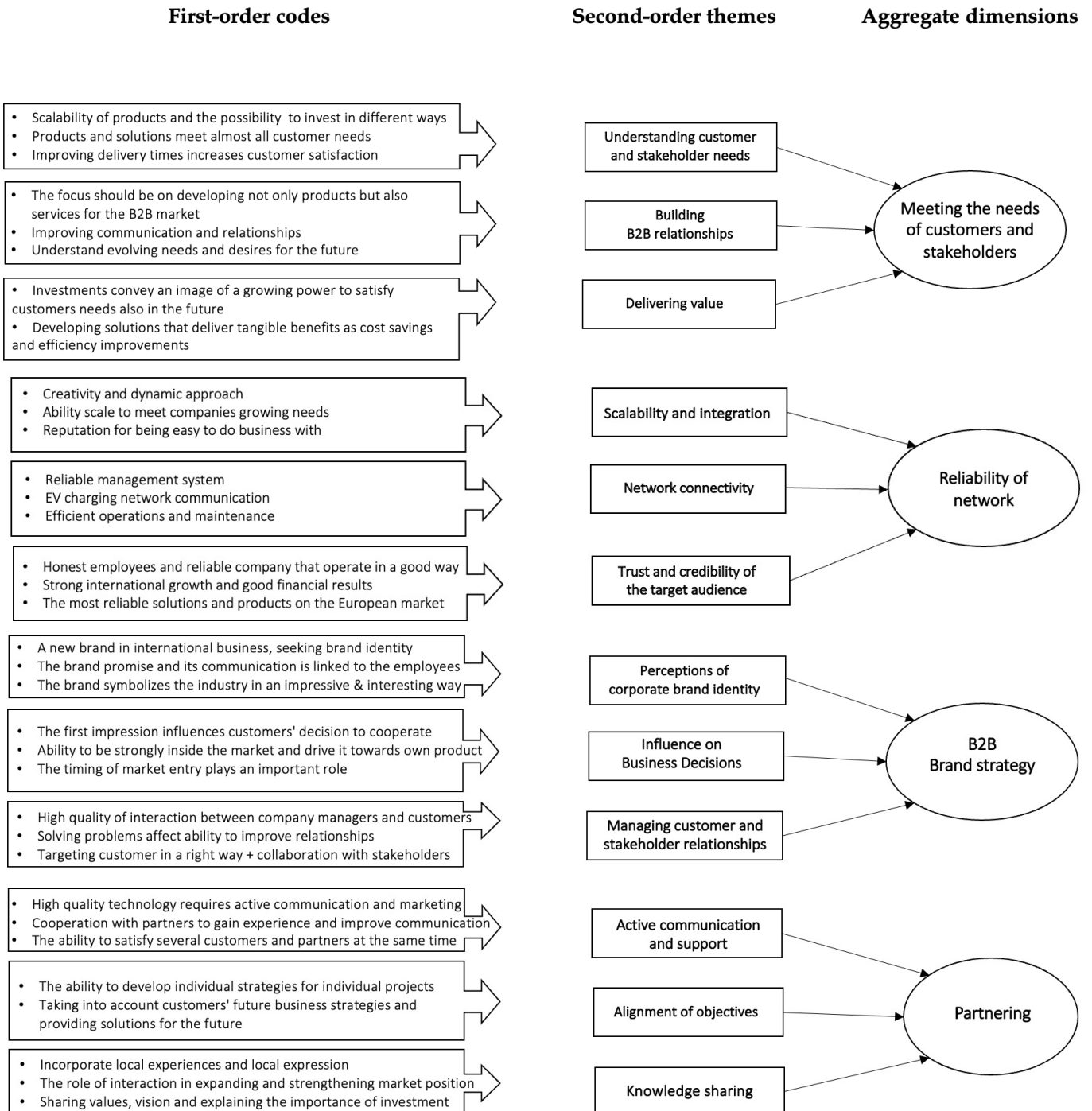
**First-order codes**                    **Second-order themes**            **Aggregate dimensions**

- Scalability of products and the possibility to invest in different ways
- Products and solutions meet almost all customer needs
- Improving delivery times increases customer satisfaction

- The focus should be on developing not only products but also services for the B2B market
- Improving communication and relationships
- Understand evolving needs and desires for the future

- Investments convey an image of a growing power to satisfy customers needs also in the future
- Developing solutions that deliver tangible benefits as cost savings and efficiency improvements

| Understanding customer and stakeholder needs |
| Building B2B relationships |
| Delivering value |

**Meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders**

- Creativity and dynamic approach
- Ability scale to meet companies growing needs
- Reputation for being easy to do business with

- Reliable management system
- EV charging network communication
- Efficient operations and maintenance

- Honest employees and reliable company that operate in a good way
- Strong international growth and good financial results
- The most reliable solutions and products on the European market

| Scalability and integration |
| Network connectivity |
| Trust and credibility of the target audience |

**Reliability of network**

- A new brand in international business, seeking brand identity
- The brand promise and its communication is linked to the employees
- The brand symbolizes the industry in an impressive & interesting way

- The first impression influences customers' decision to cooperate
- Ability to be strongly inside the market and drive it towards own product
- The timing of market entry plays an important role

- High quality of interaction between company managers and customers
- Solving problems affect ability to improve relationships
- Targeting customer in a right way + collaboration with stakeholders

| Perceptions of corporate brand identity |
| Influence on Business Decisions |
| Managing customer and stakeholder relationships |

**B2B Brand strategy**

- High quality technology requires active communication and marketing
- Cooperation with partners to gain experience and improve communication
- The ability to satisfy several customers and partners at the same time

- The ability to develop individual strategies for individual projects
- Taking into account customers' future business strategies and providing solutions for the future

- Incorporate local experiences and local expression
- The role of interaction in expanding and strengthening market position
- Sharing values, vision and explaining the importance of investment

| Active communication and support |
| Alignment of objectives |
| Knowledge sharing |

**Partnering**

Figure 9 Data Structure

45

The Data Structure above illustrates how the Gioia method is used to explore corporate brand identity in a business-to-business (B2B) context in international EV charging industry, with a particular focus on how customer and stakeholder company managers and owners perceive and interpret corporate brand identity in a B2B environment. The Figure above describes one part of the whole data structure, containing the main themes and elements. The researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in the B2B environment, including managers and owners of client companies, partners, and employee of Organization X with experience of the company's brand identity. The interviews explored their perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of the corporate brand identity, including its elements, values, messages, strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Based on the information gathered from the interviews, the transcribed texts were systematically reviewed line by line to identify relevant textual elements related to the corporate brand identity and potential factors that could strengthen the brand identity, stakeholder relationships and market position of Organization X in the future. From the perspective of these factors, first-order codes were created based on the words of the informant.

I created all first-order codes to Microsoft Word documents comment section of transcribed interview. The first coding section produced a total of 210 codes. Then I grouped the similar codes together and identified common themes or patterns emerging from the coded information to form the second order themes section. In other words, when creating second-order themes, I focused on engaging in the process of abstraction and conceptualization. I critically analyzed the first-order codes, looking for relationships and similarities between the different themes, which at the same time supported a deeper understanding of the data. I identified the underlying concepts as well as theories that explained the phenomena under study. At the same time, I also sought to reduce complexity and condense a large amount of data into a smaller category. The second-order themes in the data structure provide a framework for interpreting the data and explaining the relationships between the different concepts. In this study, the second-order themes also increase the rigor of the qualitative research through a systematic and structured analysis process. Finally, I combined the themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis to aggregate dimensions to extract the core or meaning of the company's brand identity in a B2B context. This provided an insight into how corporate brand identity is perceived, interpreted and how it affects stakeholders in a B2B environment, including their perceptions, interpretations and decision-making processes related to corporate brand identity.

### 6.1.1 Meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders

*"Organization X is very focused on customer needs. For the customer, in EV charging industry, meeting customer needs is key. Organization X's products and solutions meet almost all customer needs, which is a strong competitive advantage." (BDM1)*

According to BDM1, meeting customers' needs is a key prerequisite for B2B operations, especially in the EV charging industry. Customers want their needs and wishes to be considered in a holistic way, and they will choose the products and solutions of the company that best serves their needs and experience and is a profitable choice for them in the future. Organization X's products and solutions are seen as particularly dynamic, sustainable, and high-quality technology that give Organization X a strong competitive advantage in the market. Furthermore, according to the CR1, the Organization X's products are classified as more technologically advanced than most of its competitors.

*"Organization X makes environmentally friendly solutions. The equipment of Organization X products works in different climatic conditions, even in harsh climatic conditions (hot and cold temperatures) and are environmentally friendly. "(O1)*

Owner recognizes environmental friendliness and helping to make the world a cleaner as a strong feature of Organization X's products and solutions. He mentions that the company takes pollution into account and that it has excellent products and equipment that work in different climatic conditions, even in harsh climatic conditions, i.e., very hot or cold temperatures. The Company Report (2022) of Organization X also states that reducing carbon emissions is the main driver behind the uptake of electric vehicles and that, in addition to tackling climate change, efforts to improve urban air quality will accelerate the electrification of transport. BS1 strongly recognizes environmental sustainability as a dominant factor and encourages and inspires better solutions around the world. In addition to the above findings, according to WS1, organization X's solutions contribute to climate change mitigation and the company is committed to the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

*"Organization X enables client companies to disseminate product opportunities and solution-related services. Organization X products are an excellent response to the needs of B2B customers." (BDM1)*

In BDM1's view, organization X offers good opportunities for client companies to disseminate product offerings and solution-related services. BDM1 determines that all products of organization X perfectly serve the B2B context of the customers' needs, and that the technology meets the customers' requirements. He adds that the international company he represents has disseminated product opportunities and solution-related services, including Organization X. Organization X's products are able to meet a wide range of customer needs, which the customer finds meaningful and positive when working with the company. In addition, according to the AR1, Organization X strives to ensure an excellent user experience for all, and this is key to its operations. In addition, solutions are scalable, modular, user-friendly, and reliable.

*"A major strength of Organization X is the scalability of products and the possibility for customers to invest in different ways. "(BDM1)*

BDM1 sees the scalability of Organization X's products and various investment opportunities as a clear strength. He continues that modularity and scalability are strong advantages and can meet the needs of almost any customer. While the products and solutions ideally meet the needs of customers today, we now need to see what will happen in the near future as the product is also upgraded, and how the services connected to the network will need to be updated to meet customer needs in the future. However, the starting point for the future is seen as good and a big element for the interviewee is that national interoperability will continue to play on of the key roles in the future.

*"Organization X brings to the market a quality and strong high-tech product. Your partner understands that you will have to pay a little more for the product, but that's not a problem because the product will never break down. Improving delivery times increases customer satisfaction. (O2)*

Owner describes Organization X as bringing a high quality and strong high-tech product to the electric vehicle disc market in general. He mentions that

financially, organization X is slightly more expensive than its competitors. However, Owner also considers that Organization X's partners understand that the price of the product is higher than its competitors, but he does not see this as a problem because the product is of high quality and never breaks down. For the future, he believes that organization X can contribute to customer satisfaction by improving delivery times because developing and further improving the efficiency and speed of business is important factor.

*"Organization X should focus not only on products but also on developing the service in the B2B market step by step." (PM1)*

PM1 considers it important that organization X focuses not only on products but also on developing services in the B2B market step by step and that it has a holistic impact on the overall market. Organization X is seen as a highly technology-oriented company. Organization X should therefore focus not only on its product offering but also on the progressive development of services in the B2B market for the electric vehicle charging industry. Taking these elements into account and implementing them in the strategy could enable organization X to offer an even more complete solution in the future, improve the customer experience, differentiate itself even more from its competitors, foster customer loyalty and ultimately drive business growth.

*"The need for reliable and well-focused partners and suppliers is recognized to support customers in achieving their goals. Reliable partners must also have a proven track record of business success." (CPO1)*

CPO1 says that the B2B market needs and values reliable and well-focused partners and suppliers. This is particularly important when helping customers to achieve their goals. CPO1 adds that in practice, trusted partners must also have a proven track record of business success. In the EV charging industry, B2B relationships play an important role, as companies often depend on different partners and suppliers to provide essential components, services, or expertise. The interviewee stresses the need for reliable partners and suppliers. Reliability is crucial to ensure the smooth operation of the charging infrastructure and end-user satisfaction. Competent partners are better able to provide tailored solutions, advice, and support to meet specific customer requirements. They can bring industry expertise, sector knowledge and tailored offerings that address the

unique challenges and objectives of B2B customers. In turn, proven experience inspires confidence in customers by demonstrating that partners and suppliers have the experience, expertise, and capabilities to support them effectively.

*"Organization X is favoring the new approach remarkably well and products are high quality, which facilitates corporation. The company is moving forward with good solutions. More cooperation with partners is needed to give the business a meaningful experience of the local market." (O2)*

Owner has found that Organization X is operating in the market with a new approach that is working very well. He also notes that the quality of the products is high, which makes it easier for a company to operate. He mentions that the Organization X is moving forward with good solutions. Suggestion for development Owner wants organization X to invest more in cooperation in the future to gain more experience in the local market. Local experience as well as local expression play an important role in international markets and especially in Italy. In addition, companies need to take a holistic view of the world situation from an international perspective. From an economic point of view, the location in Europe must be considered. Cooperation with European companies and the development of European unity and community must be given special consideration. Communication plays the most important role in this context.

*"We have spoken to the technicians. Yes, we have invited organization X to come in and take bids for products and solutions, so now I think it's more of a relationship on paper. I think we need to start being real customer suppliers and, in the future, you will certainly become our partners. I would really like us to be technology partners, and I believe we can do great things together, especially in this area. I believe and hope that together our companies will change the world of electric vehicles in Europe by supporting the infrastructure with battery storage. I believe that we can really do great things together in the future." (CPO1)*

The CPO describes the ongoing B2B relationship as involving many discussions with experts, visits and offers of products and solutions from organization X and describes the relationship as more of a paper relationship. The CPO specifies that companies need to become real customer suppliers and sees Organization X as a very potential partner for the future. The CPO seems to genuinely want companies to be more technology partners in the future, and he strongly believes

that through partnership, companies can do great things together, especially in the EV charging industry. He believes and hopes that together, companies will change the EV world in Europe by supporting infrastructure with battery storage. CPO1 also adds with enthusiasm that he believes we can really do great things together in the future.

*"Organization X's investments convey to customers an image of a growing power to satisfy their needs also in the future." (PM1)*

PM1 considers that the investments made by organization X generally give customers the impression that the ability to satisfy their needs in the future will increase, which is an important factor for customers in the B2B market. These investments signal to customers that organization X is committed to meeting their needs, remaining relevant in the industry, and providing a stable and reliable relationship. This can inspire trust, foster confidence, and reinforce the perception that organization X is well placed to meet customers' current and future requirements in the market.

*"When selling a product, you should strategically emphasize how it is economical to invest more money in the product now, because in the next 20 years you will save by making this choice. "(O2)*

Owner strongly believes that when selling a product in the B2B market in this sector, it should be strategically emphasized that it makes economic sense to invest more money in the product now. He sees that a good and profitable investment in quality products and solutions will result in savings for customers over the next 20 years when they make this choice. As a concrete development suggestion, Owner offers that Organization X should put more emphasis on the selling points of products and solutions to Organization X's partners and customers, so that the value and relevance of solutions and products are better internalized to everyone.

*"Organization X's technology makes the company unique, especially in the European market. As a European customer, we want to be in the market with European solutions because our supply chain is more secure. The technological solution offered by Organization X is now unique in the European market and is a perfect fit for us and the most reliable solution we have seen so far." (CPO1)*

CPO1 describes how Organization X's technology makes the company unique, especially in the European market. He also considers it important that, as a European client, the company he represents wants to be in the market with European solutions, because he believes that this makes the supply chain more secure. CPO1 believes that the technological solution offered by Organization X is now unique in the European market, perfectly adapted to the needs of the customer and generally the most reliable solution on the market. This suggests that the interviewee has evaluated other alternatives on the European market and prefers the solution from organization X. The assessment of the reliability of the solution includes elements of performance, robustness, ease of use and compatibility with the specific requirements of the customer. In addition, the security provided by European solutions is clearly valued.

*"Organization X's technology is a competitive advantage for the company because there is no such efficient and versatile product on the market. "(BDM1)*

Comparing the strengths and weaknesses of Organization X with its competitors, BDM1 summarizes that Organization X's technology is a competitive advantage for the company, as there is no such efficient and versatile product on the market today. He specifies that the strength of organization X is that the company offers customers a variety of investment opportunities as well as creates the possibility to improve existing solutions at a reasonable investment cost. In addition, the interviewee considers as a strength the features of organization X's services related to the product management portal that the customer usually uses and the possibility to receive service related to the maintenance and possible repair of products.

*"Creativity, a dynamic approach, plays an important role for customers. The Organization X's representatives in the Italian market are perceived as important from the point of view of Italian customers. The company's managers have a strong interest in innovation." (PM1)*

PM1 summarizes that in the B2B of EV charging industry, creativity and a dynamic approach are the most important factors for customers. According to PM1, the representatives of Organization X in the Italian market are perceived as important by Italian customers, and he is also pleased that the managers of Organization X are very interested in innovation. From Organization X's perspective, SM1 specifies that Organization X is taking an increasingly important place in the world in EV charging industry, and customers are now noticing and recognizing corporate vision of scalable and efficient energy production and well-managed systems. SM1 concludes that all of Organization X's activities support this vision.

*"Organization X as a high-tech company that is easy to work with. I consider Organization X as a good partner" (O2)*

Owner describes the organization as a high-tech company that is easy to work with. In addition, he considers Organization X a good partner to work with. Owner's first impression of organization X was very positive and clean, friendly employees with good work-life balance. The general impression on the Italian market is that organization X is considered a high-quality and efficient company. The employees of organization X communicate that everyone is happy to work, which further improves quality.

## 6.1.2  Reliability of network

*"Organization X is made up of honest employees and integrity is transmitted through the company. In addition, Organization X is a reliable company that operates in a good way." (O1)*

Owner describes the corporate brand of Organization X and in the same context mentions that organization X is made up of honest employees and that honesty is communicated throughout the company and its operations. It highlights that Organization X is recognized as a trustworthy company that operates ethically and responsibly in the B2B context of electric vehicle charging. These qualities of integrity and trustworthiness contribute to building trust, building strong relationships, and enhancing the reputation of organization X among customers and partners. According to AR1, customer and employee expectations are listened to through surveys, and employees place particular emphasis on the meaningfulness of their work in Organization X.

*"Strong international growth and good financial results give a good image of Organization X. "(O1)*

Owner also describes the brand image as being linked to the strong international growth and good financial performance of organization X, which communicates well on organization X's picture in the market in general. These achievements are evidence of the company's competitiveness in the market, its financial stability, and its ability to deliver value to customers and partners. The positive image created by these factors can influence perceptions, attract new opportunities, and strengthen organization X's position in the market.

*"Organization X's solutions and products are seen among the most reliable on the European market today. From the customer's point of view, of course, everyone wants a perfect product that is highly reliable. If there is a delay in delivery, we are not satisfied, and the brand promise is not passed on to the customer." (CPO1)*

CPO1 describes the corporate brand, citing Organization X's solutions and products as the most reliable on the European market today. Moreover, from the customer's point of view, everyone wants a perfect and highly reliable product. However, the CPO1 specifies that any delay in product delivery will have a negative impact on the customer experience and the brand promise will not be communicated to the customer. The above stresses that customers expect to receive complete and highly reliable products, with a particular emphasis on timely delivery. Meeting customer expectations and successfully delivering on the brand promise is crucial to ensure customer satisfaction and to maintain a positive corporate image.

*"Developing and further improving the efficiency and speed of business as well as communication is important." (O2)*

The owner highlights the importance of continuous development, efficiency, and communication as key elements in the market. It is also essential to be able to react quickly to changes and keep up with the speed of the market. According to BR1, the case company's start to 2023 has been very promising and the upgraded strategies enable the company to grow its business globally with customers.

*"Organization X has better technological specificities than its competitors. The products are high quality, which facilitates cooperation." (O1)*

Owner underlines that the organization X has clearly better technological specificities than its competitors. Technological features include technology management systems and other quality features. He also appreciates the high quality of the products, which support network cooperation, which Owner sees as an important element. According to AR1, the organization has developed a management system to keep pace with the growing speed of the EV charging market, to analyze the data it gathers and to apply it to effective problem solving.

*"Organization X products have a high value in the market because the technology is ahead of the competitors. "(PM1)*

PM1 believes that Organization X's products have a generally high value in the market and that this is because its technology is clearly ahead of its competitors. Advanced technology is helping to shape the identity and positioning of organization X as an innovative and forward-looking brand. The perception of high value associated with organization X's products can enhance brand reputation, attract customers, and foster customer loyalty.

*"The Italian market cares about technology and Organization X products never fail."*
*(O2)*

Comparing Organization X to its competitors on the Italian market, Owner mentions that the Italian market cares about technology, adding that Organization X's products are highly reliable, never disappoint and keeps its promises. The market appreciates quality products with impressive design and unique features. Owner also mentions, high technology requires complex communication of what's behind it. Understanding the value of high technology and its entity is seen as an important factor.

*"Compared to European competitors, the technological solutions differ positively and strongly from others.  I can also suggest that the force would also be more reliable on the commercial side if there were no problems with supply or lack of components."* (CPO1)

The CPO1 stresses that the technological solutions are positively and strongly differentiated compared to European competitors. He also points out that, on the commercial side too, the forces would be more reliable if there were no supply problems or component shortages. Solving the problems identified by the CPO would improve the customer experience and the overall image of organization X compared to its competitors. This emphasizes that addressing supply chain and component challenges could first improve the company's commercial credibility. By managing these challenges effectively, organization X could further exploit its technological advantages and improve its market position, which would ultimately strengthen its competitive advantage in the B2B EV charging market.

### 6.1.3   B2B Brand strategy

*"The brand promise of the company and how it is communicated is very much linked to the employees of Organization X, who are the contact persons for the customer."* (PM1)

According to PM1, in the B2B market, and especially in the electric vehicle charging industry the company's brand promise and how it is communicated is

very much linked to the employees of organization X, who are the customer's contact persons in the market. This suggests that the effectiveness of communicating a brand promise depends to a large extent on the actions, behaviors, and attitudes of employees X in the organization in terms of how customers perceive the company's brand. In the brand context of the B2B electric vehicle charging business, where building strong customer relationships and providing reliable solutions are critical, the argument highlights the crucial role of employees in effectively communicating and representing the brand promise of organization X.

*"The use of color in the Organization X's branding is impressive for the customer. The company's logo symbolizes the industry in an impressive and interesting way. Color coding makes it easier for customers to see the brand image, but the brand values are not immediately conveyed. "(PM1)*

PM1 describes of Organization X's corporate brand that the use of color in is effective for the customer as well as the company logo symbolizes the industry in an impressive and interesting way. He emphasizes that color coding makes it easier for customers to perceive the brand image but adds that Organization X's brand values are not immediately conveyed to the customer. The logo serves as a visual representation of the brand and can be used to communicate the brand's identity, values, and industry relevance. The logo of organization X is seen as an effective reflection of the essence of the EV charging industry, which contributes to its impact and attractiveness. While the visual elements of the organization X brand are visually appealing and help to create awareness, there is a lack of direct communication of the corporate brand values. By focusing on the alignment of visual elements and brand values, organization X can strengthen the overall effectiveness of its B2B brand in the market and create a more comprehensive and impactful brand identity.

*"I don't have much other information so far about what the brand's weaknesses or strengths are or what you need to develop that would help you with this, because we don't have experience of a very meaningful relationship." (CPO1)*

When discussing the corporate brand, CPO1 says that he does not have much more information so far about what the brand's weaknesses or strengths are or what it needs to develop, and he specifies that this is because the company he

represents does not yet have very significant experience about this B2B relationship. Therefore, it can be concluded that more information and interaction is needed to better communicate the company's values and vision through the brand in the B2B market. Meaningful relationships are seen as valuable and as a basis for brand image evaluation.

*"Firstly, the Italian representative of Organization X has a very high level of expertise. Organization X represents strength in values and a willingness to innovate. There is also the ability to look outside the box again." (PM1)*

In describing his perception of the values of organization X, PM1 says that organization X represents strong values and a willingness to innovate, and that the company also can look outside the box again. He also adds and appreciates that the Organization X's Italian representative who is the customer contact person has a very high level of expertise. In response, SM1 specifies that the Organization X's corporate values are communicated through a customer-centric approach based on building a solid foundation of trust.

*"We have been active in the electric vehicle charging market for a year now. Organization X is one of my first business relationships, but I don't have as much historical memory of how the company's brand has changed over time." (CPO1)*

Discussing how the brand of organization X's corporate brand has changed over the years, CPO1 first clarifies that the company he represents has been active in the electric vehicle charging market for a year. He describes Organization X as one of his first business relationships but has less historical memory of how the corporate brand has changed over time. Little is known and understood about the development of the corporate brand. The interviewee is not aware of previous brand renewal efforts, changes in marketing strategy, changes in product or service offerings, or changes in brand awareness over time. This may affect the perception of the brand's current position and strategy in the EV charging market.

*"Organization X's presentations are impressive, and the customer is left with a comfortable and easy-to-deliver impression of the company's presentations. The content of the company's presentations represented a broad and high level of knowledge for the client, which distinguishes them from their competitors." (PM1)*

PM1 feels that Organization X's presentations are impressive and mentions that the customer is left with a pleasant and easy to convey impression of the company's presentations. He further specifies that the content of the company's presentations represents a broad and high level of knowledge for the customer, which distinguishes them from their competitors. The above factors suggest that the case company has a broad range of expertise and understanding in its field. This in-depth knowledge sets organization X ahead from its competitors and demonstrates superior competence. The interviewee's assertion highlights organization X's ability to communicate its brand in a professional manner that leaves a lasting impression on customers.

*"Organization X's brand is seen as a new brand in international business. The marketing conveys the idea that a corporate identity is being sought. The corporate identity will grow stronger in the coming years. "(O1)*

According to Owner, the Organization X brand is generally considered a new brand in international business. The marketing of Organization X communicates the idea of seeking a corporate identity. Interviewee believes that Organization X's corporate identity will be strengthened in the coming years. Deepening a corporate brand identity in international markets gives the impression that the case company is trying to create a clear and recognizable image that represents its values, vision, and unique characteristics. By creating a strong corporate identity, organization X can better differentiate itself from its competitors and create a coherent and consistent brand image. By strengthening its corporate identity, organization X can increase its recognition, credibility, and market position in international markets.

*"The client considers the Organization X to be a new brand and therefore doesn't feel it's fair to mention the company's obvious weaknesses. However, many things should even be questioned to get a clear opinion and statement about Organization X, as a new brand always has room for improvement." (PM1)*

PM1 sees Organization X as a new brand and does not think it is fair to analyze the company's weaknesses. According to PM1, many things should even be questioned to get a clear picture and vision of organization X, and he is generally of the opinion that there is always room for improvement in a new brand. This argument summarizes the importance of researching and examining different aspects of organization X to form a clear opinion and make a comprehensive statement about the company. The interviewee can take the perspective of the case company as a new international brand and understands the importance of critical evaluation to gain a thorough understanding of the company's strengths and weaknesses. Although he is cautious when talking about weaknesses, he stresses the importance of an objective evaluation of the company and acknowledges that the new brand has the potential to develop.

*"Negative experiences with the brand have been caused by delays in the delivery of products and delays due to the absence of some components. However, solving the problem can also improve the relationship with the customer." (CPO1)*

CPO1 has had negative experiences with the company's brand due to delays in product deliveries and shortages of components. However, CPO1 hopes that the problem will be resolved in the future and that customer relations will improve. In response, organization X offers the following: According to AR1, organization X is aware that the availability of electronic components has been challenging throughout the year, but because of the excellent work of procurement and RDI teams, Organization X have been able to source the necessary components and secure deliveries to customers. During 2022, Organization X has strengthened its position among global suppliers and ensured better availability of components. In addition, Organization X has been able to reduce the risk of component shortages through strategic actions, by increasing resources in the procurement team and by making longer commitments with our suppliers.

*"The first impression of a company influences customers' decision to cooperate in the B2B market. "(PM1)*

PM1 stresses the importance of first impressions and sees a clear link in the fact that first impressions of a company influence customers' decision to cooperate in the B2B market. First impressions of a company can have a significant impact on the decision-making process of B2B customers and can play a role in building trust and the overall perception of a corporate brand identity. In the electric EV charging market, where sustainability and innovation are key factors, a positive first impression can communicate that a company is reliable, technologically advanced and committed to the environment. On the other hand, a negative or poor first impression can lead customers to doubt the company's capabilities, question its commitment to sustainability or seek alternatives. In summary, the argument highlights the importance of the first impression of the customer or partner on the brand identity of the EV charging company.

*"Organization X is more product-oriented than service-oriented in the eyes of the customer. "(PM1)*

PM1 strongly believes that organization X is more product-centric than service-centric. Based on the above, the brand identity of organization X, as perceived by its customers, is primarily related to the concrete products it offers in the EV charging market. This statement reflects the customer's perception, which may be based on various factors such as the company's marketing, communication, or interaction with customers. Overall, the claim shows that the customer perceives organization X to be more focused on its products than on its services, and at the same time provides an opportunity for organization X to strategically address this perception by highlighting its service offerings and demonstrating that it provides value beyond its products.

*"It is important that Organization X has a strong competitive position and quality products so that customers of a B2B client company will choose Organization X's product." (BDM1)*

BDM1 considers it important that organization X has a strong competitive position and high-quality products and considers that this clearly influences the

choice of organization X's product by B2B customers. In this context, he also mentions that the availability of infrastructure in the sector is an important priority, as is product delivery time. Overall, he sees an excellent opportunity to work with organization X in general. However, he also mentions, as a practical suggestion for improvement, the importance of adding some selling points or arguments for each product or service, as he finds it difficult to sell value in this context to customers in general.

*"It's important to be inside the market, to be strong and drive things towards your own product in the market and not just follow the market." (O2)*

Owner sees the electric vehicle charging market in general as an essential part of being in the market, being strong and driving things towards its own product in the market and not just following the market. The owner adds that organization X should be even more in the market and closer to the market and market rules, for example regarding delivery times. In terms of communication, a mentor could be developed on product management, installation and how to have a strong belief in the product. It is very difficult to drive the market in the direction of own company's vision, but important factor is to believe in own strong product as an argument to say yes to people.

*"Greenfield investment must all be done from the perspective of transport electrification. The timing of market entry plays an important role in greenfield investment. The company had a good timing in the Italian market entry in the client's opinion, which allowed them to enter the market and to get top clients from the Italian market." (PM1)*

PM1 mentions that any international investment in new projects must be made with a view to electrification of transport. He considers the timing of market entry to be a very important success factor. He believes that the timing of the entry of Organization X into the Italian market was good, which allowed it to enter the market and attract top customers to the Italian market. As highlighted above, entering the market at the right time can have a significant impact on the success and performance of an investment. The interviewee is pleased that the company has entered the Italian market at the right time, as it is responding to the growing demand for electric vehicle charging solutions in Italy. According to PM1, the company was able to attract top customers to the Italian market, which shows that its market entry strategy was successful. The above factors and the timing of

the market entry also contributed to a positive customer perception, which enabled the company to exploit the market potential and attract high-profile customers.

*"There is a high quality of interaction between company managers and customers." (PM1)*

PM1 sees a clear advantage for Organization X in the quality of the interaction between Organization X's managers and customers. Quality interactions can be reflected in different ways for customers, for example by company managers actively listening to customers' needs and concerns, dealing with queries or problems quickly and providing comprehensive and accurate information. The interviewee clearly values the customer experience and strives to create a positive and mutually beneficial relationship. According to AR1, the CEO of Organization X is impressed by the excellent performance and contribution of the employees. The CEO also highlights that the hard work of the employees has been crucial in serving customers, driving growth, expanding capacity, and successfully expanding operations in Europe.

*"Targeting customers plays an important role in making the right campaign for a specific market. In addition, Organization X should develop a CRM system to improve its partners' ability to make new offers, for example. (O1)*

Owner mentions that customer targeting is important as well as run the right kind of campaigns for specific markets to target specific customers. Furthermore, he makes a concrete suggestion for improvement and considers that organization X should develop a CRM system to make it easier for its partners to make new offers to customers in the future. Given the diversity and unique characteristics of the different market segments in the electric vehicle charging industry, it is crucial for organization X to tailor its marketing efforts to specific customer groups. By understanding the preferences, needs and behaviors of its target customers, organization X can create campaigns that are relevant to the target audience and increase the likelihood of generating leads and driving business growth. In turn, a CRM system allows companies to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle. By implementing a CRM system, organization X can provide its partners with tools and insights that improve their ability to identify new business opportunities and develop tailored offerings for customers. A CRM system can facilitate better

communication, track customer preferences, and analyze sales data, leading to more effective partner engagement and improved business results.

### 6.1.4 Partnering

*"A lot of work must be done on corporate values, and active communication through different channels is an essential part of this. Higher quality technology requires more active work on communication and marketing." (O2)*

Owner remarks that organization X that must work hard to promote its corporate values, and active communication through different channels is an essential part of this. He also points out that better quality technology requires more active work on communication and marketing. Owner further specified that organization X should talk more about the values and vision or future of the company and why customers and partners should spend more money to buy Organization X instead of buying a cheaper competitor's product. The company's values are not fully communicated to customers and communication of both values and vision needs to be improved in general.

*"The Organization X conveys a high level of enthusiasm to its customers and the company is highly dynamic. I would like to see at least the same level of support in the future, if not better. "(PM1)*

PM1 has observed that organization X conveys great enthusiasm to its customers through its activities and its employees. He also feels that the company is very dynamic. PM1 wants to see at least the same level of support in the future, if not better. This underlines the importance of consistent and exceptional support for B2B transactions in the electric vehicle charging sector. The interviewee acknowledges that maintaining or exceeding current levels of enthusiasm and momentum is critical to continued success and a positive customer experience. He expresses his desire to enter a long-term relationship with Organization X and hopes that it will commit to continually provide excellent support and foster a mutually beneficial relationship.

*"More cooperation with partners to gain experience and improve communication in Italy. "(O1)*


Owner sees it as highly relevant for Organization X to work more actively in the future with partners in the Italian market to gain experience and improve communication. Working with partners in the B2B Italian electric vehicle charging sector is vital for knowledge sharing, operational efficiency, market expansion, interoperability, and policy influence. By working together, companies can leverage their collective strengths, overcome industry challenges, and drive the uptake of electric vehicles.


*"We have found that the weakness of the supply chain is that the factory also needs to improve its design. So that's certainly something that will improve our relationship as partners. If the supply chain problems were solved in the future, we could consider a partnership with organization X instead of a customer relationship." (CPO1)*


In CPO1's view, the weakness of Organization X's supply chain is that the factory also needs to improve its design. Through this improvement, CPO1 also sees potential opportunities as partners in improving business-to-business relationships. CPO1 summarizes that if supply chain problems are to be solved in the future, the company he represents could consider partnering with Organization X instead of a customer relationship. The above highlights the importance of problem-solving skills for the potential of business-to-business partnerships. Overall, the opinion underlines the importance of addressing supply chain weaknesses in the B2B electric vehicle charging sector.


*"Communication plays a very important role. I want even more active communication from Organization X in the future. Communication could develop a mentor on product management, installation and how belief in the product is strong. Product-related communication should focus more on the side that the different features of a product make it more advantageous in the long run." (O2)*


Owner's responses underline the importance of communication, which he sees as a key element of B2B operations and an area for future development. Owner emphasizes that Organization X should communicate more actively in the future. He believes that more active communication would help to develop product

management, installation, and a mentor with a strong belief in the product. In terms of product communication, Owner sees that there should be more focus on the different features of the product that make it more affordable in the long run.

*"The client is concerned about the ability of Organization X to organize and support multiple client projects simultaneously in the Italian market. Expectation is that Organization X can satisfy many different customers at the same time." (PM1)*

PM1 is aware that Organization X has numerous customers in international markets. He is concerned about Organization X's ability to organize and support several client projects simultaneously in the Italian market. In addition, expectations are high for Organization X to be able to continue to serve multiple customers at the same time. It is crucial for organization X to communicate openly with the customers, understand their specific needs and address their concerns effectively. Providing evidence of the organization's ability to manage multiple customer projects simultaneously can build trust with the customer and strengthen the chances of a successful partnership.

*"Organization X should develop individual strategies for individual projects, so that the brand can also be differentiated from the product range and competitors in the market." (PM1)*

For PM1, it is important that Organization X develops its own strategies for individual customer projects, so that the brand can also differentiate itself from the product range and competitors in the marketplace and deliver a holistically unique customer experience. The above shows that by developing individual strategies for individual projects, organization X can tailor its approach to meet the unique requirements and challenges of each project. Tailoring allows the organization to showcase its expertise, innovation and added value in addition to its general product offering. By highlighting these unique aspects, organization X could differentiate itself from its competitors even more and build a strong brand identity that meets the unique needs of its customers and stakeholders in the marketplace. By differentiating its brand through unique strategies, organization X can differentiate itself and attract customers who value individualized approaches and holistic solutions. According to AR1, one of the key strategies focuses on each customer segment in selected geographical

markets. In addition, that includes an individual assessment of customers based on various factors and responding to customer needs.

*"We want Organization X to consider our future business strategy and bring together our business strategies so that we can consider joining forces in the future." (CPO1)*

According to CPO1, organization X should look closely at the business strategy of the company represented by CPO1. He sees relevant to combine the business strategies of the companies, which would provide an opportunity to join forces in the future. Based on the above, when the interviewee highlights the of organization X to consider about its future business strategy, he expresses his interest in finding synergies and areas of cooperation between the two companies. In practice, the interviewee sees opportunities to improve competitiveness, share resources, expand market reach, or gain other strategic advantages that could result from joining forces. It is therefore important to assess the compatibility of business strategies and establish a common vision and clear objectives before considering joining forces with client companies. In addition, partnerships require effective communication, mutual trust, and a shared commitment to success.

*"For the customer, it is important that Organization X can respond to the customer's strategy with future technology upgrades." (BDM1)*

When considering what the customer wants and needs in the future, BDM1 believes that it is very important that organization X can respond to the customer's strategy with future technology updates. The customer wants the relationship to continue well into the future, which requires Organization X to provide product upgrades to future technologies that support the customer's goals. He specifies that organization X must decide how to update its products and services in the future so that they continue to meet customers' needs comprehensively internationally. From the customer's point of view, organization X should not change anything, it is more important to be curious and understand the needs of customers and update services and what customers really need. The interviewee also has a strong belief that all the services of organization X can be developed in the future.

*"It is very important to have local experience and local expression, because in a foreign country you don't know the market very well. "(O2)*

Owner considers it very important that internationalizing companies consider the experience of local experts and local expression in their activities, as foreign markets are generally less well known than domestic ones and there can be wide differences between them. Local expertise can better consider cultural differences in the market, market insights and dynamics, and the different effects of network building in international markets. Local experience in international markets is considered crucial for B2B context, as it enables a deeper understanding of cultural nuances, provides market insights, ensures regulatory compliance, helps in networking and relationship building, improves adaptability and reduces risk. By ensuring the above factors significantly increase the chances of success and growth for companies operating globally.

*"Interaction plays an important role in expanding and strengthening Italy's market position." (PM1)*

PM1 believes that interaction in a B2B context is key to expanding and strengthening Italy's market position in future. Interaction is achieved by building trust and credibility, understanding customer needs, adapting to cultural norms, gaining market knowledge, and promoting cooperation and partnerships. An emphasis on direct interaction will improve the ability to navigate the Italian business environment effectively and put company in a position to succeed.

*"There is a desire to work with local partners and the marketing and advertising department to link local ideas with foreign countries and their customers, so that local customers can be targeted in the right way." (O1)*

According to Owner, more active cooperation with local partners would clearly be beneficial in the future to strengthen its market position in Italy. He would like to see more cooperation with local partners and with the marketing as well as advertising department, so that local ideas can be linked to foreign countries and their customers, to target local customers in the right way. This highlights the importance of localization, targeted marketing, cross-cultural communication,

and cooperation to succeed in foreign markets while meeting the specific needs and preferences of local customers. When different departments in an organization work together, the aim is to incorporate local insights into marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of coordination and teamwork to effectively integrate local ideas into an overall marketing approach.

# 7 DISCUSSION

The theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of creating a strong corporate brand identity and differentiating the company from its competitors in a B2B environment (Iglesias et al., 2020; Balmer & Podnar, 2021). This requires a deep understanding of the target audience and their needs, as well as consistency in communication, visual identity, and all other aspects of the company's activities. Building trust and credibility with customers and stakeholders is also crucial to developing a strong brand identity, and this can be achieved through open and honest communication (Balmer & Podnar, 2021), which is also conveyed by the findings of the interviews. The research interviews with key B2B customers EV charging industry in the Italian market provide insights into how customers and stakeholders perceive and interpret the corporate brand identity of organization X. Overall, the findings underline the importance of understanding customer needs, active and honest collaboration and developing solutions to meet customer's needs. Organization X's products and solutions are perceived as particularly dynamic, sustainable, and high quality, which gives the company a strong competitive advantage in the market. This is in the line with theoretical framework which highlights that the key is to be able to meet and respond to the customer's needs efficiently and by adding value to the customer's value chain in B2B context (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). The theoretical framework also underlines that a network between companies can develop relationships that provide a sustainable competitive advantage in market (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Organization X's presentations stand out from their competitors thanks to their extensive and high level of knowledge. The corporate brand is perceived as new in international business, and interviewees convey that corporate identity seems to be sought. The company's corporate identity is expected to strengthen internationally in the coming years. The theoretical framework supports the view

that a company's brand identity develops over time. (von Wallpach, Voyer, et al., 2017). The above factors are also consistent with the theoretical phenomena that a company's brand identity is created through a dynamic process of social interaction between the company and its key stakeholders over time (Törmälä & Gyrd-Jones, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020). Overall, organization X is perceived as a good partner and a reliable company with a strong focus on innovation and scalability. In terms of brand identity, customers are impressed by the use of color in the corporate branding and the logo symbolizes the industry in an interesting way. However, the brand values are not immediately communicated to the customer, which shows that there is room for improvement. The above is also closely linked to the theoretical framework which underlines that the corporate brand also has a key role as a bridge between the organization, customers, and stakeholders. In particular, the importance of communicating the brand identity of the company and how the company's brand and the brand image perceived by customers and stakeholders should be fully aligned is also underlined (Urde, 2013). In addition, corporate brand, combined with company's values, vision and market position, has a potential impact on the success of B2B companies brand and identity in the market (Ozdemir, Gupta, et al., 2020). Theoretical framework also highlights that companies should maintain to core of their corporate brand identity, while also investing in corporate brand co-creation (Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017).

Interviewees stressed the importance of first impressions, a strong competitive position, quality products and targeting the right customers. A company's first impression on customers is crucial to creating a unique brand identity that differentiates it from its competitors. This is also in line with the theoretical framework, which emphasizes the need for B2B companies to identify what makes their corporate brand unique and to communicate this clearly to their target audience (Iglesias et al., 2020). Organization X was described as more product-centric than service-centric. Interviewees also underlined the value of active communication and support, alignment of objectives and information sharing. The theoretical framework and Jones (2005) also supports the importance of active communication and collaboration in creating brand value and strengthening brand reputation and trustworthiness.

Interviews highlights that organization X's technology is a competitive advantage, as there are currently no products and solutions on the market that are of the same quality and completely meet customer needs. In addition, creativity and a dynamic approach are essential for customers in the B2B market, and organization X's presence in the Italian market is valued by customers. The managers of the company have a strong interest in innovation and all its activities support the vision of scalable and efficient energy production and well-managed systems. This refers to theoretical framework and how important for a company

to constantly gain knowledge how customers perceive the corporate brand over time and how changes in the corporate brand affect their experiences (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). Organization X is perceived as a reliable company whose employees communicate integrity throughout the company. In addition, strong international growth and good financial results give a positive image in the market. Organization X's solutions and products are currently considered the most reliable on the European market, due to its technology being ahead of its competitors. The Italian market cares about technology and organization X is the ideal answer, as its products are highly reliable and never disappoint. However, there have been problems with deliveries due to a lack of components, which affects the customer experience and brand promise. Above mentioned elements link to theoretical framework. Corporate branding and its evolution can be considered as a tool to build customer brand perceptions that can in turn be used by the company in its strategic actions, and the brand experiences of an individual from various interactions with a particular corporate brand have a clear impact on brand perceptions (Rindell & Strandvik, 2010).

A strategic focus on the financial benefits of investing more money in quality products and solutions is also seen as an effective approach. Based on the results of the interviews, organization X appears to be a customer centric as well as high tech centric company with a strong emphasis on meeting the needs of customers and stakeholders. In addition, the company's commitment to the environment is seen as a strength by key customers and is also the driving force and key element in the industry. Above mentioned is also in the with theoretical framework which emphasizes that cooperation and interaction between companies in the network of EV charging industry to meet customers needs is considered to have an impact on the quality of services and brand image (Röckle & Schulz, 2021) Another corresponding element in the theoretical framework in that the competitive environment is influenced by customer focus as well as technology focus. In other words, innovative technology plays an important role and need to invest in close customer relationships, especially to strengthen their position in international markets (Odlin & Benson-Rea, 2017).

Interviewees highlighted the importance of timing and local expertise in expanding into foreign markets, as foreign markets are generally less well known than domestic markets. Another key factor that emerges from the interviews is the value of collaboration with local partner companies to gather valuable information from local experts and to adapt the company's marketing and strategies to the specificities, culture, and nuances of the Italian market. The above-mentioned collaborative activity refers to the importance of collaboration with networks as presented in the theory section. For strategic network management, it is essential that a company integrates into networks to make a valuable contribution to its performance and to act as a driving force. Key factors

affecting performance include industry dynamics and position, resources and capabilities, and potential network advantages and constraints (Gulati et al., 2000). It is also valuable to remember that brand identity is an important part of strategic planning, as it helps to define the direction of the company, its target audience, competitive factors, and marketing strategies. By aligning strategic planning and brand identity, companies can create a clear and consistent brand experience that builds trust, loyalty, and differentiation in the market (Roy & Banerjee, 2008).

The interviews also reveal the current and future needs of customers and partners and concrete suggestions for improvement, for example that organization X should develop a CRM system that would help its partners to make new offers to customers. The above is in line with the objective highlighted in the theoretical framework, where Meyer & Schwager (2007) underlines the importance of understanding the needs, preferences, and pain points of the target audience to create communication and branding that meets their needs in B2B context. In addition, the interview results emphasized the importance of active communication and support, as well as local experience and expression. As a concrete suggestion for improvement, organization X should communicate more about its values and vision as well as communicate more clearly why customers and partners should choose its products over cheaper competitors. This is in line with the theoretical framework where Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) emphasis on the importance of corporate branding to increase knowledge efficiency, reduce risk, create value, and image, and adapt to change, as B2B brand strategies should be adaptable to changing market conditions and evolving customer needs.

The results of the interviews suggest that B2B interaction is key and that active communication and cooperation with local partners would be beneficial in the future, indicating a willingness to involve stakeholders in shaping the brand identity. This is the line with theoretical framework that highlights the need for permanence in a more dynamic environment over time and the role of stakeholders in building and developing the brand (da Silveira et al, 2013). Smooth collaboration and commitment to the network has a significant impact on a company's competitiveness and success in the market, and successful collaboration with stakeholders can also enable shared learning and new innovations (Ozdemir, Kandemir, et al., 2020). The theoretical framework also highlights the importance of brand identity co-creation in the B2B context, as activities will contribute to building brand awareness and trust, and to creating emotional and cognitive brand experiences (Essamri et al, 2019).

Developing a B2B brand and reaching the top requires the ability to create meaningful relationships, which can also be seen as a mutual partnership (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Interviewees agree that building strong B2B relationships is also seen as key factor, focusing not only on products but also on the development of

services in the B2B market to meet customers' needs in a holistic way and build strong relationships of trust. Reliable and well-focused partners and suppliers are valued in the B2B market, especially when they help customers to achieve their goals. This is also in the line with theoretical framework that underlines the importance of customer relationships as a company's first strategic asset, especially in the B2B environment. Companies operating in B2B context need to be identifiable and differentiate themselves by treating their customers well (Youssef et al, 2018). The theoretical framework also points out that for co-creation to succeed, business managers need to identify and engage the right stakeholders in co-creation and spend time and resources interacting with them to create meaningful innovation processes (Kazadi et al, 2016).

The theoretical framework shows that everything in this market environment starts from a holistic understanding of B2B, it is also crucial to recognize that the B2B world is by its nature a continuous process of value creation. (Vargo & Lusch, 2011). Interviewees agree that value creation is a key driver for organization X, and the company's investments reflect its growing strength to meet customer needs in the future. Key customers mentioned that quality interaction between company managers and customers is essential to building trust and credibility. Organization X is considered to play an important role in strengthening customer relationships by considering customers' business strategies and providing high-quality solutions to meet customer needs also in the future. This is in line with the theoretical framework which emphasizes the importance of building long-term relationships with customers and stakeholders to create added value for all actors in the network. In addition, B2B branding strategies are influenced by the relationships between the different players that define the industrial market. Indeed, one of the purposes of B2B brands is to deepen the complex relationships between market players. It is important to recognize that each market relationship is unique and therefore brand strategies should be tailored to the individual needs of companies (Cassia & Magno, 2019). In addition, in the case of corporate identity management, the rapidly changing business and competitive environment drives the need for management to regularly review identity performance of company (Balmer & Greyser, 2002).

## 7.1 Comparison of customer experience with PLC brand strategy

**RQ**: How do customers experience PLC's brand in the international market of EV charging industry and how does it fit into the company's brand strategy?

The following compares the experiences of B2B clients as well as partner companies' Managers and Owners with the brand strategy (BS1) of organization

X, while respecting the anonymity of the case company and the more detailed content of the strategy. Furthermore, it is relevant to note that the research shows that each Manager's or Owner's perception of the organization X's brand is highly dependent on the length of the customer or partner relationship, the level of the relationship between the companies, the level of cooperation, and the interviewees' overall experience of the corporate brand.

In general, organization X can communicate to its customers and partners the key elements of its corporate brand strategy. The visual elements of the corporate brand are perceived as meaningful and impressive, and these experiences are aligned with Organization X's brand's consistent brand communication. However, corporate values have not yet been fully communicated to Managers and Owners in the Italian market in a way that would allow them to identify the corporate values immediately and clearly. Some interviewees were not able to identify the company's values during the interview phase when the topic was discussed, but when they described the activities of the organization X and the corporate brand in more detail, the elements of the company's values and vision were more identifiable from their descriptions. In addition, the experience of the interviewees shows that the values of the organization X are transmitted through the actions of the company's employees, in particular the Italian representatives of organization X, who play a very important role in the cooperation between the customer and the partners. The results of the study also demonstrate that, in general, partners have a stronger understanding of organization X's overall corporate brand.

When comparing the brand attributes included in BS1 with the experience of the interviewees, it can be identified that organization X is able to successfully communicate the new brand attributes to its customers and partners in its operations and overall actions. However, identifying the brand identity of the Organization X is challenging for many interviewees, who consider the company to be a new international brand that will grow stronger over time. The research also reveals that B2B client companies and partners are keen to collaborate, understand and communicate the deeper meaning of organization X's brand identity. This shows that organization X has been able to create meaningful customer and partner relationships in the Italian market and to impress them with its operations.

In summary, the visual elements, corporate brand's overview, and brand attributes have been well communicated to the Italian market. However, the deeper meaning of the corporate brand, corporate values and vision will require more active communication with the target audience of the Italian market in the future.

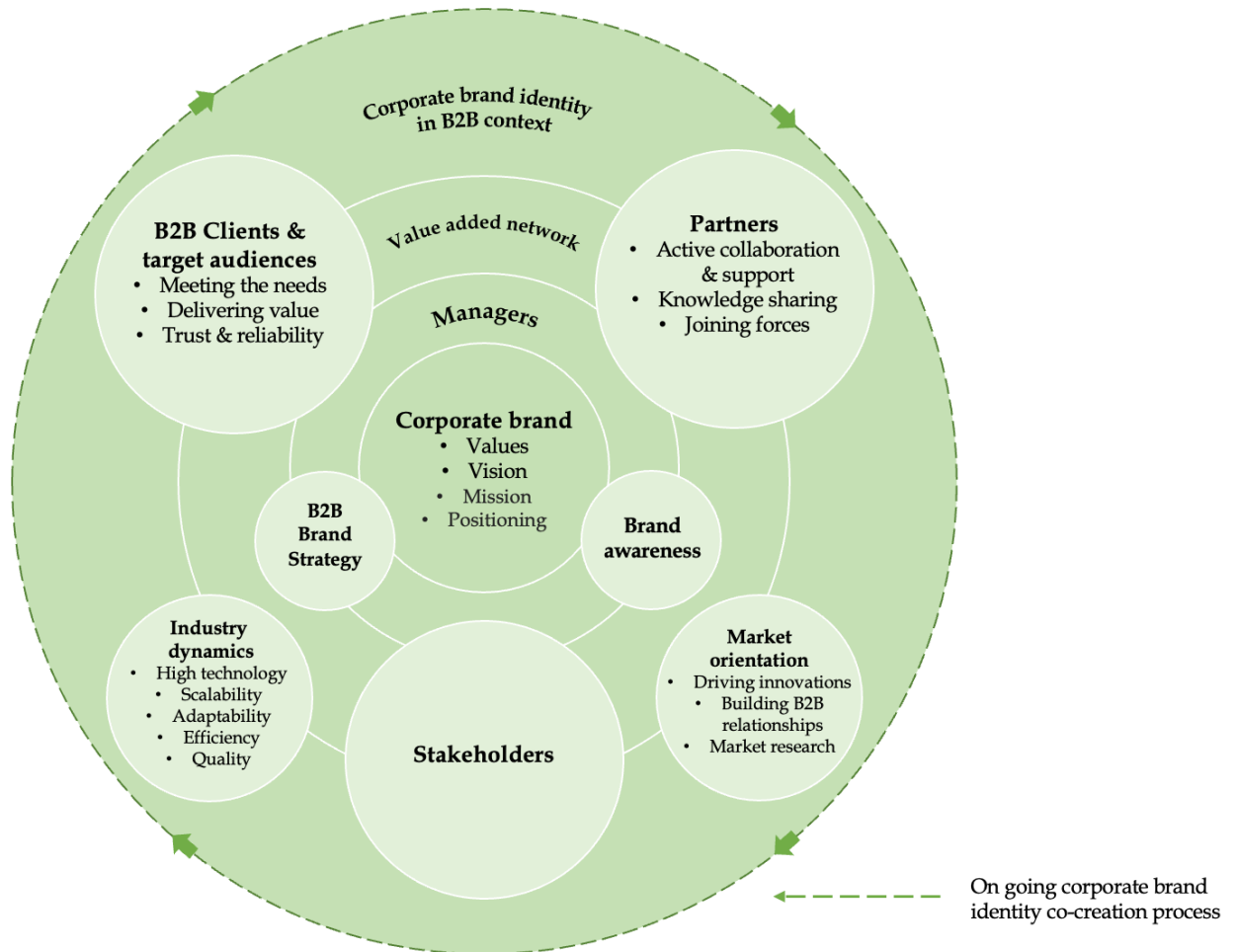## 7.2 Corporate brand identity in a B2B context in the international EV charging industry



Figure 10 Corporate Brand Identity in a B2B context in the international EV charging industry

The framework above illustrates the key elements of a corporate brand identity that emerged from the research in the B2B context of the international EV charging industry. In addition, the figure combines the theoretical framework with the data collected in the research, highlighting the experiences of key B2B client and partner companies' managers, and owners in the Italian market. Together, carefully integrated, the elements of the figure contribute to deepening the corporate brand identity, aligning the corporate brand and brand image, and creating added value for the actors in the entire network.

# 8   CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to meet the needs of the case study company, organization X, as it develops its international markets and strengthens its market position in Italy in the long term, as well as its customer and stakeholder relationships. Organization X was aware of the need to understand how its client companies perceive its corporate brand and how it fits into the company's brand strategy in the international B2B context of EV charging industry. By focusing on the Italian market, where the case company does not yet have a strong market position and which is considered a valuable international market for the future, it was possible to investigate market development and react in time as Italy started to support more electrification of transport and invest in EV charging solutions. The perceived need to align brand experiences with the strategy of organization X and to emphasize the importance of understanding customer perceptions created elements for successfully strengthening market position and customer and stakeholder relationships. The strategic approaches presented in this chapter and the conclusions drawn from the research findings provide organization X with the keys to succeed in the dynamic and competitive international EV charging environment in Italy and strengthen the company's customer and stakeholder relationships as well as PLC's corporate brand in the international B2B context.

## 8.1 Improvements for the future to strengthening market position in Italy

**Active communication of corporate values and vision**

Based on the results of the research findings, it can be concluded that the values and vision of the organization should be communicated even more actively. More specifically, the core values and long-term objectives of organization X should be communicated more actively and consistently to its business partners, stakeholders, and target audiences through different communication channels. Corporate values are and are perceived by customers and stakeholders to be essential in shaping a company's brand identity and creating a strong brand image. By actively communicating these values, the organization can create a common understanding and consistency with its business partners in the electric vehicle charging sector. Similarly, by effectively communicating the corporate vision, organization X can inspire and engage B2B stakeholders and create purpose and direction for shared goals.

Here are several reasons why effective communication of a company's values and vision is critical in the electric vehicle charging industry. Clear and consistent communication of corporate values helps build trust and credibility with business partners in practice. This also helps customer companies and stakeholders to understand the organization X's commitment to ethical practices, environmental sustainability, and social responsibility. This trust provides the basis for long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationships in a B2B context. In addition, effective communication of the company's values and vision provides the case company with ways to better differentiate itself from its competitors. By articulating unique selling points such as commitment to innovation, holistic customer satisfaction, quality, and scalable investment opportunities, organization x can position itself as a preferred partner in the B2B market. This differentiation can also provide a competitive advantage in a rapidly evolving market. Clear communication of the company's values and vision ensures that all stakeholders are aligned with the organization X's strategic objectives. It helps to create a common purpose and direction, enabling joint efforts to achieve common goals. In the electric vehicle charging industry, where partnerships and collaboration are critical to success, aligning business objectives through effective communication is vital. By communicating a compelling business vision, an organization can inspire and motivate its market partners. In addition, a well-communicated vision helps create a sense of shared purpose and encourages partners to actively participate in the long-term goals of the

organization X. This motivation fosters innovation, collaboration, and the pursuit of excellence.

In summary, actively communicating the company's values and vision through different channels in the B2B context of the electric vehicle charging industry means communicating the organization's core principles, long-term goals, and strategic direction in an intentional and consistent manner. Effective communication of the company's values and vision builds trust, creates differentiation, aligns business objectives, and inspires partners to collaborate in the EV charging industry.

## Establishing market leadership: Driving innovation and emphasizing product positioning

Another conclusion of the study is that organization X should be strongly involved in the market and steer things towards its own products as well as solutions and corporate vision, rather than following the Italian market in general. In other words, the above points underline the importance of active participation in the market, building a strong brand and a proactive approach to shape the market with the company's own product offering which is type of the strategy already maintained by organization X. Active participation and immersion in the Italian market is a prerequisite for operating on the Italian market. This requires an understanding of market dynamics, customer needs and industry trends, to which this study also contributed insights. In practice, through its active presence and participation, organization X can gain valuable first-hand knowledge of market requirements and opportunities. In addition, developing a strong brand in the market requires building a good reputation, credibility, and awareness in the B2B context of electric vehicle charging. A strong brand and industry focus on providing a holistic and quality response to customer needs will in turn build trust among customers and stakeholders.

Instead of simply following market trends, a proactive approach should be maintained strongly to determine the direction of the market through its own product offering in Italy. In practice, this requires the development of innovative and differentiated products that meet customer needs, respond to industry challenges, and offer unique value propositions. By steering things towards its own product case, the company can also create a greater advantage over its competitors. Passively responding to market changes would make it more difficult to strengthen market position, and instead should actively shape the market by introducing more distinctive features, cultivating superior quality or innovative solutions that differentiate it from others. By being strong and pushing its own product into the market, it creates the elements to achieve market leadership.

In summary, organization X need to actively participate in the Italian market, build a strong brand and proactively shape the market with their product offering. This will enable them to establish themselves as market leaders, differentiate themselves from their competitors, respond effectively to changing customer needs and build long-term customer relationships, ultimately leading to business success.

**Enhancing the local presence and communication: collaborative partnerships for Italian market success**

The results of the study show that more cooperation with partners is needed to gain local experience and improve communication in Italy. Partnerships provide valuable insights into local markets, facilitate information exchange, and foster mutually beneficial relationships. By working more closely with Italian partners, organization X can benefit from their local expertise, industry knowledge and understanding of market dynamics. More specifically, organization X can gain a deeper understanding of the Italian electric vehicle charging industry, including customer preferences, regulatory environment, cultural nuances, and business practices. In addition, effective communication is crucial for successful business and brand development in B2B. The study also highlights the need to improve clear and consistent communication to promote understanding, align objectives and strengthen partnerships.

To put this into practice, the following strategic actions are needed. Identify potential partners in the Italian electric vehicle charging sector and build partnerships through joint projects, knowledge sharing initiatives or strategic alliances. Actively engage with partners to learn about local market dynamics, customer preferences and industry trends. Promote an open communication and information exchange environment that allows for the exchange of best practices, market research and experiences. Leverage local experience gained from working with partners to adapt marketing strategies and brand positioning to the Italian market. In practice, it would be important to tailor communication, promotional activities and brand elements to local preferences, cultural sensitivities, and market needs. In addition, communication channels with Italian partners can be strengthened and an open and effective communication culture promoted both within the organization X and externally with partners to ensure consistency and consensus. It would also be important to regularly monitor the effectiveness of partnerships and communication practices in Italy. Feedback from partners, monitoring of market developments and strategic planning accordingly with the right elements will create opportunities to strengthen market positioning and relationships between customers and affiliates. In

addition, these activities contribute to effective brand development, market growth and overall business success in Italy.

**Improving the supply chain excellence: Delivering high-quality service to wide range of international customers**

The results of the study underline the need to improve the supply chain and the ability to serve and support multiple international customers simultaneously and with high quality. Strategically, this requires improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the supply chain, which mainly means streamlining processes, such as overall improvements in logistics and operations to ensure a smooth flow of products and services. Another important element in this area is anticipating growth and planning for scalability by investing in infrastructure, resources and systems that can meet growing demands.

Research also shows that the ability to serve and support multiple international customers simultaneously is crucial in B2B. This requires organization X to have the infrastructure, resources, and capacity to handle a high volume of orders, enquiries and customer requirements while maintaining high quality. Providing excellent customer service and support can be seen as a key factor in building strong customer relationships and maintaining customer satisfaction. In practice, robust customer relationship management (CRM) systems can help manage customer and partner relationships and enable effective management of interactions with international customers. In addition, the collection and analysis of data helps to understand customer needs, preferences and buying habits, and can be used for customization, to provide more personalized support and to anticipate customer needs. Soliciting feedback from customers, monitoring key performance indicators, and improving process performance to increase efficiency and reduce lead times are elements of ensuring quality service delivery. In practice, training programmes to improve the skills and knowledge of staff involved in supply chain management, customer service and technical support can also be invested in to ensure they have the necessary expertise. The above will also support more effective problem solving. By implementing these strategic elements, organization X can improve supply chain operations, effectively serve multiple international customers, and provide quality support. This in turn will improve customer satisfaction, strengthen the company's brand reputation, and foster long-term customer loyalty, ultimately contributing to business growth and success in global markets.

**Strategic alignments and technological development: anticipating customer's future strategies and improving success of international business**

Strong factors for strengthening the market position in Italy as well as customer and stakeholder relationships are the need to pay individual attention to the future business strategies of client companies in the future operations of the organization. In practice, organization X should therefore align its own strategy with the business strategies of its main customers and partners to support the long-term response to the individual needs of its customers. This is a practical way to provide better solutions to customer needs in the future, to support customers in achieving their goals and to improve customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the potential for long-term customer relationships. Anticipating customer's future strategies also highlights the possibility of identifying valuable market opportunities in Italy for the future. To continue to be the best product and solution provider in the Italian market, it is important for organization X to continue to provide its customers with high quality technology upgrades that take into account their needs in a holistic way.

The same important need can be concluded from the partners' perspective. It is essential to consider the business strategies of both potential partner companies and existing partners to create opportunities for future partnerships, joining forces, create new innovations, strengthening market positions, growing business, and strengthening corporate brand identity.

## 8.2   Managerial implications

This chapter presents relevant recommendations and development proposals on what actions Organization X should take in a B2B context in the EV charging industry in Italian market. One of the key elements is the development of a strong corporate brand identity. The elements for this are already existing at organization X, as it boldly pursues its own approach in the international market, offers customers the best products and solutions on the market today in Italy and can respond to customer needs in a holistic and dynamic way. However, it is important to create a strong corporate brand identity that reflects the values of the organization and is relevant to the target audience. This requires more active communication of the company's values and vision with customers, partners, and other stakeholders. The brand's visibility and credibility should be further strengthened, and a more detailed strategy should be developed. Now that the overall position of the brand of organization X company on the Italian market has been analyzed and its development needs highlighted, these development

needs must be put into practice and the visibility of the corporate band as well as corporate brand identity on the market must be actively deepened. In practice, these actions can further enhance the position of the corporate brand in the Italian market by tailoring brand communication and positioning effectively to the target audience and responding to customers' needs and preferences in B2B context. The organization X's brand is consistent. However, brand awareness, brand communication and building trust among B2B customers, partners and generally in the Italian market can be further strengthened.

Another important development proposal is to strengthen customer relationships by discussing and developing strategies, future needs, and preferences regularly, and providing solutions to build and maintain strong relationships with B2B customers in EV charging industry. Develop individual customer experiences, provide more active service and support incentives that contribute to long-term customer relationships and partnerships. Similarly, corporation and relationships with partners need to be deepened to gain more local experience, put local market knowledge into practice and strengthen brand's position in the Italian market.

The EV charging industry requires rapid adaptation to change and solution provision, which is why organization X should stay ahead of market trends by developing technological upgrades, anticipating customer needs, and driving continuous innovation to meet the changing demands of B2B customers. In addition to the above factors, the effectiveness of the company's branding efforts should be actively measured and evaluated in a competitive and rapidly evolving industry. In summary, by actively collaborating with partners, addressing customer's future business strategies individually and providing them with high-quality solutions, technological upgrades as well as excellent customer service, Organization X can boldly drive the entire Italian market towards its own products, solutions, and corporate vision.


## 8.3   Limitations and future research


This chapter discusses the limitations of this study and suggests the possible areas for future research. First, the limitations that may have affected the results of the study are presented. The small sample size of Managers and Owners of the client and partner companies that participated in the research points out the partly limited generalizability of the results. On the other hand, five industry leaders of international client and partner companies participated in the study, so in this specific context the results provide a lot of evidence on the state of the corporate brand in the market and suggestions for future development. It can be

concluded that if more client company Managers or Owners had participated in the research, the results would have provided even stronger evidence. It is also important to recognize that the brand on organization X is perceived as a new brand in the international market of EV charging industry, and in this context the results offer many potential development suggestions to strengthen the market position and customer as well as stakeholder relationships in the future. It is also relevant to note that the specific context and characteristics of the EV charging industry affect the result. In addition to the elements above, there can be methodological constraints. Qualitative research methods were used to collect as well as analyzed the data and were chosen to best suit the nature as well as quality of the research and to apply systemic conceptual and analytical rigor. It should be recognized that different methods could have produced different results. In terms of time constraints, if the time available for interviews had been extended beyond a few months, the study might have offered an even larger number of results. In terms of external validity, it should be also mentioned that the results of the study are not fully applicable to other B2B environments, as the study focuses on the EV charging industry and its specific characteristics.

Suggestions for the future research are presented below. In the future, it would be useful to conduct comparative research across different industries to support the generalizability of the results in a B2B context. However, the electric vehicle sector has many research options that would be particularly useful as it is a new industry that is developing and growing rapidly. Possible options could be to study the long-term effects of corporate brand identity in the EV charging sector by observing changes over a longer period. Another important aspect would be to study the impact of brand identity on employees in the EV charging industry, including their role in brand perception and internal alignment. In addition to the above, customer experiences, such as the impact of a company's brand identity on B2B customers' behavior, preferences and decision-making processes in the electric vehicle charging industry could be further investigated. In this international context, it would also be possible to investigate the role of cultural factors in shaping corporate brand identity and its effectiveness in different B2B environments. Furthermore, it would be useful to explore the impact of new technologies, such as electric vehicle charging infrastructure or smart grid solutions, on the brand identity of companies in the sector. The relationship between corporate brand identity and environmental performance could also be studied in relation to the specificities of the industry. In addition to the above, the role of stakeholder engagement in shaping corporate brand identity would provide valuable insights. Another important aspect for future research is to explore strategies to manage and enhance corporate brand reputation in the EV charging industry, considering the unique challenges and opportunities it presents.

# REFERENCES

Aaker, D. (1991). Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name. New York: The Free Press.

Aarikka-Stenroos, L., & Ritala, P. (2017). Network management in the era of ecosystems: Systematic review and management framework. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *67*, 23–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.08.010

Abimbola, T. (2001). Branding as a Competitive Strategy for Demand Management in SMEs. *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, *3*(2), 97–106. https://doi.org/10.1108/14715200180001480

Adegbesan, J. A. (2009). On the origins of competitive advantage: Strategic factor markets and heterogeneous resource complementarity. Academy of management review, 34(3), 463-475. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.40632465

Adner, R. (2017). Ecosystem as Structure: An Actionable Construct for Strategy. *Journal of Management*, *43*(1), 39–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316678451

Adner, R., & Helfat, C. E. (2003). Corporate effects and dynamic managerial capabilities. *Strategic Management Journal*, *24*(10), 1011–1025. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.331

Arslan, B. (2018). The interplay of competitive and cooperative behavior and differential benefits in alliances. *Strategic Management Journal*, *39*(12), 3222–3246. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2731

Ballantyne, R., Warren, A., & Nobbs, K. (2006). The evolution of brand choice. *Journal of Brand Management*, *13*(4–5), 339–352. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540276

Balmer, J. M. T., & Greyser, S. A. (2002). Managing the Multiple Identities of the Corporation. *California Management Review*, *44*(3), 72–86. https://doi.org/10.2307/41166133

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

Bansal, P. (2005). Evolving sustainably: A longitudinal study of corporate sustainable development. *Strategic Management Journal*, *26*(3), 197–218. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.441

Barney, J. (1991). Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage. *Journal of Management*, *17*(1), 99–120. https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108

Baumgarth, C. (2010). "Living the brand": Brand orientation in the business-to-business sector. *European Journal of Marketing*, *44*(5), 653–671. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561011032315

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2015). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573

Beitelspacher, L., & Getchell, K. (2023). The adoption of conscientiousness in business to business relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *109*, 221–231. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2023.01.006

Biedenbach, G., & Marell, A. (2010). The impact of customer experience on brand equity in a business-to-business services setting. *Journal of Brand Management*, *17*(6), 446–458. https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2009.37

Campbell, A. J. (2003). Creating customer knowledge competence: Managing customer relationship management programs strategically. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *32*(5), 375–383. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0019-8501(03)00011-7

Cassia, F., & Magno, F. (2019). A framework to manage business-to-business branding strategies. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, *14*(2), 110–122. https://doi.org/10.1108/EMJB-08-2018-0047

Clatworthy, S. (2012). Bridging the gap between brand strategy and customer experience. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, *22*(2), 108–127. https://doi.org/10.1108/09604521211218936

Cuypers, I. R. P., Ertug, G., Cantwell, J., Zaheer, A., & Kilduff, M. (2020). Making connections: Social networks in international business. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *51*(5), 714–736. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00319-9

da Silveira, C., Lages, C., & Simões, C. (2013). Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(1), 28–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.020

Dul, J., & Hak, T. (2008). *Case study methodology in business research*. Butterworth-Heinemann.

Dyer, J. H., & Singh, H. (1998). The Relational View: Cooperative Strategy and Sources of Interorganizational Competitive Advantage. *The Academy of Management Review*, *23*(4), 660. https://doi.org/10.2307/259056

Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory Building From Cases: Opportunities And Challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(1), 25–32. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.24160888

Eriksson, P., & Kovalainen, A. (2008). *Qualitative research evaluation. Qualitative methods in business research.* SAGE. Retrieved from http://www.econis.eu/PPNSET?PPN=549535136.

Eskola, J., & Suoranta, J. (1998). Johdatus laadulliseen tutkimukseen. Vastapaino. Tampere.

Essamri, A., McKechnie, S., & Winklhofer, H. (2019). Co-creating corporate brand identity with online brand communities: A managerial perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, *96*, 366–375. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.015

Fjeldstad, Ø. D., Snow, C. C., Miles, R. E., & Lettl, C. (2012). The architecture of collaboration. *Strategic Management Journal*, *33*(6), 734–750. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.1968

Frow, P., & Payne, A. (2007). Towards the 'perfect' customer experience. *Journal of Brand Management*, *15*(2), 89–101. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2550120

Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2018). Finding Theory–Method Fit: A Comparison of Three Qualitative Approaches to Theory Building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *27*(3), 284–300. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617706029

Ghodeswar, B. M. (2008). Building brand identity in competitive markets: A conceptual model. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *17*(1), 4–12. https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420810856468

Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking Qualitative Rigor in Inductive Research: Notes on the Gioia Methodology. *Organizational Research Methods*, *16*(1), 15–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151

Gioia, D. A., Schultz, M., & Corley, K. G. (2000). Organizational Identity, Image, and Adaptive Instability. *Academy of Management Review*, 63–81.

Glynn, M. S. (2012). Primer in B2B brand-building strategies with a reader practicum. *Journal of Business Research*, *65*(5), 666–675. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.03.010

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. SAGE Publications. E-book.

Gulati, R., Nohria, N., & Zaheer, A. (2000). Strategic networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, *21*(3), 203–215. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(200003)21:3<203: AID-SMJ102>3.0.CO;2-K

Gyrd-Jones, R. I., & Kornum, N. (2013). Managing the co-created brand: Value and cultural complementarity in online and offline multi-stakeholder ecosystems. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(9), 1484–1493. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.02.045

Hannah, D. P., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2018). How firms navigate cooperation and competition in nascent ecosystems. *Strategic Management Journal*, *39*(12), 3163–3192. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2750

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2001). Are the Strategic Stars Aligned for Your Corporate Brand? *Harvard business review*. 128–134.

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2010). Toward a theory of brand co-creation with implications for brand governance. *Journal of Brand Management*, *17*(8), 590–604. https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2010.14

Hillman, A. J., & Keim, G. D. (2001). Shareholder value, stakeholder management, and social issues: What's the bottom line? *Strategic Management Journal*, *22*(2), 125–139. https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200101)22:2<125: AID-SMJ150>3.0.CO;2-H

Hohenthal, J., Johanson, J., & Johanson, M. (2014). Network knowledge and business-relationship value in the foreign market. *International Business Review*, *23*(1), 4–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2013.08.002

Iglesias, O., & Ind, N. (2020). Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: The next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management*, *27*(6), 710–720. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-020-00205-7

Iglesias, O., Landgraf, P., Ind, N., Markovic, S., & Koporcic, N. (2020). Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *85*, 32–43. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.09.008

Iglesias, O., Mingione, M., Ind, N., & Markovic, S. (2023). How to build a conscientious corporate brand together with business partners: A case study of Unilever. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 109, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2022.12.008

Ind, N., Iglesias, O., & Markovic, S. (2017). The co-creation continuum: From tactical market research tool to strategic collaborative innovation method. *Journal of Brand Management*, *24*(4), 310–321. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41262-017-0051-7

Inkpen, A. C., & Tsang, E. W. K. (2005). Social Capital, Networks, and Knowledge Transfer. *Academy of Management Review*, *30*(1), 146–165. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2005.15281445

Jawahar, I. M., & McLaughlin, G. L. (2001). Toward a descriptive stakeholder theory (1).pdf. *Academy Ot Management Review*, 397–414.

Jones, G. R., & George, J. M. (1998). The Experience and Evolution of Trust: Implications for Cooperation and Teamwork. *The Academy of Management Review*, *23*(3), 531. https://doi.org/10.2307/259293

Jones, R. Finding sources of brand value: Developing a stakeholder model of brand equity. *Journal of brand management* 13, 10–32. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540243

Kapferer, J. N. (2008). The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term. London. Kogan Page.

Kazadi, K., Lievens, A., & Mahr, D. (2016). Stakeholder co-creation during the innovation process: Identifying capabilities for knowledge creation among multiple stakeholders. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(2), 525–540. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.05.009

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*, *22*(6), 357–362. https://doi.org/10.1108/08858620710780118

Mäläskä, M., Saraniemi, S., & Tähtinen, J. (2011). Network actors' participation in B2B SME branding. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *40*(7), 1144–1152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.09.005

Mariadoss, B. J., Tansuhaj, P. S., & Mouri, N. (2011). Marketing capabilities and innovation-based strategies for environmental sustainability: An exploratory investigation of B2B firms. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *40*(8), 1305–1318. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.10.006

Meyer, C., & Schwager, A. (2007). *Understanding Customer Experience*. Harvard Business Review, 85(2), 116-126.

Molinillo, S., Ekinci, Y., & Japutra, A. (2019). A consumer-based brand performance model for assessing brand success. *International Journal of Market Research*, *61*(1), 93–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470785318762990

Odlin, D., & Benson-Rea, M. (2017). Competing on the edge: Implications of network position for internationalizing small- and medium-sized enterprises. *International Business Review*, *26*(4), 736–748. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2017.01.003

Ozdemir, S., Gupta, S., Foroudi, P., Wright, L. T., & Eng, T.-Y. (2020). Corporate branding and value creation for initiating and managing relationships in B2B markets. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *23*(4), 627–661. https://doi.org/10.1108/QMR-12-2017-0168

Ozdemir, S., Kandemir, D., Eng, T.-Y., & Gupta, S. (2020). Vertical stakeholder collaborations for firm innovativeness in new product development: The moderating roles of legal bonds and operational linkages. *Journal of Business Research*, *119*, 172–184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.08.014

Pyper, K., Doherty, A. M., Gounaris, S., & Wilson, A. (2019). Investigating international strategic brand management and export performance outcomes in the B2B context. *International Marketing Review*, *37*(1), 98–129. https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-02-2019-0087

Ramaswamy, V., & Ozcan, K. (2016). Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *33*(1), 93–106. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2015.07.001

Ramaswamy, V., & Ozcan, K. (2018). What is co-creation? An interactional creation framework and its implications for value creation. *Journal of Business Research*, *84*, 196–205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.11.027

Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M. A., Sabir, S. S., & Waseem, A. (2019). Case Study Method: A Step-by-Step Guide for Business Researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*, 160940691986242. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919862424

Rindell, A., & Strandvik, T. (2010). Corporate brand evolution: Corporate brand images evolving in consumers' everyday life. *European Business Review*, *22*(3), 276–286. https://doi.org/10.1108/09555341011040976

Röckle, F., & Schulz, T. (2021). Leveraging User Preferences to Develop Profitable Business Models for Electric Vehicle Charging. *World Electric Vehicle Journal*, *12*(2), 60. https://doi.org/10.3390/wevj12020060

Roy, D., & Banerjee, S. (2008). CARE-ing strategy for integration of brand identity with brand image. *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, *17*(1/2), 140–148. https://doi.org/10.1108/10569210710776512

Santos-Vijande, M. L., del Río-Lanza, A. B., Suárez-Álvarez, L., & Díaz-Martín, A. M. (2013). The brand management system and service firm competitiveness. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(2), 148–157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.007

Seyedghorban, Z., Matanda, M. J., & LaPlaca, P. (2016). Advancing theory and knowledge in the business-to-business branding literature. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(8), 2664–2677. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.11.002

Singleton, R., & Straits, B. C. (2018). *Approaches to social research*. New. York: Oxford University Press.

Törmälä, M., & Gyrd-Jones, R. I. (2017). Development of new B2B venture corporate brand identity: A narrative performance approach. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *65*, 76–85. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.05.002

Tsai, W., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). SOCIAL CAPITAL AND VALUE CREATION: THE ROLE OF INTRAFIRM NETWORKS. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 464–476.

Urde, M. (1999). Brand Orientation: A Mindset for Building Brands into Strategic Resources. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *15*(1–3), 117–133. https://doi.org/10.1362/026725799784870504

Urde, M. (2013). The corporate brand identity matrix. *Journal of Brand Management*, *20*(9), 742–761. https://doi.org/10.1057/bm.2013.12

Vallaster, C., & Lindgreen, A. (2011). Corporate brand strategy formation: Brand actors and the situational context for a business-to-business brand. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *40*(7), 1133–1143. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2011.09.008

Vallaster, C., & von Wallpach, S. (2013). An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(9), 1505–1515. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.09.012

Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2011). It's all B2B…and beyond: Toward a systems perspective of the market. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *40*(2), 181–187. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2010.06.026

Veloutsou, C., & Guzman, F. (2017). The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the *Journal of Product and Brand Management*. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *26*(1), 2–12. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-01-2017-1398

Verhoef, P. C., Reinartz, W. J., & Krafft, M. (2010). Customer Engagement as a New Perspective in Customer Management. *Journal of Service Research*, *13*(3), 247–252. https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670510375461

Vesal, M., Siahtiri, V., & O'Cass, A. (2021). Strengthening B2B brands by signalling environmental sustainability and managing customer relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *92*, 321–331. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.02.024

von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A., & Espersen, P. (2017). Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research*, *70*, 443–452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.06.021

von Wallpach, S., Voyer, B., Kastanakis, M., & Mühlbacher, H. (2017). Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: Introduction to the special section. *Journal of Business Research*, *70*, 395–398. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.08.028

Witell, L., Kowalkowski, C., Perks, H., Raddats, C., Schwabe, M., Benedettini, O., & Burton, J. (2020). Characterizing customer experience management in business markets. *Journal of Business Research*, *116*, 420–430. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.08.050

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. https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420510601021

Youssef, Y. M. A., Johnston, W. J., AbdelHamid, T. A., Dakrory, M. I., & Seddick, M. G. S. (2018). A customer engagement framework for a B2B context. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, *33*(1), 145–152. https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-11-2017-0286

Other references

Annual Report 2022 of Organization X (2023)
Brand Strategy of Organization X (2022)
Business Review Q1 2023 of Organization (2023)
Company Report of Organization X (2022)
Organization X′s website (2023)

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: Interview questions

1. What company do you represent and what is your role in the company?

2. What values does Organization X present?

3. What is Organization X's corporate brand like? What is its identity? What does it represent for the customers?

4. How do you think that Organization X's brand has changed over time?

5. What makes the brand of Organization X different or similar from its competitors?

6. Do you think that Organization X's brand delivers on its promise, and to what extent?

7. What are the strengths or weaknesses of the Organization X's brand? What should be changed?

8. What suggestions do you have for the future? Why?