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Brand Expansion of Swedish SMEs

A study on how Swedish SMEs exercise branding to expand in the European market

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Abstract

Title:	Brand Expansion of Swedish SMEs: A study on how Swedish SMEs exercise branding to expand in the European market
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Introduction Globalization has opened up for opportunities, as well as challenges, for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to distinguish themselves in a competitive environment. A branding strategy that aims to develop a strong reputation and recognition can be an attempt for Swedish SMEs to create awareness and differentiate themselves in the European market. This thesis is composed of three major bricks; *branding,* and how the firms exercise it; *SMEs resource constraints,* in terms of employees and financial assets; and *internationalization*. All these combined become special challenges for SMEs.

Purpose The purpose of this thesis is to examine how Swedish SMEs exercise branding internationally in order to develop a strategic model of how they can continue their brand expansion in the European market.

Method In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, a qualitative study based on four Swedish SMEs were included in the sample. Through semi-structured interviews (six face-to-face and one telephone interview). The respondents were the owners, external CEOs, product or marketing managers of the SMEs. The collected data was categorized and each SME was analyzed in order to finally construct a model.

Conclusion The findings in this thesis show that all the investigated SMEs, to different extents, use branding strategies in order to succeed in the international market. Generally the findings conformed to a certain degree to previous findings concerning branding. Further, the importance of international fairs and networking while developing the brands outside the Swedish market was found. The authors came forward with *the SME European Brand Expansion-model*, which is strongly influenced by the empirical findings in this thesis.

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1   Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to why branding internationally is a challenge for SMEs, and why this is an interesting topic to study. The problem discussion highlights how the study of this thesis relates to previous studies within the field. Further, the specific focus of this thesis is expressed through research questions, purpose and delimitations, and ends with a disposition.

1.1   Background

In a competitive environment where countries, people and products are getting closer and closer to each other by trade (Heery & Noon, 2008), it is crucial to stand out from the crowd. Due to globalization a large part of firms decide to internationalize (Zain & Ng, 2006), and having a known image and distinct brand strategy might benefit for those firms competing in a market as the size of the world. A brand is defined as: "a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (American Marketing Association, 2014). If a company works efficiently with brand management, the brand can become a valuable asset for the company (Aaker, 1991).

Branding started to gain more attention during the 1990s, and it was also during this period the most valuable literature and theories were established (Krake, 2005). An interesting observation is that mainly large organizations (LOs) were in focus, which means that the majority of the theories are based on LOs (Krake, 2005). Yet, it is of importance to consider that there are differences between small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and LOs, as SMEs are generally suffering from resource constraints. Since the resources differ it will have impact on how the firms exercise branding strategies, but it has been assumed that SMEs and LOs' brands grow similarly even though their situation is different (Centeno, Hart & Dinnie, 2012). Moreover, in Europe SMEs cover 99 % of the market (European Commission, 2014), and comprise an important part of economic growth (Thurik & Wennekers, 2004). Despite this fact, SMEs are rather ignored within the branding literature even though they cover a majority of the market. To have in mind is that many successful LOs once started out as small, such as Nike, Coca-Cola and IKEA that today are corporations with highly recognized brands. Hence, companies that manage to enhance the benefits of branding can become successful in a competitive environment.

1.2   Problem Formulation

The three major bricks in this thesis are *branding,* and how the firms exercise it; *SMEs resource constraints,* in terms of employees and financial assets; and *internationalization.* These factors combined are a special challenge for SMEs.

It has been argued and well documented that small businesses are not smaller versions of large businesses (Centeno et al., 2012), and therefore SMEs encounter difficulties when adapting to the same branding and internationalization strategies as LOs. Sweden is a country where 99 % of all companies are SMEs (European Commission, 2014). SMEs comprise 66 % of employment in Sweden (European Commission, 2014), and are creating growth and

strengthening the welfare (Edling, Hermansson, Nilsson & Nordborg, 2007). Hence, SMEs are an important building block in the Swedish economy. SMEs are characterized by their limited resources, which create disadvantages within certain organizational operations compared to LOs (Centeno et al., 2012). In this thesis the authors refer to limited resources as the lack of financial assets and few employees. Furthermore, SMEs do possess advantages such as being flexibile and innovative (Berthon, Ewing & Napoli, 2008), which will be taken into account in this study. Despite this fact, the authors aim to investigate how SMEs use branding and how the process appears internationally. Even though the majority of the companies in the Swedish economy consists of SMEs, still very little research on how SMEs exercise branding can be found.

As mention above, another area of interest is to what extent companies tend to internationalize. Globalization has created opportunities for companies to expand their activities, e.g. make use of opportunities, expand their business and reach more customers (Gjellerup, 2000). Since SMEs are influenced by resource constraints, consequences within both internationalization and branding appear. Branding internationally then becomes a special challenge for these companies. For this reason, the authors of this thesis have discovered an opportunity to develop a model of how SMEs can continue their brand expansion in the European market and potentially add to existing literature.

1.3   Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how Swedish SMEs exercise branding in order to develop a strategic model of how they can continue their brand expansion in the European market.

1.4   Research questions

- *How do Swedish SMEs work with brand expansion strategies to create awareness in the European market?*

1.5   Delimitations

Even though SMEs cover 99 % of the Swedish market, the authors do not have the time or resources to conduct a study which is applicable for all sectors, sizes and industries within these 99 %. Hence, the authors have chosen to delimit the study to only micro and small firms within the SME category, having not more than 50 employees. Furthermore, the authors will only investigate firms that are selling an end-product which is ready to consume (e.g. candy, furniture and watches).

The three bricks the study is built upon might differ in process and structure depending on country and culture. Since the study focuses on the Swedish market, the findings should be applied with caution to other markets and contexts.

The internationalization brick of the study will be limited to only the European market, mainly due to both cultural and geographic distance that might influence the process and

resource allocation of the internationalization strategy. The authors are aware that within Europe it exists different cultures, but in this thesis the authors will consider Europe in general as more culturally close to Sweden than for example Asia.

The study is conducted with a firm-centric approach which delimits the study to the companies' perspective. This can have implications in the validity of the branding brick since branding is a two-sided relationship where the customers' opinions also play a central role. However, this thesis will only investigate *how* the companies are exercising branding in order to address this issue.

1.6 Definitions

Brand Management

Brand management is when a company that has embedded brand management within its organization recognizes that the implementation of a brand strategy and the management of a brand are not once-only exercises, but a daily recurring aspect of its marketing policy (Kapferer, 2002).

SMEs

SMEs are defined by the European Commission (2013) as firms with no more than 250 employees and with an annual turnover not exceeding SEK 500 million. Three different categories are defined to include micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

Brand Identity

According to Kapferer (2012) a brand is not just the name of a product but rather the vision that drives the creation of services and products under that name. The vision, the brand's key beliefs and its core values is called identity.

Brand Equity

In order to define the concept brand equity the well-known author Aaker's (1991) definition will be used: "Brand equity is a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (Aaker, 1991).

Brand Strategy

According to Doyle (2013) a brand must be closely linked to the company's overall business strategy and market positioning. The positioning and repositioning of the brand is at the heart of a successful brand strategy in order to build awareness of the brand attributes (Doyle, 2013). To clarify, the authors of this thesis will describe brand strategy as a combination of use of brand identity and brand equity, while at the same time take limited resources into consideration.

1.7   Disposition

Frame of Reference	*The frame of reference starts with discussing the central theories within the research topic. Additionally, the theories focus on branding and SMEs with regards to internationalization. The frame of reference is acting as a foundation and guide for the empirical investigation and the analysis in this thesis.*
Method and Methodology	*This chapter starts with the research approach and the chosen strategies. The authors will provide with methodological insight and reflection, and provide explanations why certain approaches are chosen. A description of the primary data collection through interviews as well as the sample of four Swedish SMEs will be presented and argued for. The chapter finishes off with a model development description.*
Empirical Findings	*This section of the thesis will present the collected results from the interviews. The empirical findings will be presented under five different headings followed by the four SMEs which will be presented one at a time. Moreover, a table summarizing the interviews in a scannable manner will be provided.*
Analysis	*In this chapter the empirical findings presented in the previous chapter are analyzed and connected to concepts and theories from the frame of reference. First, the focus is on branding, then the European market presence, followed by challenges and opportunities to throw light on the branding strategy. The chapter ends with the development of a model suitable for SMEs future brand expansion in the European market.*
Conclusion	*This chapter summarizes the most important findings based on the analysis concerning branding and its influence on companies' expansion plans in the European market. The presented conclusions concern findings specific to the firms and general findings, and relates back to the purpose of the thesis.*
Discussion	*This chapter will present further reasoning and the authors' personal reflections about the findings collected from the four SMEs. Relevant observations and thoughts outside the specific research area have as well been discussed, which will be highlighted in this chapter. Furthermore, limitations and implications of the result will be discussed and lastly, the thesis will finish off with suggestions for further research.*

2   Frame of Reference

The frame of reference starts with discussing the central theories within the research topic. Additionally, the theories focus on branding and SMEs with regards to internationalization. The frame of reference is acting as a foundation and guide for the empirical investigation and the analysis in this thesis

2.1   Brand Management in SMEs

SMEs have been known as an important source of economic recovery in terms of growth, employment and competitiveness, whereas LOs have lost power in generating a sustainable economic growth (Ribeiro, 2005). Still it has been assumed that small and large LO's brands grow similarly even though their situation and resources are very different (Centeno et al., 2012). According to Aaker & Biel (1993) LOs' brands are mostly built on resource efficiency, formal structures, expertise and performance evaluation, measurement and long-term planning. On the contrary, SMEs' brands are usually characterized by flat and informal organizational structures, entrepreneurial manners in the form of innovation and creativity thinking, in addition to this SMEs contend with lack of financial resources and experience *(*Carson & Cromie, 1990*)*. SMEs should emphasize creativity and innovation to create brand value (Krake, 2005). Furthermore, Krake (2005) argue that the brand and the entrepreneur are strongly connected since the characteristics of the entrepreneur usually appears in the brand. Continuing on the entrepreneurial nature of SMEs, it is argued to contribute to the capability of coping with complex market environments, acquiring marketing information and increase organizational learning (Berthon et al., 2008). According to Krake (2005) marketing strategy is mainly based on differentiation: the distinctiveness of a product from that of its competition; and added value: a branded item has more value for the customer than an unbranded one.

Within the field of branding several concepts are included. In this chapter the authors will examine the most common concepts of branding which are frequently mentioned in theories and literature. The authors believe that brand management is of importance for organizations in general, but for SMEs in particular since that is what most successful organizations start out as. Also, as mentioned in the introduction due to globalization and growing markets the authors believe it is more important than ever to stand out from competition.

2.2   SME Brand Identity

As Kapferer (2012) mentions a brand is not just a name of a product, in accordance to this Aaker (1996; Aaker & Biel, 2009) states that the identity of a brand is composed of four main dimensions. These four dimensions are: brand as a person, brand as an organization, brand as a symbol and brand as a product (de Chernatony, 2006). These dimensions do as well constitute the five phases of SME brand-building (Centeno et al., 2012). In addition, according to Centeno et al. (2012) brand differentiation is an important factor for brand growth. However, it has been found that brand management activities are not top priority among SME owners (Krake, 2005).

In this section the authors are focusing on the five phases of brand-building within SMEs, also known as the five phases of SME brand-building model, constructed by Centeno et al. (2012). The model represents a framework for managers in a SME context. According to Centeno et al. (2012) SME brands are built in a non-traditional manner with minimum brand planning and limited resources, and in order to build their brand they engage in brand exploration and experiment based on risk, commitment, creativity and a willingness to learn.

2.2.1 Five Phases of SME Brand-Building

The following sections will present the four brand identity dimensions. In addition to this, brand-building is composed of two stages, a starting and a development stage. During the starting phase the four dimensions mentioned above are created and during the development stage one of the brand identities is composed (Centeno et al., 2012). According to de Chernatony (2001) brand-building should be a strategic progression that is visionary and incorporates cross-functional actions in the value-adding process.
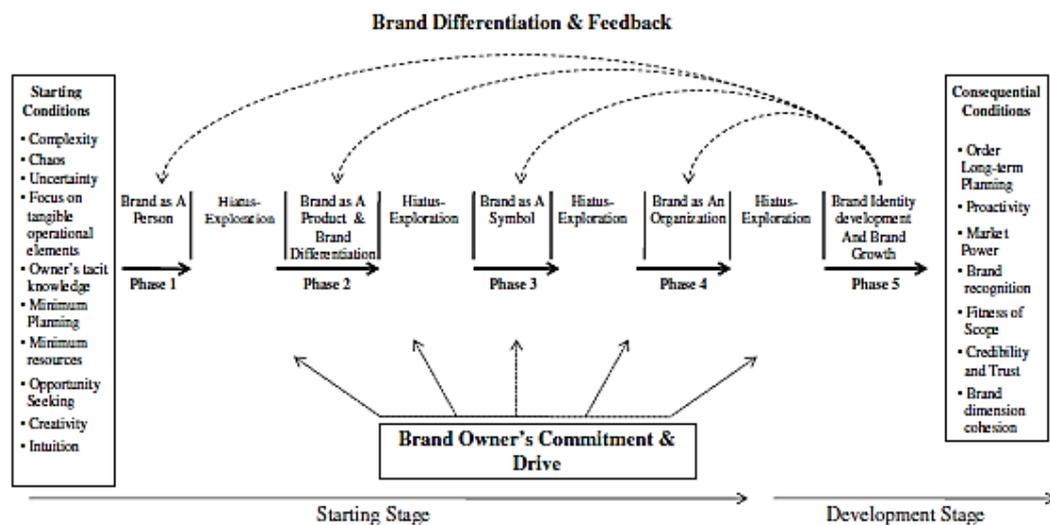

Figure 1 - Five Phases of SME Brand-Building (Centeno, Hart & Dinnie, 2012)

The First Phase – "Brand as a Person"

The first step is the starting stage of creating a brand, and it is about the brand owner to recognize the personality with the brand. Entrepreneurs or the owners of a brand are driven by a personal choice and own preference which support their motivation and commitment in the firm (Centeno et al., 2012). Centeno et al. (2012) have found a relationship between the SME owner and the brand's personality. Hence, brand as a person indicates how well the owner's personality permeates in the brand. It has been found that in some cases the personification of the brand owner may decrease as more employees or members of staff are involved in the brand decision-making, that is, as the SME grows the personification decreases (Centeno et al., 2012).

The Second Phase – "Brand as a Product"

The second step in brand-building for SMEs is brand as a product, which determines how well the brand owner knows its product. Findings suggest that brand differentiation is created at this phase, since a close link between the product and brand differentiation is found (Centeno et al., 2012). Opportunity recognition is the first key factor that helps entrepreneurs start successful brands (Merrilee, 2007), and many entrepreneurs found a gap in the market before they start producing their products and then develop market-focused strategies (de Chernatony, 2001). Centeno et al. (2012) found that many SME owners went through a brand exploration in which they learned how to produce the original product and then subsequent products. Many brand owners also referred to product development, such as brand extensions, as a way to differentiate (Centeno et al., 2012).

The Third Phase – "Brand as a Symbol"

In this dimension three key themes are raised, namely the brand name, logo, and colour (Centeno et al., 2012). Also symbols as staff uniforms and brochures should be visible appearances of the brand's values (de Chernatony, 2001; 2010). Bhat and Reddy (1998) along with Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger (2011) claim in their studies that symbolic association towards a brand is related to intangibles such as feelings, emotional values, self-image and social identification. Moreover, Liang and Wang (2004) argue that symbolic benefits are an extrinsic value that is equivalent to non-product-related attributes which communicate a variety of brand meanings to consumers. According to MacInnis, Shapiro and Mani (1999) brand names and symbols represent communication tools between a firm and the customer, and the most distinct focus is on brand name awareness, namely to create a brand name and symbol that customers remember.

The Fourth Phase – "Brand as an Organization"

In an organization it has been found that organizational values are of importance, and when used appropriate they can provide a brand with a competitive advantage (de Chernatony, 2001; 2010). It has been found that the owners often bring their own values into the organization which in turn becomes the organizational values (Centeno et al., 2012). According to de Chernatony (2001; 2010) organizational culture, i.e. staff, are critical contributors to a brand's emotional values. The staff has unique knowledge and skills that permeates in the delivery of the brand, and as their personal values align with the brand they get more motivated and committed to deliver the brand (de Chernatony, 2001; 2010).

The Fifth Phase – "Development of the Brand"

During the fifth phase of the brand-building the company continues developing each of the branding phases. This stage is an on-going phase in which the company and the owners experience sequences of exploration, and trial and errors until they gain more knowledge and build their brands further (Centeno et al., 2012).

2.3   Brand Equity

As mentioned in the definition section, brand equity is based on certain assets and liabilities. Furthermore, if a firm manage to create and maintain brand equity it will provide value to the firm (Aaker, 1991; Belo, Lin & Vitorino, 2014). The well-known name, the perceived quality and the associations can provide reasons to buy a certain product and reduce the incentive to try others (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1991; Aaker & Biel, 2009) has grouped brand equity into five categories: *Brand Loyalty, Brand Awareness, Perceived Quality, Brand Associations* and *Proprietary Assets*. The authors will go through these categories in order to create a broader understanding of what brand equity is.

2.3.1   Brand Loyalty

The brand loyalty of the customer base is often considered as the heart of a brand's value (Aaker, 1991; Aaker & Biel, 2009). If customers were to buy with respect to price, features and convenience, and being indifferent between brands, there is likely little brand equity. Conversely, if customers purchase a product with a known brand instead of competing products offering better price, convenience and features the value of the brand must be high and can perhaps exist in its slogans and symbols. In other words, one can say that brand loyalty is a measure of the attachment that a customer has to a brand. However, for the customer to get attached he/she must have positive experiences related to the brand (Ekinci, Nam & Whyatt, 2011). If a customer is loyal to a brand it is less likely that the customer will switch to another brand when a change is made, e.g. in price or product features. Aaker (1991; Aaker & Biel, 2009) also writes that as brand loyalty increases, the vulnerability of the customer base to competitive operations decreases. By this one can conclude that brand loyalty is noticeably linked to future sales and profits.

2.3.2   Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is the capability of a potential customer to recognize or recall a brand e.g. as being a member in a certain product category (Aaker 1991). Brand awareness is an asset that acts as a source of influence on consumers (Kapferer, 2012). People like things that are familiar to them and are prepared to assign many different sorts of good attributes to products of that kind (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). In the case of brand awareness a link between brand and product class is involved. Aaker (1991) uses an example about Levi's to explain this. If Levi's uses a large balloon with its name printed on it, it would necessary not improve the name awareness. However, if the balloon would be shaped as a pair of jeans from Levi's product line, the link to the product would be provided and the balloons effectiveness in creating awareness would be larger. However, Kapferer (2012) argues that brand awareness often is correlated with high quality, trust, reliability, closeness to people, a good quality/price ratio, accessibility and traditional styling.

Brand awareness can create value in at least four ways (Aaker, 1991). The first one is as an anchor to which other associations can be attached. The second way is through familiarity which as mentioned before can drive people's purchases. The third way is through signal of substance/commitment, which means that if the brand is recognized by a customer, there

must be a reason. A reason could e.g. be that the firms have been in business for a long time. The last way in which brand awareness can create value is through being a brand that it considered. In the buying process the first step is to select a group of brands to consider. If a brand falls into this group early on it will have an advantage.

2.3.3 Perceived Quality

Aaker (1991) defines perceived quality as "the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or a service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives" (p.85). Along with this Keller (2003) states the same.

Since perceived quality firstly is a perception by a customer it can differ depending on the customer in question and the situation. Hence, it cannot be objectively determined. Perceived quality differ from satisfaction. If a customer has low expectations about a product and its performance level he/she can still feel satisfaction. High perceived quality is not compatible with low expectations, neither with attitudes (Aaker, 1991). For example, a person could have a positive attitude about a product with less quality that is inexpensive. Contrariwise, a person could have a negative attitude toward a product with high quality that is overpriced. To summarize, one can say that perceived quality is an overall feeling about a brand. In this thesis, this dimension of brand equity will not be in focus since this is a measurement mostly concerning customers. Since the investigation is firm-centric, perceived quality will not be as present in the empirical material.

2.3.4 Brand Associations

A brand association is anything linked to, or that connects the customer to a brand (Aaker, 1991; Crawford Camiciottoli, Ranfagni & Guercini, 2014). An example can be McDonald's that can be connected to fast food or the character Ronald McDonald. McDonald's might as well be associated with a feeling, like having fun, or a customer segment such as children. The associations have a level of strength. If a link to a brand is based on many exposures to communications and experiences rather than a few, it will be stronger (Aaker, 1991).

The set of associations linked to a brand often create the underlying value to it. They represent the bases for brand loyalty and purchase decisions. According to Aaker (1991) there are five mentioned possibilities to why associations can create value for a brand. Associations can help process/retrieve information, differentiate or position the brand, generating reasons-to-buy, create positive attitudes or feelings, and provide basis for brand extension.

2.3.5 Other Proprietary Brand Assets

This dimension refers to other assets that can create a competitive advantage which is not attached to the other four dimensions of brand equity (Aaker, 1991). Assets can be trademarks and patents, but also strong channel relationships, which create barriers for competitors (Aaker, 1991; de Chernatony & Christodoulides, 2010).

2.4   Nation Equity as an Association

According to Maheswaran and Chen (2009) nation equity can be defined as "equity or good-will associated with a country". These associations often go beyond company or product performance-related perceptions, and can be positive or negative as a function of macro-factors such as culture, politics, economic development, and religion (Maheswaran & Chen, 2009). Hence, nation equity associations are induced by factors that are external to the company or the product, yet they have impact on the company and its products. Accordingly, de Chernatony (2010) argues that countries and cities are being developed as brands. The image of the country adds image to the product category, for example Scottish whisky, and French perfumes (de Chernatony, 2010).

2.4.1   Country-of-Origin Effects

The effect of country-of-origin has been interpreted as a type of halo effect, where customers rely on their general impressions of a country to form some beliefs about a product's attributes or performance (Maheswaran & Chen, 2009). It can influence consumers' perceptions of a product's quality, performance, design, prestige, price, as well as consumers' product evaluations and purchase decisions. For example, Germany can be associated with superior engineering and cars, whereas France is associated with a positive image for design and fashion, which are important attributes for handbags and shoes, but not as much for beer (Maheswaran & Chen, 2009). Sweden on the other hand is associated with functionality of their automobiles (Volvo) and their furniture (IKEA) (Laroche, Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Mourali, 2005). In accordance to this Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) also argue that Swedish products are perceived to be high quality goods, exclusive and expensive, especially when it comes to Swedish cars and furniture made out of wood. Hence, this is something Swedish firms can take advantage of when producing cars or luxury home furnishing. According to Herlitz (2003) Sweden developed a reputation of good quality, due to the manufacturing industries and a great social system, during the years back in the 50s and 70s, something that are still associated with Swedish design.

2.5   Challenges with Brand-Building

Aaker (1996) states that the road towards building a strong brand consists of both barriers and pressures. Aaker (1996) identifies eight factors that make brand-building difficult. Each factor will be elaborated further to get an understanding of the challenges organizations might encounter related to branding.

Pressure to Compete on Price

In almost all industries, the pressure to compete with prices exists. Aaker (1996) states that the price competition is mainly driven by strong retailers, overcapacity, reduced category growth and value-sensitive customers. Before, private-label brands were rarely associated with low-quality and low-price products. Retailers are offering price-brands and at the same time private-label brands which still are associated with quality and usually higher price. What

retailers do is to divide the cost over hundreds of products to push prices even more (Aaker, 1996).

Proliferation of Competitors

When the number of competitors is increasing, the importance of having a unique identity is as well increasing (Aaker, 1996). In order to be perceived as special, firms need to target smaller markets and position their brands more narrowly. When competition is fierce new competitors are influenced by higher motives to take risky approaches or copy past successful strategies. According to Aaker (1996) this can result in destabilized competitive dynamics. In Sweden where 99 % of all companies are SMEs, this factor could be important to consider when building a brand.

Fragmenting Markets and Media

There are many communication channels where companies can expose their brand. Through media a company can reach its identified target group and increase the customers' brand awareness. However if the company lack coordination between different communication channels it is hard to create consistency within the brand. Aaker (1996) suggest that companies should strive to send the same message through media, since the audience regardless of customer segment always overlaps.

Complex Brand Strategies & Relationships

Even if a brand has a well-established identity it needs to apprehend its role in the different environments and contexts where it is present (Aaker, 1996). If a company have several brands the relationship between them must be clear both regarding customer perceptions as well as strategically.

Bias Toward Changing Strategies

Aaker (1996) states that some brands never reach their fullest potential. This is due to the internal pressure to change identity and brand strategy. The resulting changes can weaken the brand equity of the company in question. One example of a company that has developed a clear identity and kept it for a long time is Volvo.

Bias Against Innovation

In the market there is an incentive to keep competition static. Changes often occur costly and risky and could in some cases cause previous investments to have reduced returns. The result is that firms get vulnerable to aggressive competitors that come from outside the industry. Companies managing successfully established brands can be so satisfied with their current and past success and too occupied with managing their day-to-day processes that they do not see the changes in the competitive environment. This makes the brand vulnerable and the managers risk missing opportunities (Aaker, 1996). Competitors not enjoying the same success are at the same time trying to come up with new innovative solutions and increase their competitiveness.

Pressure to Invest Elsewhere

What this factor describes is that a great brand position can also become a potential strategic problem (Aaker, 1996). When a brand increases its power, management are tempted to reduce the investment into the core business in order to promote short-term performance or to fund new ventures within the business. A mistake that is commonly made is that the brand will not suffer from these actions and hence other investment opportunities seem more attractive. The overall outcome of this course of action is negative.

Short-Term Pressure

There is a pressure in the business world to achieve results. When a company is focusing on short-term results it usually undermines investments into branding. Aaker (1996) states that especially US firms operate in a way that profits are made quickly, but long-term competitiveness is put aside. Brand-building activities get sacrificed due to short-term pressure.

On the account of SMEs working with resource constraints and that the decision-making process is highly affected by the owner/entrepreneur, SMEs are following a different pattern than LOs dealing with marketing issues (Carson & McCartan-Quinn, 2003). Since marketing practices seem to often be decided by managers with limited knowledge than a proper marketing department the process of achieving a strong brand identity takes time. Time is a resource smaller firms need to manage efficiently. The financial constraints as well as the time it takes to invest in branding can be seen as factors contributing to why SMEs branding activities are not as promoted as LO's. Brand equity and reputation are invisible assets, which are difficult to measure the effect of. It is therefore difficult for any organization to relate branding activities to a certain positive happening (Abimbola & Koack 2007). As the case for SMEs, these facts contribute to why other operations seem more important to develop than the organization's brand.

2.6   SMEs Internationalization

The conditions for marketing and production are changing rapidly which results in that firms, including SMEs, need to respond to market changes at an increasingly faster pace (Pleitner, 2002). As mentioned before, SMEs are characterized by limited resources which creates a disadvantage for smaller firms compared to LO's when trying to expand. However, according to Antoncic, Hisrich and Ruzzier (2006) there are difficulties in understanding what critical resources that are needed for internationalization. Due to this fact the topic of this research can be perceived as even more interesting since a strong brand can be seen as a valuable resource.

How prepared a firm is to internationalize is mainly determined internally. The degree of how prepared a firm is depends on the ability to carry out strategies outside the country of origin, with other words the actual skills the firm has related to international business operations (Solberg, 1997). These organizational capabilities do not need to consist of experiences, it can also be personal characteristics (such as culture and language skills) or financial resources.

According to Solberg (1997) a well-prepared company stands on a steadier foundation for dominating the international market. Solberg (1997) uses the word "mature" for a company that is ready to internationalize and "immature" for a company that is not. What Solberg (1997) also states is that a company with a weak position in the home market and limited international experience should not engage in international expansion. In other words, immature firms should "stay at home". On the contrary, Knight (2015) argues that SMEs now can emerge as born global, which means that previous experience no longer is crucial. Due to globalization, emergence of sophisticated information and communications technologies, SMEs are able to enter international markets easier (Knight, 2015). Hence, SMEs can undertake international activities close to their establishment.

2.6.1 Networking

According to Johanson and Vahlne (2009) the business environment is viewed as a network, as a web of relationships rather than a market with many independent suppliers and customers. Johanson and Vahlne (2009) talk about insidership and outsidership, in which insidership in relevant networks is necessary for a successful internationationalization. Hence, outsidership is a liability and when being excluded from a relevant network it is more a root of uncertainty than psychic distance (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Furthermore, relationships in networks offer potential for learning and knowledge and for building trust and commitment, which all are preconditions for entering foreign markets.

According to Johanson and Vahlne (2003) networking through stakeholders such as clients and colleagues, is likely affecting the selection of countries to enter and which mode to take. SMEs typically rely more extensively on network relationships as they pursue international opportunities (Coviello, 2006). Since SMEs are small, and typically lack resources, an international expansion is a greater risk than for larger and established organizations (Musteen, Francis & Datta, 2010). Hence, a network can e.g. help gain knowledge and information to reduce uncertainty before conducting international activities.

2.6.2 International Market Entry and Operational Modes

There are different strategies of how a firm can enter and operate in another market. For example, wholly owned subsidiaries and joint ventures present equity modes of entry, and non-equity modes can be defined as export and contractual agreements (Brouthers & Nakos, 2004). But the different modes can also be classified depending on the need to maintain control (Chang, Chung & Moon, 2013). Because of SMEs severe resource limitations, they have difficulties chosing equity entry modes (Erramilli & D'Souza, 1993; Maekelburger, Schwens & Kabst, 2012). Below, a further explanation of the different modes will follow.

Foreign Direct Investment – Equity Mode

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) occurs when an enterprise invest in another country apart from that it is resident in (Drahokoupil, 2015). For FDI, a crucial feature is the long-term relationship orientation (Drahokoupil, 2015). In other words, the investment is made to

maintain lasting interest and control of the entity in question. Basic forms of FDI are green-field, mergers and acquisitions and joint ventures.

Wholly Owned Subsidiaries – Equity Mode

As the name states, a wholly owned subsidiary is 100 % owned by a holding or company. In other words, there is no minority interest (Wholly Owned Subsidiary, 2009). A company may have several subsidiaries, both nationally and internationally (Brock, 2009). For example, the company GE, which includes several subsidiaries such as GE Money, GE Infrastructure and NBC Universal to mention a few.

Exporting – Non-Equity Mode

Exporting is considered to be a relatively low-risk approach as it does not involve larger investments (Kogut & Chang, 1996; Kiran, Majumdar & Kishore, 2013). This type of entry has been considered the most traditional one when it comes to enter the international market. Exporting serves as a platform for further international expansion (Kogut & Chang, 1996; Kiran et al., 2013). An export activity can be conducted in several ways. For example, a firm can use an agent in the host country or sell directly to a retailer.

Contractual Agreements – Non-Equity Mode

Examples of contractual agreements could be *licensing* and *alliances*. Being a part of an alliance generally allows companies to concentrate on their own competences while relying on their partners in other areas. On the other hand, international alliances are increasingly being utilized to provide companies with advantages, for example access to distant countries and cultures at reduced risk (Foscht, Meierer, Morschett & Swoboda, 2011). A relevant course of action for SMEs with limited financial resources is to enter alliances with companies that have complementary competences (Solberg, 1997). A licensing agreement provides a firm in a host country with the right to produce and sell a product for an agreed period in return for a fee (Hill, 2007). The company providing the license is called a licensor and the one operating according to the licensor's agreement is called a licensee. Licensing allows the licensee to gain presences in the international market without investing a lot of equity.

3 Method and Methodology

This chapter starts with the research approach and the chosen strategies. The authors will provide with methodological insight and reflection, and provide explanations why certain approaches are chosen. A description of the primary data collection through seven interviews as well as the sample of four Swedish SMEs will be presented and argued for. The chapter finishes off with a model development description.

3.1 Research Approach – Theory and Empirics

When reviewing the existing literature the authors discovered that branding in itself is a well-researched area where many theories already exist. However not many of these are directly focused on SMEs, and even less on small firms with less than 50 employees. As elaborated earlier the resource constraints in terms of financial assets and few employees create certain disadvantages compared to LO's. The authors have chosen to focus on the challenges of branding internationally which is a subject that the existing theories do not fully cover from a SME perspective. Hence, the research will not purely be deductive or inductive. Separately, theories concerning branding and internationalization exist but the two combined with a small firm focus is lacking. With this base, the study will be conducted with an approach starting with theory then finishing off with a new model developed from both empirics as well as existing theories. An explanation of the two approaches will follow to clarify the choice of method.

According to Yin (2003) deductively based analytical procedures can be defined as a research made from theory to empirics. By investigating more deeply how the chosen investigation subject connects to reality, researchers will have a broader information spam before the actual study is conducted. A critical view towards this strategy needs to be elaborated as well. The risk that researchers limit themselves to only finding information that supports their predetermined expectations might exist. This strategy might cause that other relevant information is overseen, and hence limit the credibility of the research.

The opposite of deductive research is inductive. Hence, from empirics to theory. The ideal is that researchers enter reality with almost no expectations, collect all relevant information and at the end systematize the collected data (Jacobsen, 2002). With this broad basis, theories are later formulated.

Since the authors of this thesis are entering this research with theoretical knowledge, they cannot purely follow an inductive approach and since they are going from empirics to model-development it is not purely deductive either. Hence, a mix of these is necessary to fulfill the purpose of this thesis.

3.2 Qualitative vs. Quantitative Method

The basic difference between a qualitative and quantitative method is that a qualitative method collects data in a word form and a quantitative method in the form of numbers (Jacobsen, 2002; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). However, Jacobsen (2002) states that one should try to avoid thinking about these two methods as opposites. It is more correct to

imagine the pure qualitative and the pure quantitative as two end points on a scale. Jacobsen (2002) also writes that the pure quantitative method is a questionnaire where all answers are given by predetermined alternatives, while the pure qualitative method is applied by a completely open conversation. Usually, researchers do not purely use any of these end-point methods. It is more common to move towards the middle.

The SMEs' own view is of great importance for the accuracy of this thesis' results. That is why a qualitative method is chosen for the research. The purpose is to examine how SMEs exercise branding and in order to do so the authors want the respondents' answers to be under minor control. The authors of this thesis want to create an understanding of the respondents' attitudes, behaviors, interactions and believes, which a qualitative method is more appropriate for (Pathak, Jena & Kalra 2013). Furthermore, the authors believe that by applying a qualitative method they will be able to find similarities, differences and other information that can be of use for the strategic model development.

There are some disadvantages with the choice of method that needs to be elaborated. Qualitative studies often take long time and since the authors are lacking time they might need to satisfy with less respondents. Few respondents create a problem with representativeness amongst the interviewed people. Although the authors will try to compensate for this problem by interviewing two persons at each firm. This strategy enables the result to be of two different views. Even if these critics exist, Jacobsen (2002) argue that a qualitative approach is the most suitable when there is an interest in creating a clarity about a phenomenon or concept. In other words; how people interpret and understand a situation. Since the authors are investigating the branding situation within SMEs and the international expansion, it is more relevant to conduct a qualitative study since a quantitative one will not be able to provide them with in-depth information.

3.3   Sampling

Fritz and Morgan (2010) claims that sampling are of relevance in an investigation of a population, in order to make claims about a certain population. Fritz and Morgan (2010) argue that some advantages with sampling are lower costs, higher speed and convenience. In this study the population of interest is Swedish SMEs with less than 50 employees with activities outside Sweden. Based on this the authors will obtain a sample of four companies as well as eight respondents. The SMEs have been selected based on recommendations and the authors' own awareness of potential respondents. The suggested SMEs were further explored on Allabolag.se, in order to make sure they were classified as SMEs and of use for the purpose of this thesis. Further, questions were asked to the respondents from each SME to secure the second hand information by a primary source.

Since the authors do not have access to all individuals in the population, a non-probability sampling method will be used. The selection of respondents is purposive since the authors have used their own judgement in order to answer the research question and fulfill the purpose (Saunders et al., 2009). The companies are sampled through both a homogenous (i.e. one particular sub-group in which all the sample members are similar) and heterogeneous (i.e. diverse characteristics) approach (Saunders et al., 2009). However, from an operational

or industrial view, the companies have a heterogeneous approach since they operate differently towards different target groups.

3.3.1 Sample Presentation

For the study the authors have interviewed the following four companies and representatives:

SMEs	Industry	Employees	Respondent position	SME is selling an end-product	Customers outside Sweden	Type of interview
Company A	Confection	31	**Respondent 1**: External CEO	YES	YES	Face-to-face
Company B	Accessories	2-3	**Respondent 1:** Founder **Respondent 2:** Sales Manager	YES	YES	Face-to-face
Company C	Furniture	33	**Respondent 1:** Marketing, export and sales Manager **Respondent 2:** Sales, support and logistics Manager	YES	YES	Face-to-face
Company D	Sports equipment	30	**Respondent 1:** Marketing Director **Respondent 2:** Product Manager	YES	YES	Telephone Face-to-face

Table 1 - Company Presentation

Note: Due to few employees at Company A the authors were not able to conduct a second interview. Respondent 1 in this company claimed that the organizational situation was too intense to interview another person of relevance. The authors are aware of the reliability issue this brings to the thesis.

3.4 Interviews

To fulfill the purpose the authors have chosen to conduct semi-structured interviews on a sample of four SMEs. The structure as well as the sample decision and technique will be presented below. The interviews will be conducted in a face-to-face manner or over telephone depending on the respondent's availability. All interviews will be recorded to ensure that no data is lost. All authors will participate on all interviews, one will be responsible of asking the questions to the respondent while the two other authors take notes and ask follow-up questions when necessary. In this study the authors have chosen to investigate four SMEs. They have chosen four because they want to increase the validity of the information and be able to track strategic branding and internationalization similarities and differences among the investigated SMEs. The authors believe that it is important to consider differences and

similarities between the firms in order to develop an accurate model in the end of the research. For every SME, two interviews with two different people will be conducted in order to get a broader picture about how the branding is exercised. Due to time limitations the authors have concluded that more than two interviews at each firm will be hard to process. The thesis is quality-oriented thus not quantity-oriented, hence the authors believe that few interviews with high credibility will contribute more to the empirical analysis. A semi-structured interview model has been chosen to fulfill the purpose. This structure allows the respondents to give their point of view, as the authors at the same time control the topic. A further explanation of what semi-structured interviews are and the sampling method will follow below.

3.4.1   Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Ayres (2008) semi-structured interviews is a data collection strategy where the questions are predetermined but open-ended. In comparison to questionnaires, there is no fixed range of responses to each question. A written interview guide is developed in advance. The interviewers can themselves decide how to follow the guide. One alternative can be to follow the guide to the letter and another could be to move back and forth based on the responses. Furthermore, how the interviewers will follow the guide is depending on the flow of the conversation, since different interviewees might require various approaches to the guide (Saunders et al., 2009) A semi-structured method is particularly useful where concepts and relationships among them are relatively explored and understood. Since the topic relates to branding as well as internationalization which in themselves are explored areas the authors argue for a semi-structured approach to be the most appropriate method.

Since the chosen companies are Swedish, the interviews will as well be in Swedish since the authors believe that it is the language that both the respondents and the authors of this thesis are most comfortable with. All the interviews will be recorded so the authors can listen to them more than once in order to avoid missing out on important information. Saunders et al. (2009) do as well recommend audio recording when adapting to this interview method. The questions are published in the appendices in Swedish since the authors want to provide the reader of this thesis with the exact material that has been used when conducting the study. This is for the reliability and validity of the material.

The questions are divided into different categories. The categories are based on theories that is brought up in the frame of references. These categories have headlines such as *Brand Identity, Brand Equity, Brand Strategy, Internationalization, Opportunities* and *Challenges*. These categories are also developed to guide the authors when the model is going to be developed. Within the categories there are both opened questions as well as some more structured. The first questions in the order are more opened. The authors believe that this gives the respondent a chance to answer more truthfully with the knowledge and information he/she has about the company's branding and internationalization strategies and plans, before the authors steer the conversation into more specific questions

3.5　Data Presentation

To facilitate for the reader, the empirical chapter and the discussion chapter will be structured with the same headings. In the empirical chapter, each and every company's interviews will be summarized. The respondents' answers will be summarized under the company's headline within the certain category that is being presented. This structure is chosen because the reader will then be able to follow each company's individual answer and already in the empirical chapter be able to spot similarities and differences between the respondents and the companies. This is in order for the reader to more easily connect the result to the discussion and analysis. Apart from the structure, it is the material within the frame of references that is the base for both the headings as well as the interview questions.

3.6　Data Analysis

In order to get more objective empirical findings the authors of this thesis do not mention the companies and the interviewed respondents by their name, but rather call them Company A, B, C, and D and Respondent 1 and 2. After doing the interviews and taking notes, the authors will transcribe the interviews and will not only take into account what the respondent says but also *how* the respondent says it, in order to get a full understanding of the interviewee's thoughts (Saunders et al., 2009). The interviews are transcribed into Swedish and then translated into English. Since spoken and written language are very different (Saunders et al., 2009), the authors are aware of the disadvantage with holding the interviews in Swedish, since some concepts and content might be difficult to translate literally. Saunders et al. (2009) argue that there are no standardized procedure to analyze qualitative data. However, the possibility to group data into three main types of processes exists; summarizing, categorization, and structuring (Saunders et al., 2009). In the empirical chapter, the data will be summarized but still narrative since the authors of this thesis want to provide the reader with a genuine picture of each SMEs story. A table summarizing similarities and differences between the sample will as well be provided. The table in itself will be structures according to the categorization approach where units of data (e.g. a special sentence or a couple of words) will be placed in a certain category (Saunders et al., 2009). The analysis chapter will be structured using summarizing as well, however key points will be highlighted to a greater extent.

3.7　Model Development

As stated in the purpose the authors want to create a tool for small businesses that want to continue their brand expansion in the European market. The model will be based on the empirical material gained from the interviews and theory presented in the theoretical framework. By analyzing the different companies the authors of this thesis aim to identify their successful brand actions and compare and combine them to create a superior strategy for small businesses within the investigated category. The model will be strategic, presenting a suggestion on how SMEs can continue their brand expansion in the European market.

3.8   Method Summary

SUMMARY	
Research Approach	Deductive and Inductive
Research Method	Qualitative
Four SMEs	Seven Respondents
Sampling	Non-probability Purposive
Interviews	Semi-structured
Data analysis	Transcribe Translate Summarize Categorize
Model Development	

Table 2 - Method Summary

4 Empirical Findings

This section of the thesis will present the collected results from the interviews. The empirical findings will be presented under five different headings followed by the four SMEs which will be presented one at a time. Moreover, a table summarizing the interviews in a scannable manner will be provided.

4.1 SME Brand Identity

4.1.1 Company A

The identity of Company A according to Respondent 1 is very engaging and fun. With engaging the respondent refers to the different scenarios where candy can be consumed. Important for the identity is as well the modern production facility which the firm operates in. In summary the respondent says that Company A is a flexible firm with candy of the highest quality.

Company A do not have any stated values that everyone within the firm knows and follows, however the vision of the company is known and can be stated as: "Sweden's most modern, flexible and nicest production plant where all workers feel involved and important". Another thing related to the company's flexibility is that Company A do not just state that they are flexible, they operate accordingly. For example, when developing new products they have the ability to adapt fast to market trends and new customer demands.

The company does however not invest much time to in-weave the company's values into the brand, mostly because none of the values are stated. The respondent stresses that their ordinary customers would claim that Company A is characterized by high quality. As the respondent stated: Respondent 1 says "This type of reputation is easily spread among customers". Due to the high quality, Company A's candy thus has a higher price compared to other actors.

When Company A are searching for new employees they first consider skills and abilities before certain values of the candidates. "We are too small in that sense. It is interesting but at the moment the most important sector is production, however I think that values will become more important".

At Company A they want a relation to the customers, which is the retailers, as well as to consumers. Another thing that was mentioned during the interview is that Company A are stressing the fact that the company is Swedish and have the label "Made in Sweden". This identity is more important abroad than within the domestic market. Company A work with the consumer side through their Facebook page and Instagram where they upload fun and inspiring pictures. The name of the Facebook page is not the name of the brand, but the product name.

According to Respondent 1, Company A are in a mixed phase where the product mostly represent the brand, especially towards end-consumers. To retailers the logo of the company combined with the product are the two factors that represent Company A's identity.

4.1.2 Company B

The first thought with Company B was to create a lifestyle-inspired brand associated with class and quality. The logo of Company B is inspired from horseback-riding. After first launching the watches Respondent 1 found that the watch had possible prosperity since it was not only suited for an active lifestyle but also fashion-inspired. As Company B want to be perceived as a classic and timeless brand the owners choose wisely where to sell the watches, and at this date they focus mostly on premium retailers that sell fashion within the category the company wants to be associated with.

Company B do not have internally stated values, however the respondents mention that values are more important than skills when recruiting. As they go on, the respondents clarify that since they are small, passion is of great importance to develop the brand.

The fact that the founder is a business woman, but also an active woman, holds characteristics and values that permeate in the brand. According to Respondent 1 Company B are the first company that design "watches for a woman, by a woman". The watch is affordable but still high quality, and has been proven the Swedish design is an important characteristics. Company B works mainly through social media. The posted pictures and quotes are supposed to not only show the product but as well mediate a feeling behind the picture.

According to Respondent 1 the company is in a combined brand-building phase; the product and the person are the two factors that compose the brand identity. The respondent answers all emails and questions from customers on her own, and she put a lot of effort and time into answering personally and unique to all questions, something that she believes permeates in the brand.

4.1.3 Company C

Company C is a family owned business established in 1898, and according to the respondent's heritage is a central part of the brand's identity.

The respondents state that honesty is important as well as fulfilling given promises. The respondent adds that Company C is very basic in that sense. The company does not aim to follow trends, rather it strives towards producing products that are classic and durable. Respondent 2 mentions that the question of recycling and sustainability have started to appear more frequently and to this she answers "our stuff is not supposed to be recycled, it is supposed to be inherited". Both the respondents mention that this is a part of Company D's values. Another important value that both of the respondents mention is to be occupational proud. Respondent 1 states that this is important as it creates motivation and a willingness to always do your best.

Respondent 1 states that it is important for the employees to have certain values and characteristics. The people employed should be reliable, honest and be proud working for Company C. However, Respondent 2 mentions that as long as the individuals hold similar core values there should not be any difficulties.

Respondent 1 claims that Company C is to a large extent dependent on the actual products. "The product is the key, without a good product, you are screwed". If a new product-idea comes up, the management first consider if the product fit into the entire concept of Company C. The respondent concludes that values often create the base of how the brand is perceived. Both respondents claim that it is the product and the symbol/logo that are important for the brand's identity. However, the core values and the heritage are also part of the brand's identity.

4.1.4 Company D

Since the establishment in 2004, Company D's mission is according to Respondent 1: "to do everything we can too possibly save lives and to reduce consequences of accidents, for alpine skiers, by developing and renewing what personal protection is all about". According to Respondent 1, the same mission still applies today although the focus has extended from alpine skiers to gravity sports athletes.

Company D's brand identity is built around a strong team consisting of strong athletes called "Team Athletes" within gravity sports. The firm works in a cross-scientific way with specialists in different fields such as material specialists, engineers, industrial and graphic designers, and neurologists. As Respondent 1 mentions, by working with their team athletes along with Company D's scientific team, it creates credibility and attraction when it comes to produce the best and safest products on the market.

Both respondent 1 and 2 agree that when recruiting new ambassadors and athletes to their team, being number one in their field is not of highest priority. Instead, having good values, a great personality and being a good person while communicating the brand is of much greater importance than being number one in their sport.

Company D are proud of being Swedish. According to Respondent 1 Sweden is related to prominent safety, which can be recognized in for example Volvo with an incentive to promote the company's Swedish heritage and safety aspect.

Both the respondents state that when hiring new personnel, certain values could create an advantage for the candidates. However it mostly depends on required skills demanded at the moment. A person working in the products or marketing department should have some interest or connection to gravity sports in order to relate to the products. Moreover in a more administrative role an interest or connection towards the sport is not as high of priority Respondent 2 adds. The following words are being used internally to describe the people behind their brand: leader, high-tech, high-end, pre-medical, crisp, laid-back and humble.

Company D rely on their ambassadors and staff to be able to communicate the company's image that should connect with its vision and mission. In order to promote Company D the best way possible Respondent 2 mentions internal educations and conferences are held to educate ambassadors and staff.

Respondent 1 also mentioned Company D vision which is: "to be recognized as leading supplier of protection gear by gravity sports athletes, cyclist and practitioners internationally

and to grow into a global sport lifestyle". And to whom; "True opinion leader makers, in every segment that we enter to eventually reach our buying target, kids between 10-17 years old with a common passion for gravity sports and cycling together with a creation to belong to the same community".

According to Respondent 2 Company D's brand is in the product stage where the products represent the brand's identity. However Respondent 1 claims that the brand's phase is a mix between all of the phases but put most emphasis on Company D's values and vision to reflect the brand identity.

4.2   SME Brand Equity

4.2.1   Company A

Respondent 1 mentions that the company reaches out to two different groups, namely retailers and consumers. He says that when the company is in contact with retailers they talk about the company and the brand, but in contact with end consumers the company is mostly associated with their most popular piece of candy.

The respondent does not consider Company A as an especially strong brand even though the awareness of the products have increased. Company A are not satisfied with their current market position, the firm wants to develop further and strengthen their market position frequently. According to Respondent 1 the industry they operate in grows about 2-3 % annually and Company A are growing with 20 %, hence, Company A are doing better than the market. "We are not satisfied, and will probably never be, I believe that when you are satisfied the firm stops innovating".

The largest candy segment Company A offer is the Swedish "pick and mix" which the respondent claims is growing outside the Swedish borders more and more. The main idea is to keep the "pick and mix" part as it is in Sweden, and concentrate to make packaged candy grow abroad as well as investing in export. These are the three main parts that Company A are working actively with at the moment.

4.2.2   Company B

According to Respondent 1 there are connections between the brand and the product. Company B are high in quality, trust, and accessibility; characteristics that are correlated with brand awareness. They are using Instagram and Facebook to post pictures, sales offers, but also everyday quotes and greetings to the followers, which create an overall good association to the brand and its attributes. Another attribute abroad is the association to the Swedish elegant and classy design. Company B want to be associated with their posted pictures where the watch is an accessory and part of a woman's everyday life. One special symbol that can be associated with Company B is the logo that takes the shape of a horsebit, as well as the packaging of the watch. According to Respondent 1 what differentiates the brand is that the watches are designed for a woman, by a woman. The respondents see the company as an

early adopter or a trendsetter which want to continue developing their current market position. As the respondents state the majority of sales is abroad.

According to the respondents Company B are a bit hidden in the Swedish market whereas the "Swedish design" is a competitive advantage abroad and is driving sales in Europe, as well as in the USA and Asia. The Swedish design is also associated with Scandinavian design, factor that is a reason why the competition is less abroad. As Respondent 1 stated: "it seems as Swedish design is something cool, there is something special to it. I believe that it is not the same for us Swedes, it is not unique to us, but by stating 'Swedish design watches for women' we can use this as a competitive advantage abroad".

4.2.3 Company C

Respondent 2 states that the awareness of the brand is highly diverse among the buyers. There are differences when it comes to private customers and companies contacting Company C. Respondent 2 is under the impression that the awareness of the brand is higher in the private customer group than among their retailers. Both respondents however claim that they are working more towards architects and retailers than private customers.

Respondent 1 is under the impression that Company C are being associated with high quality and expensiveness: "You of course buy a certain social status if you buy a bookshelf for SEK 30.000". Both of the respondents mention the "family feeling" which they think Company C are associated with. The company's name is the same as the founder's name which the respondents as well claim creates a family association. The company has been in business since 1898, which both of the respondents highlight as an important association: "We have survived two world wars and several financial crises, our years of experience tells its own story". Respondent 1 mentions that the customers' associations to Sweden and Swedish design are important for the brand and its popularity. The respondents also claim that they are somewhat associated with other world-famous corporations from the area. Company C are riding on the "Scandinavian design-wave" created by many other famous designers. These associations, both of the respondents although claim to be more important abroad than domestically.

The respondents repeat "most important customer" when talking about their customers. According to Respondent 2, Company C often do business with embassies and other authorities.

4.2.4 Company D

According to Respondent 2, Company D want to be associated as pre-medical and clean while Respondent 1 mentions that they want their buying target group to associate Company D with their potential role models. As mentioned in the brand identity section, Sweden is associated with safety which is what Company D strives for.

Company D have managed to win around 55 prestigious prizes since 2006, which have helped create credibility and acknowledgement on the market and among customers. Respondent 1 says that by working together with sport athletes have helped building the brand

and its' equity, credibility, visibility, and exposure on the market. The awards and the athletes are the two bases when building brand equity: "Our ambassadors and athletes are our strongest marketing tools, and together with the product, design, innovation and sports marketing they create a symbiosis".

Respondent 1 mentions in-house investigations about premium brands. According to the respondent it shows that Company D score eight or nine out of a scale of ten in brand awareness and recognition and that position Company D in the top of premium brands.

Respondent 1 says that they are pleased with the market position but not in all segments. Ski helmets are their strongest part, however Company D overall have a strong awareness and recognition according to both the respondents. The rating is not as strong within the bike segment, eyewear and goggles. Today they are pleased with the athletes and the team they work with. They manage to build credibility and visibility on the market and Respondent 1 believes it is enough to get the brand out on the market. It is rather a question to strengthen their brand through PR, Respondent 1 states.

4.3   SME European Market Presence

4.3.1   Company A

Company A are exporting to several countries. Respondent 1 mentions Norway, Denmark, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands and in a smaller scale they are having contact with companies in Spain, China and the US.

When asked how Company A have done in order to expand their brand into the international market Respondent 1 mentioned a fair. The fair is held in Köln, Germany and is the world's largest confectionery fair. Company A have attended the fair during the last 15 years, and it has started to become even more important. Company A have gotten in contact with new large customers through the fair. As Respondent 1 states "Swedish quality is simply demanded".

Company A do not produce a special product for a special market. Respondent 1 stresses the importance of good relations and a good first impression. According to Respondent 1 the international activities and brand expansion start with the fair then they follow up the interested parties with negotiations and meetings before an export contract is signed. Respondent 1 mentions that Company A recently hired a person to take care of all export activities.

4.3.2   Company B

Since Company B is still a very small enterprise with insufficient resources the main focus today is on e-commerce with the products sold on the internet. Besides their website and retailers in Sweden, they also have retailers in Norway and Singapore. In Norway they have an agent to handle business outside Sweden. The respondents believe that using agents is the most preferable in order to succeed abroad. In the nearest future Company B's watches will be launched in 40 new stores in Norway. In order to expand in the international market and

have more retailers Company B need more agents, so at the moment the focus is mainly on e-commerce. Company B are thanks to e-commerce a worldwide company, they have sold a watch to all continents and almost all countries in Europe. The watches are most popular in Italy, France, and Germany.

4.3.3 Company C

Surprisingly, the first country Company C entered outside of Sweden was Palestine, which was a long time ago, due to the owners' family's missionary history. Although, Respondent 1 adds that the first official country to enter was Denmark. After entering Denmark the company took advantage of the Danish interior trends that were appreciated in Germany and could enter with less barriers. Their products were simply called "Scandinavian furniture".

Company C are exporting significantly and are continuously increasing, but still they are not well-known around the world. Still they receive several questions and requests from many countries, as Respondent 2 said: "Sometimes it makes you wonder, how did they find us, it is a bit fascinating". The respondent believes that the customers find them at the main fairs in Milan, Köln, and Stockholm. The fair in Stockholm is one of the most important in terms of targeting the Nordic customers, the fair in Milan is good for brand-building, whereas in Köln only architects are attending. Another possibility is that they find them at the Internet, and also through architects that are suggesting Company C to customers. Besides attending fairs, Company C have a showroom in Copenhagen.

Respondent 2 argues that an opportunity on the international market is that Company C are Scandinavian, something that is popular abroad: "We're imprinting that we are from Sweden with 'Hand made in Sweden since 1898', the fact that we are located in Huskvarna is also positive since customers relate to the company Husqvarna". The fact that Company C have been established since 1898 is something that gives strength and authority.

Both respondents agree that it is through fairs and external agents they reach international markets. Agents work like sellers and representatives for the company internationally, they are visiting the retailers and fairs, selling the furniture, and showing new products. An advantage is that the agents know the foreign language and Company C try to find agents that have a well-established network in the country they are operating in. One example is in Denmark where one of the agents has confirmed that Company C are attending a 'mini-fair' to which a lot of other furniture brands are invited.

Currently Company C have agents in Norway, Denmark, Germany, the Benelux countries, Holland, France, Italy, and Spain. In Finland they have their own sales person, a person that is working for the company in Stockholm and is originally from Finland so she knows the market very well. Respondent 2 says that is it not many companies within their segment that are exporting to Finland, so there they have a competitive advantage. Respondent 2 mentions that it is easier to stay in touch with the Nordic countries and Germany, whereas for example the agents in Spain and Italy are more difficult to reach.

4.3.4　Company D

Company D sell their products in 3500 stores located all over the world and the USA is their largest market. The strategy to apply a product on a new market is the same world-wide. Respondent 2 mentions that Company D have managed to grow simultaneously around 25-30% on all markets.

Respondent 1 explains their "three phase rocket" which have together with sport marketing and PR managed to build Company D. The first stage is to develop a new product, secondly the product is applied on an athlete or a team and lastly PR is created via broadcast and magazines. Respondent 2 mentions participation on international fairs as another strategy to create PR.

According to the respondent's relationships between retailers and sellers have shown to be important for product distribution. To reach the end consumer all the parts in the chain have to be consistent. By internal training and conferences the brand message is imprinted. Further Respondent 1 stresses the importance of having an open dialogue between the countries to make sure that the brand's vision and values are the same across markets.

4.4　Challenges and Opportunities for SMEs

4.4.1　Company A

Company A are growing at a rapid pace and this growth becomes a capacity problem. The production plant can only produce up to a certain amount, and the storage is too small. Respondent 1 states that it is difficult to move or build a new factory since it is many parameters that needs to fit, for example the temperature and humidity. Due to the size constraints of the production plant, Company A have a limit for how far they can expand. Another challenge according to Respondent 1 is that the firm is not the kind of partner customers often deal with. The respondent explains that Company A is not the first supplier up for discussion among retailers, the firm acts as a complement to other larger actors. Hence, the respondent stresses the challenge of not being a considered brand.

The most highlighted benefit is Company A's ability of being flexible. Respondent 1 states: "If there were to be a product recall we would be able to stop the production, stop the sale and track the error within four hours". The respondent also mentions benefits of being small since the organization is flat and decision-making is fast. When it comes to marketing and especially through social media Company A is fast to keep up with trends. The humor is important, since the firm wants to be associated as fun and playful.

4.4.2　Company B

Company B are growing at a rapid pace, however Respondent 1 can only see potential with the growth, and states that "It is just a matter of time before we will grow even more". The opportunities with being a small firm is that it is easier to be flexible, the decision-making is smooth. Company B comprise of only three employees which makes it easier to compromise

and share information. Since Respondent 1 and 2 are siblings, it is easier to make fast decisions, and that is also one reason they have not employed anyone else at this point. An example Respondent 1 mentions is the buckles on the watch, it is hand-made and has a special print, due to the smallness of the company such a detail is possible.

Within Company B there are no clear positions. Respondent 1 has a central position and handles administration, logistics, design, and production development. Respondent 1 is thinking about the brand in general; "In what markets should we exist, what we want the watches to be associated with, and I take all the pictures we post on Instagram and Facebook". In the beginning it is important that customers understand the message Company B are trying to convey, and both respondents try to be clear with that, and planning accordingly.

The largest challenge for Company B is that it is 16 weeks delivery time for the most popular product. However Company B do everything they can to shorten the production time. Another size-related challenge is to be prioritized among manufacturers. The respondents stress the importance of creating good relations towards the manufacturers and make them understand Company B's potential.

4.4.3   Company C

The respondents agree that the lack of financial resources constrains them to be as present on international markets as they prefer. Respondent 2 mentions that having their own employed agents only promoting Company C on the international markets would be desirable. Respondent 2 also says that in order to strengthen Company C as a brand they need further resources and employees. According to Respondent 2, finding suitable retailers, architects and target groups are other challenges. Respondent 1 mentions that they have showrooms in Copenhagen, Gothenburg and Stockholm, however showrooms in more countries would be optimal. Transportation is another challenge for Company C, with transportation it might be damages on the furniture, which is affecting the quality and the overall reputation.

Respondent 2 also mentions that one challenge with being small is a priority issue since agents usually have more companies in their portfolio. The agents work with provision which means that they might put more effort into the larger companies since it might generate more provision for them. The respondent says: "It is difficult to follow up, we are not sure how much they are working with us, and we feel that we do not have control". Another challenge is that Company C want to be in a category with similar companies in the agent's portfolio, but at the same time it is a fine line of becoming competitors. In order to 'solve' this challenge Respondent 1 usually travels to Germany and work with the agents a few times a year. The personal contact and relationship-building activities are important and beneficial for the brand.

According to Respondent 1 one advantage of being a SME is that you have control over the whole process from raw material to complete product. Both respondents see advantages of being small since the employees know each other and communication is smooth. The respondents also mention that being a smaller company with few departments means faster decision-making due to a flat organizational structure. They also mention flexibility as an

advantage: "If a customer want other dimensions on their table or another color, it is not a problem as long as it not intervenes with quality or stability". Respondent 2 also mentions some advantages of being a family-owned company: "Since we are a family-owned company it is our money, and we do what we want with the money. We are not on the stock market, hence no obligations to report."

4.4.4 Company D

According to the respondents, communication is the largest challenge when working across borders. Being in different time-zones makes it difficult to schedule meetings. The respondents mention communications problems related to culture, since cultural differences often create barriers. Respondent 1 states: "If you have a great product you often manage to enter a market no matter where it is, as long as the product have the right price and innovation". When it comes to opportunities, the respondents see more opportunities of being small since they consider smaller firms to be flexible and faster to adapt to new trends and marketing strategies.

4.5 Identified Brand Strategies

4.5.1 Company A

According to Respondent 1, there is no stated brand strategy within the firm. However, Company A do have a vision which is to produce and develop their own candy. In the past years the firm has been working hard to strengthen its strongest product in order for it to become "the face" of Company A. The respondent states: "The product becomes the brand which we communicate with, but we always have Company A's name on our packaging. The plan is to make Company A stronger so it can stand for itself". The respondent's objective is that Company A's name will be able to stand on its own in the future. The company also has in-house visits from companies and school classes to demonstrate how the efficient production plant work.

Company A work actively with their brand on their Facebook-page in order to create brand awareness among consumers. Facebook is used in order to show their humoristic side since consuming their product is supposed to be fun. Since candy is a product usually bought by impulse, Company A try to strengthen the brand by being visible in the stores. Company A does not invest much into branding. Social media is cost-effective and therefore some savings can be made. But Respondent 1 is making it clear that some money is invested into branding. Internationally it is through the fair that most customers discovers them. According to the respondent the fairs is a key event for their international brand building. Company A have aside from Facebook and fairs another strategy to increase the awareness, namely sponsorship to the local youth-hockey team.

4.5.2 Company B

Company B have no stated brand strategy. According to the respondents the business relies on key pillars. Company B focus mainly on e-commerce and their website.

Company B have not spent a crown on marketing, they have only used social media, Facebook and Instagram in particular. Along with posting pictures their customers share the posts on several social medias. As Respondent 1 states: "As a 'newborn' firm we do not have that much money in order to afford traditional marketing".

Respondent 2 states: "There is no secrets. You have to handle everything, you cannot use marketing as a layer and create magical sales, it starts with design, production, to understand the target group and create something that the customers want. If you do not succeed with this, you will not succeed with anything anyway". Respondent 2 further explains that online marketing is only distribution, exactly as stores, display windows and other types of commercials. The respondents agree that social media marketing is powerful because not only can the customers be part of the brand, they can also share and engage in the brand.

Company B work with call-to-action, which means that the product should be easily accessed and exposed on the website. This strategy aims to reduce barriers for a potential purchase. Respondent 1 states: "We are trying to create a familiar feeling around the brand by posting quotes and beautiful pictures". Respondent 1 explains that some posts are targeted to a certain market e.g. Italy to engage those customers and make them feel special.

Company B measure success on several stages simultaneously. They measure production, quality, design, and development in all tangible parts of the value chain. They also measure sales, both online and in stores. The next step to expand is to find physical distribution channels, such as agents. However, the respondents consider online distribution to be easier since it reaches several countries. Moreover, marketing is always a central part in all areas as well as communication. Company B works with a six months' time-frame along with their strategies.

Respondent 2: "We always have goals to follow up on. Logistics are a large part of an e-commerce company. Administration, accounting and agreements are always something to improve". Company B are trying to sync activities and they mention the lean strategy and that they are prioritizing things that take long time to sync with other faster activities. They give an example that they cannot work with the brand before production is stable.

4.5.3 Company C

Company C are first and foremost participating at different interior fairs. They are selling their products to retailers, so one extra step between them and the end customer exists. Therefore it is important to attain appropriate retailers to reach the end-consumer. Further the respondents mention advertising as an important factor for their brand strategy. Advertisements are published in interior magazines in order to target architects, which act as intermediates between the company and the end-consumers.

Company C use Facebook, Instagram and their webpage where they upload pictures. Respondent 1 believes it to be important to put time and effort into these pages and not have it "just because".

Respondent 2 claims that the most important and efficient strategy is to invite current and potential customers to the office and the factory, and engage them in different activities. The respondents believe the reason for this enthusiasm among the visitors is because they get to see the crafts go from raw material to end-product. According to the respondents this creates a relationship between the product and customer. When meeting international clients Respondent 2 argues that they are adding the little extra to make the visit more special, for example by display the Swedish culture. Respondent 2 claims that the Swedish experience is strengthening the brand.

Respondent 2 argues that "Some companies just live for well-known designers and names, but in the end it is about the selling the product to keep the company running". Further, the respondent mentions that you cannot only do it for the attention and media, rather for the customers. Respondent 1 also adds that when exhibiting in Milan, Company C use a light showcase, something that stands out in the crowd internationally: Respondent 1 says: "Differenti they say, and even though they cannot tell it is Swedish design, they can see that it is Scandinavian". Moreover the respondents mention the advantages of being a family business, Swedish, and made in Huskvarna since 1898.

4.5.4   Company D

Company D do not have a stated brand strategy however Respondent 1 mentions: "Our marketing is based on two cornerstones; sports marketing and PR".

Company D's sports marketing strategy is seen as the greatest marketing asset and the area in which the most financial resources are invested in. The respondents confirm that Company D's sports marketing is built around a strong team consisting of international and national sports athletes. The team of athletes consists of athletes that are seen as opinion leaders and role models within their community. The respondents prefer that the sponsored athletes should have a great personality, good values, and be able to proudly communicate and carrying out Company D's products and identity. This action is taken to create credibility and attraction to the brand to eventually reach the target market.

Respondent 2 also brings up another aspect of their sports marketing strategy which is the contribution to the company's research and development. By sponsoring athletes within different segments and communities, the athlete's feedback on the products and how they should develop and improve are of great value.

The other cornerstone of the marketing strategy is compromised by PR, which is a cost-efficient tool to communicate the message about Company D's products. In order to create good PR a third party writes about the products by story-telling and product reviews in magazines and media. As Respondent 1 mentions Company D are successful in both their sports marketing and in conveying their message about their products through PR. As Respondent 1 says: "A lot of our brand-building is founded from our sports marketing which includes our athletes".

When taking a new product to the market Respondent 1 mentions the "three stage rocket", where the first step is creating a product and later on apply this product on their athletes and

teams which is the second step, in order to get recognition and create PR around it and get the third parties such as magazines and media to write and talk about their product which is the third step.

Another strategy of Company D is one of the ways they approach their products to the market, which is through sports fairs. The first product was launched 2004 and was presented at one of the world's largest international sports fairs in 2005.

4.6 Empirical Summary

	Differences/Similarities	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
Brand Identity	*Internally stated values*	NO	To an extent	YES	YES
	Mentioned the company's vision	YES	Not directly	Not directly	YES
	Values before skills when recruiting	NO	YES	To an extent	To an extent
	Importance of Swedish origin	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
	Phase of the brand	Product and Symbol	Person and Product	Product, Organization and Symbol	Product and Organization
Brand Equity	*Customers associate brand with...*	Product	Lifestyle	Quality, Family, Age of the company	Values, Role-models
	Customers associate brand with Sweden	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Current market position	Not satisfied	Not satisfied	Almost satisfied	Satisfied
	Perceived awareness of brand	MEDIUM	LOW	LOW	HIGH
	Loyal customers	YES	NO	YES	YES
International Market Presence	*Export activities*	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Employed agents	NO	YES	YES	To an extent
	Participation at fairs outside Sweden	YES	NO	YES	YES
	Spent resources on internationalization	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Presence internationally (retailers) 1-5 countries = LOW 5 10 countries = MEDIUM Over 10 countries= HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	HIGH	HIGH
SME challenges	*Capacity problems*	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Lack of financial assets	NO	NO	YES	NO
	Lack of employees	NO	NO	YES	NO
	Supplier influence	-	LOW	-	-
	Priority issues among partners because of company size	YES	YES	YES	NO
SME Opportunities	*Perceived firm flexibility*	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
	Limited compromising	-	YES	YES	-
	Control of processes	HIGH	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH
	Decision making process	FAST	FAST	FAST	FAST
	Sense of community	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH
Brand Strategy	*Stated brand strategy*	NO	NO	NO	NO
	Participation in fairs	YES	NO	YES	YES
	Sponsorship	YES	NO	NO	YES
	Active on social media	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Advertisement	NO	NO	YES	YES
	PR	NO	NO	NO	YES
	Ambassadors	NO	NO	NO	YES
	In-house visits	YES	NO	YES	To an extent

Table 3 - Empirical Summary

5 Analysis

In this chapter the empirical findings presented in the previous chapter are analyzed and connected to concepts and theories from the frame of reference. First, the focus is on branding, then the European market presence, followed by challenges and opportunities to throw light on the branding strategy. The chapter ends with the development of a model suitable for SMEs' future brand expansion in the European market.

5.1 SME Brand Identity

5.1.1 Company Vision and Stated Values

When exploring SME's brand identity, the authors found that the companies had difficulties stating their identity. This align with Centeno et al.'s (2012) statement about SMEs informal and minimum brand planning. For example, Company A do not have internally stated values but they have a clear company vision, whereas Company C have clearly stated values but no company vision. However, Company D have both stated values and vision. The authors believe that this align with Company D being the relatively successful brand, and that they have a clear stated mission; to save lives. The overall consistency in Company D eases the process of brand-building for employees. As Aaker (1996) argues a well-established identity is not enough, it needs to attain in different environments where it is present. Hence, the authors conclude that the identity is the same internally and externally for Company D, which shows consistency and leads to success.

Interesting to notice is that Company B, which is a newly started company with few employees does not have a clearly stated vision or values. It is clear that the owner of Company B is driven by personal choice and preferences that permeate in the brand, which according to Centeno et al. (2012) are characteristics of the first phase of brand-building. Since the company is young the authors believe this argument makes sense, and can therefore make the assumption that Company B is in the first phase. However, the values the employees hold are very important and are more prioritized than skills when it comes to recruiting. An explanation for this could be since they are few employees, young, and on top of that they are family, the vision and values do not have to be stated at this point. This could be because the employed hold the same unstated vision from the beginning. The authors' assumption is strengthen by Krake (2005) who states that the entrepreneur's personality reflects in the brand.

Company A on the other hand prioritize skills before values, and this might be due to the recruitment of an external CEO. The authors believe that the hiring was due to overcome the 'family-thinking' in order to develop and gain new insights and skills. A challenge Aaker (1996) mentions is due to internal pressure to change identity and brand strategy. This change can interrupt the consistency and as a result some brands never reach their fullest potential. The authors believe that this change can be good for the company per se, although it can affect the *brand* negatively if the external person is not consistent with the firm's values and vision.

On the other hand, Company C hold firmly to their family-orientation and prioritize values and personality over skills. However, the authors are under the impression that the brand has not improved during the past years. Company C partly claims being in the fourth phase of brand-building, but the authors disagree. Even though the company has internally stated values, this is nothing that is shown for the external audience. Company C have been in business since 1898 and still they do not have a clear vision, which the authors believe to be a reason for their lack of improvement.

The findings show that the most successful brand, in terms of size and international activities, is Company D who have internally stated values and a strong company vision. The respondents in Company D mentioned that everything they do are related to their vision. However, when it comes to the employees' values it is preferable with a combination of values and skills. It is an advantage if the employees hold interest for gravity sports in order to relate to the firm and to try on the products, however the most important factor is the skill to emphasize safety. The authors believe that the stronger the values the more it will shine through in the success of the brand. If everyone in the firm know what they are promoting it is easier to be persuasive in the sales process. By using the model of Centeno et al. (2012), the authors conclude that Company D is clearly in the fifth phase which is the development phase.

All four companies agree on the importance of the Swedish origin. This can be associated with the effect of country-of-origin, which according to Maheswaran & Chen (2009) is interpreted as a type of halo effect, in which positive or negative associations with a country can have effect on a country's products. Company A mention that the label "Made in Sweden" has more importance abroad than in the domestic market. In accordance to this Company B also say that the Swedish labelling is more important in the foreign market; and states that "Swedish design is not unique for us". In addition, Swedish products are associated with high quality and design, characteristics that seem to be popular in the foreign market. Company C take advantage of the Swedish origin since furniture made of wood is associated with high quality (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003). The authors found that the Swedish origin is of importance due to the associations of high quality abroad.

5.1.2   Phase of the Brand in Accordance to the Five-Phases Model

All four companies agree that the product is the brand. However, common for the companies is that the product phase was mentioned in a combination of another phase. The findings show that SMEs in general focus more on the product rather than other important aspects of the brand identity. Hence, in the model the authors will suggest SMEs to stress other factors in order to contribute to the overall identity. Associations have shown to be important, the companies have to stress other important factors, such as Company B that get associated with a lifestyle. Through adding other attributes more associations to the company can be made, hence creating awareness.

Company B is the only company that besides the product, the person is the brand. Since Company B is the smallest of the chosen companies, this can be related to what Centeno et al. (2012) say about when SMEs grow the personification of the brand tend to decrease, since the other companies that are older have less personification. Closely related to the product

of Company A is the symbol/shape of the candy. For example, Company A's Facebook-page is not named after the company, but rather the product and the symbol. Hence, there is a close link between the product, brand name and logo, which relates to what Bhat & Reddy (1998) say about symbolic associations toward a brand and its relation to intangibles. Furthermore, the symbol of the Facebook-page becomes a communication tool between the company and customers which aligns with the statement of MacInnis, Shapiro, and Mani (1999). Company C also mention symbol as a stage. The symbol for Company C is mainly the brand name, based on the family name, which creates familiarity especially in the nearby areas in Sweden. Additionally, this name is very Swedish which makes positive associations in foreign markets due to the country-of-origin effect mentioned by Maheswaran and Chen (2009).

Both Company C and D have products in which the functional design is very important, especially for Company D since they are producing safety equipment. Hence, knowledgeable staff that influence the delivery of the brand is important. According to de Chernatony (2001) when personal values of the employees align with the brand they become more motivated and committed to deliver the brand, a theory that has been proven in the sample. The authors have discovered the importance of enthusiasm and unified employees in order to bring success and consistency within the company and its brand. Hence, a strong identity needs to be supported by motivated staff.

From this section the authors bring forward that SMEs in general are aware of their brand identity, but do not promote and show all parts in their brand. For example, the companies mention factors that are important to them internationally but do not promote them, such as the Swedish origin. For the model development the authors will carry forward the importance of creating a strong identity and consistency in all parts of the brand in order to expand. The authors stress the importance of nation equity in order to differentiate, as Centeno et al. (2012) state brand differentiation is important for brand growth.

5.2   SME Brand Equity

During the interviews, the authors noticed that knowledge about the concept brand equity was lacking. One out of all the respondents seemed to have extended knowledge about brand equity and its assets and liabilities.

Company A, C and D claimed to have loyal customers. These three are larger and older than Company B, which was the only firm claiming not to have a loyal customer base. Company A, C and D's main customers are retailers, which can relate to the loyal customer base. As stated in the frame of reference, brand loyalty is a measurement of the attachment a customer has to a brand (Aaker, 1991). Based on the findings, the authors believe that the attachment to a brand is larger in a supplier-retailer relationship than for a firm using e-commerce as the primary sales channel. For example, a private person usually buys a watch once whereas a retailer continuously has to restock.

All the firms had a clear view of what their brands get associated with. Interesting to the associations is that all brands, except Company B, somehow correlate with what the firms

stated to be their brand identity. For example, Company C claim their brand identity to be in the product, organization, and symbol phase. Furthermore, the respondents think that the brand gets associated with quality, family and the age of the company. To conclude, product relates to quality, organization relates to family and symbol related to the age of the company. The authors find this interesting since the companies' beliefs of the customers' perceptions align with the companies' internally developed brand (Table 2, "Phase of brand" and "Customers associate brand with…").

All of the investigated companies claim that their brands are associated with Sweden. In an international context this fact carries other associations linked to the Swedish-origin stamp. The findings suggest quality and design as two factors that Sweden can be associated with. The image of the country adds image to the product category (de Chernatony, 2010) which all the SMEs in the sample are aware of but do not utilize sufficiently internationally. The authors make this assumption since during the interviews it was not obvious that the Swedish origin played a large role, however as the interviews continued the Swedishness appeared frequently. Indirectly the companies mentioned something that can be connected to Swedish history and reputation, for example Sweden is associated to safety due to Volvo, and functionality due to IKEA. From the findings the authors have discovered that the Swedish-origin effect is of greater importance than the respondents seem to be aware of. Brands connected to certain associations can provide an important basis for differentiation (Aaker, 1991). The authors believe that the Swedish-origin effect provides differentiation abroad.

The authors noticed that the dimensions of brand equity intersect in several ways, this is also the case for the investigated sample. The awareness of the SMEs' brands internationally seemed to be connected to the associations of Sweden. Furthermore, another way in which brand awareness can create value is through familiarity (Aaker, 1991). The findings strengthens the argument that the customers' awareness of the brands' origin might create a familiarity associated with certain country attributes. In other words, the customers are familiar with connecting Sweden to e.g. quality and design. Aaker (1991) states that if a brand is recognized it must be for a reason. For example, if a potential customer has seen a company exhibiting on a fair it is probably a larger chance for purchase due to familiarity. This is as well a reason for companies to visit fairs to create awareness.

Some of the investigated brands had a common problem with brand awareness. One of Aaker's (1991) value-adding suggestions is to become a brand that is considered. Due to size, the investigated SMEs had priority problems with suppliers as well as with larger customers. Company A is a clear example of how brand equity can provide value to the firm. The respondent stated that the company has been growing faster than the market during the past years. The respondent also mentioned that the awareness of their most popular product has increased and they are still working on increasing it. Due to this, the associations connected between the product and the brand has provided basis for extension for Company A. Further, the trade leverage and the brand loyalty show related improvements. This is also the case for Company D. As the brand equity has grown, the company has been able to charge premium prices and extend their product portfolio. Moreover, since Company D successfully

have managed to get influential ambassadors and PR, they do not need to invest in costly promotion activities.

By analyzing how the sample exercises branding from a brand equity view the authors can conclude that SMEs are aware of what they want to be perceived as. The authors will include in the model the importance of a strong established identity before the companies can enter the growth-phase. To create equity, a base of a strong identity is needed in order to be consistent and efficient in the brand-building process.

5.3   SME European Market Presence

Findings show that all companies, to different extents, are present in the European market. For example, Company B is the smallest company and has shown to have the lowest international presence. Conversely Company D is the largest company with the largest international presence. One explanation to this can be related to employees, since more people mean more skills to canalize into different business operations. Company A mention that they recently hired a person with export as the main responsibility in order to expand the company's international activities further. The authors believe that the type of industry can affect the international scope. For example Company A sell candy in different countries with different dietary preferences, whereas a piece of furniture from Company C has the same logic world wide.

Company A, C and D are participating on international fairs. However they utilize the fairs in different ways. Company A and C mention the fairs as an important foundation in order to establish new relations towards international retailers. As Coviello (2006) argues, SMEs rely extensively on relationships as they pursue international opportunities. Based on the findings, patterns show that the investigated sample prefer to first become insiders in a network before signing contracts. For example Company A meet potential customers on fairs, thereafter they negotiate and later on come to an agreement. The authors believe that participation at international fairs is a good first step to establish contacts in the foreign market. For example, in the beginning Company D utilized fairs to get recognition, but as they grew the focus changed to PR. From a branding perspective, these actions potentially affect the brand awareness. The authors believe that the differences between the SMEs can be affected by the different phases of the brand that the companies are in. The fifth phase is the development stage (Centeno et al., 2012), the closer a brand is to enter the development phase the more mature the authors consider the brand to be. Company D perceive their brand as mature, and according to them their brand awareness is high among their customers.

Company A and C describe fairs as the key element in both their national and international brand recognition and awareness actions. However, they also mention that their brand awareness is not as high as they wish. Further, the authors noticed that company A, C, and D have fairs as a common denominator related to their first international establishment. As previously mentioned Company B have the lowest presence on the European market, which can be due to that they are still young and the smallest company in the sample. Furthermore

Company B have not attended any fairs, which can be a reason for their relatively low international presence, in terms of retailing. However, measured in e-commerce their presence is larger.

Company D utilize cost-effective tools such as ambassadors and sponsored athletes to reach the international markets. Since SMEs lack resources findings show that SMEs find opportunities to overcome this obstacle. By applying their products on opinion leaders within different gravity sport communities Company D succeed in creating brand awareness, recognition and credibility. Company C on the other hand, have external agents in Europe with the tasks to promote and create brand awareness to generate sales opportunities outside the Swedish borders. However the authors believe that Company C's relationship towards their agents is not as good in order for the agents to prioritize and promote the brand. This can be a reason why Company C are not as satisfied with their market position.

Company B mention that they recently entered a collaboration with an agent in Norway in order to establish their products on the Norwegian market. Company B also mention social media as their main marketing tool to create awareness. Since Company B is the youngest as well as the smallest company in the sample, there is a natural explanation to why they use social media more than the rest of the sample since they do not have any resources to spend on traditional marketing, fairs and sponsorship at this point. The majority of sales is through e-commerce, which can make the step towards social media usage more natural. Additionally social media is cost effective.

Company A mention that after establishing contact with new retailers they always go and visit them before signing any contracts in order to create a good relationship. From what the authors have seen, good relations are of importance both between customers and agents. Company C stress the challenge of having agents not prioritizing their company. However, when the relationship is close, as in the case with their Finnish agent, the success factor is higher. As Johanson & Vahlne (2009) state, a good relation is a precondition for entering foreign markets. Company A, C and D uses networks to a large extent in terms of fairs, ambassadors and agents when doing business. Company A and D mention that they invite customers, retailers, and designers to their facilities to create and foster relationships.

All the companies in the sample have managed to establish important networks and relationships. One of the events that has created this opportunity is through participation at international fairs, where you meet your audience, potential customers and partners within the same industry. This is a chance to gain knowledge and experience about the intended foreign market you wish to enter. The authors will consider these findings in the model development at the end of this chapter.

5.4   Challenges and Opportunities for SMEs

Company B mention the challenge of not being prioritized by their manufacturer which cause long delivery time. Since problems meeting the demand of customers exist, the authors believe that there is little time to spend on brand-building activities. Furthermore, Company A do as well elaborate on capacity problems which create barriers for expansion. Again,

Company A are insecure of how to meet the increasing demand as the awareness of the firm grows. Furthermore prioritization problems are brought up by Company C as well. Their agents do not perform in sales as mentioned above. The authors believe that investing in brand-building can potentially solve the problem of prioritization.

Aaker (1996) describes proliferation of competitors as one major challenge of brand-building. Parts of the sample group felt the pressure from larger established firms. The respondents claimed that LOs get prioritized by suppliers as well as customers, and Company A have tried to solve this problem by approaching the market as a complement to LOs. Aaker (1996) mention that due to increased competition, firms need to target smaller markets and position their brands more narrowly, which the authors believe that all investigated SMEs have succeeded in. For example, Company B have chosen to target only younger women and they do not charge premium prices. Due to this they do not compete with larger and more established companies within their segment.

The authors noticed that Company D, which have the most mature brand in the sample, did not experience obstacles as much as the other three firms. Once again, a strong brand seem to create opportunities and ease for firms on new markets.

The main advantage brought up by all respondents was related to flexibility. Since the SMEs do not have many employees, compromising does not slow down processes. Moreover, due to the flexibility and the advantages with being few employees, the decision-making process is fast within all the SMEs. Company A mentioned that they easily respond to market trends. Moreover, if problems with their products occur, the problem will be solved in less than 24 hours. Past research about flexibility being a large advantage for SMEs (Berthon et al., 2008) holds true for this study. The authors conclude that these discovered advantages should be considered in the process of how SMEs should continue building their brand.

5.5   Identified Brand Strategies

The authors found from the collected data that brand strategy can be perceived in several ways depending on company. However, a brand must be closely linked to a company's overall business strategy and market positioning, in order to build awareness of the brand attributes (Doyle, 2013).

Common for the four companies is that none of them argued to have a stated brand strategy. Although when talking about what they are doing to enhance and strengthen their brand they all had several ways to do it. Hence, although the companies do not have *stated* brand strategies they still work to improve the brand in various ways.

All companies except Company B participate on fairs. The reason why Company B cannot exhibit on a fair is mostly due to lack of financial resources and few employees. As mentioned earlier this company is the smallest and youngest in this study, therefore fairs might not be as current at the moment, although something to strive for.

As mentioned in the empirical findings the identity of Company A is very engaging and fun, hence in order to reach out to consumers they work actively on Facebook with humor and

making candy a fun event. Company A as well as Company B are very active on Facebook but neither of them use the social media in a selling way, but rather as a communication tool to reach and engage customers. Company B are active on Facebook and Instagram, however indirect they are active on all social media due to word-of-mouth, likes and shares made by customers.

Social media in all forms have been proven to work well for Company A, B, and D, and them all agree that it is a golden era to live in when being able to market products without spending a crown. Since they all lack financial resources for advertisement on a regular basis, they instead use their money for production, sponsorship, and exhibit at fairs. Hence other ways to be visible and reach out to customers. Company A and D work actively with sponsorship, Company A to the local youth-hockey team and Company D to gravity sports athletes.

Although Company C do use social media in terms of Facebook and Instagram, they still do not work *actively* with their accounts. They believe it to be a good way to reach customers however they find their target group to be less active than preferred. The authors agree to some extent that their current target group is not as active on social media. However the authors see the potential of using social media in an inspiring way to attract customers and create buzz. The authors claim that IKEA, which also sells furniture is active on social media, however the target market differs. Instead Company C pay for advertisements in relevant interior magazines in order to reach their target market. Since Company C sell quite exclusive furniture it is not for everyone, rather for high income takers or companies. Company C engage in activities to strengthen the relationship towards customers by inviting them to visit the head office. Since the furniture is premium these activities are even more important to create loyalty and relationship. Inviting customers to in-house visits is a cost-effective tool compared to other types of marketing activities.

Company D is the only company among the four that is working actively with all the identified brand strategies, this might be why they are the most mature company in this sample. They work actively with PR, ambassadors and in-house visits to an extent. PR can be promoted through social media, and through ambassadors. For example, if an influential ambassador is active on social media and posts a picture exposing the product this might generate brand awareness.

Company B's respondents mentioned that marketing does not work as a layer to create magical sales. It is the right design, production, and to understand the customers that are important. Therefore, in the authors' opinion social media is a very powerful tool to succeed in engaging the customers. Successful social media usage could generate sales. Company B also work with "call-to-action" on their webshop and Facebook-page.

From this section the authors highlight the important role social media plays for companies' marketing strategies. It is an efficient and cost-effective way to reach a larger span of potential customers.

5.6   Authors' Own SME European Brand Expansion Model

The authors have developed a model suggesting how Swedish SMEs can continue their European brand expansion. The model is based on existing theories and new findings gathered through this investigation.
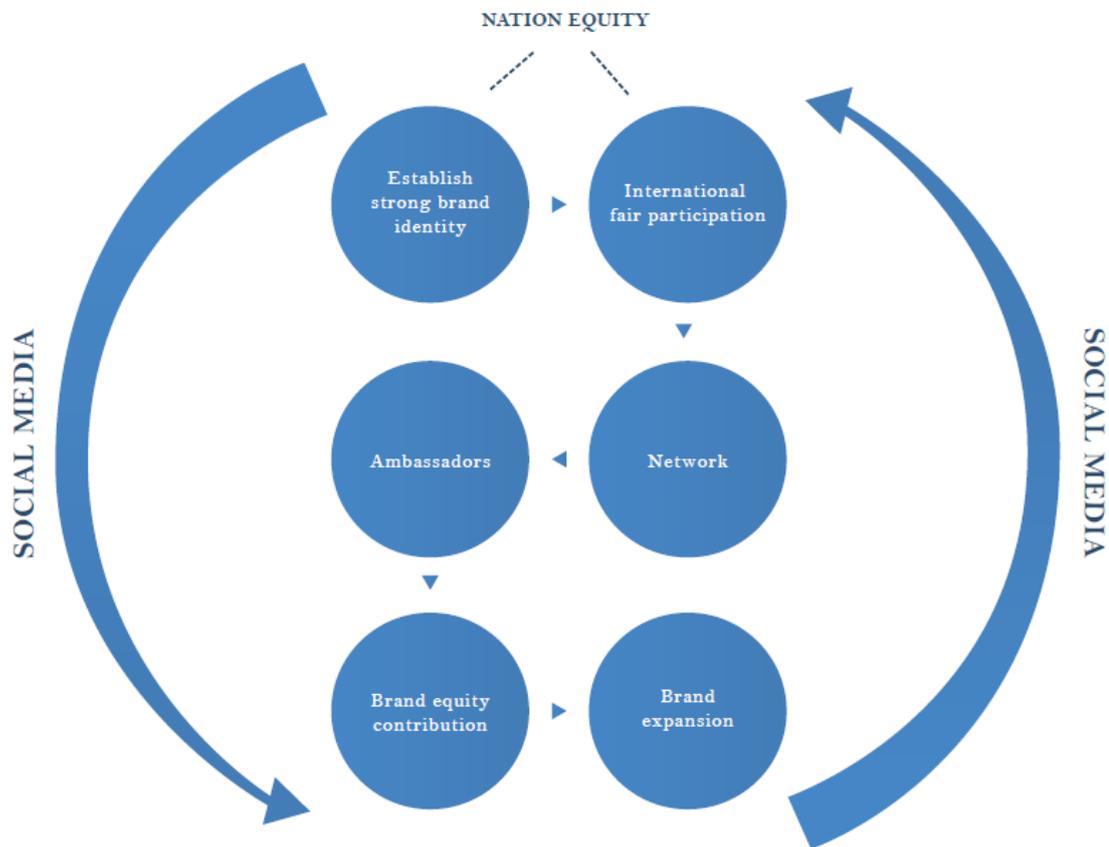

Figure 2 - Authors' Own SME European Brand Expansion Model

Establish Strong Brand Identity

Before continuing the European brand expansion SMEs need to establish a strong brand identity. Since a brand is more than just a name of a product (Kapferer, 2012), the organization building the brand must be aware of what it wants to promote. The findings show that the SMEs promoting their values and beliefs the most, are the ones with the largest international success. Hence, the firm and its employees need to know the stated values in order to enhance it in the brand. Furthermore, firms need to utilize the assets available to create recognition. In this study, nation equity and the country-of-origin effect have been large providers to the Swedish SMEs international brand identity. According to the participants in this study, Sweden is e.g associated with quality and design. Hence these associations are of importance when differentiating and creating advantage in the foreign market.

International Fair Participation

When a strong identity is established and ready to promote, the next step is to find the right audience. Participation at international fairs allows the SME to connect with potential customers and partners outside the country of origin. Further, through fairs SMEs have the ability to expand the brand awareness in a country which they already are established in.

Network

As mentioned, the fairs can lead to profitable relations. The SMEs should try to build a network in the targeted market in order to become an *insider*. Being a part of a network in the target market can culminate in brand expansion opportunities. Johanson and Vahlne (2009) state that relationships in networks offer potential for learning and building trust and commitment, which all are preconditions for entering foreign markets.

Ambassadors

When a network is established the SMEs are closer to find a reliable ambassador in the target market. An ambassador could be an influential person or a trustworthy agent. Having an effective ambassador enables the SMEs to maintain direct contact with the target market.

Brand Equity Contribution

If the SMEs succeed in finding a relevant and effective ambassador, brand equity can be generated. Brand equity can provide value to the firm and increase the product's values to customers (Aaker, 1991). If the ambassador in question is perceived as an influential person, potential consumers can create associations that connect with the product. Furthermore, if the ambassador is well-known or active on e.g. social media the awareness of the brand might increase.

Brand Expansion

When the brand starts to create brand equity abroad, SMEs can continue developing and expanding the brand further. When the awareness increases, the network might grow and through networking new ambassadors can be found.

Social Media Influence

The findings show that the firms using social media actively have succeeded in expanding their brand. Throughout the process, SMEs should engage in informing stakeholders and create marketing activities. For example, keep potential customers informed of international fair participation or if having a well-known ambassador, make sure it shows on social media.

6   Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the most important findings based on the analysis concerning branding and its influence on companies' expansion plans in the European market. The presented conclusions concern findings specific to the firms and general findings, and relates back to the purpose of the thesis.

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate how Swedish SMEs, which are influenced by resource constraints, can continue their brand expansion in the European market. To lead this investigation the following research question was developed:

How do Swedish SMEs work with brand expansion strategies to create awareness in the European market?

The central parts of this thesis were; branding, SMEs resource constraints, and internationalization. By collecting qualitative data and conducting a comprehensive analysis, the authors of this thesis were able to fulfill the purpose and developed *The SME European Brand Expansion-model.*

The authors found that nation equity is an important factor for Swedish SMEs brand expansion in Europe. From the study it has been found that Sweden is associated with attributes such as quality and design, which contributes to the brand identity and differentiation abroad. By using the five phases of SME brand-building model the authors could make assumptions of where the SMEs' brands are in the brand-building process. From this a conclusion could be drawn on how close they were to the development phase of their brand. In the study all the SMEs had an idea of how they want to be perceived as from the customers' point of view. The authors found that all companies' identities, except for one company, aligned with how they thought the customers associated the brand with. Therefore the SMEs in study have shown proof of consistency between the brand identity and the brand equity created from it. The authors discovered a common denominator among the majority of the SMEs' brand strategies, namely international fair participation. These fairs have proven to be a successful tool to gain knowledge and experience in the foreign market and to establish important networks and relationships. Through networking, opportunities to find partners such as ambassadors and export agents appear.

One of the main advantages, stated in the literature and also proven in this study, is that SMEs are known for their flexibility. SMEs might have resource constraints, however from this study the authors have found that the SMEs can overcome this obstacle by the usage of social media in their branding strategy. From the findings the authors have been able to develop a strategic model of how SMEs can continue their brand expansion in the European market. The model consists of six steps; establish strong brand identity (with influence of nation equity); participation at international fairs; networking; ambassadors; brand equity; and finally entering brand expansion-phase.

7   Discussion

This chapter will present further reasoning and the authors' personal reflections about the findings collected from the four SMEs. Relevant observations and thoughts outside the specific research area have as well been discussed, which will be highlighted in this chapter. Furthermore, limitations and implications of the result will be discussed and lastly, the thesis will finish off with suggestions for further research.

7.1   Implications

The thesis has to some extent contributed to enlighten how Swedish SMEs exercise branding and how they can continue their European brand expansion. The delimitation of this thesis was based on size of the SMEs and having an end-product ready to consume by customers. Further, the sample had to be present on the European market. The study and research of this thesis have shed light on the need for further investigation of this topic. By analyzing the result from different angles, the authors have found that different areas of interest could be in the center for future research. These will be elaborated further in section 7.3. Despite limits, the authors have been able to present how SMEs actually expand their brand even though they lack certain assets compared to LOs. A model was successfully developed as stated in the purpose and hence, the goal of this thesis has been fulfilled, but the results need to be tested further in order to see if the findings, especially the model, is applicable outside the sample.

The findings in this thesis can be of value for SMEs trying to develop a strategy concerning how to proceed in the international market. The authors therefore believe that SMEs are the main target group of the findings. For example, the model could help indicate where in the process of brand expansion the chosen SME is as well as how to continue. The assumption that SMEs are influenced by resource constraints has continuously followed this study, to help firms avoid extra cost, the model gives a suggestion on how to allocate resources. Further, the findings can be used by international fair hosts creating promotional argument on why firms should participate and exhibit their products.

7.2   Limitations

Even though carefully carried out, the research conducted in this thesis involved some limitations. The chosen method was qualitative followed by semi-structured interviews to collect data. The collected data was comprehensive in order to give a true picture as possible about the four SMEs in the sample. However, due to the sample of just four SMEs there is limited possibility to make generalizations. But, the sample did not consist of a certain industry, hence, the results can be applicable to several sectors instead of just one. Due to this, some generalization can be made, but with reservation to sample size and industries presented in the sample. The authors were aware of these issues from the start, which have made it possible for them to increase the validity and reliability in other ways. For example, four companies in different industries were in focus of the investigation, which made it possible to analyze similarities and differences across the sample. Unexpectedly, the authors found similarities related to branding between all the firms, which contributed to the generalization

ability of *the SMEs European Brand Expansion-model*. But even though comparisons were made across the sample, also these findings need to be applied with caution due to the firm's different operational activities. In addition, the authors recommend to increase the validity and reliability by investigating from the customers' perspective as well. For example, a case study could have been made on one company in the sample investigating all parts in the value chain. This is to compare the different views of the brand, and if possible see if they align.

7.3   Future Research

The findings of this thesis have shown differences between the investigated companies, which the authors believe is due to the differences in size, industry and maturity of the companies. A SME has a span of one up to 250 employees. The findings show that it is a large difference from having three employees to having 200, and therefore further research might consider a certain span. The authors have limited their research to "expansion in the European market", where the majority of the countries are highly developed and therefore further studies on expansion towards less developed continents would be of interest. This thesis has limited the research to companies offering products that can be consumed directly by the end customer. If the research would be specified to business-to-business or business-to-consumers the findings might differ in future research. Furthermore, the findings have shown that international fairs were a major part in the sample's expansion to international markets. Therefore further studies on how much international fairs contributes to SMEs further expansion should be made. Also future research could as well study the effect international fairs in general have on SMEs brand expansion. Since this study has been done with a firm-centric orientation, future studies can consider a customer's perspective. As stated in section 1.4, branding is a two-sided relationship between company and customer. One can study how the firm works with branding, contra the effect of it on customers. Findings implicated that social media does play a large role in SMEs branding however the authors did not consider this in the frame of reference, rather social media is something that came forward during the data collection. Therefore future studies should consider social media from the beginning as a large influence in SMEs branding. In the frame of references the authors elaborate on different international market entry strategies and operational modes. These modes are presented since the authors wanted to see how the sample of SMEs operated abroad. For future studies the authors recommend to focus on one specific mode of entry in order to delimit the study further, which make the findings more reliable.

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Appendices

Interview Questions in Swedish

Start-Up

- Vilken position har du i företaget?
- Berätta om hur ert företag startade
- Hade ni några mål?
- Vad var era värderingar?
    - Har de förändrats med tiden?

Brand Strategy

Hur ser er varumärkesstrategi ut?

- Varför?

Ingen strategi:
    - Vad gör ni för att stärka ert varumärke?
Hur jobbar ni för att nå ut med ert varumärke till kunden?

- Avsätter ni pengar specifikt för varumärkeshantering?
- Är det en del av marknadsföringen?
- Sponsring, WOM, Mässor?

Utöver det som tagits upp, är det något annat som ni anser viktigt i er strategi?

Brand Identity

Vad är Company X för dig?
Hur är företagets vision?
Hur stämmer era egna värderingar in på ert varumärke?

- Hur jobbar ni för att få fram era värderingar i ert varumärke?

Vad för speciella värderingar ska de anställa ha innan de anställs?

- Hur viktigt anser du att de anställda har vissa värderingar?
    Hur jobbar ni för att sprida ert varumärke internt?

I vilket skede anser ni att ert varumärke är just nu?

1. *Speglas ägarens personlighet i varumärket?*
2. *Är det produkten som är varumärket?*
3. *Är det er logga/namn som utgör varumärket?*
4. *Är det företagets värderingar och vision som formar ert varumärke?*
5. *Alla dessa (som nämnts ovan) samt att ni jobbar för att stärka dem?*

Brand Equity

Hur vill ni att andra ska uppfatta ert varumärke?

Vad tror du att kunderna associerar ert varumärke med?

Vill du att ert varumärke ska bli förknippat med något annat än just er produkt?

- Hur jobbar ni för att detta ska ske?

Hur starka anser ni ert varumärke är på marknaden? Är det skillnad på olika destinationer i Sverige?

- Borde det läggas ner mer vikt att stärka varumärket?
- Är ni nöjda med er nuvarande position?
- På vilket sätt anser du att varumärket borde stärkas?

Hur skulle du beskriva relationen till era kunder?

- Lojal?

Är företagsnamnet samma som ert varumärke?

- Tankar kring det?
- Varför/varför inte?

International Presence

Finns ni utomlands?

- Hur har ni gjort för att få ut ert varumärke på den internationella marknaden?
- Hur säkerställer ni att ert varumärkes vision/ värderingar är den samma på alla samtliga marknader?
- Vad ser ni för möjligheter/svårigheter?

Vad tror ni era kunder på internationella marknaden associerar er med?

Vad vill ni att era kunder ska associera er med?

Hur stor del av resurserna lägger ni på er internationella varumärkesstrategi?

Hur skulle ni använda ert varumärke för att nå ut till en ny marknad?

- Vad tror ni skulle krävas för resurser för att lyckas utomlands?
- Vad tror ni är den viktigaste byggstenen?
- Vad ser ni för möjligheter/ svårigheter?

Challenges?

Vad har ni fått tänka extra på för att bygga ert varumärke?

Nackdelar med att vara ett SME?

Opportunities

Vad har varit enklare i varumärkesprocessen?

Fördelar med att vara ett SME?

Other information

Har du något att tillägga?

Interview Questions in English

Start-Up

- What position in the company do you have?
- Tell us how the company started
- Did you have any goals/objectives?
- What were your values? Have they changed over time?

Brand Strategy

Do you have a stated branding strategy?
- Why do you have a stated brand strategy?
- Why don't you?
- What does it look like?

How do you work with branding to reach your customers?
- Do you allocate money for branding in specific?
- Is it part of the marketing?
- Sponsorship, WOM, fairs?

Besides these questions, are there anything else you stress as important in your strategy?

Brand Identity

What is XXX to you?
(What are your values?)
How do your values align with your brand?
- How do you work to bring your values into your brand?

What kind of values do employees need to hold before being hired?
- How important do you believe it is that the employees have certain values?

Do you work to spread out you values internally?
- How?

In what phase do you believe your brand is at the moment?
1. Is the owner's personality reflected in the brand?
2. Is it the product that is the brand?
3. Is it the logo/name that represents the brand?
4. Is it the company's values and vision that shapes your brand?
5. All of the above, and are you working to strengthen them?

Brand Equity

What do you want others to perceive your brand as?
What do you think customers are associating your brand with?
Do you want your brand to be associated with something else than just your product?

- How do you work in order for this to happen?

How strong do you consider your brand to be on the market? Does it differ depending on destinations?

- Should you put more emphasize on strengthening the brand?
- Are you satisfied with your current position?
- In what ways should the brand be strenghtened?

Who is your target group?

- How do you work to reach your target group?

Is the company name the name as the brand?

- Thoughts about this?
- Why/why not?

Internationalization

Are you present abroad?

- How did you do to bring your brand to the international market?
- How do you secure that your vision/values are the same in all markets?
- What are the opportunities/weaknesses?

What do you believe your customers abroad are associating you with?

How large part of your resources are spent on international branding strategy?

How would you use your brand to reach a new market?

- What resources would be needed to succeed abroad?
- What do you believe to be the most important building block?
- What kinds of opportunities/weaknesses do you see?

Challenges

What have you been thinking extra about to build your brand?

Disadvantages of being a SME?

Opportunities

What have easier/advantages of being a SME?

How flexible are you? And how do you work to respond to trends? Market changes that affect your brand?

Other information

Do you have something to add?