



EPOKA UNIVERSITY

**BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION, AND BRAND VALUE CO-EVALUATION: A
CASE STUDY FROM THE ALBANIAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DISSERTATION

BESJON ZENELAJ

EPOKA UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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BESJON ZENELAJ

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APPROVAL PAGE

Student Name and Surname: Besjon Zenelaj

Faculty: Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences

Department: Business Administration

Thesis Title:

BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION, AND BRAND VALUE CO-EVALUATION: A
CASE STUDY FROM THE ALBANIAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Date of Defense: _____

I certify that this final work satisfies all the requirements as a PhD for the degree of PhD in
Business Administration

Dr. Esmir Demaj

Head of Department

This is to certify that I have read this final work and that in my opinion it is fully adequate,
in scope and quality, as a PhD Dissertation for the degree of PhD in Business
Administration

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mirdaim Axhami

Supervisor

Examination Committee Member

Title / Name & Surname	Affiliation	Signature
1- Prof. Dr. Waldemar Adam PFOERTSCH (Chairperson)	EPOKA UNIVERSITY	
2- Prof. Dr. Klodiana GORICA (Jury Member)	FEUT	
3- Prof. Dr. Kreshnik (Jury Member)	UET	
4- Prof. Dr. Osman KÖROĞLU (Jury Member)	EPOKA UNIVERSITY	
5- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Manuela MECE (Jury Member)	ALBANIAN UNIVERSITY	

Abstract

BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION, AND BRAND VALUE CO-EVALUATION: A CASE STUDY FROM THE ALBANIAN TEXTILE INDUSTRY

The hypercompetitive world and the rise of social media are the main elements that characterize today`s markets. Such a context urged the implementation of innovative thinking and solutions as the emerging problems and cases were not addressed properly with mindset and tools of an old context.

In this perspective, we experienced the rise of a new mindset in many fields, and especially in the field of business and particularly in marketing. Service Dominant Logic to many scholars is a new innovative paradigm, or an emerging thought in marketing. To this study Service Dominant Logic is the theory in which it is grounded a new perspective of brand management.

This study brings together the pieces of one of the main parts of marketing, branding, by offering a mindset that is in accordance with the new thought in marketing, Service Dominant Logic. This study revealed the importance of many actors that interact with each other to create the brand, and to evaluate brand value. Therefore, brand value is both co-created and co-evaluated among the actors that operate in a given context, market or ecosystem.

The originality of this study stands as it offers the literature a view how brand value is co-created and how it is co-evaluated. The case study revealed the main elements that actors use to co-create brand value, and the main elements that actors use to co-evaluate brand value.

Keywords: *Service Dominant Logic, Brand Value Co-creation, Brand Value Co-evaluation*

Acknowledgements

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this PhD Thesis, titled `**BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION, AND BRAND VALUE CO-EVALUATION: A CASE STUDY FROM THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY**`, is based on my original work except quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that this thesis has not been previously or concurrently submitted for the award of any degree, at EPOKA University, any other university or institution.

Date: 26 September 2023

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1 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With events having big impact on the world history such as the Industrial Revolution, the mankind in general and particularly business field, experienced drastic changes. Equilibrium changed almost in every field of science and society. World War 1 and 2, The Great Depression, political system changes in the early 90s, dot.com bubble, several financial and economic crises in different regions across the globe, 2008 financial crisis, the rise of social media, huge improvements in information and communication technologies, and plenty of other events left their sign on today`s landscape. Turbulences and complexity are among the terms which have become very familiar in business environment. Tough competition, speed, changing lifestyles and consumption habits force organizations to develop new adaptive practices. Organizations tend to adapt to the new reality to sustain their activities.

What they offer in the market, who they are, and how they communicate with customers has become the critical theme for every organization. In this dissertation we focus on branding which is one of the flagship concepts for achieving sustainability in the market. While it is possible to learn lessons from brands with a legacy (i.e., Coca Cola, General Electric etc.) and relatively new brands (i.e., Amazon.com, Facebook etc.), it is not possible to establish a receipt for successful brand management that can work universally. Brand management involves many factors, and actors. Nevertheless, it is possible to provide and implement successful brand management initiatives by reading the context (environment) and implementing a systemic view. A lot went through since the old days when brand was only a sign to recognize and identify horses. For brand management, a new reality which requires a holistic (systemic) approach and consideration of all other factors and actors has emerged. Thus, the present work aims to offer a new window for considering brand management in the new reality.

1.1 Problem statement

Today`s landscape is characterized by a set of problematics concerning economy, politics, finance, environment with issues such global warming and demographics since world population is approaching 9 billion people (Kapferer, 2012, 124). It is concluded that

‘current revolution is taking place at 15 times the speed and at 100 times the scale of what happened in Britain after 1750’ (Schaffmeister, 2015, 3). One interesting data is the time which took to reach 150 million users for some of the great tools of the past millennium and start of the current one. While for telephones it was needed 89 years to reach 150 million users; for television, mobile, iPod and Facebook it took respectively 89, 38, 14, 7 and 4 years to reach that number (Temporal, 2010, 214). Navigating throughout this complexity requires huge efforts. On the other hand, the speed of events is unimaginable.

New realities require new methods. Due to new realities, we are witnessing the rising of a new mindset such the focus on bigger picture (Gummesson, 2012, 9) rather than getting lost in the particles. The emergence of a new mindset might not be the cure to every problematic, but it might be seen as the logical path to address complexity and navigate in turbulences.

Focus on production and products is limited and incomplete. On the other hand, there are intangible strengths such brand image which becomes determinant in the choices of customers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, 327). In this perspective, it becomes imperative to understand the indispensable importance for implementing a new mindset throughout the organization (Brax, 2005; Gronroos, 2006, 405). It is obvious the tendency towards a new service logic mindset (Gronroos, 2006a) for today`s organizations. According to Lusch and Vargo (2006a, 407) shifting towards a service logic aids organizations in viewing the reality differently. Service mindset holds implication for performance. It seeks to continuously improve performance rather than optimizing it. Service mindset draws attention towards the use of resources, and towards breaking the resistance and barriers of resource use. In the service mindset, customers are seen as part of the process and cocreators whereas value is meaningful only and only if customers appreciate it (Ballantyne et al., 2008, 43). Therefore, ‘value in use is superior to value in exchange’ (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 407). Service mindset enhances competitiveness (Polese et al., 2009) and has started to leave behind the old manufacturing orientation (Yan et al., 2010, 2222). The new service mindset is suitable for solving new emerging problems (Walther et al., 2011) and offers new opportunities for creating competitive value propositions (Oshio, 2014) which in turn enhances brand equity too (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 12).

The hallmark of the new reality is without doubt the ability to create and maintain sustainable relationships with relevant actors around because relationships and interaction stand at the heart of marketing function (Gummesson, 2017). Moreover, relationships, and

perceived quality are among concepts of the new service-oriented mindset (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, 333). Interaction with customers might be the start of a relationship (Salomonson et al., 2012,154); therefore, relationships are also among critical elements to take in consideration in managing a brand. The focus of businesses must be establishment of relationships with interested actors, an inclusive implemented in this work to indicate all stakeholders. Such mindset requires taking in consideration resources of other actors such level of knowledge, access to the information, adaptation process and willingness to adapt (Akaka et al., 2012, 45-46). At the same time, it is critical to consider other influencers` on other actors` perceptions. It is possible then to argue that while evaluating a brand one actor is influenced by others too. Moreover, according to Akaka et al., (2012, 45-46) this will allow to: avoid decentralization in communication; enhance collaboration with other actors; implement new strategies and contemporary practices, thus resulting in cocreation of the brand. Relationships stand at the essence of life - both social and business life- (Polese and Di Nauta, 2013, 114). Relationships influence positively customer motivation for collaboration (Chou et al., 2014, 645) despite the existing doubts on their actual effect on creating value mutually (value co-creation) (Komulainen, 2014, 238; Skjalsvik, 2017, 193). Emotions, relationships, positive actions from all actors are the essentials for establishing interaction and collaboration which are the identifying concepts of the new era (FitzPatrick et al., 2015, 463). The focus on something wider than product and manufacturing, and dyadic relations, avoids non-desired results and prevents harming relationships (Andreini et al., 2015, 251).

However, customers establish a relationship (Ranjan and Read, 2016) only upon their will despite the will of businesses to consider customers as relations that must be properly managed. Willingness of customers and the ability of resource integration (Chandler and Lusch, 2014,11) affects deeply the nature of relationships. Marketing as a business function must address both '*relational* and *non-relational* marketing strategies and activities' (Gronroos, 2006, 403). At the end, customer is the true evaluator of value (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006). However, one must not neglect the essential importance of relationships as a strategic weapon in today`s marketplace (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 408). They are considered a 'valuable resource in today`s service economy (Polese and Di Nauta, 2013, 114). Given the tendency towards interaction (Sheth et al., 2009, 866) the presence and establishment of relationships (Zhang et al., 2018) with all stakeholders contribute to the co-creation of value (Lusch et al., 2006, 267-268) which is the flagship

concept and mentality of Service Dominant Logic (Wind, 2006, 479). Relationship-building efforts include different forms such as branding and brand management (Gummesson, 2007, 241). Relationships occur within a dynamic environment (Vargo, 2009, 378; Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 188), and interaction with ‘interdependent relationships emerge’ (Akaka et al., 2012, 18). Therefore, for understanding customers, industries, and markets is essential to exploit the relationships among actors.

1.2 Motivation behind the study

In the light of the aforementioned information, it is possible to state one important issue which concerns the whole organization and its sustainability. This issue is brand, and brand management. Managing the brand over time requires adaptation to new realities. The process of brand management on the other hand, requires dedication of resources and adaptation with the changing environment. In this perspective, it is imperative for businesses to implement a new mindset for brand management. This new mindset must represent the whole roadmap for managing the brand properly. One of the main shifts is the acceptance of the shifting power of brand as an asset that is orchestrated not only by the company anymore. The need to assess the environment and its effect on branding brought up the discussion to consider brand from a new perspective. Within the environment there are plenty of relevant actors which help to create the brand and affect each other's perceptions on the brand. This dissertation states that brand management must be adapted to the new reality. Furthermore, brand management must be executed according to the new dominant logic, the Service Dominant Logic. This dissertation goes beyond considering brand cocreation from relevant actors around the brand. At the same time this dissertation brings clarity to another critical issue. While evaluating a brand, customers rely on opinions which affect their perceptions. Other actors experience the same situation. For a high school graduate the choice of university is a process which is affected by many actors around the university. Honeymoon vacation hotel selection is influenced by plenty of actors around the hotel. The university, and the hotel are not the single owners of their brands. Other actors influence how their brand is being evaluated. Thus, this issue which has been labeled as co-evaluating the brand; is another issue addressed in this dissertation.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Purpose of this research is two folded. At first this research aims to investigate how brand creation and brand evaluation takes place in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders (actors). The shared meaning of the brand has indicated that brand meaning is co-created. Therefore, brand is not only the property of the business but at the same time it is a platform which is influenced by the moves of other actors too. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate brand value co-creation.

Second, the value of the brand cannot be defined only by taking in consideration some aspects. Despite the high number of studies and research which are focused on brand value measuring they are either taking in consideration one or some different aspects. Brand value is created by the complexity of the actors that are within the ecosystem. In this context, the second purpose of this study is to investigate brand value co-evaluation.

1.4 The landscape of the market

In today`s business landscape competition has reached an outstanding level. Given this, businesses tend to combine, and compete with their strategic competitive strengths package (i.e. suppliers, technology, reputation). It is then obvious the need to focus in the whole picture where both business-to-business and business-to-customer entities are part of the same marketing context (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 337), and not two different realities. In this dynamic business landscape, the control shifted from the company (Schlager et al., 2011, 497) towards other actors and they act all together part of ecosystem (Gretzel et al., 2015, 559). According to Webster and Lusch (2013, 392) there occurred incremental changes which affected the way we see consumer as individual, and customer as part of an exchange process. Even though it is important to know the degree of engagement of customer in this complex and dynamic reality (Rajapakse and Terano, 2014), it can be said that customer gained an active role in this process and turned into an essential actor for enabling a mutual creation of value (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2015, 11). Not only the role of customer; the role of employees too has undergone changes in today`s business landscape (Bowen, 2016). Referring to Vargo, Wieland and Akaka (2015, 71) it can be said that one major change occurred in the perspective on innovation. There is a

need to reconsider innovation in all levels (i.e. market innovation, strategy, market offering) from the perspective and within a dynamic, systemic, and complex context (Järvi et al., 2018).

Industries experience deep transformations too. The concept of smart tourism become prevalent due to new technologies (Gretzel et al., 2015), and due to the raising initiatives and practices for smart city/smart planet.

In higher education there is a tendency towards new practices that take in consideration cocreation with involved actors, and the integration of resources of each actor (Diaz-Mendez and Gummesson, 2012).

There is ambiguity in what is the main asset of an organization. According to Vargo and Lusch:

On a more macro societal basis, we are beginning to realize that the most valuable asset in all organizations, whether they are nonprofit or for-profit, are their intangible brands and what they symbolize. These intangibles whether they be for the Catholic Church, Arthur Andersen, Firestone, or Intel are where most value of the firm resides (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, 328).

It is essential to enable the use of resources to create further potential resources. However, one must keep in mind that use of resources and/or creation of potential resources happens in a 'specific unique context' (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 184). According to Wetter-Edman et., (2014, 108) actor can be assess value on and only within a given context. Akaka and Vargo (2015, 455) confirmed this by labeling it service encounter. According to the authors: "the service encounter represents the context in which service is exchanged between a firm and a customer and satisfaction/dissatisfaction is determined" (Akaka and Vargo, 2015, 455). Therefore, it is critical to keep in consideration what branding is aiming to deliver, to whom it appeals, and what is the longevity of branding efforts. Knowledge sharing among actors offers the opportunity to look beyond simple dyadic relations and fosters value co-creation (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012, 23) and allows the emergence of a 'collaborative logic' (Botti et al., 2017, 63).

Changes and complexity brought the need for new mechanisms to addressing them. Following this, the need for methodologies which aim to assist businesses in navigating in complexity became evident. According to Gummesson (2012, 10) Service Science, Service Dominant Logic, Viable Systems Approach stand at the front as new tools or

methodologies for addressing the new emerging reality. These can help in digging in relationships, thus supporting business activities in general and its departments (i.e., marketing) in specific activities (i.e. brand management). Today`s markets are ‘hypercompetitive and dynamic’ (Botti et al., 2017, 63) and the business landscape experiences turbulences. Industries such higher education is at the paramount of these turbulences due to rapid changes (Chalcraft et al., 2015). Given this, it is important to anticipate changes and to consider them as routine of business activities rather than seeing them as emergency disrupting the establishment. According to Meynhardt et al., (2016, 2985) for instance, any existing system/ecosystem should be seen systemically in order to embrace and anticipate emergence. Retail industry too needs to address serious concerns related to the efficiency of their activities. Both traditional retail, and electronic commerce must obey to the new reality for improving customer experience (Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014,8). Powerful companies such IBM realized the need to shift towards a new mindset which considers other actors besides the organization itself, and focusses not solely on the product (Spohrer, 2017). However, this is a process that requires digitalization and implementation of technology which at the same time brings the need for smarter customers. As it can be understood, one-sided steps which come for the companies only are not efficient anymore.

Changes in information and communication technologies too acted as catalyzers of the merging reality. According to Gummesson (2017, 18) social media platforms and digital marketing have brought a new reality. Internet of Things (IoT) enables customers to be part of the process of creating something with companies rather than just become passive receivers (Lambert and Enz, 2012, 1603; Balaji and Roy, 2016).

The mindset implemented from the organization affects its journey in the market. The new emerging mindset which is present in today`s market landscape is necessary for organizations to exploit potential opportunities (Prahalad, 2004). Nowadays, according to Gronroos (2006a), focusing on service logic and going beyond the simple manufacturing logic is the principal indicator of the new mindset (Antons and Breidbach, 2018). This new mindset which has been labeled as Service Dominant Logic (see. Vargo and Lusch, 2004) urges to consider markets as macrostructures which emerge, and under this umbrella actors exchange service for service. Markets are macrostructures which are being cocreated from both sellers and buyers (Lusch, 2006, 241). Therefore, such mindset requires to focus on the big picture and implementing a systemic approach. In avantgarde countries like Japan

for instance, the importance of service, and service economy has been brought to attention since early 2000s (Hidaka, 2006, 45)

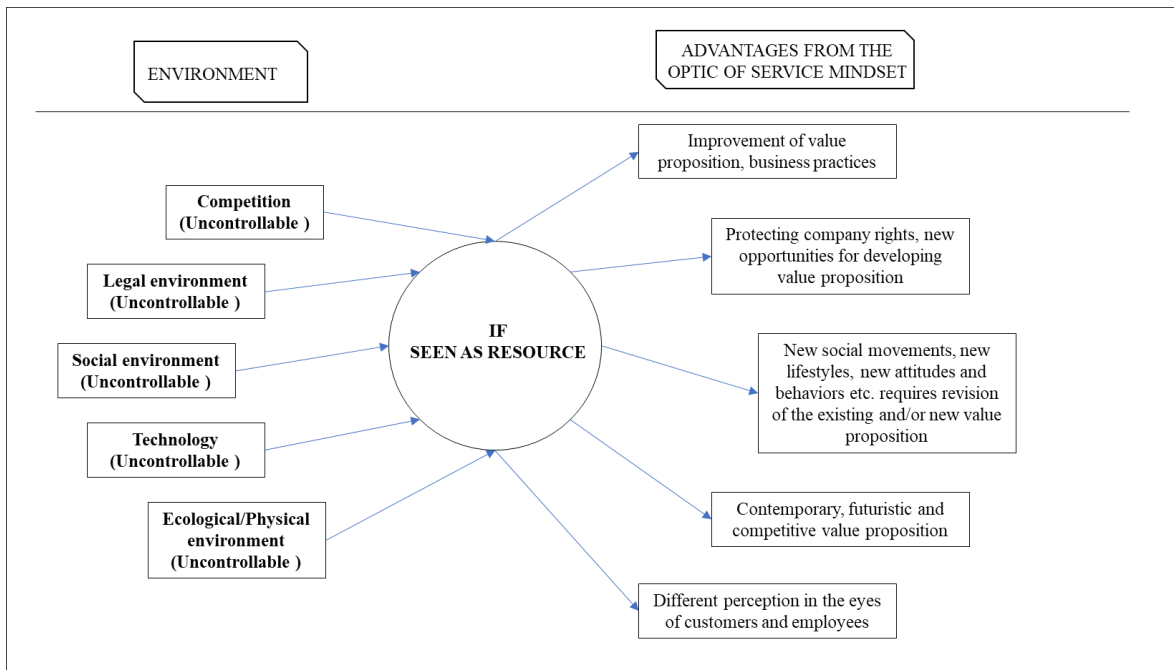
1.5 The necessity for a new business mindset

When discussing the new mindset is important to take in consideration the environment (context) too. Figure 1 represents the importance of environment for the new mindset. Sometimes the external environment is considered among the main obstacles for shifting towards a contemporary and futuristic mindset. In the new service mindset, a different approach takes place. Environment is seen as a river of possibilities and opportunities for creating and taking advantage of resources. The shift towards the new service mindset has been obvious in supply chain management. Changing practices, customer needs, and technology made businesses consider new approach for obtaining results. In this perspective, the need to work closely with concerned actors has grown and new practices have emerged (Wu and Wu, 2015). The effect of Service Dominant Logic on supply chain management though and practice is noticeable (Vural, 2017, 1119)

Actors (customers, suppliers, etc.) undertake steps based on the context they percept. This affects, and defines their further moves (Chandler and Lusch, 2014,11). For businesses is important to offer solutions which stand in alignment with the context customers (Werner et al., 2017).

In each instant, actors bridge together by integrating resources and exchanging service. All these relationships, and dynamics that occur are unique. This means that integrated resources and relationships among actors are totally different from each other. This situation is labeled as context according to Chandler and Vargo (2011, 41). The relationship among two actors (i.e. company-supplier) forms a context. A direct service exchange in a dyadic relationship (Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 41) where both actors participate actively in the process of value co-creation establishes the *micro-context*.

Figure 1: Service Mindset and Environment



Source: Based on Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 414

Once the relationship goes beyond a simple dyadic relation, thus including more actors (i.e. company-customer-supplier); two of which serve to each other directly, and together they serve directly to another third actor, then *meso-context* is established. *Macro-context* on the other hand, occurs when more complex relationships take place. Complex networks are formed with the combination of dyadic and triadic relationships that occur simultaneously. Chandler and Vargo (2011, 44) conclude with *meta-context* which includes exchange among complex networks. It is important to highlight that ‘practices, routines, activities, or processes may be replicated at any of the three levels of context (Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 41).

Table 1: Paradigm shift

Paradigm	Period	Characteristics
Goods paradigm <i>Services Are Not Recognized, All Is Goods and Manufacturing</i>	before 1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Manufacturing oriented ○ focus on product ○ dominated by American marketing management and the marketing mix -4P

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ standardized goods ○ mass-manufacture ○ services and relationships were neglected ○ focus on the transactional relationships which create immediate cash flows.
<p>The services vs goods paradigm</p> <p><i>The Era of Goods-Service Differences</i></p>	1970s-2000s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ focus on differences between goods and services ○ interaction between service providers and customers was introduced ○ B2B and B2C marketing begun to be treated as separate ○ customer relationship management (CRM) was introduced ○ use of concepts such networks, one-to-one marketing, relationship, and interaction became obvious ○ value and customer satisfaction came to focus.
<p>Service paradigm</p> <p><i>The Era of Commonalities, Interdependencies and a Systemic Approach</i></p>	2000s-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ goods/services integration ○ goods/services interdependency ○ business and marketing complexity in its peak ○ interdependencies and a systemic approach which considers all stakeholders (actors) emerged ○ <i>Service-dominant (S-D) logic as theory</i> emerged; aiming to offering dynamic and viable solutions for complex and turbulent markets ○ emphasis on many-to-many networks and systems theory ○ the raise of science of service based on cocreation of value

Source: Based on Gummesson, 2012; Gummesson and Gronroos, 2012, 482; Kuzgun and Asugman, 2015, 243; Gummesson, 2017, 17

One important derivative from the new mindset is the ability for adaptivity. Implementing adaptability practices (i.e. create symbiotic, mutual, and profitable relationships, observe the changes around) and create adaptable systems (i.e. evolve, expect change) (Lusch, et al., 2016, 86) is much easier when focusing on service mindset.

To understand the evolution of market landscape, and to embrace the new mindset is required to go backwards (Yu and Sangiorgi, 2018). In the past century, the market experienced a paradigm shift which was accompanied with new tools. These paradigms, and their respective tools forced the actors to behave in a certain way. Once change came, new actors replaced old ones. According to Gummesson and Gronroos (2012, 482) this evolution can be summarized in three paradigms (Table 1). It is obvious the shift from a philosophy based solely on production and manufacturing towards a mindset that takes in consideration relationships, collaboration with others, and implements a systemic approach.

In the new emerging mindset relationships and networks gain an important role (Barile and Polese, 2009) and the old *goods-centered, manufacturing-based model of economic exchange* (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a) requires major revisions. The service logic fits a vast majority of companies in today's market (Gronroos, 2006a, Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018).

In this section we would like to highlight one indispensable and critical point. When referring to the terminology of Service Dominant Logic the reader (academic and practitioner) might find differences since she/he will realize differences in the lexicon implemented by SDL and practical lexicon (the one used in daily business routines). Nevertheless, it is important to understand the background of these differences. The differences do not stand at the concept itself, rather they represent the evolution towards a new mindset. In order to help the reader of the present work we are offering below a summary of these concepts, and how they evolve under the service mindset.

What is also important to highlight is that conceptual shifting does not intend to replace the traditional marketing mix (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 413) which is one of the main frameworks in the business, rather it aims to reinforce the implementation of a strategic orientation for marketing. Goods still have a vital role in service provision (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 255).

Table 2: Conceptual shifting

Manufacturing mindset	Conceptual transition phase	Service Dominant Mindset
Goods	Services	Service
Products	Market offering	Experiences
Attributes	Benefits	Solutions
Added value	Co-production	Cocreation of value
Maximization of profits	Financial ‘engineering’	Financial ‘feedback’
Pricing	Delivery of value	Value proposition
Equilibrium	Dynamic	Complex and adaptive systems
Supply chain	Value chain	Value creation network
Promoting (to) market	Integrated marketing communication	Dialogue
Orientation towards products	Market (to) Orientation towards market	Market (with) Service orientation

Source: Lusch and Vargo, 2006, 286

Brand management process too stands in the forefront of the main activities and cannot be neglected (Williams and Aitken, 2008, 263). The need for the mindset and conceptual shifting on the other hand, is the hallmark of the new reality. It is seen as an important source for further academic research on business in general (Ostrom et al., 2010, 3) and a turning point for the marketing theory (Lobler, 2011, 63).

The new mindset for marketing is backed up by technological advancement which change the way how the message is being delivered thus influencing also brand management process (Fisher and Smith, 2011, 347).

The need for the implementation of a different mindset (Smyth et al., 2018) become evident since the importance of participation of customers in the improvement of processes has been acknowledged (Mahr et al., 2013, 601).

One aspect for the new emerging mindset is the process of creation of value proposition. So far, we have come to an agreement on the complex nature of business and market relations. Such complexity urges the engagement of other actors while designing the business` strategic roadmap:

“Businesses, governments, and scientists seek new tools and methods for making better decisions and aligning stakeholders in an increasingly interconnected world with numerous, complex, urgent problems” (Barile et al., 2016, 666).

One eventual concern is on the value proposition. It is not easy to design proper and acceptable value proposition in the age of complexity. Offering competitive value propositions in alignment with service mindset and set of skills and capabilities becomes the critical touchpoint in the new era (Holttinen, 2014). According to Gronroos (2006, 407), designing contemporary and competitive value propositions requires involvement of customers, new technologies and employees. This goes in alignment with S-D logic which recognizes customers as operant resources (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 413) that enable the refinement of a valuable value proposition which do not has limited focus neither on goods nor on services (Gummesson, 2007a, 114). In the section above there has been discussed the importance of relationships in the new landscape (Patrício et al., 2018). Shaping the value proposition according to service logic (S-D logic) mindset supports the development of relationships, diffusion of knowledge and increase of dialogue (Ballantyne et al., 2008). Nevertheless, it should be a clear distinction on what the customer, as the main actor, can do to refine value proposition (Hilton and Hughes, 2008, 34). The importance of value proposition stands since it is among the keystone competitive ‘weapons’ of a business:

“Firms do not produce value; they can only make value propositions and then, with the customer as a collaborator, cocreate value if the proposition is accepted. For competitive advantage, these value propositions should be more compelling than those of competitors” (Lusch et al., 2008, 10).

In this perspective, reinforcing the capabilities all actors that participate in the refinement of value proposition reduces complexity in navigating in turbulences, and enhances collaboration within the system (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008,19). Sandstrom et al. (2008, 114) have stated the importance of presence in value proposition of physical and emotional elements. This view reinforces the necessity for engagement of other actors in value proposition development process because of its strategic importance for marketing efforts (Payne and Frow, 2014, 223)

Service Dominant logic on the other hand, is the suitable conceptual framework for value proposition in the new era of marketing (Randall et al., 2010, 36) which has in its center ‘the marketing of value propositions’.

Given the complexity, and turbulences, and difficulties of companies to navigate, the shift in the mindset has a strong influence on shaping value proposition. Implementing a view which considers other actors while developing value proposition provides opportunities for viewing things systemically. In this perspective, service logic is suitable since it has strategic influence on the value proposition of an organization (Figure 2). Developing value proposition requires knowledge on actual strengths of the organization, partners, potential opportunities, contextual awareness, and proper usage of resources (i.e. technology) (Ng et al., 2012, 418). Moreover:

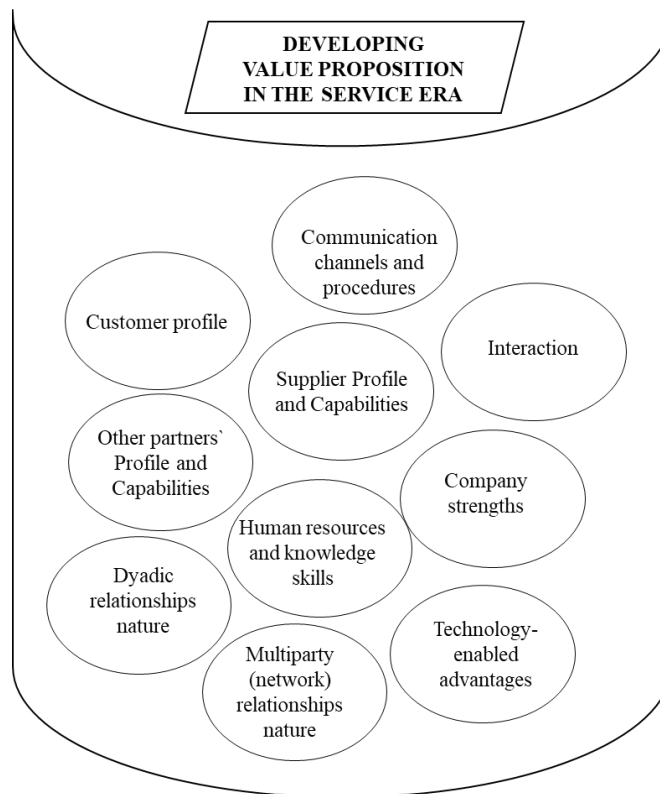
“The value proposition defines the mix of various resources (economic, functional, emotional, social, technical) that is promised to the customer (and/or other stakeholders). The nature of this mix depends on the beneficiary’s perceptions of the value inherent in the use of the promised resources” (Mele and Polese, 2011, 47).

Therefore, it is obvious that for value propositions in the new era is not enough anymore to deliver value. Value must bear a meaning to the receiver within his/her/its own context. Value-in context (Akaka et al., 2012, 15) is the new symbol of value proposition in the new era. Besides the obvious effect on value proposition developing effort, there is its evident effect on communication and brand management activities too.

Value proposition ‘connects actors with each other’ (Jaakkola and Hakanen, 2013, 48-49). Engaging other actors in offering a contemporary value proposition makes them aware and responsible (Edvardsson et al., 2012, 91). Chandler and Lusch (2014, 3) has defined value proposition as an invitation that actors deliver to each other to engage. Actors evaluate the value proposition based on their own context (Chandler and Lusch, 2014, 4). For instance, lets take the example of a dealer selling electric cars in a developing country such as Albania. The dealer, as the seller of the cars, might develop astonishing marketing campaign and might find the most suitable ways to establish a dialogue with customers. Nevertheless, his contemporary brand management efforts implementing a new service mindset remain incomplete since for customers is essential to have charging points, spare parts, and suitable infrastructure to ride these sensitive cars. While there are problems due to very few charging points; unawareness of the market on spare parts, and missing

expertise for any anomaly in the car; and problematic roads; the value in the context of Albanian customer for an electric car would be blurred.

Figure 2: Developing value proposition in the service era



Source: Author`s elaboration based on Maglio et al., 2010

In order to succeed in this business and to successfully deliver the value proposition in the market there are required efforts from a large set of actors (i.e. state, businesses, mechanics etc.). Hence, value proposition has to be seen by all relevant actors as ‘co-created, reciprocal and dynamic’ (Frow et al., 2014, 18).

Let us demonstrate the importance of value proposition in one dynamic and established industry such tourism. Only the business is not enough to offer for the tourist remarkable experiences. Business is only one of the actors or sources for a compelling value proposition (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2018). There is the need for a whole set of actors to engage with each other, to establish relationships and to collaborate within the network. The trend to go beyond the actual offering and to look for references in service (i.e.

involving customers and turning them to proactive customers) (Valtanen, 2014, 65) urges for adequate techniques which involve identification of all resources that can improve the value proposition of one business or destination (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2015, 709). Since tourists cocreate their travel experience (Buhalis and Foerste, 2015, 159) finding the suitable means to foster and facilitate this process brings mutual benefits for all actors.

Additionally, not only relationships have effect on value proposition. Value proposition itself has effect on relationships too (Frow et al., 2014, 18). Engaging actors is not easy unless with the offer of a compelling value proposition. In this perspective, it becomes imperative to fulfill the needs of each actor in its own context. Actors create the context (Maglio and Spohrer, 2013, 667) and knowing the context of each actor, estimating its potential needs, and become aware on the nature of the relationships facilitates the creation of value propositions which in return will contribute in the maintenance of sustainable relationships.

Stakeholders, or actors as we label them since it is more inclusive and appropriate which also fits Service Dominant logic terminology, affect and shape value proposition (Wan and Zhang, 2014). Frow et al. (2014) consider value propositions from the perspective of service ecosystem which offers a systemic view and includes all relevant actors. This dissertation implements such approach while discussing the topic of brand (Morosan, 2018). Value proposition concerns interactions among all actors. At the first level (micro level) takes place the interactions among buyers and sellers, and firms and customer communities. At the second level (meso level) of the ecosystem the focus is on interactions between the employees and suppliers due to their importance for the firm. At the upper level there is the highest level (macro level). The focus is on the market and its 'game rules' and their effect on value proposition. Maglio and Spohrer (2013, 667) too agree on the importance of all relevant actors and their effect on value proposition. Service provider must take in consideration the viewpoint of customers, competitors, and authorities (who set the rules of the game).

1.6 The necessity for a new mindset for marketing and branding

According to Achrol and Kotler (2011, 50) marketing requires a wide and systemic implementation approach. Other actors and publics must be included in the short and long-

term marketing interests of an organization. Having a new typology of customer requires businesses to adopt an inclusive approach (Finsterwalder, 2018).

For instance, Word of Mouth (WOM) has become more significant nowadays with the raise of social media platforms, and internet. Therefore, we experience a shift of communication power from company towards masses (Williams and Aitken, 2011, 452). Customers share their own experiences on internet and that makes obvious the need to reconsider many practices (Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012, 1483-1484). Information which exists and is uploaded on internet stands among the catalyzers of the power shifting that occurred (Achrol and Kotler, 2011, 43). It is then obvious the shift of power from companies towards customers. Marketing experienced a major shift in its mindset (Gronroos, 2006, 405). Brand choice, and value do not withstand apart, and critical elements such as relationships, and the cost of jumping in another relationship have to be taken in consideration too (Waseem, et al., 2018). Marketing has become complex (Möller, 2006a, 447). Marketing has the necessity to implement a mindset which considers customers as the cocreators of the value (Lusch, 2007, 265). Production companies need to include other actors (ex. buyers, suppliers) while defining their value propositions (Edvardsson et al., 2008, 339). It has become essential to consider marketing from a systemic and practical perspective (Gummesson, 2008, 17). Although the fear that marketing sub-disciplines (i.e. brand management) might show different attitude towards the new service mindset (Jacob and Ulaga, 2008, 248), the general tendency of marketing goes towards the implementation of a service dominant logic (Karpen and Bove, 2008, 214) which challenged traditional marketing and its status-quo (Lusch et al., 2008, 6). The shift of power from companies towards customers has become possible under the new dominant mindset which calls for focus on operant resources as the core of the competitiveness (Madhavaram and Hunt, 2008, 79). Focus from manufacturing mindset towards service mindset has facilitated the shifting of power. Marketing can benefit from this shift from several perspectives. These perspectives have implications for brand management too. Some of these perspectives have been listed below (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 258).

- Customer becomes part of the process of value proposition offering, and active participant in the communication strategy.

- Instead of acquiring something owned by the company alone, customers acquire a value proposition which not only has been cocreated with them, but at the same time is valuable to them in their own context.
- Customers are seen as part of a bigger picture
- Focus on operant resources (i.e. brand, knowledge, skills) become obvious. Customers on the other hand, are not solely targets but are considered as resources at the same time.

Such new face for marketing requires strong decision-making and managerial will rather than investments and costs. The late ones are the main obstacles for implementing a new mindset due to the fear of managers that new practices bring out new costs. However, implementing service logic for marketing and brand management requires at first a managerial shift and avant-garde decision-making skills (Chuang, et al., 2018).

The exchange that occurs between actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 26) is at the core of marketing. The novelty is that what is exchanged in market is much more than market offering (products, etc.). Actors exchange and integrate their own resources. And this is the actual reason for the shifting of power. Nevertheless, the way how companies engage with customers to establish last longing relationships is at the core of the value proposition (Brohman et al., 2009). Therefore, shifting the mindset contributes in changing the view on customers. This will create a domino effect and will have an impact on every business function; specifically, on marketing and branding.

Marketing started to experience some transitions since 80s (Brodie, Coviello and Winklhofer, 2008, 84) and today's need for practices compatible with service logic (Karpen and Bove, 2008, 214), besides the attention and interest (Purvis and Long, 2008), reflects the evolvement of marketing as a discipline.

Marketing is being enriched by avantgarde thoughts such 'many-to-many marketing, S-D logic, and 'service science' (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 340). Traditional practices unfortunately tend to provide full power for companies, and neglect customers a lot. One sided message becomes risky because it constantly seeks to support the view of the company. To some extent this is seen as 'propagandistic' (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 9)

According to Christodoulides (2009, 292) there is a clear trend of shifting power from companies towards customers, and marketing have shown a tendency to become focused on the bigger picture. The same applies to branding. Dialogue has started to substitute one-

sided message delivery. Thus, branding started to be seen as critical element in building relationships and fostering cocreation (Christodoulides, 2009, 292). Brand meaning is not only what companies are trying to communicate, rather it is being cocreated with customers and other actors. That is why S-D logic is a supportive framework for brand management in the new era:

Service-dominant logic argues that communication should be characterized by conversation and dialog. It is especially important with conversation and dialogue that all parties are transparent and truthful with each other. This approach to communication should include not only customers, but also employees and other relevant stakeholders that may be affected by service exchange. All stakeholders need to be part of the market dialog (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 10).

Not only marketing; the business thought is experiencing a deep change (Maglio et al., 2009, 396). Marketing science (Vargo, 2007; Read et al., 2009, 16; Rust and Huang, 2014) is experiencing major shift from an approach where transaction is the main motivator, towards relational approaches (Crowther and Donlan, 2011, 1444). The late contains by default transactions and offers the opportunity to view the big picture.

Marketing is experiencing deep changes due to big data and information technology (Rust and Huang, 2014). Businesses have new gates to retrieve information from customers and other actors (i.e. competitors, government, NGOs etc.). Such information supports them in shaping value propositions according to the new reality. In this context, the shift towards service logic become mandatory. For instance, social marketing is an example how sub-disciplines of marketing tend to shift towards service logic (Luca et al., 2015, 17). What has been discussed so far does not mean that manufacturing mindset, and transactional approach stands out of the new logic. Indeed, with the new service mindset they preserve their importance and become robust. Today's landscape 'represents a blend of Fordist and post-Fordist technologies' (Awa and Ukoha, 2016, 143).

Manufacturing orientation and goods dominant logic seems to be left behind as new research streams emerge (Delpechitre et al., 2018). These new research streams are defining the dynamics for the whole market. Considering practices systemically, shaping value propositions according to dialogue and cocreation principles offers a new window for considering the market.

While the mainstream marketing focuses on dyadic relationships, the new emerging landscape focuses on networks, and ecosystems (Mele et al., 2015, 107). Marketing need to be seen systemically as a system and even as a network of relationships (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 337). Marketing is not anymore, a single function of the business. Activities covered by marketing department such creation of brand awareness has become much more sophisticated and go beyond borders of the brand (Gronroos and Gummerus, 2014). They represent the power and the ability of the organization to bond with other actors. One important aspect that need to be taken to consideration is the ability of different cultures to contribute to the refinement of marketing thought (Hartmann et al., 2018). There is no such thing as 'universal marketing'. For instance, marketing science has been influenced from USA marketing thought (Gummesson and Gronroos, 2012; Letaifa and Reynoso, 2015, 684) but that might not be the solution to every market. Different practices from different schools and countries can enrich marketing further and can contribute in developing new practices.

So far, we have talked about the shift of power from company towards customers (and other actors). Marketing itself on the other hand experienced a major shift. Probably the biggest shift is the one from a manufacturing mindset towards a service dominant logic. As it is a logical result, subdiscipline of marketing (i.e. brand management, consumer behavior, sales techniques) have experienced this transition too. Therefore, the question related to the essence of marketing and its evolution gain incremental importance.

According to Gronroos (2006, 407) marketing assist the whole organization to provide a contemporary value proposition by taking in consideration the inclusion of other actors in creating value. The science of marketing is rooted in the science of economics (Mele et al., 2015) and Adam Smith's matra on creating national wealth in an industrialization era has a profound effect in the raise of marketing (Vargo, 2007). Traditional marketing thought is largely focused on the exchange of manufacturing outputs (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). It has been recognized the need to discuss marketing again and to reposition it according to the new context (Ambler, 2005, 50). The new context requires marketing to consider customers not just as information providers (Mahr et al., 2013, 601) for the sake of developing innovative (but incomplete) solutions. In 80s it started the rise of service marketing as a need to break out a little from the good dominant logic. However, as years passed, and the context changed service marketing experienced an evolution by becoming a subdiscipline of marketing in late 80s (Baron et al., 2013, 5). In 2004 occurred the

breaking point where Vargo and Lusch (2004) initiated the discussion on Service Dominant Logic which gave to marketing a contemporary, competitive, and modern face.

The urge for a new mindset in marketing has a direct effect on every marketing effort. Brand management is one of the subdisciplines of marketing that has experienced a major shift. In the dialogue era is impossible to deliver the message and to wait for customer to answer the call (Busser and Shulga, 2018). Neither one-sided message nor irrelevant ones have efficiency anymore. Furthermore, it is impossible to neglect voices which harm your brand, and as a result your organization. Consequently, the urgency for a shift in the managing mentality of brand management and the need for suitable methods and approaches is present more than ever.

Until 1990s, mainly, the market value of organization has been defined with strong reference to financial indicators (Oertzen et al., 2018). Tangible assets such manufacturing units, storages etc. did not show the whole assets of the company. One of the crucial assets which was missing was the value of the brand, as one of the main non-tangible assets. Including brand in the overall value assessment of the organization become critical for offering realistic information to stakeholders (Temporal, 2010, 294). Raising importance of branding saw a shift from ‘a transactional perspective to a relational perspective’ (Kapferer, 2008, 160) in alignment with the shifting view of marketing itself. With time, brand management started to take a crucial role and experienced major changes (Figure 3). Brand management started to implement a new and contemporary view. The focus unit and mindset of brand management began to take a new shape (Temporal, 2010). Brand value is cocreated with other stakeholders and this urges a new style of managing the brand (Balmer et al, 2017, 148)

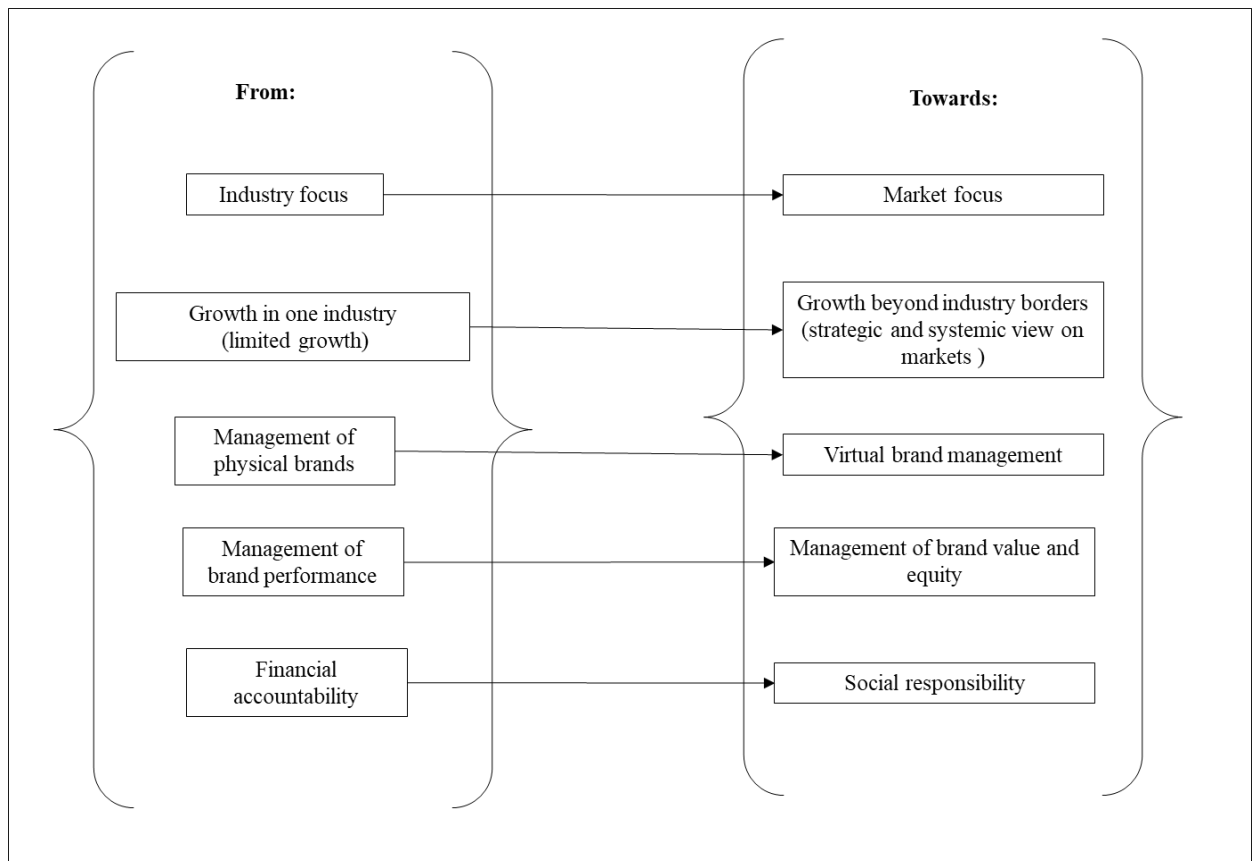
According to Heding et al. (2008, 3), the changing role of brand management is closely associated with the perspective from which brand is considered. Moreover, it is essential to highlight that the role of brand management changed in harmony with other environmental and mindset changes around. For instance, in a certain period brand was seen only as part of traditional mix.

Such an economic approach on branding is different from the identity approach where brand is seen as an element of organizational identity. The customer-based approach (brand associated to customer), personality approach (brand as a human) become different perspectives for considering brand management. The other 3 approaches (Heding et al., 2008); respectively, relational approach (the brand as a viable relationship partner),

community approach (brand as point of social interaction) and cultural approach:(brand as part of a broader cultural mindset) (Eggert et al., 2018) seems to be more contemporary approaches that fit with the service dominant logic.

At the same time these approaches clearly indicate the necessity for consideration of a large variety of actors in brand management. Brand management, especially between 1985-2006, has been influenced by a powerful ‘positivistic paradigm’ (Heding et al., 2008, 21) which considered brand as orchestrated exclusively by the company. Throughout this discussion is essential to understand that importance of traditional brand management will not disappear at a glance (Temporal, 2010, 234). What the present work has tried to reflect, is the necessity to shift towards a different approach in brand management. This approach fortunately is backed up by a suitable framework such Service Dominant Logic. Moreover, nowadays there have augmented the challenges to properly manage brand. According to Keller (2013) there are a set of factors which are serious obstacles to overcome, and real problems to be addressed. Today`s customers have become smarter.

Figure 3: Changing role of brand management



Source: Author`s elaboration based on Temporal, 2010

They want and ask for more but seek to pay less. Challenges such as changes in lifestyle, competition, difficulties in differentiating value propositions within one industry, communication tools, economic cycle (Keller, 2013, 53) enhance complexity and turbulences in managing the brand. That is why the paradigmatic shift of marketing and as a result of brand management is the adequate solution. Brands are not owned by companies anymore. Some go too far by stating that brands are owned by customers who ‘own and build them’ (Temporal, 2010, 17). Brands affect and transform the whole organization (Kornberger, 2010) and brand management is a dynamic process (Kapferer, 2008, 52) where relationships are essential (Heding et al., 2008).

In fact, it is exactly the dynamic nature of brand that brings the necessity for reconsidering actual practices from a contemporary perspective (Merz et al., 2018). The involvement of other actors gives birth to brand value. In this perspective, brand value is cocreated by other actors, and their involvement:

“The management of a brand relationship is a dynamic process, leaving room for the negotiation of both similar and conflicting views and many different players. It goes without saying that it is difficult to manage in practice. The approach is meaning-based, implying brand value is co-created in an ongoing process between brand and consumer” (Heding et al., 2008, 176).

This situation urges consideration of brand equity from a different viewpoint (Balmer et al., 2017, 125).

It is not easy however to pretend to start addressing brand management from the perspective of service dominant logic. Conducting brand management process with an ecosystem perspective too is a serious task. Despite these difficulties and challenges addressing each activity as an ecosystem itself would be

a good starting point. There is a set of elements as shown below (but not limited to these) which requires a systemic consideration, and engagement of other relevant actors found within the ecosystem. These elements are (Temporal, 2010, 244):

- Word of mouth
- Employees
- Brand culture
- Organizational standards
- Value proposition development

- Public relations
- Sponsorship and promotions
- Advertising

These elements are the inception point for starting something new concerning the brand management in the new era. There is always the pressure to grow the brand (Kapferer, 2008, 269), to find ways for creating the value of a brand, proper ways of evaluating it, and approaches on how to sustain the value of a brand (Keller, 2013, 21). On the other hand, brand cocreation and considering other actors, mirrors the new reality in brand management (Rihova et al., 2018).

New communication technologies made possible for customers, one of the main actors in brand management process, to influence brand value via their shared content. Thanks to the new communication technologies, customers take in charge the orchestration of the brand themselves (Heding et al., 2008, 17). Sometimes brand communities affect the brand, and brand value (Kapferer, 2008, 215). Brand value is influenced by the quality of relationships with stakeholders, and is created together with them (Balmer et al., 2017, 135-136). Some relationships trigger the enhancement of brand value whereas some relationships prevent any further development. Accordingly:

“...brand value is co-created through the relationships between the brand and its stakeholders. The brand manager needs to prioritize which relationships are most salient for the success of the brand” (Balmer et al., 2017, 142).

The question that rises is on how value comes out to surface. According to Balmer et al. (2017, 138) brand value cocreation has its inception in the interaction among actors (brand and stakeholders). One incremental aspect in succeeding in brand value cocreation, is the fulfillment of the promise from the brand to meet the expectations of relevant actors. Therefore, identifying relevant actors and the relationship nature with them supports cocreation of brand value.

As it has previously discussed; the set of skills and knowledge level is the ultimate competitive ‘weapon’ (Aaker, 1991). Such dependency on operant resources rather than operand ones brings out the necessity to address brand management from a different perspective in order to maintain a sustainable brand performance. As it is an operant resource brand must be taken in consideration carefully because operant resources have become the key stone of competitiveness.

According to Aaker (1994) the value proposition should reflect the strong sides of a brand and organization. It must represent the basics for establishment of reliable and meaningful relationships. Besides, the value proposition must include the essence of the brand which is its identity. Brand must be considered in its own context (Akaka et al., 2013, 278) and must be opened towards interaction with relevant actors (Laud and Karpen, 2017, 790).

2 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: BRANDING FROM THE SERVICE DOMINANT LOGIC PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Goods Dominant and Service Dominant Logic

2.1.1 Terminologies

The current era is characterized with some characteristics that recall us many-to-many approach (Gummesson, 2008b, c) that utilizes the network properties of marketing and as a consequence recognizes that both suppliers and customers operate in complex network contexts (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 340). One aspect of marketing is the importance to develop the required lexicon that characterizes the field and implies reorientation rather than reinvention. In this aspect reorientation not necessarily calls for abandoning of most of the traditional core concepts, such as the famous marketing mix, target marketing, and market segmentation, etc. but rather it would complement these with a framework based on a new mindset relevant for the market (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 14). New developments in the theory of marketing have been extended and requires a radical shift of perspective accompanied with a new lexicon. In order understand the relationships with in the new context are required new and much more significant terminologies which are not easy to be accepted and making thus this an exciting challenge for new theoretical shifts (Aitken et al., 2006, 279).

The new terminologies do not aim to replace the existing ones but to express them from a co-creational perspective (See Table 3).

It is important to state that new shifts does not eliminate immediately the current lexicon just as the modern industry did not eliminate the need for agriculture for instance. The new dominant logic of marketing too is focused on the enrichment of the lexicon rather than making them disappear (Lusch et al., 2006, 267-268). In the new era of marketing the goods have turned to service appliances. In this context, customer judgments about the value-in-use of goods extends the time-logic of marketing. Therefore exchange concept is no longer the essence and the capability to serve becomes the keystone of a firm's value

propositions. In the new era, the life of the brand is sustained by the service experience (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007).

Table 3: The conceptual shift of 4 Ps

MARKETING MIX	NEW TERMINOLOGY
Product	Service Offering
Price	Value Proposition
Promotion	Conversation and Dialogue
Placement	Value Processes and Networks

Source: Adapted from Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 413.

Some concepts that are related to manufacturing such as product, production, goods, distribution, supply, and consumption require to be replaced in the new era of marketing as the evolving of the discipline calls for its own conceptual framework (Lusch et al., 2008, 5). The shift from operand towards operant resources and collaborative marketing, resourcing, value-creation network shows the perfect match of the new mindset and the new lexicon (Lusch et al., 2008, 7).

The observation that some of the wording of the original Foundational Premises of the new evolving logic suggested refinements (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 2). The wording of commerce that is characterized by the core lexicon such as product, production, goods, supplier, supply chain, consumer, etc. presents a problem for any attempt at discussing and describing a counter paradigmatic view (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 2)

Therefore, in the Service-Dominant Logic ecosystem view, various actors are connected, directly or indirectly, and become dependent and interdependent through a set of relationships that extend beyond some notions of the transaction and economic exchange. Business activity and value co-creation have to be understood in the context of relationships among a complex set of actors (customers, employees, suppliers and other stakeholders) that transcend transactions which can be either single or repeated transactions (Vargo and Lusch, 2010a, 177). Some examples of this new shift in the terminology have been provided below (Vargo et al., 2010, 135):

- Goods => Service
- Products => Experiences
- Features => Solutions
- Value Added => Value-in-context
- Profit maximization => Financial feedback
- Equilibrium systems => Complex adaptive systems

Even though the lexicon of S-D logic is being refined it is obvious that empirical study using a multitude of research method is the solution to make the new terminology vivid (Vargo et al., 2010, 162). It is critical to state that the way in which a careful use of word choice, metaphor, and narrative structure can help to increase the persuasiveness of a marketing text for its audience (Miles, 2014, 751). Some studies make an integration in terminology of the lexicon of different streams (Chuang and Chen, 2015, 3).

The traditional terminology of the actor categories in the marketing literature, such as ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’ have been based on some unidirectional, and dyadic views on both value creation and delivery and these transaction-centric notions of value that limits the understanding of value ignores the complex nature of markets (Wieland et al., 2015; Evans, 2016, 17).

2.1.2 Goods vs. Service Dominant Logic

Innovation for goods aims to make better output that can increase market share. Service innovation mindset on the other hand aims to offer value proposition that can shape the needs and wants of the actors (in this case customers), and instead of market share increase strives to own the market by shaping it and defining the trends (Vargo, 2013, 9). Usage of service in the context of something that is used to indicate the opposite of the product is narrow and the characteristics are outdated (Fang, 2019). The new view on marketing suggests that service is rather used as a perspective. Therefore, we conclude that service is a research area in its own (Edvardsson et., 2005). Customers do not pay only for goods which are tangible but rather they buy the services that goods perform for them, as well as other intangibles, such as the assurances of the brand (Vargo and Morgan, 2005: 50). We

clearly see the power of the brand as a distinctive element for gaining market competitiveness and advantage. However, in S-D logic service is used to indicating a process of doing something for someone and not on the context of implying units of output as would be consistent with G-D logic. In S-D logic; service is the common denominator of exchange (Lusch and Vargo, 2006, 282).

The shift from a goods-centered view to a service-centered as Table 4 indicates, occurs in different perspectives.

To provide a framework for thinking clearly Service-dominant logic (S-D logic) is contrasted with goods-dominant (G-D) (Lusch et al., 2007, 5). For instance, customers view goods such as software and hardware as mere `appliances` for serving customers (Tuli, Kohli, and Bharadwaj, 2007, 5).

Table 4: From goods-centered towards service-centered.

TO:	FROM:
shift to the primacy of intangibles	rather than tangibles
shift to a focus on the creation and use of dynamic operant resources	as opposed to the consumption and depletion of static operand resources
recognition of the strategic advantage of symmetric	rather than asymmetric information
shift to conversation and dialog	as opposed to propaganda
an understanding that the firm can only make and follow through on value propositions	rather than create or add value
shift in focus to relational	rather than transactional exchange
shift to an emphasis on financial performance for information feedback	rather than a goal of profit maximization

Source: Adapted from Lusch et al., 2006, 267-268

The use of the term service as singular represents a shift from value in terms of *operand resources*— usually tangible, static resources that require some action to make them valuable – to *operant resource* – usually intangible, dynamic resources that can create value. Considering this conceptual shift value creation moves from the company towards a collaborative, co-creative process which involves both actors (Vargo, 2007, 56)

Nowadays product and production focus indicates a focus towards ‘goods-dominant logic’ (GDL) that can be considered as the opposite of a ‘service-dominant logic’ (SDL) (Edvardsson and Enquist, 2008, 204). As firms have historically been viewed primarily as manufacturers that exchange goods it shows the primary focus on operand resources (Brodie et al., 2019). Furthermore, the view towards customers as an operand resource like something to be segmented, penetrated, distributed to, and promoted to altogether with the traditional view on profit maximization reinforces the focus of companies on operand resources (Lusch et al., 2008, 7). The most critical distinction between G-D logic and S-D logic is found in the conceptualization of service. In S-D logic, service is defined as the application of competences (knowledge and skills) for the benefit of another party whereas G-D logic sees services as (somewhat inferior to goods) units of output (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 256). Some authors view G-D logic as the source of some of the underlying concerns (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 5).

Service-dominant (S-D) logic is linked to the value-in-use meaning of value. One example would be from automobile industry. A manufacturing firm applies its knowledge, skills, and capabilities to transform raw materials into an automobile. According to S-D logic,

‘the automobile is only an input into the value creation that occurs as a customer uses it (in transportation, self-identity, etc.) and integrates it with other resources. If no one knew how to drive, had access to fuel and maintenance, and functioned in social networks for which particular automobiles had particular meanings, etc., the car would have no value. It is only when the customer makes use of the automobile – in the context of his or her own life – that it has value. In this case, customers and manufacturers co-create value: manufacturers applying their knowledge and skills in the production and branding of the good, and customers applying their knowledge and skills in the use of it in the context of their own lives’ (Vargo et al., 2008, 146).

According to the view of S-D logic the customer is always a co-creator of value (Xie et al., 2008, 110) and tangible goods serve as appliances for service provision (Chen et al., 2009, 37) making thus physical goods elements of the offering as a part of an on-going process of supporting the customer (Gronroos, 2009, 351). The new marketing approach has eliminated most of the differences between product and service marketing (Gurau, 2009, 186) and rejects the common distinction between goods and services (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 8; Maglio et al., 2009, 398).

G-D logic orientation on marketing communication leads to unidirectional message making which does not offer feedback opportunities (Ballantyne et al. 2010, 209). It becomes then imperative for SMEs to understand the mindset change from GDL to SDL (Hsieh et al., 2010, 397) as they are contrasted to each other (Gruen and Hofstetter, 2010, 232) and applying S-D logic as a market orientation enhances competitive skills (Kowalkowski, 2010, 291).

S-D logic which represents a broader perspective of markets (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, 2008) has been built upon service-driven principles, establishing thus a general logic for understanding economic activities (Vargo et al., 2010, 129) compared with traditional perspectives of markets (Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 37).

S-D logic can be used to address the problems caused by the G-D Logic (Lubrica et al., 2011, 53). Recent changes in viewing business interactions from a goods-focused to service-focused (or process-driven) perspective have been reflected in information and communication technology (ICT) research and practice through innovations (Purvis and Long, 2011, 248). According to one research service dominant logic is far more useful compared to goods dominant logic (Uusitalo and Gronhaug, 2012, 280).

SD logic is also a shift in philosophy (Babb and Keith, 2012, 8) which offers different and revised ways of thinking industries (Park and Vargo, 2012, 242).

Value co-creation, the importance of value-in-context, multiple stakeholders, operant resources, resource integration and service ecosystem become the key stones of the new marketing dominant logic (Akaka and Vargo, 2013). SD logic considers all economic actors as resource integrators stating thus the importance of each actor for co-creation (Akaka et al., 2013, 271). One of the main changes that SD logic brought is value co-creation (Domegan et al., 2013, 249).

In one of the first empirical studies of SDL it has been observed that SDL outperformed GDL based system (Edvardsson et al., 2013, 183; Chin and Wu, 2014, 314)

A shift to Service-Dominant (S-D) logic as a new avenue of exploration (Clavier et al., 2014) despite the truth that IHIP which distinguishes service intentionally from goods is still dominant (Liu et al., 2014, 94) although SD logic radically claims that all business is underpinned by a service orientation (Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014, 375).

When inverting some of the strongest pillars of G-D logic is clear that S-D logic can advance the understanding of value creation and marketing (Vargo and Lusch, 2014, 9) and more and more companies are moving towards a service-dominant logic (Andreini et al., 2015, 250).

In different industries sellers are changing their business models from goods orientation to a hybrid goods–services model, placing greater emphasis on delivering complete customer solutions (Deleon and Chatterjee, 2015) due to limited resources or capabilities (Chen et al., 2015). Branding of services (Helm and Özergin, 2015) is another example of the significant and argumentative shift from GDL to SDL (London et al., 2015). Companies have to shift their product-focused perspective on innovations towards a service-centered perspective (Schfer and Klammer, 2015, 96) and this refers to the transformation from a GD to an SD logic (Skalen and Edvardsson, 2015).

Lastly, service transactions vary among traditional production, co-production and co-creation based on changes in attitudes, enabling technologies and the logic or ideology supporting the change (Chathoth et al., 2016). Therefore, it becomes valuable the thesis of S-D logic which advocates a broader, service-ecosystems perspective compared to the view provided by G-D logic (Greer et al., 2016).

2.2 Service and Service Research

2.2.1 Service

Service is the fundamental basis of exchange. Considering service-dominant industries (Xie et al., 2014) such a tourism, education, banking, and healthcare, we can say that services dominate the world's established economies and are becoming increasingly

important in developing economies, including those of China and India (Bitner and Brown, 2008). IT infrastructures and applications support a business process however still they the service is considered in the context of goods and services (Chen, 2008). Nevertheless, industries that seem to be service dominant or have been considered within the framework of service marketing such as tourism still are grounded in a goods and manufacturing based (Yin et al., 2019).

Model (Li and Petrick, 2008, 241). The perception of a service economy is actually due to the effect of GD logic mindset (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 4).

Later on the literature saw the emerging of theories on Service (SD Logic and Service Science) and network theories (Many-to-Many Marketing and The Viable System Approach) (Barile and Polese, 2009). The strategic considerations include also competing through service which started to be seen as adding value to products. In fact, this is not the case as competing through service refers to the organizational level competition and implementing of a different mindset which is SD Logic (Lusch et al., 2007, 5). Despite the service meaning, companies increasingly directed their core business functions towards a certain competitive model which is based on service quality and service innovations (Barile, and Polese, 2010, 21).

The term service is very essential in this research since `service` is the keystone of the new marketing logic on which the present study has been based. In this context, we offer enhanced elaboration on the term service, and service research (Dolan et al., 2019).

In literature service is seen as an activity; as a perspective on the customer's value creation; and as perspective on the business logic (Gronroos, 2008a, 300)

Vargo and Lusch (2004, p. 2) offer this definition of service:

“We define services as the application of specialized competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself”.

This definition is accepted widely in different works and accepted by different scholars consistent with the one adopted in the present paper (Gronroos, 2008a; Spohrer et al., 2008, 5; Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 255).

Service is a common denominator for exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 26) and this concept has come to dominate theoretical models, enterprise strategies, corporate

governance, decision-making processes, and virtually all business and social relationships (Barile, and Polese, 2010, 21). Service Science emerged given the importance that service began to gain in literature (Godsiff, 2010, 93) and its roots are found in the division of capabilities and duties (Spohrer et al., 2010, 4). While service is considered as an outcome by some (Godsiff, 2010, 93), other researchers studied service from different viewpoints such as operations, and computer science (Alter, 2010, 198).

Service in general is referred to activity types (Alter, 2010, 200) especially in the period before SD Logic entered literature (Gummesson, 2010, 631-632).

On the other hand, in SD Logic service is the basis for value creation (Wetter-Edman et., 2014, 106). Still some authors (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 364; Shek et al., 2015) define service as blurred and cannot escape GD Logic.

Service has best been defined by service science which considers it as value cocreation phenomena occurring upon the interaction of different actors and entities (Spohrer et al., 2010, 4) which are focused on achieving mutual goals and benefits (Maglio and Spohrer, 2013, 666).

This research goes in alignment with Spohrer et al. (2007, 72) and defines service as:

“the application of specialized competences (operant resources—knowledge and skills), through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself—that is exchanged for service” Lusch, 2006, 241.

In this research service is defined also as the *process* of doing something for another party (Vargo, 2007, 56; Vargo and Lusch, 2010, 167).

Addressing value creation and customer behavior within an SD Logic boundary (Chen et al., 2009, 37) is a clear proof that the marketplace undeniable has changed substantially (Luck and Moffatt, 2009, 313).

2.2.2 Service Research

In this section we discuss service research. One of the best examples how integration could occur is IKEA with its business model which integrates different perspectives such as economic, social, and environmental (Edvardsson and Enquist, 2011, 536). Studies on

services and service thinking have enriched service research (Alter, 2010, 99) and understanding services requires addressing them in four levels which are: markets and economic exchange, service systems, service activities and service computing (Alter, 2010a). Service science offered advances (Read and Sarasvathy, 2012, 229) in theory development (Brodie and Gustafsson, 2016) and design thinking methods (Andreassen et al., 2016, 23).

Big data, mobile solutions, cloud, social, and cognitive computing, altogether with the Internet of Things (Demirkan et al., 2015) triggered service research to be considered apart from the goods-service distinction (Storey et al., 2015).

This gave rise to systems, and systems thinking. Service Science, Management, Engineering and Design – SSMEDE of IBM, viable systems (from Viable Systems Approach - VSA), smart systems (from systems thinking), reticular systems (from network theories), living systems (from natural sciences), economic systems (from economics), social systems (from sociology), institutional systems (from law), technological systems (from cybernetics), conceptual systems (from psychology), and ecosystems (from ecology) added to the business and marketing mindset a different dimension (Mele et al., 2010, 127). Basically stating service systems are seen as value-creation networks composed of different actors that include people, technology, and organizations (Maglio et al., 2006, 81; Spohrer et al., 2007, 72; Maglio et al., 2009) and is a useful fundamental unit (Alter, 2008, 71) Service systems are value-co-creation configurations (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008, 18) that are from the smallest service system which is the individual towards the largest service system that comprises the global economy (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008, 18), and co-create value depending on the resources of others to survive (Vargo et al., 2008, 149).

The service system which is the the basic unit of analysis for value cocreation Maglio et al., (2010, 45) proposes a value-cocreation interaction to another service system (Maglio et al., 2009, 400) where the application of the resources of one or more systems for the benefit of another system in economic exchange takes place (Qiu, 2009, 54; Maglio et al., 2009, 405). The advances on service research (Briscoe et al., 2012, 420) have been extended beyond marketing towards very incremental applications such as smart planet (Barile, and Polese, 2010, 31; Spohrer et al., 2010, 5).

Service systems for value co-creation can be seen as essential tools for solving real problems in marketing (Ng et al., 2012, 215). Service systems seen from the perspective of

SD Logic emphasizes the processes, rather than the output (Vargo and Akaka, 2012, 208; Guarino, 2013; Wang et al., 2014, 815; Wang et al., 2014, 824).

Service research set the basis for value co-creation by emphasizing the importance of value assessed in context. The integration of resources has become among the essentials for advancement of service research (Wetter-Edman et., 2014, 108). Customers started to be considered as value co-creators (Trischler and Scott, 2015) in a market which is reflecting incremental changes as the systems thinking has begun to raise (Vargo et al., 2017, 266).

System thinking started to emerge as a sub-discipline in service research (Vargo et al., 2017, 263) together with systems theories (Mele et al., 2010, 127). Systems thinking has been applied by different research streams also in marketing (Barile et al., 2012, 59-60; Vargo et al., 2017, 264).

In service research there have been advances as service science which studies complex service systems (Maglio and Breidbach, 2014, 166).

Service system innovation (Maglio, 2014) and the conciliation of Service Design from IBM (Spohrer et al., 2007 71-72; Briscoe et al., 2012, 419) with the S-D Logic view (Lee, 2013, 28) together with new approaches to services (Hidaka, 2006, 35; Sawatani, 2007, 2763) indicates the last research stream in service research with a specific focus on value co-creation (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008, 18-19).

Emerging discipline (Spohrer et al., 2008, 4) of the service research (Saco and Goncalves, 2008, 10) goes in alignment with economies which have become increasingly dependent on services (Spohrer and Maglio, 2008, 244) and emerging stream of service science is based on foundational premises (Spohrer et al., 2008, 6; Spohrer and Kwan 2009; Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 341).

Service research emerged as a necessity considering the economic context (Ng and Maull, 2009; Barile, and Polese, 2010, 26; Mele et al., 2010, 131). Services Science has built a concrete framework (Morin et al., 2010) and is multidisciplinary (Wieland et al., 2012, 15; Lightfoot et al., 2013, 1413; Stoshikj et al., 2016; Spohrer, 2017, 171).

Another essential emerging theory on service research is Viable System Approach (Barile and Polese, 2009) which has been developed within the Italian research community (Barile et al., 2012, 62) and is an approach which proposes to adopt system thinking understanding any business knowledge domain such as engineering, management, marketing and other fields (Badinelli et al., 2012, 511).

Service science, service dominant logic, and viable systems approach highlight the centrality of a continuous interactions among different actors that are within the ecosystem (Barile, and Polese, 2010, 27; Saviano et al., 2010, 44).

These streams in service research are inter-related to each other (Barile and Polese, 2009) and can contribute to providing new methodological insights (Saviano et al., 2010, 41).

This research`s theoretical foundation has been based on Service Dominant Logic approach which at first started to focus on dyadic relationships between customers and companies (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 5) but later on it was obvious that it was beyond and SD logic provided a macro lens for viewing the transcending meaning of relationship as a mutual value-creation empowered through service provision (Vargo, 2009, 378).

Thanks to SD Logic streams such as Service Dominant orientation (Karpen et al., 2015) and service innovation (Nam and Lee, 2010, 1766) that almost always involves a network of actors (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, 161) emerged.

2.3 Service Dominant Logic: the new mindset

2.3.1 What is Service Dominant Logic?

Value co-creation capabilities (Karpen et al., 2015) obviously enforced a perspective towards more complex relationships rather than dyadic relations (Vargo, 2007, 57) such as service-dominant logic (Gummesson, 2008) which emerged a central business philosophy (Vargo, 2007, 56; Lusch et al., 2008, 12).

The general orientation of Service Dominant Logic applies to any service system going thus beyond marketing field (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 5). Service Dominant Logic is a logic (Vargo, 2007, 56) and an alternative to the exchange paradigm using the word service with another connotation (Vargo and Lusch, 2006, 48; Vargo, 2007, 56; Vargo et al., 2010, 129). SD logic offers a new mindset against value-in-exchange concept and urges a commitment to collaborative processes with customers, partners, and employees becoming this a logic that challenges management at all levels by involving all stakeholders (actors) (Lusch et al., 2007, 5).

Service Dominant Logic is a lens and a mindset through which phenomena is evaluated (Vargo, 2007a; Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 3). Service provision (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 256) and service-for-service exchange in the service system that is a configuration of resources (including people, information, and technology) connected to other systems by value propositions (Vargo et al., 2008) which states the importance of value-in-use (Vargo and Akaka, 2009, 34) and value co-creation (Vargo and Akaka, 2009, 39).

Service Dominant Logic considers customers as the crucial actors that co-create value (Lusch et al., 2010, 28)

Service Dominant Logic is in its pre-theoretic state (Lusch and Vargo, 2011, 1299) and becomes a framework for developing theory (Vargo, 2011, 218; Vargo, 2011a, 4). The core concepts of Service Dominant Logic are service-for-service exchange, value co-creation, value propositions, resource integration, and collaborative relationships (Wieland et al., 2012; Vargo and Lusch, 2013, 93). One of the main theoretical foundations of Service Dominant Logic is actor-to-actor networks (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, 160) which at the same time has become a very strong foundation of this research. It is not only based on relationships, mutual trust, and win-win exchange (Joiner and Lusch, 2016, 26) but also is connected to other research streams such as the consumer culture theory or service science (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). Service Dominant Logic **does not** (Vargo and Lusch, 2006, 45; Lusch and Vargo, 2011, 1299):

- reflect a transition from Industrial to Service Era
- considers superiority of services on goods
- restates consumer orientation
- offer regressive marketing perspectives
- advocate new technologies

As Service Dominant Logic is not a theory (Vargo, 2007a; Williams and Aitken, 2011, 440)) and operates at a paradigmatic level (Vargo, 2008, 213) many scholars still have misunderstood this paradigm shift. For instance, scholars argue that Service Dominant Logic *is supplier focused* (Schlager and Maas, 2011, 103) or it is within relationship marketing (Möller, 2006, 914). It is true that Service Dominant Logic integrated different subfields (Penaloza and Venkatesh, 2006, 300) and compatible with relationship marketing logic (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006; Brookes, 2007, 90) but its focus on intangible

resources, co-creation of value and relationships (Wind, 2006, 479) and viewing customer as a co-creator (Blümelhuber, 2007; Gummesson, 2007a; Sawatani, 2007, 2764).

Some scholars consider Service Dominant Logic in the context of previous paradigms such as postmodernism and relationship marketing (Sweeney, 2007, 97) given its linkage to other disciplines (Theoharakis and Sajtos, 2007) and its dynamic nature (Tronvoll, 2007, 601-602) offers the basis to be a general theory about marketing (Winklhofer et al., 2007) going thus beyond being a simple advancement in marketing (Anderson et al., 2008, 366) and gained acceptance from scholars given the philosophy it proclaims (Badot and Cova, 2008, 213; Ballantyne and Varey, 2008, 11; Gummesson, 2008a, 323; Karpen et al., 2008, 407; Kasouf et al., 2008, 59; Li and Petrick, 2008).

Service Dominant Logic as a new perspective on marketing (Kasouf et al., 2008, 67; Layton, 2008, 16; Moeller, 2008; Gurau, 2009, 187, 192; Gebauer et al., 2010, 512; Lobler, 2011, 52) is the right perspective that is suitable to build a theory of service systems (Maglio and Spohrer, 2008, 18) and provides valuable theoretical perspective in rethinking conventional literature on innovation (Michel et al., 2008) and is a lens which offers new insights for understanding problems of marketing and different marketing phenomena (Schulz and Gnoth, 2008; Xie et al., 2008, 110). As a paradigm shift (Payne et al., 2008, 84) Service Dominant Logic has its own foundational premises (Pongsakornrunsilp et al., 2008).

Viewing Service Dominant Logic as the re-positioning of Relationship Marketing (Johns et al., 2009, 11) is not correct at all as it is a new mindset (Maglio et al., 2009, 399) based on some foundational premises (Ordanini and Maglio, 2009, 604) and has become very influential (Spring and Araujo, 2009, 452) by drawing the attention of scholars from different fields (Tynan and McKechnie, 2009, 502; Wetter-Edman, 2009, 9; Wikstrom et al., 2009, 114; Zehrer, 2009, 333). Service Dominant Logic became the lens that explores the intersection of marketing and economics (Alter, 2010, 112). The valuable essence of Service Dominant Logic which is value co-creation and resource integration (Andreu et al., 2010, 243; Maglio et al., 2010, 44; Paulin and Ferguson, 2010, 382) and value-in-context (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 187) provides a valuable lens to examine and reflect on current business practices (Chalcraft and Lynch, 2011).

Service Dominant Logic reconfigures sales aiming to provide integrated solutions for customers (Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2011, 423) by benefiting from co-production and co-creational practices in different industries (Shaw et al., 2011)

Service Dominant Logic is opened to different scholars for elaboration and contribution (Gummesson, 2012, 9) and different elaborations that consider it as a viable option to explore (Clavier et al., 2012, 4143; Gronroos and Helle, 2012, 346) and suggests radical change with regards to mainstream practices (Pels, 2012).

Still many scholars do not understand the underlying logic of this new paradigm (Williams, 2012) and for many years there was weak empirical research (Yi and Gong, 2013, 1279).

Service Dominant Logic emphasizes value in use (Hilton and Hughes, 2013, 861) and co-creation which is essential also for branding and branding activities given the importance of all stakeholders to participate in value co-creation (Ind and Coates, 2013, 87; Zhendong et al., 2013, 426; Shah et., 2013; Navarro et al., 2014).

Service Dominant Logic gained acceptance (Paredes et al., 2014) and a broader reach (Pels et al., 2014, 578) represented a significant upgrade in marketing field (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2015, 707). Considering these developments, there are scholars that supported Service Dominant Logic in a level that even considered it a theory (Gemser and Perks, 2015, 661). The ability of Service Dominant Logic to create value through service provision (Luftenegger et al., 2015) and develop sustainable business models (Osborne et al., 2015) together with the paradigm shift (Sievers et al., 2015) made it the right ground to support integration of resources from other actors (Koskela-Huotari and Vargo, 2016, 166; Morosan and DeFranco, 2016)

The enrichment of Service Dominant Logic by other scholars. (Perano et al., 2016) made it appealing for the literature. From many aspects Service Dominant Logic differs clearly from other marketing mindsets (González-Mansilla et al., 2019). Table 5 indicates some main changes in some critical dimensions for Service Dominant Logic.

Despite the different views on Service Dominant Logic (Rashid and Sadiq, 2016) its foundation principles can be a basis for critical questioning related to individual service events, service event context, and supporting service infrastructure and goals (Beckett, 2017) as SDL has considerable implications for research, practice, and society at large (Göbel and Cronholm, 2017). It has been accepted and research shows that SDL evolved out of necessity (Da Silva et al., 2017).

SDL does not ignore value in exchange which means that the money is the real feedback. However SDL emphasizes value in use and value cocreation, it does not ignore value in exchange (Lusch et al., 2008, 12). It encourages relationships (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006,

343) as relational and collaborative orientation does not just apply to the cocreation of the core offering but also extends to the relational creation of the value proposition, the communication, the pricing structure, and the brand (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 33). SDL offered different approaches considered to conventional approaches in different industries such as tourism (Park and Vargo, 2012, 234) or real estate (Sivunen et al., 2013) or daily business functions such as procurement (Dobrzykowski et al., 2012, 579).

Table 5: Service Dominant Logic critical elements

Dimension	Service Dominant Logic
Purpose of Exchange	Realizing Benefits
Subject of Exchange	Intangibles
Conceptualizing value	Value in use, determined by the beneficiary
Process of Exchange	A staged process involving value-in-use
Assumptions about customers	Coproducers of value, Resource Integrators
Assumptions about suppliers	Directs operant and operand resources and capabilities
Key Criticism	Does not provide a comprehensive basis for exchange, limited managerial capability
Indicative Authors	Robert Lusch, Stephen Vargo
First appearing to Literature	2004
Medium	Journal of Marketing

Source: Adapted from Prior, 2016, 3

Scholars suggested to have Service Dominant Logic included in curricula (Brunswick and Zinser, 2016, 132) as it is a framework that offers strategies with greater precision so that

the approach to marketing solutions for instance, can be more developed (Cova and Salle, 2008) given the co-creational nature of SDL (Pires et al., 2015, 930; Ranjan and Read, 2016, 290).

Service Dominant Logic's impact on co-creation and the orientation that seeks to provide (Vargo, 2007a, 105-106; Nysveen et al., 2013, 408; 2015, 848) also stimulates the discussion on brand co-creation. The scarcity of empirical studies on SDL (Winklhofer et al., 2007, 79; Dibrell and France et al. Moeller, 2011, 50; Lamberti and Paladino, 2013) was among the triggers for this study.

The difficulty to put SDL to practice becomes inevitably a challenge for managers (Karpen et al., 2012, 21) as doubts on testing of SDL has been present in the past (Wright and Russell, 2012, 219).

The intersection of Service Dominant Logic with Service Science and Viable Systems Approach (Barile, and Polese, 2010, 27, 35; Polese and Di Nauta, 2013, 121) is the ultimate proof for further enrichment in literature (Löbler and Woratschek, 2013, 87; Hammervoll, 2014).

Enrichment of SDL has been widely accepted by the founding fathers of this mindset (Lusch and Vargo, 2006, 287) and the further enrichment serves to refine it further (Theoharakis and Sajtos, 2007, 85). The enrichment of SDL avoids any misunderstanding for it (Vargo, 2007a, 107) and ongoing debates (Baron and Harris, 2008, 118) could be vanished if scholars continue to contribute (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 2) since SD is a `dialogical and collaborative work in progress` (Vargo, 2008, 211; Vargo, Lusch, 2008; Carrubo, 2009). Academic work on the acceptance of SDL (Cova et al., 2009, 572; Paulin and Ferguson, 2010, 366) as it is a work-in-progress (Vargo et al., 2010, 161) and different scholars agree (Wright and Russell, 2012, 218).

SDL's future is to become a general theory of value cocreation. Concepts of service exchange, resource integration, value cocreation, value determination, and institutions/ecosystems support this idea (Vargo and Lusch, 2017).

2.3.2 SDL and other fields

After defining the essence of Service Dominant Logic, in this section we offer a view of this mindset with other fields. Service Dominant Logic has been criticized (O'Shaughnessy, J. and O'Shaughnessy, N., 2009) by scholars due to its weakness in addressing specific markets and concepts such as value creation (Smyth et al., 2016, 211; Hietanen et al., 2017). Given the abundant literature review on the topic we do not agree with criticism on SD logic. On contrary; Service Dominant Logic has been advanced by many academic gatherings and events (Brodie and Storbacka, 2014, 231) and compatibility with different streams (Rashid and Sadiq, 2016) such as Customer Culture Theory (Akaka et al., 2013, 269; Akaka et al., 2015, 208) and Viable Systems Approach which offer sources for radical business models able to challenge the conventional business models (Pels et al., 2014, 575). Despite the truth that Service Dominant Logic it cannot be tested in its current form despite being a general theory of the firm (Lamberti and Paladino, 2013). Service Dominant Logic is compatible with Relationship Marketing, Core Competency Theory; Resource-Advantage Theory, Network Theory; Interpretive research, Experience Marketing; B2B Marketing/Value Creation (Cova et al., 2009, 572; Gersch, et al., 2010; Ordanini and Parasuraman, 2011).

Service Dominant Logic is a good mechanism for enabling innovation (Chen et al., 2009, 37) and is a valuable framework considered particularly appropriate for understanding innovation in service from a customer-centric standpoint (Breidbach et al., 2013).

The compatibility of Service Dominant Logic with other fields is evident as it is considered as a good framework that can help Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to bridge the gap between co-operation performance and customer satisfaction (Hsieh et al., 2010). Information Communication Technologies which enable co-creation and are considered as drivers of innovation supports Service Dominant Logic (Chen and Wang, 2016). Digital Infrastructure (Blaschke et al., 2016), knowledge (Wesley et al., 2014), big data (Xie et al., 2016, 1046) are important elements that aid market advances and support market novelties (Claus et al., 2014, 284; Freiling and Dressel, 2014).

Consumer culture and cultural meaning becomes dynamic under Service Dominant Logic (Penaloza and Mish, 2011; Tronvoll, 2012; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Social media at the same time can be viewed as collaborator of co-creation (Lagrosen and Grunden, 2014).

The effect of Service Dominant Logic in different industries such as tourism for instance, has not been fully recognized (Shaw et al., 2011, 207) despite the potentiality that SDL

represents for this industry (Grisseemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Evans, 2016).

Service Dominant Logic enabled smart tourism (Wang, Li and Li, 2013) as SD logic is central to value co-creation within smart tourism destinations (Boes et al., 2016). Service dominant logic via its associated concepts, contributes to a rethinking of the place (as a value proposition) (Warnaby and Dominic Medway, 2015, 47).

SDL can positively influence marketing managerial fields such as marketing ethics and ethical accountability (Abela and Murphy, 2008). Additionally; managerial elements such as performance measurement (Laihonen et al., 2014, 75) can positively impact competitiveness of businesses in the market. The relationship and effect of SDL is evident in public management (Osborne et al., 2012; Alves, 2013).

Lastly, Service Dominant Logic bears an essential and particular relationship with many marketing activities that are carried out by the firm. As Service Dominant Logic is substantive for marketing field (Virtanen and Stenvall, 2014); it can impact Supply Chain Management by offering a valuable co-creative mindset for supply chain partners (Lusch et al., 2010). Within the S-D logic, supply chains are viewed as value co-creation networks (Tokman and Beitelspacher, 2011, 718; Ehrenthal et al., 2014; Maas et al., 2014), co-creative and resource integration networks (Zhang et al., 2016). Not limited to supply chain; SDL can reframe supply chain (Lusch, 2011; Flint et al., 2014), purchasing and procurement (Lindberg and Nordin, 2008, 289; Percy and Dobrzykowski, 2012; Hammervoll, 2014, 162) logistics (Yazdanparast et al., 2010, 396), sales management (Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2011, 437).

Besides the influence of SDL in tourism and higher education it shows a deep impact in healthcare (Rehman et al., 2012; Hardyman et al., 2014, 102), forestry industry (Mattila and Roos, 2014, 10), banking and specific banking streams such as Islamic banking (Javed et al., 2015).

2.3.3 Advantages of SDL

Service Dominant Logic bears its advantages due to innovative mindset with a focus on service (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, p.14). SDL encourages the sharing of new ideas and new knowledge within the firm affecting competitiveness positively (Ballantyne and Varey,

2006, 343). It is argued that SDL has positive impact on firm performance (Vargo, 2007a, 106) and fosters innovation (Ballantyne and Varey, 2008). Some implications of SDL for marketing theory and thought are listed below (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 29):

- Simplifies the model of exchange by providing a common denominator (service)
- a unique marketing origin, as opposed to an inherited origin
- implicit shift to value-in-use rather than value-in-exchange
- shift in focus toward resources, rather than products, with a particular emphasis on operant
- resources and resource integration
- ability to provide continuity through retention of the exchange paradigm
- unifying potential in relation to a number of apparently alternative

SDL implementing firms can facilitate market-entry (Barnes et al., 2009, 166) thanks to the ability of being an emerging theory based on knowledge that has gradually been presented in the literature over the past few decades, sometimes even with roots in past centuries (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 341). When focusing on SDL and relationship marketing firms gain competitive advantage (Johns et al., 2009) and develop new potential business models (Kowalkowski, 2010, 290).

The easily adaptive characteristic of SDL (Lusch, 2011, 17) across industries and markets makes it a suitable choice for finding accurate solutions to emerging customer needs (Freiling, Wassermann and Laudien, 2012, 1631). Another advantage of SDL is the consideration of all economic and social actors as resource integrators, service providers and recipients, and contributors to value creation (Akaka and Vargo, 2013).

SDL can form a good basis to reduce costs and unnecessary efforts (Hsieh and Yuan, 2015, 217) due to its systemic view of the processes and market conditions (Awa and Ukoha, 2015; Ranjan and Read, 2016, 305).

One example on the advantages that SDL bears in terms of enhancing competitive advantage comes from Chinese manufacturers. At the same time, it clearly shows the viability of SDL to navigate across different market structures (Zhang et al., 2016).

Perhaps one of the main advantages of SDL is the ground it create for new and innovative solutions and business models (Turetken and Grefen, 2017). Besides industry, academy too

is benefiting from this huge advantage of SDL. SD logic provides a theoretical foundation for studying service ecosystems and value cocreation (Beirão et al., 2017); two essential topics that helped the theoretical foundation of this research.

SDL eliminates consumer and producer distinction as both the provider and the receiver becomes co-creators of value (Vargo, 2007, 57). Thanks to SDL mindset resource integration among company stakeholders open new windows for innovation (Mele et al., 2010). Thanks to SDL mindset we see emerging of new applications such as the huge service science program run by IBM together with 250 institutions of higher education with the purpose of improving the efficiency and innovation of service systems (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 188).

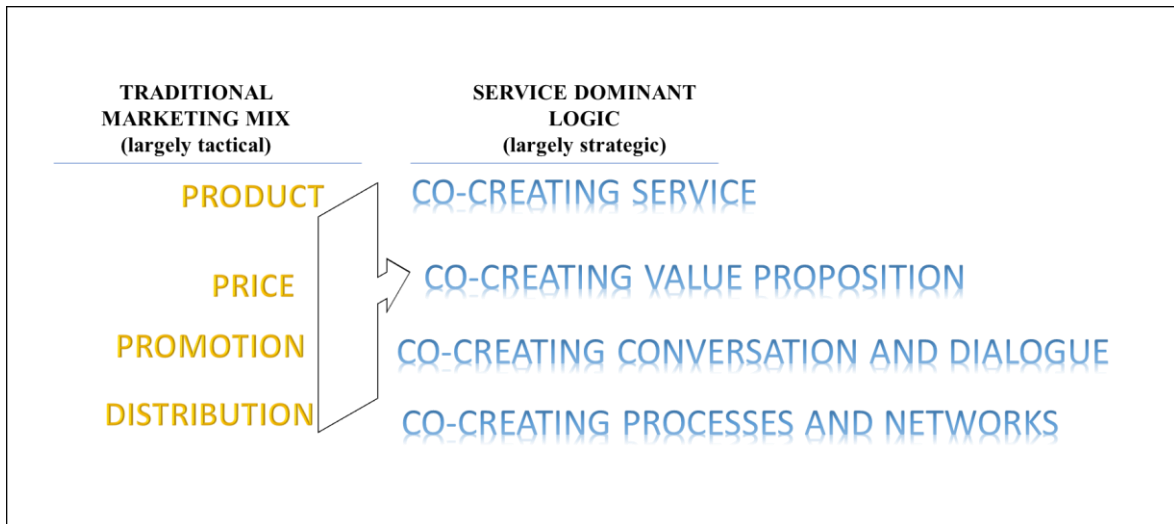
Another advantage of SDL is its viable nature (Wells et al., 2015) that can cure problems (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 10). Service Dominant Logic centered entrepreneurship may be useful in unlocking new opportunities (Callaway and Dobrzykowski, 2009, 227).

The positive affect on corporate welfare and human resource management (Iannotta, Gatti and Giordani, 2014) and its emphasizes on relations and value in use (Aitken et al., 2006, 276; Ballantyne and Varey, 2006, 336; Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 363) clearly shows the advantages of SDL for the company's entire marketing program and strategy (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 10) gained through the value cocreative experiences with companies and/or other stakeholders (Brodie et al., 2011, 253)

The starring advantage of SDL is the ability to assist in building assets such as brand and network equity (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, p.14)

Lastly, the main advantage that Service Dominant Logic is the influence on the marketing mix which offers one of the main and conventional thoughts in marketing literature and practice (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 407; Ingenbleek, 2014; Sakano and Kosaka, 2014). Figure 4 shows the transition of thought in marketing mix from a tactical perspective towards a wider and largely strategic perspective of marketing mix.

Figure 4: The influence of Service Dominant Logic on Marketing Mix elements conceptualization



Source: Author`s elaboration based on Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 408

SDL claims that customers buy solutions rather than just products/services. However, SDL states that marketing innovation should not be restricted to problem solving but rather to find the opportunities for `learning together` and as a result, co-creating together (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 364; Anderson et al., 2008, 376). Customers buy from a systemic perspective under SDL. It is not one element that defines the purchase but is the complexity of the integrated resources from other actors that enables co-creation of value (Gummesson, 2008a, 324; Lusch et al., 2008, 10; Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 257). And value is meaningful -in-use and/or in-context (concepts that are going to be elaborated in another section of this research).

2.3.4 Foundational premises of SDL

In this section we clearly discuss the Foundational premises of Service Dominant Logic. Given the importance of SDL as a ground for this research; these premises have been elaborated briefly and accurately for the reader in order to understand SDL.

Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing is the iconic article on Journal of Marketing (the most influential marketing related publication journal) which to date has been cited around 20.000 times. Steve Vargo and Bob Lusch; after years of publication rejection managed to publish this article that proved to change profoundly marketing theory.

In this article, at first, the foundational premises of Service dominant logic were as follows (Vargo and Lusch, 2004):

- FP1: The Application of Specialized Skills and Knowledge Is the Fundamental Unit of Exchange
- FP2: Indirect Exchange Masks the Fundamental Unit of Exchange
- FP3: Goods Are Distribution Mechanisms for Service Provision
- FP4: Knowledge Is the Fundamental Source of Competitive Advantage
- FP5: All Economies Are Services Economies
- FP6: The Customer Is Always a Coproducer
- FP7: The Enterprise Can Only Make Value Propositions
- FP8: A Service-Centered View Is Customer Oriented and Relational

As new advancements and elaborations took place these foundational premises got updated, new ones got added, and became the founding keystones of this mindset. During this section we are going to elaborate each of them briefly.

To the date, SDL has been grounded on 11 Foundational premises as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: FOUNDATIONAL PREMISES (FPs) OF SERVICE DOMINANT LOGIC

	Foundational Premises	Year
FP1	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.	2004
FP2	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange.	2004
FP3	Goods are a distribution mechanism for service provision.	2004
FP4	Operant resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit.	2004
FP5	All economies are service economies.	2004
FP6	Value is cocreated by multiple actors,always including the beneficiary.	2004
FP7	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.	2004

FP8	A service-centered view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.	2004
FP9	All social and economic actors are resource integrators.	2006
FP10	Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.	2016
FP11	Value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements.	2017

Source: Vargo and Lusch (2004), "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing" *Journal of Marketing* 68(January), 1-17. Vargo and Lusch (2008), "Service-Dominant Logic: Continuing the Evolution" *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 36(Spring), 1-10, Vargo and Lusch (2016), "Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic" *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-19. Source: Vargo and Lusch (2004), "Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing" *Journal of Marketing* 68(January), 1-17. Vargo and Lusch (2008), "Service-Dominant Logic: Continuing the Evolution" *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 36(Spring), 1-10, Vargo and Lusch (2016), "Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic" *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 1-1.

In 2006, another foundational premise has been added to the ones existing. Given that core elements in services are operant resources (skills and knowledge) which includes domain knowledge (application specific skills and knowledge), and business and technical skills. Later on, these skills and knowledge become core competitive resources, and units of exchange. Therefore, a new foundational premise was added:

“FP9. Organizations exist to combine specialized competences into complex service that is demanded in the marketplace” Vargo and Lusch, 2006, 53.

Such a change of core elements affects processes too (Sawatani, 2007, 2764) and these premises have been a research unit in different studies in order to define the usage of these premises in practice (Randall et al., 2014, 126)

In 2016, Vargo and Lusch extended their views on Foundational Premises as follows:

“FP10: Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary”

“FP11: Value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, 8)

2.4 Value Cocreation and Resource Integration

2.4.1 Cocreation

Service Dominant Logic urges for a fundamental shift in marketing mix (refer to Figure XYY, the one that indicates the effect on marketing mix). Collaboration among the actors and the integration of internal and external resources indicates the co-creative nature of SDL (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 413). This becomes a ground to consider company-related elements, assets, etc, as units that are subjects of co-creation. Therefore, it is concluded that relational an co-creative nature of SDL impacts many elements including branding (Fisher and Smith, 2011, 331; Fagerstrom and Ghinea, 2013, 50). **Brand clearly is not anymore belonging just to one simple actor.**

Active participation and interaction important in co creation (Campos et al., 2015, 25) as co-creation varies (Cova et al., 2011, 233) since it is about communicating with customers (Gustafsson et al., 2012) to anticipate dynamic environmental changes (Babb and Keith, 2012, 6)

Co-creation considers customers as important factors to create value (Babb and Keith, 2012, 7). Individuals sharing experiences, and opinions contribute to increasing participation and these behaviors strengthen the sense of community (Ind and Coates, 2013, 91). As the importance of consumers in value creation process has already accepted (Galvagno and Dalli, 2014, 659) providing co-creational opportunities for them increases satisfaction level (Prebensen et al., 2015, 8). Marketers are interested in fostering co-creation as it offers potential and positively impacts the collaboration of the actors within the ecosystem/market (Frow et al., 2016, 26).

The engagement of customers and providing a medium for them to share experiences are some co-creational activities (Day, 2004, 23) and today`s landscape which is characterized

by communities, crowd-sourcing and open innovation facilitates co-creation (Gouillart, 2014, 3).

Different works on co-creation rely on value co-creation (Mostafa, 2015, 17). However, co-creation bears opportunities for companies as it enables innovation (Durugbo and Pawar, 2014, 4385) and transforms business functions as it gives consumers a different role (García Haro et al., 2014, 76). In today`s dynamic world with changing consumer expectations and needs co-creation appears to be an antecedent of competitive advantage (Chathoth et al., 2013, 19). Co-creation itself is considered to be a business` strategy.

Co-creation impacts customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is among the main important concepts in marketing literature (Vega-Vazquez et al., 2013, 1948). Customer satisfaction is enabled by favorable customer service experiences, and these experiences are fostered by intangibles such as operant resources and information (Edvardsson et al., 2013, 184-185). When customers undergo through favorable experiences, they become more likely to participate in co-creating (a solution) (Dong et al., 2008, 123-124) and as stated above, it brings potential differential advantage (Dong et al., 2008, 132).

Co-creation goes in alignment with the logic of SDL which views customer as value co-creator (Dong et al., 2008, 132). Furthermore, it is essential to point out that among the main differences between goods-dominant logic and service dominant logic, is precisely the view on value exchange and value creation (Gummesson, 2008, 308). In this perspective, viewing customers as collaborators that you `market with` rather than an audience that you `market to` (Lusch et al., 2008, 12) is a sign of acceptance of a new economic reality that is characterized by economic integration (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 8). However, value is co-created with customers but makes sense only when assessed on the basis of value-in-context (Edvardsson et al., 2010, 327) that we discuss in the upcoming section. In order to talk about co-creation is important that actors know and understand each other as co-creation is not exclusive only to for-profit organizations but also for non-profit organizations like museums for example (Randall et al., 2011, 21).

The changing role of customers (Saarijarvi, 2012, 388) as a major contributor and beneficiary (Gummerus, 2013, 24; Minkiewicz et al., 2013, 20) and has an active role as a co-creator (Navarro et al., 2016, 1336). This role is enabled when the right conditions take place (Petri and Jacob, 2016).

The actors that co-create are not limited to customers. Software agents (Cellary, 2015,

3634) in the light of the rise of a network economy, enabled by global telecommunications and ubiquitous computing (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 6) are among the co-creator actors. On the other hand, it must be stated that customers sometimes do not engage in co-creation at all due to different problematics (Greer, 2015, 255).

Engagement in co-creation can be facilitated when it is seen as management culture within the company, and when managers support it (Mostafa, 2015, 18).

Customer-enabled co-creation is in alignment with SDL (O'hern and Rindfleisch, 2010, 102). Co-creation is different though compared to co-creational literature in the past. Customers can either assist by sharing their views or establishing communities for instance, and this makes them valuable co-creators (Ng and Smith, 2012, 225). Even though they are considered operant resources (Blazquez-Resino et al., 2015, 709) not always are co-producers (Alford, 2015, 4).

Empirical evidence of co-creation comes from different industries such as tourism (Grissemann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012) music industry (Lin and Chien, 2015) bicycle industry (Chuang and Chen, 2015) or higher education (Fagerstrom and Ghinea, 2013).

Current developments empowered by the rise of social media empowers co-creational practices (Yadav et al., 2016; Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti et al., 2016). One of the practices, that is directly related to the topic of this study is co-creation in branding. Different studies find co-branding as the new trend that has been empowered by the new context (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 369; Enquist et al., 2007, 389) and brand co-creation from the consumer's perspective, rather than an internal management perspective (France et al., 2015, 860; Kennedy and Guzmán, 2016, 313) goes in alignment with the premises of SDL.

Lastly, the co-creational studies are divided into different categories which are (Alves, Fernandes and Raposo, 2016, 1632):

- co-creation as driver of business innovation
- co-creation as a process for new products and services
- co-creation as a gathering of consumers' experiences of brands
- co-creation as keystone for market relationships.

2.4.2 Value Cocreation

Co-creation and value co-creation section are the critical sections that stand at the center of this research becoming thus the main theoretical foundation of our research questions. Co-creation is a new reality in marketing field and Service Dominant Logic refined it. Before discussing value co-creation, we offer an overview on the concept of value.

Value must not be connected to individual products, services, or customer solutions only as this narrows the view on them (Edvardsson et al., 2006, 243) however it is accepted that experiences create and generate value (Flint, 2006, 349).

In a marketing context, value is created in processes and through interactions (Gronroos, 2006, 401). Value is not created one-way but rather is a process of reiteration and feedback (Hearn and Pace, 2006). According to the view of Service Dominant Logic, value is created when customers define it in terms of the usage at their own context (Schembri, 2006, 389). Value is derived from the service experience of the particular actors in interaction (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006; Brodie et al., 2008, 141)

Value went through incremental changes in terms of the managerial intent, decision focus, and market context. Value is born at the moment that relationships among various stakeholders take place (Brodie et al., 2008, 149). Further, under Service Dominant Logic value creation occurs when a potential resource is turned into a specific benefit (Lusch et al., 2008, 8). This leads to a co-created outcome that can be translated into value (Fyrberg and Juriado, 2009, 427). Value is closely tied to usage, consumption, and therefore it evolves towards a new form that is value-in-use (Moeller, 2008, 208).

Value creation is a concern for the industry in general (Mejtoft, 2011, 672). Value has been defined as something created for the customer and embedded in units of output. This has been the generic definition of value (Edvardsson et al., 2012, 90). SDL on the other hand, defines value as a results that derives from the enactment of practices among multiple actors (Akaka et al., 2014, 12). The focus of value creation through the manufacturing of products (Smith et al., 2014, 247)

Value bears different conceptualization and considerations (Karababa and Kjeldgaard, 2014). Value is embedded with other considerations too. For instance, perceived value is different from exchange value (Pena et al., 2014, 1050). Some studies stated that value is created with customers (Kowalkowski et al., 2012, 1554) and with their participation

(Martínez-Cañas et al., 2016). Given that customers determine value (Anderson et al., 2008, 376) then value makes sense at the moment of `usage`. This reinforces the switch of view towards value-in-use (Ballantyne and Varey, 2008, 12). Building a foundational theory for marketing urges shifting of the unit analysis from the narrow view of product as the main unit analysis, towards value creation as a result of interaction of actors and integration of resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 257). As stated previously value is *phenomenologically* (the term `experiential` has not been used in order not to create connotations) determined by the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 4; Farquhar and Rowley, 2009, 429). Nevertheless, the SDL also suggest the importance of context for the concept of value (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 10).

Value is defined also as a process consisting of proposition, acceptance, and fulfillment (Mele and Polese, 2011). SDL and its view on value urges the shift from supply chain towards value network (Lusch et al., 2010, 21).

After defining the concept of value, we discuss the importance of value-in-use and value-in-context. The value of a particular brand according to SDL, is confirmed or disconfirmed at the time of use (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 365; Gronroos, 2008a, 303). In this context, businesses do not add value but only offer value propositions (Lusch, 2007, 265) that the customers either take or leave. The fact is that customers are not the only actor for which value can make sense. Other actors might be beneficiaries of service and as a result the beneficiaries are the one that define the meaning of value (Vargo, 2007, 57; Ballantyne et al., 2008, 49). Value has a profound meaning in use. Therefore, value-in-context and value-in-use takes the concept of value towards another dimension (Karpen and Bove, 2008, 217). In this research we do not go through the value-in-use and value-in-context to define what are the differences. It is clear that `in use` and `in context` have literately meanings as indicated. Value does not get predefined, but it is defined during service consumption (Sandstrom et al., 2008, 120).

One very critical aspect is the fact that value is determined by the beneficial entity in regard to the context, other actors, and other resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 257). In long run the value-in-use is much more important than value in exchange for (Gronroos and Ravald, 2009). According to SDL value-in-use determines the long success for a firm and is a good point to focus on (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 9). Following this logic; the brand value is determined by the customers' value-in-use perception, rather than through value-in-exchange (Merz et al., 2009, 334).

Value-in-use is assessed with satisfaction and loyalty measurements (Gronroos and Helle, 2010, 585). Value-in-context unites the two parties (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 189; Nam and Lee, 2010, 1771). As stated by SDL value does not (only) happen in the use of the resources of the provider (Korkman et al., 2010, 23; Crowther and Donlan, 2011, 1454) because value-in-use is highly context specific (Macdonald et al., 2011, 671; Mejtoft, 2011, 673). Knowing this fact, businesses tend to implement a service orientation in order to increase the perceptions of customers of value-in-use (Tokman and Beitelspacher, 2011, 720; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012).

Value not only is assessed from customers in their own context (Edvardsson et al., 2013, 38) but at the same time they do create value and are the value creator (Grönroos and Voima, 2013, 138). Service Dominant Logic points out the importance of subjectivity for value in use, meaning that customers experience and perceive differently the relationship between themselves and a particular market actor (Hayslip et al., 2013, 322). SDL's attempts to reduce the complexity (Minkiewicz et al., 2013) and the particular importance of value-in-use (Bruns and Jacob, 2014) are among the proofs of the dynamic nature of value as a concept, and value creation as process (Tynan et al., 2014).

In order to be able to talk about value creation there must be an integration of resources from various actors in a given context (Kuzgun and Asugman, 2015, 245). Value-in-context is the first step towards something much more important that is value is co-creation (Edvardsson et al., 2010, 327). Especially for branding and brand management practices value-in-use altogether with value-in-context are important. The define the essence of relationships indicates that customers' perceived value-in-use defines the meaning, the value, and evaluation of the brand (Merz et al., 2009, 334). This theoretical ground has been among the pillars to establish research questions of this study, and data collection instrument.

Value co-creation urges customers to generate value too. The customers are among the actors that generate value by offering skills and knowledge which is merged with other actors' operant resources (Hayslip et al., 2013, 322). The value co-creation occurs among stakeholders and takes place as a result of their interactions (Park and Vargo, 2012, 243). This theoretical foundation too, assist the research questions, and the data collection instrument for this research (Hein et al., 2019).

The value co-creation concept is among the foundational principles that characterizes the new context in marketing (Smyth et al., 2016, 210). Moreover, as resources are critical for

value co-creation, and as the context itself is influential on the resources we draw the conclusion that context influences value co creation (Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 39). Firm value creation has been widely elaborated in literature (Gummerus, 2013, 23) but is missing the point as it neglects other actors. According to one research value co-creation effects loyalty towards organization (Cossío-Silva et al., 2016) and there is a positive relationship among value co-creation and customer satisfaction (Vega-Vazquez et al., 2013).

Considering value from each actor`s point of view is essential as value differs for each actor (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2015, 448). Since value is co-created among different actors, it is obvious that value is not anymore `just delivered` by the organization towards customers (Nenonen and Storbacka, 2010, 53) and value co-creation extends beyond a dyadic (dual) interaction between a service provider and customer (Black and Gallan, 2015).

Value is co-created by actors` interactions is a fundamental concept within contemporary marketing research and practice (Yngfalk, 2013, 1163; Kohtamäki and Rajala, 2016, 4). Value is co-created when customer contributions, the support from the network, and macro-environmental conditions have been fulfilled accordingly (Black and Gallan, 2015). Another important view on value is that customers do not only consume value and thus becoming value destroyers (Polese et al., 2009).

Value co-creation started to influence also the way brand has been managed (Brodie et al., 2006, 373). The interaction between customers and suppliers is essential for value co-creation to take place (Gronroos, 2006a, 324). One of the foundational premises of SDL which views customer always a co-creator of value (Lusch and Vargo, 2006, 284; Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 413) does not neglect the importance of shared sources between other actors in the market in order to co-create value (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006; Moeller, 2008, 208).

Cocreation bears an important role in seeking to develop an outstanding customer experience (Zaborek and Mazur, 2019). Thanks to the adoption of cocreational experiences the customer engages in dialogue and interactions with suppliers during product design, production, delivery and subsequent consumption. This affects also branding as it becomes a process for building experience (Frow and Payne, 2007, 90-91). The notion of value is co-creation in use challenges the conventional views and deeply impacts branding and brand management (Aitken et al., 2008, 290-291). Adopting a service logic for marketing is a strategic decision (Gronroos, 2008) and therefore it requires a strategic shift in brand

management too. Interaction of actors within a network is characterized by each actors` ability to integrate their resources in order to benefit from the whole network`s advantages (Lusch et al., 2008, 7).

Resources and competencies of actors are integrated into a whole in order to co-create value (See: Ordanini and Pasini, 2008, 291; Payne et al., 2008, 84; Sandstrom et al., 2008, 115) and this supports the main thesis that Service Dominant Logic is primarily about value creation, and value co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a, 7).

Exchanging skills and/or services (King and Grace, 2009, 128) makes value co-creation a very ordinary phenomenon rather than an option once actors integrate their resources (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 9). Therefore, not only customers co-create value by sharing their skills but also value provider acts as a facilitator of this process (Andreu et al., 2010, 243). Value co-creation literature is abundant, and it has been found that co-creation which goes in alignment with SDL principles is among the themes that is very distant from the others as it offers unique elements (Gebauer et al., 2010, 513). Some valuable research extended further the ability of value-cocreation as a phenomenon that is enabled within the boundaries of ecosystems that sustain Actor-To-Actor (A2A) involvement and commitment (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 190). Actually this is true considering that value creation has two main dimensions that are the degree of co-creation and the degree of networked collaboration (Nam and Lee, 2010, 1766). As value co-creation is at the heart of SDL (Le Meunier-FitzHugh et al., 2011, 427) we see an extensive contribution to the literature on value (Mele et al., 2010, 62).

Different industries experience co-creation (Prebensen and Foss, 2011) as this concept emerged to one of the most important marketing paradigms (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011, 305).

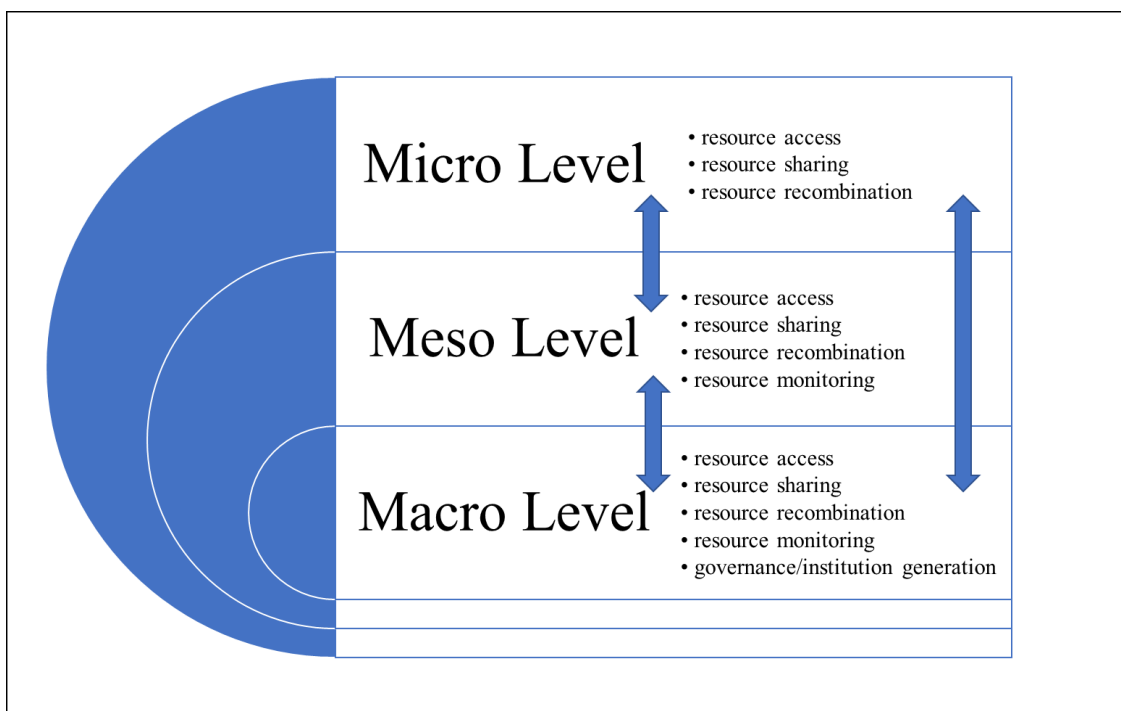
Value co-creation which is a term that has been variously defined in literature (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2012, 371) requires interactions (Gronroos, 2012, 1520) and is an iterative, and continuous process going beyond individual transactions (Vargo and Lusch, 2012, 3-4). The contextual nature of value (Akaka et al., 2013, 268) makes imperative multisided communication, mutual learning, and knowledge renewal (Nätti et al., 2014, 983).

Value co-creation has always been at the attention of scholars (Ng et al., 2012, 428-429; Leclercq et al., 2016). Value co-creation occurs in different levels. At actor level it is the perceived value from the service whereas in the dyadic levels the value co-creation

resembles to a `win-win` situation (Chih et al., 2019). Lastly, at the network level we have all actors offering their resources end thus enabling co-creation of value. Again, this theoretical foundation has been influential to the research questions, and to the data collection instrument (Choi and Burnes, 2013, 47; Ekman et al., 2016, 54).

Perhaps one of the main contributions in the literature of value co-creation is the defining dimensions, and the ecosystem levels that value co-creation takes place (Beirão et al., 2017, 242). These too have become essential to the research questions, and to the data collection instrument.

Figure 5: Dimensions of Value Co-creation in different levels



Source: Author`s elaboration from Beirão et al., 2017, 242.

The first three dimensions at the micro level facilitates for all actors to access, to combine and if it is needed to configure the resources. Besides, these actors generate further resources that benefit to all actors in different levels of the ecosystem (service ecosystem is going to be elaborated in another section). At the level that has been labeled as meso level resource monitoring enables the firm to monitor themselves whereas at the level of macro, governance/institutions generation factor is critical for to the whole ecosystem viability, as it comprises common language, shared norms, and rules definition (Carlson et al., 2019).

These common characteristics that are called `institutions` influence and shape value co-creation at all levels (Beirão et al., 2017, 242)

It is not neglected that value co-creation is influenced by the relationships between different actors and by implementing different practices. For instance, customer-staff relationships, staff training and collaborations do influence value co-creation (Navarro et al., 2015, 1634). However, when thinking about industries and companies that have challenged the traditional business mindset such as AirBnB or Uber it becomes evident that new elements such as knowledge; technology; culture; and sharing risk, rewards, and governance across business and society, impact value co-creation (Barile et al., 2016, 657).

Again, the aforementioned elaboration has set the fundamentals to both research questions and data collection instrument.

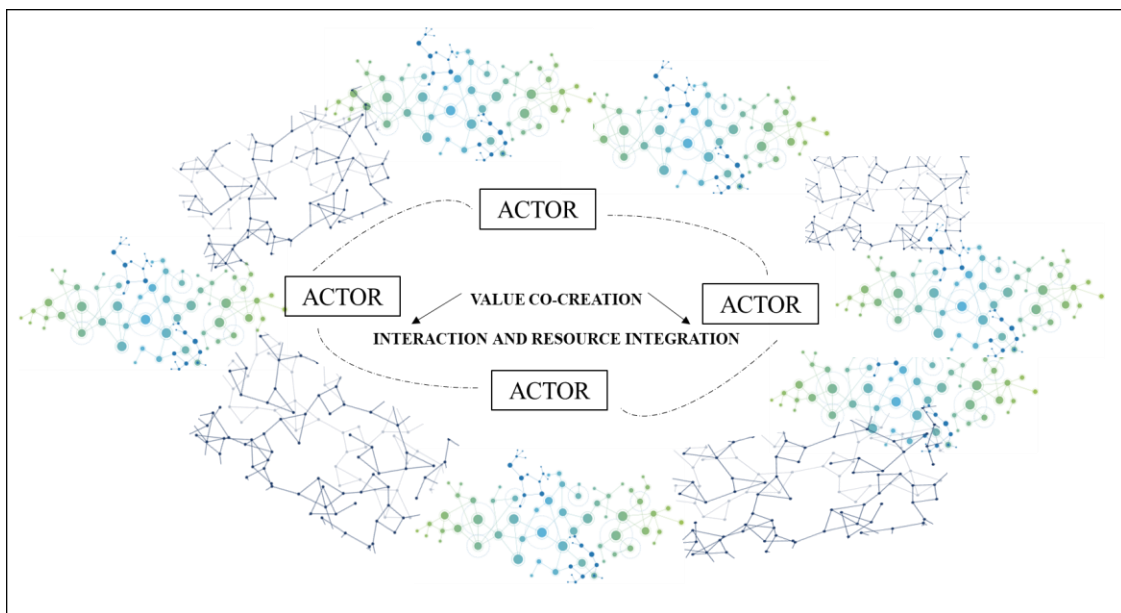
Value co-creation occurs when resources become enable (Assiouras et al., 2019). Customers gain resources from different actors that sometimes are neglected, for example, customers not only get resources from organizations and their activity in the market but they gain resources from themselves, friends, family, other customers, other firms and the community (Arnould et al., 2006; Baron and Harris 2008; Sweeney et al., 2015, 11). This goes in alignment with the logic that value is co-created within ecosystems (Corsaro, 2019).

Relationships are a good mean to access resources in order to co-create value. These relations occur in a complex network of entities that interact with each other to exchange service and co-create value (Lambert and Enz, 2012, 1588; Banyte and Dovaliene, 2014, 488). The importance relations in value co-creation has been acknowledged and accepted widely in many studies (Vargo, 2009, 378; See-To and Ho, 2014, 188; Moretti and Tuan, 2014, 125). Moreover, value co-creation has been facilitated by the new communication technologies and practices (Pena et al., 2014, 1050; Bowen, 201; (Breidbach and Maglio, 2016, 83) as Information and Communication Technology is seen a good opportunity for resource creation, and as a resource itself (Cabiddu et al., 2013, 103; Paswan, D'Souza and Rajamma, 2014) since it enables learning which is essential too for the value-cocreation (Komulainen, 2014; Hakanen, 2014).

Daily business activities such as procurement (Rafati and Poels, 2017) and market situation such as performance (Doan et al., 2013, 18) influence value co-creation.

Value co-creation from many to many perspectives and Service Dominant Logic supports the thesis that value is co-created through A2A interaction and resource integration. The creation of value is derived and determined through use, in a particular context – value-in-context of many actors and is a multi-level process (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 190; Akaka et al., 2012, 46; Tommasetti et al., 2015)

Figure 6: Value co-creation through the resource integration and interactions among actors



Source: From Vargo et al., 2008, 149

In the light of this information, it is clear that value co-creation is created among interaction and resource integration of different actors in different levels of an ecosystem. This makes the foundation for the research questions in this research, and data collection instrument.

2.4.3 Resources and Resource Integration

One of the most obvious changes and shifts is the ability of customers to gain knowledge very fast. Internet has unbelievably changed the way customers allocate knowledge about different value propositions such as the ones in tourism industry (Wajid et al., 2019). For instance, information and new communication technologies like online booking interfaces have transformed the structure of tourism industry (Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer,

2012, 1483). Companies on the other hand, can benefit from the opportunities to get feedback from customers. For instance, a large percentage of products from Procter and Gamble have originated from external ideas. In this regard, companies have increasingly opened their boundaries (Russo-Spena and Mele, 2012, 527).

Knowledge and information is crucial to the decision-making and performance of the actors involved in any service system and both customer and businesses need to have basic information about the life cycle of the value proposition, and in the value-creation process there is a process of transfer and sharing of knowledge that influences service processes and as a consequence determines service quality (Mele and Polese, 2011, 45). According to one study, information needs differ at different levels of the service system and affects the whole performance of service system (Laihonen et al., 2014, 82).

Knowledge is retrieved from the integration of resources. These types of resources are of two types: *operand*, those that require some action to be performed on them to have value (e.g. natural resources; technology (using tools) and information (symbolic processing)) and *operant*, those that can be used to act (e.g. human skills; people and businesses). Interestingly knowledge itself is an operant resource. Service provision implies the ongoing combination of resources, through integration, and their application, driven by operant resources (the activities of actors) (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 184; Maglio and Spohrer, 2013, 666). Resources altogether with learning processes become the ground for the value-creation processes of service systems. In resources there are four key dimensions that enable learning processes and indirectly value co-creation (Mele and Polese, 2011, 43):

- Customers
- People
- Information
- Technology

Resources are described in several ways and categories, but an emphasis is placed on the actors' knowledge and skills (Edvardsson et al., 2012, 91). Relationship among the human actors for instance becomes a resource (Löbner, 2013, 426), and application of resources stands at the heart of SD logic (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, 160).

Operant resources are at the core of the applications of SD logic and aid co-creation of value (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a, 413). These intangible resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2006,43) do include customers which are not to be `segmented, targeted, promoted to, persuaded, and somehow convinced to buy`. Rather they are `active participants who bring needed skills or competences to the exchange process; in this context, they are operant resources and endogenous to the marketing process` (Lusch, 2007, 265).

Therefore, operant resources are the essential elements which acts upon static, usually tangible, resources to ensure service provision (Lusch et al., 2007, 8). In this perspective, the true competitiveness and competitive advantage (Arnould, 2008, 21) of the business relies on its ability to own and apply operant resources in order to meet the needs of the customer relative to another firm (Lusch et al., 2007, 8-9). According to this logic the production process is replaced by and transformed to `resourcing` that ensures value creation through collaborative value cocreation, not only involving the business and the customers but all parties in a value-creation network (Lusch et al., 2008, 7).

As SD logic is oriented towards operant resources (Lusch et al., 2008, 7; Madhavaram and Hunt, 2008, 67) customers are considered as collaborators of the process and co-creators of value as a valuable operant resource (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 9).

In this regard, a shift in the branding literature is obvious too (Merz et al., 2009, 340). As distinctive operant resources (human experience, relational trust, uncodified knowledge, strategic reserved information, and synergistic networked embeddedness) cannot easily be replicated the market competitiveness occur (Barile, and Polese, 2010, 23) and businesses in general and brands in particular can easily navigate in this complex and hypercompetitive environment (M'zungu, 2010, 606).

Let us illustrate with an example of washing machine. A washing machine provides the service provision of clean clothing. The value proposition is not about the machine but clean clothing. Products are valuable to the customer only in that they lead to achieving a desired outcome (Randall et al., 2010, 36). In this example the various competency is the knowledge and skill to be applied on the washing machine. Therefore, the value of the washing machine is understood exclusively due to the application of the skill or competency (using the washing machine) (Dibrell and Moeller, 2011, 44).

Furthermore, when skill and knowledge renewal become part of an enabling iterative process of organizational learning, creative solutions to new problems do emerge (Purvis and Purvis, 2012, 1638) and value can be created more effectively when a service provider only uses their own operant resources (Hayslip et al., 2013, 322) which are primary source of value of the value propositions (Holttinen, 2014, 108).

Resource integration offers advantages in various industries and fields such as tourism (Line and Runyan, 2014, 93), e-commerce (Paredes et al., 2014) which is a significant sign that marketing has evolved toward a dynamic, evolutionary process (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006, 336), service-centered view in which marketers focus on specialized skills and knowledge as operant resources that provide competitive advantage (Madhavaram, Granot and Badrinarayanan, 2014, 280).

According to Service Dominant Logic the potential for co-creation is enabled via the sharing of knowledge resources between customers, suppliers and other market actors (Varey and Ballantyne, 2006) and this focus on intangible resources, co-creation of value and relationships is a characteristic of SD logic (Wind, 2006, 479). This goes in alignment with other theories like the one on relational resources (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 189) and becomes itself a ground for new theory development (Vargo, 2007, 57) as it presents a new view which is related to resourcing (Lusch et al., 2008, 8). Resource creation, resource integration and removal of resource resistances are the three essential elements of resourcing (Lusch et al., 2008, 9; Michel, Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 154). Given this strong theoretical foundation we see the resource integration among actors as the basis for value co-creation which is dynamic phenomenon (Agrawal et al., 2015).

Value occurs in interaction with resources (Lusch, 2007, 266) and value co-creation is not limited to the activities of any one exchange or a dyad of service systems (Vargo et al., 2008, 150). Resources alone does not bear any significant value unless applied and integrated (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 187)

Actors have different resources that serve in different ways but need integration to enable value-creating process. Resource integration on the other hand requires collaboration and sharing of resources to obtain a common ground that would be valuable to enable co-creation of value (Gummesson and Mele, 2010, 193; Lusch et al., 2010, 22).

Next, markets are configurations, and actors share and integrate both operant and operand resources to co-create value (Nenonen and Storbacka, 2010, 54) and as a matter-of-fact

value co-creation occurs at the moment that actors (e.g. customers, buyers, suppliers) interact with each other (Hilton et al., 2012, 1505). Interestingly this goes in alignment with the Nordic School of marketing thought which considers customers as users of resources that renders value for them (Gronroos, 2011, 240).

Briefly stating; competitive advantage occurs when resource integration and networking altogether with collaboration and relationship management are present (Dza et al., 2013, 154). Customers share their knowledge and skills (Edvardsson and Tronvoll, 2013, 27) as value emerges through the physical or mental use of these resources, and sometimes even from possession of them, so that value can be meaningful in the moment of using something (Grönroos and Voima, 2013, 137-138). Value co-creation includes multiple parties which integrate resources (Jaakkola and Hakanen, 2013, 47; Jitpaiboon et al., 2013) despite the truth that an actor can be involved in resource integration at different levels (high/low) (Löbler, 2013, 423).

An actor can have a meaningful experience based on meaning in the current context (Chandler and Lusch, 2014,11) and only resource integration which is a multidirectional network-oriented process where different actors are involved (Rafati, 2014, 5) can enable value co-creation (Pinho, Beirão et al., 2014, 489; Wetter-Edman et., 2014, 108).

To reinforce the aforementioned statement, we conclude with Lusch`s remark on resource integration as the essential element to enable value co-creation.

`S-D logic views all social and economic actors as resource integrators. Human actors integrate resources for two primary reasons. First, any resource an actor obtains can never be used in isolation but needs to be combined or bundled with other resources for usefulness or value. Many resources that are integrated are market facing, but many are also nonmarket facing, such as private resources (e.g., trust, knowledge) and public resources (e.g., societal institutions, public lands, and infrastructure). Second, all innovation is the result of recombining existing resources` (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, 160).

2.5 Service Ecosystem Perspective

2.5.1 Service Ecosystem

Service Dominant Logic with service-for-service and resource-integration perspective offers the shift in the marketing mindset. Moreover, it urges the necessity to thing relations from both complex and contextual nature (Vargo and Lusch, 2010, 167-168), from a wider perspective or from a framework that fits the new reality such as service ecosystems point of view (Vargo and Lusch, 2010a, 177)

Value co-creation takes place when two actors interact together thus considering the context from a wider perspective explains and justifies how value co-creation takes place among actors (Chandler and Vargo, 2011).

As explained below:

“Individual actors pursue value through service-for-service exchanges that are the basis of dyads, triads, complex networks, and service ecosystems. Markets are simply collections of individual actors reconciling tensions in their direct contexts with respect to indirect forces from overlapping complex networks. Over time, these can be viewed as service ecosystems, within which value lies at the tensions of micro and macro pulls. It is because of a need to reconcile these tensions that markets evolve (Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 46)

Service Dominant Logic considers the service ecosystem as a moderated and relevant framework that replaces the supply chain. Therefore, is argued that:

“A service ecosystem is a spontaneously sensing and responding spatial and temporal structure of largely loosely coupled value proposing social and economic actors interacting through institutions and technology, to: (1) coproduce service offerings, (2) exchange service offerings and (3) cocreate value. A supply chain is nested in the service ecosystem. (Lusch, 2011, 15)

or;

“A service ecosystem is a spontaneously sensing and responding spatial and temporal structure of largely loosely coupled, value-proposing social and economic actors interacting through institutions, technology, and language to (1) co-produce

service offerings, (2) engage in mutual service provision, and (3) co-create value (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 185)

As it is understood from the information above, value co-creation occurs in a systemic perspective. Therefore, it is meaningful to argue that **brand is co-created among actors within an ecosystem.**

Service ecosystem approach has urged the necessity to consider markets as service ecosystems which is a mindset that defines today's hypercompetitive context. Additionally, service ecosystems approach that is grounded in Service Dominant Logic requires to consider relations beyond simple exchange and to see co-creation of value from the contextual perspective (Akaka et al., 2012, 19).

Service Dominant Logic ecosystems approach facilitates the understanding of value cocreation (Vargo and Akaka, 2012, 215). Service-centered thinking offers a loop to view systemically how interactions, integration, and co-creation takes place (Vargo and Lusch, 2012, 3-4; Vargo and Lusch, 2013, 92).

2.5.2 Service Ecosystem and Actors

Service ecosystems is grounded in Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, 11) According to Service Dominant Logic theory (Sudo and Ito, 2017), even one industry a service ecosystem that is a self-adjusting system of components connected by service exchange (Werner et al., 2017; Beirão et al., 2017; Wilden et al., 2017, 9). Ecosystem perspective is among the major theories of Service Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2017, 48).

Service dominant logic the actors are defined not only based on service provision (resources applied for benefit) but also based on the resource-integration activities (Meynhardt et al., 2016, 2984; Vargo and Lusch, 2017, 49).

Below has been quoted Vargo and Lusch (2016) in order to understand the structure of the service ecosystems and actor engagement:

“In S-D logic, institutions—humanly devised rules, norms, and beliefs that enable and constrain action and make social life predictable and meaningful—and higher-order, institutional arrangements—sets of interrelated institutions (sometimes

referred to as `institutional logics`—and the process and role of institutionalization are the keys to understanding the structure and functioning of service ecosystems” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, 11).

One very interesting perspective is viewing and evaluating things and practices from a wider perspective that involves all actors` view. It is essential to understand how evaluations are made. Since co-creation occurs within a dynamic, systemic, and service-centered mindset therefore evaluating too must occur within the same dynamic, systemic, and service-centered mindset (Webster and Lusch, 2013; Akaka and Vargo, 2015, 456; Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, 161; Altinay et al., 2016; Frow et al., 2016, 30).

It is stated that:

“A service ecosystems perspective allows both academicians and practitioners to not only zoom from single actors to dyads of actors to the broader practices and relationships of multi-leveled systems and their institutions and institutional change processes, but also reframes market communication to multidirectional learning processes among systemic actors (Wieland et al., 2015; Barile et al., 2016, 660).

Furthermore, service ecosystem perspective offers an understanding of Service Dominant Logic and has deep impact on the value proposition and competitive advantage. Thus:

“A service ecosystem perspective enables managers to view their organization in broader and more enlightening perspective. Service and service exchange is transcending and can be used as a unifying and integrative way to manage intra and inter-organizationally. A service perspective can enhance value co-creation, including coproduction possibilities. A service perspective is conducive to and fostering of innovation (of all types). A service perspective moves the firm away from an emphasis on competitive advantage and toward a focus on strategic advantage and emergent strategy (Greer et al., 2016).

In the light of this information, it is clear that brand which is the key and central concept of this research, is a powerful notion for enhancing competitive advantage. Brand value as stated is suitable to be subject of co-creative practices and bears a co-creational nature. At the end, the hypothesis that **brand value is co-evaluated among all actors** is born.

Lastly; service ecosystem involves specific values, norms, and laws and how actors use several resources (including platforms) to accelerate value co-creation and service transformation is important and is related also to these specifics that service ecosystem

literature labels as `institutions` (Lusch and Vargo, 2014; Letaifa et al., 2016, 1938; Lusch, et al., 2016, 95; Matthies et al., 2016, 62; Meynhardt et al., 2016; Siltaloppi et al., 2016).

Value as a core organizing principle in a service ecosystem (Meynhardt et al., 2016, 2982) is meaningfully created and evaluated only in a systemic and ecosystem perspective (Meynhardt et al., 2016, 2982; Stoshikj et al., 2016; Taillard et al., 2016, 2973).

Word of Mouth (WOM) become more significant nowadays with the raise of social media platforms, and internet. Therefore, we experience a shift of communication power from company towards masses (Williams and Aitken, 2011, 452). Customers share their own experiences on internet and that makes obvious the need to reconsider many practices (Grissmann and Stokburger-Sauer, 2012, 1483-1484). Information which exists and is uploaded on internet stands among the catalyzers of the power shifting that occurred (Achrol and Kotler, 2011, 43). It is then obvious the shift of power from companies towards customers. Marketing experienced a major shift in its mindset (Gronroos, 2006, 405). Brand choice, and value do not withstand apart, and critical elements such as relationships, and the cost of jumping in another relationship have to be taken in consideration too. Marketing has become complex (Möller, 2006a, 447). Marketing has the necessity to implement a mindset which considers customers as the cocreators of the value (Lusch, 2007, 265). Production companies need to include other actors (ex. buyers, suppliers) while defining their value propositions (Edvardsson et al., 2008, 339). It has become essential to consider marketing from a systemic and practical perspective (Gummesson, 2008, 17). Although the fear that marketing sub-disciplines (i.e. brand management) might show different attitude towards the new service mindset (Jacob and Ulaga, 2008, 248), the general tendency of marketing goes towards the implementation of a service dominant logic (Karpen and Bove, 2008, 214) which challenged traditional marketing and its status-quo (Lusch et al., 2008, 6). The shift of power from companies towards customers has become possible under the new dominant mindset which calls for focus on operant resources as the core of the competitiveness (Madhavaram and Hunt, 2008, 79). Focus from manufacturing mindset towards service mindset has facilitated the shifting of power. Marketing can benefit from this shift from several perspectives. These perspectives have implications for brand management too. Some of these perspectives have been listed below (Vargo and Lusch, 2008, 258).

- Customer becomes part of the process of value proposition offering, and active participant in the communication strategy.

- Instead of acquiring something owned by the company alone, customers acquire a value proposition which not only has been cocreated with them, but at the same time is valuable to them in their own context.
- Customers are seen as parts of a bigger picture
- Focus on operant resources (i.e. brand, knowledge, skills) become obvious. Customers on the other hand, are not solely targets but are considered as resources at the same time.

Such new face for marketing requires strong decision-making and managerial will rather than investments and costs. The late ones are the main obstacles for implementing a new mindset due to the fear of managers that new practices bring out new costs (Saha et al., 2020). However, implementing service logic for marketing and brand management requires at first a managerial shift and avant-garde decision-making skills.

The exchange that occurs between actors (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 26) is at the core of marketing. The novelty is that what is exchanged in market is much more than market offering (products, etc.). Actors exchange and integrate their own resources. And this is the actual reason for the shifting of power. Nevertheless, the way how companies engage with customers to establish last longing relationships is at the core of the value proposition (Brohman et al., 2009). Therefore, shifting the mindset contributes in changing the view on customers. This will create a ‘domino effect’ and will have an impact on every business function; specifically, on marketing and particularly on brand management.

Marketing is being enriched by avantgarde thoughts such ‘many-to-many marketing, S-D logic, and service science’ (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 340). Traditional practices unfortunately tend to provide full power for companies, and neglect customers a lot. One sided message becomes risky because it constantly seeks to support the view of the company. To some extent this is seen as ‘propagandistic’ (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 9)

According to Christodoulides (2009, 292) there is a clear trend of shifting power from companies towards customers, and marketing have shown a tendency to become focused on the bigger picture. The same applies to branding. Dialogue has started to substitute one-sided message delivery. Thus, branding started to be seen as critical element in building relationships and fostering cocreation (Christodoulides, 2009, 292). Brand meaning is not only what companies are trying to communicate, rather it is being cocreated with customers and other actors. That is why S-D logic is a supportive framework for brand management in the new era:

Service-dominant logic argues that communication should be characterized by conversation and dialog. It is especially important with conversation and dialogue that all parties are transparent and truthful with each other. This approach to communication should include not only customers, but also employees and other relevant stakeholders that may be affected by service exchange. All stakeholders need to be part of the market dialog (Lusch and Vargo, 2009, 10).

Not only marketing; the business thought is experiencing a deep change (Maglio et al., 2009, 396). Marketing science (Vargo, 2007; Read et al., 2009, 16; Rust and Huang, 2014) is experiencing major shift from an approach where transaction is the main motivator, towards relational approaches (Crowther and Donlan, 2011, 1444). The late contains by default transactions and offers the opportunity to view the big picture.

Marketing is experiencing deep changes due to big data and information technology (Rust and Huang, 2014). Businesses have new gates to retrieve information from customers and other actors (i.e. competitors, government, NGOs etc.). Such information supports them in shaping value propositions according to the new reality. In this context, the shift towards service logic become mandatory (Nadeem et al., 2021). For instance, social marketing is an example how sub-disciplines of marketing tend to shift towards service logic (Luca et al., 2015, 17). What has been discussed so far does not mean that manufacturing mindset, and transactional approach stands out of the new logic. Indeed, with the new service mindset they preserve their importance and become robust. Today's landscape 'represents a blend of Fordist and post-Fordist technologies' (Awa and Ukoha, 2016, 143).

Manufacturing orientation and goods dominant logic seems to be left behind as new research streams emerge. These new research streams are defining the dynamics for the whole market. Considering practices systemically, shaping value propositions according to dialogue and cocreation principles offers a new window for considering the market (Iglesias et al., 2020).

While the mainstream marketing focuses on dyadic relationships, the new emerging landscape focuses on networks, and ecosystems (Mele et al., 2015, 107). Marketing need to be seen systemically as a system and even as a network of relationships (Gummesson and Polese, 2009, 337). Marketing is not anymore, a single function of the business. Activities covered by marketing department such creation of brand awareness has become much more sophisticated and go beyond borders of the brand (Gronroos and Gummerus, 2014). They represent the power and the ability of the organization to bond with other actors. One

important aspect that need to be taken to consideration is the ability of different cultures to contribute to the refinement of marketing thought. There is not such thing as ‘universal marketing’. For instance, marketing science has been influenced from USA marketing thought (Gummesson and Gronroos, 2012; Letaifa and Reynoso, 2015, 684)

but that might not be the solution to every market. Different practices from different schools and countries can enrich marketing further and can contribute in developing new practices.

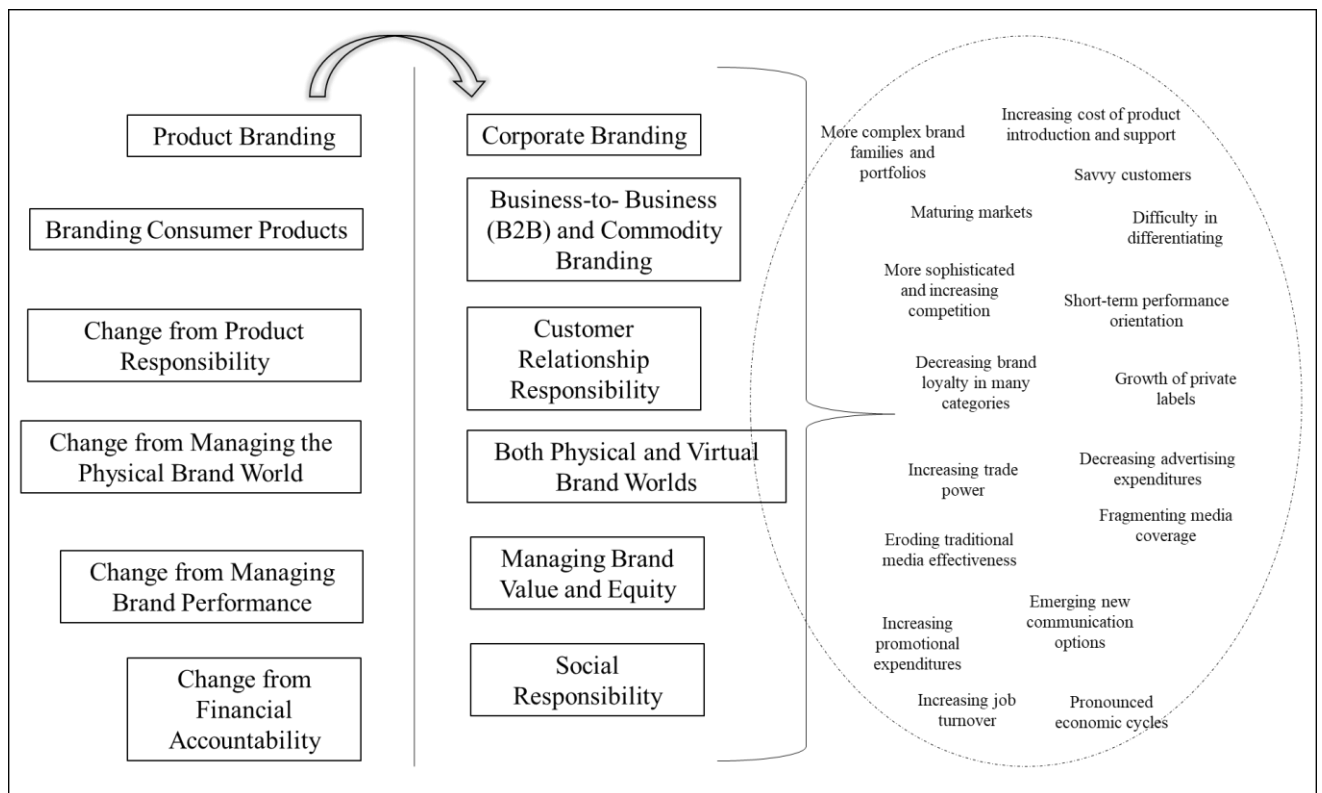
2.6 Branding and Brand management

So far, we have talked about the shift of power from company towards customers (and other actors). Marketing itself on the other hand experienced a major shift. Probably the biggest shift is the one from a manufacturing mindset towards a service dominant logic. As it is a logical result, subdiscipline of marketing (i.e. brand management, consumer behavior, sales techniques) have experienced this transition too (Qiu et al., 2020). Therefore, the question related to the essence of marketing and its evolution gain incremental importance.

According to Gronroos (2006, 407) marketing assist the whole organization to provide a contemporary value proposition by taking in consideration the inclusion of other actors in creating value. The science of marketing is rooted in the science of economics (Mele et al., 2015) and Adam Smith’s matra on creating national wealth in an industrialization era has a profound effect in the raise of marketing (Vargo, 2007). Traditional marketing thought is largely focused on the exchange of manufacturing outputs (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). It has been recognized the need to discuss marketing again and to reposition it according to the new context (Ambler, 2005, 50). The new context requires marketing to consider customers not just as information providers (Mahr et al., 2013, 601) for the sake of developing innovative (but incomplete) solutions. In 80s it started the rise of service marketing as a need to break out a little from the good dominant logic. However, as years passed, and the context changed service marketing experienced an evolution by becoming a subdiscipline of marketing in late 80s (Baron et al., 2013, 5). In 2004 occurred the breaking point where Vargo and Lusch (2004) initiated the discussion on Service Dominant Logic which gave to marketing a contemporary, competitive, and modern face.

Still before entering in detail the discussion on branding is valuable to state that brand went through some changes in time. For instance, during 1980s brand became a valuable asset within the balance sheet and `goodwill` value was considered essential. Many underperforming branded goods companies were worried and started to recognize the power of brand as an element that could affect investor perceptions (Temporal, 2010, 294). Brand management started to evolve together with marketing environment (Kapferer, 2008, 160). Changing role of brand management (Jones, 2022) from industry to market focus, and from tactical to strategic thinking were just some of the areas that showed the change in brand management. Brands started to implement a global market focus rather than local focus, and from product to category management (Temporal, 2010). Figure 7 indicates the shift of thinking in brand management, and a lot of challenges surrounding brand management, and these became the proofs of the evolution of branding.

Figure 7: Shift of the focus, and challenges in brand management



Source: Elaboration of the author from Temporal, 2010 and (Keller, 2013, 53)

Another valuable work which indicates how brand management evolved comes from a study based on an extensive analysis of the most influential brand research articles (more than 300 articles) published between 1985 and 2006 in some influential academic journals such as: European Journal of Marketing, Harvard Business Review, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Research, and Journal of Marketing (Heding et al., 2008). These approaches (approaches are listed in alphabetical order) have been listed below and these are (Heding et al., 2008, 3):

- **community approach:** brand is the pivotal point of social interaction,
- **consumer-based approach:** brand is linked to consumer associations,
- **cultural approach:** brand is part of the broader cultural context,
- **economic approach:** brand is a piece of traditional marketing mix,
- **identity approach:** brand is linked to corporate identity,
- **personality approach:** brand has a human-like character,
- **relational approach:** brand is a viable relationship partner.

In the light of the above information, it is clear the evolution of branding. Considering the evolution that it had through different periods it also logical the need for new considerations. Given the hypercompetitive context it is impossible to predict in advances development and a new shift is essential to navigate safely (Temporal, 2010, 234) despite the challenges (Keller, 2013, 53). One widely accepted truth is that brands are not owned anymore by companies (Temporal, 2010, 17; Kornberger, 2010,23)

Brand management is a dynamic process in which relations are important and involves many players. Co-creation of branding is an accepted reality:

“...implying brand value is co-created in an ongoing process between brand and consumer. This means that the marketer has to let go of total control of the brand and incorporate the meaning created by consumers in the management of the brand. Furthermore, the management is considered a very dynamic process where the meaning is constantly negotiated under the influence of the many factors influencing both human and brand relationships” (Heding et al., 2008, 176).

It is obvious the need to re-examine both the ways how brand value is created and how their value is evaluated. Some authors call this a call for reexamining brand equity (Balmer

et al., 2017, 125). This view goes in alignment with the main research questions of this study and indicates the need of this study to fulfill the literature gap in this regard.

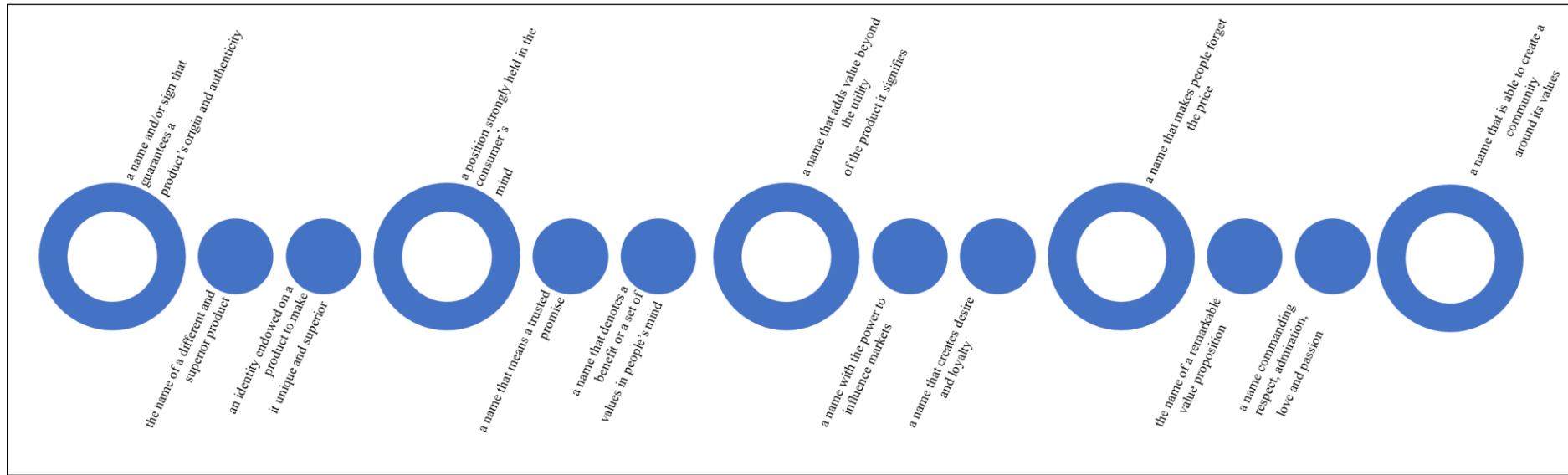
2.6.1 Brand

Some of the first brands started the activity with their focus on the commodity but later on they managed to become a sign that reflected much more than the commodity itself. Ivory Soap for instance; a soap brand from Procter and Gamble, or Sunlight, a soap brand from Unilever, managed to be linked to the idea that it represented purity (Aaker, 1991; Kornberger, 2010,15). Swatch for example made to convince customers that wearing a watch is not about its functionality if measuring time but rather it is about having an accessory as part of a particular lifestyle (Kornberger, 2010,18). Brands do have history, as the example of the Royal Bank of Scotland indicates. The bank has had its headquarters in Edinburgh since 1695 (Kornberger, 2010,90). One of the main elaborations that has been in the literature of branding is the evolution of branding from Kapferer (2012). Figure 8 shows the evolution of branding.

One of the main questions that takes place when discussing branding is its actual meaning. A brand is a name which can influence buyers via differentiability and/or trust (Kapferer, 2008, 11). Furthermore, brand is at the same time a shared idea that has been embodied within a market offering (Kapferer, 2008, 13). It is a concept that literature offers ambiguity and there is not a clear consensus on the concept (Kornberger, 2010,14-15). What we could say is that brand is not owned by the businesses and “*relies on interpretation and sense-making by both insiders and outsiders*” (Kornberger, 2010,14-15).

Brand is a sign and a collection of tools. Brand is not a single thing, but many things combined (Kornberger, 2010). Brand in general has been accepted as “*a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors*” stated David Aaker which is one of the most influential scholars on branding and brand management (Aaker, 1991). As stated above, there is no international consensus on the definition of branding. However brands in the past served to protect producer, late in old times. They were used to identify olive oil or wine and wineries (Kapferer, 2012, 8).

Figure 8: Evolution of branding



Source: Author's elaboration based on Kapferer, 2012, 12

Note:

This figure indicates how brand evolved from being a sign that guarantees a product's authenticity towards being a name that can create community around its values. Even though Kapferer did not necessarily consider branding evolution from the perspective of Service Dominant Logic, it is obvious the effect that context had on branding. Throughout different economic and customer context brand meant different things and represented different mindset in different times. Given this, we clearly see that a new emerging logic in brand management is required to answer the needs of the current context. The important thing that we see while we are conducting this research is the fact that Service Dominant Logic not offers answers to the present context but at the same time becomes a valuable framework for branding in the upcoming eras.

Another powerful figure in brand management, Kevin Lane Keller, has defined branding as:

“... is something that resides in the minds of consumers. A brand is a perceptual entity rooted in reality, but it is more than that—it reflects the perceptions and perhaps even the idiosyncrasies of consumers” (Keller, 2013, 36).

Ambiguity in defining branding is related also to the way how branding is used. That is:

“...One source of confusion is industry itself, which constantly churns out new terms around the topic with rather limited shelf-lives, including ‘brand equity’, ‘brand identity’, ‘brand strategy’, ‘brand image’, ‘brand reputation’, ‘brand promise’, ‘brand culture’, ‘brand experience’, ‘brand positioning’, ‘brand architecture’ and ‘brand awareness’. The word ‘brand’ seems to sell as soon as it is put in front of a more or less complex second word. The resulting conceptual inflation does not help the clarity of the term...(Kornberger, 2010,15)

Des the ambiguities in defining branding there is one actual truth and that is the invitation from scholars for a new mindset in branding as a necessity given the context (de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley, 1998: 417 as cited in Riley et al., 2016, 3). This is another proof, evidence, justification and ground that support this research, its research questions, and the data collection tool.

Brand represents a social and cultural icon (Kornberger, 2010,16); a vision (Kapferer, 2008, 171); a competitive advantage providing tool (Aaker, 1991) or a strong emotional association with customers (Temporal, 2010, 46).

Brand which is a word in brand Management (Heding et al., 2008, 9) is a multidimensional concepts and capture content culture, feelings, images, lifestyles, personalities in order to help customers to associate or not with a particular brand (Riley et al., 2016, 32). The importance of recognizing branding as an important asset for the company starts in 1980s (Kapferer, 2008, 3) when market segmentation concept was introduced starting from 1970s (Temporal, 2010, 2).

Brand has several advantages because it produces trust (Heding et al., 2008, 22; Kornberger, 2010,14) and produces financial value (Kapferer, 2012, 446).

In this research, in brand valuation (or evaluation) we are not suggesting to leave out financial valuation. Rather, we do require do take in consideration also the other actors

while making this valuation (or evaluation) (Daskou et al., 2022). Furthermore, we do require do make also an evaluation of what brand means to other actors. This means that is essential to find the importance of the brand for other ecosystem actors. Our main hypothesis, and ground of this research is that brand is co-created. Therefore, someone (a specific actor) who participates in brand co-creation has also an attitude (or an evaluation to make) for that brand. Automatically, naturally and logically this evaluation form of an actor (what the brand is to the actor) is at the same time a basis for the next co-creational steps/activities/practices (Nadeem et al., 2020).

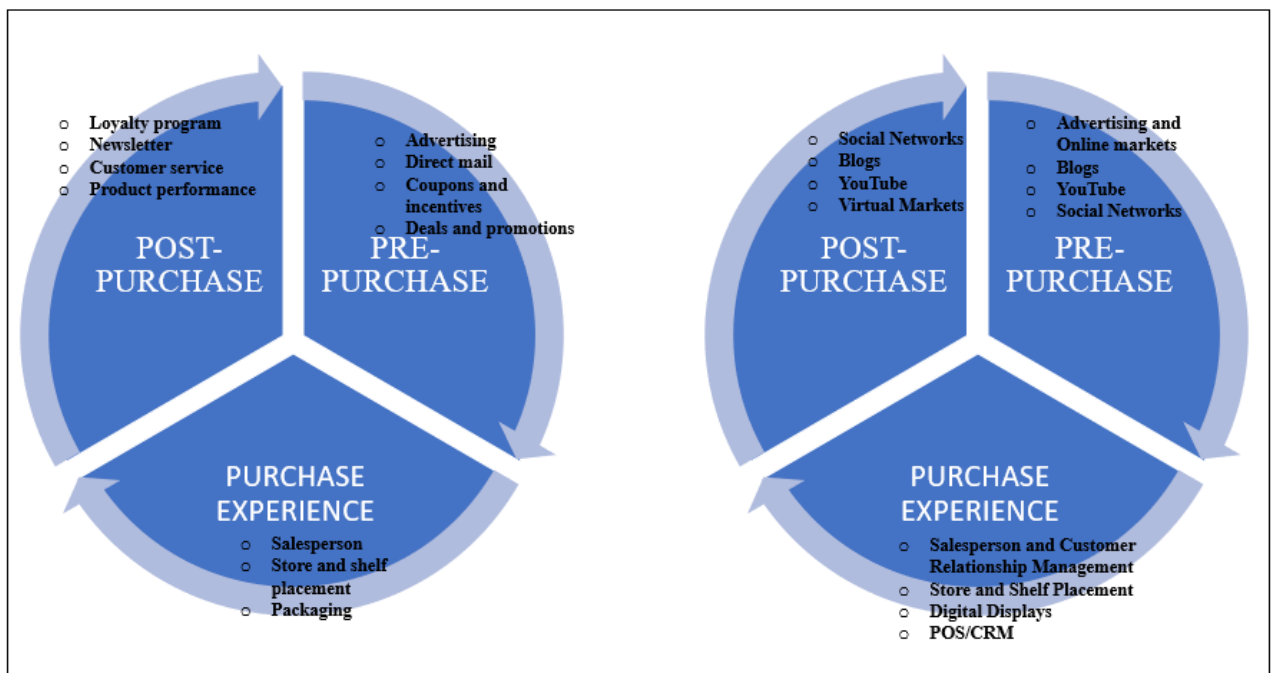
Above we have discussed seven approaches of the brand. They do show how brand evolved in different times and support our main idea that brand has the necessity for a new mindset. The proposed taxonomy of the seven approaches by Heding et al. (2008) has defined the main specific concepts and frameworks for the relevant approach. The **community approach** in brand management states that brand communities refer to social entities and tries to affect lives of consumers and make them to affect the brand. In this approach the brand is seen from a social perspective. According to **economic approach** of brand management states that thanks to marketing mix sales increase. According to **personality approach** on the other hand, customers assign personality to brands. **Identity approach** urges for unified visual and behavioral identity of the brand. **Customer-based approach** of brand management takes in consideration that brand is analyzed as being and residing in the mind of the individual consumer. **Cultural approach** of brand management is based on analysis of brands and branding under the cultural influences. According to this approach cultural forces in society affect the building of the brands. Lastly, we briefly discuss the **relational approach** of brand management. According to this approach, consuming brand can be understood only through a systemic understand of the context in which brand is consumed (Heding et al., 2008, 49-59, 64, 117). This is an important point but in this research we go further. In this research we go beyond a dyadic relationship, and the relationships that exist within ecosystem, the activities and practices that enable value co-creation, and at the same time the “**co-evaluation of the brand**” by different actors within ecosystem become the focal point.

Brand is an element that customers meet with in different stages and places (Taylor et al., 2020). With the rise of digital age what are called as brand touchpoints has experienced a shift. Figure 9 shows the shift of brand touchpoints from the traditional towards digital age.

190.000 thousand customers were included in the study when Coca Cola introduced New Coke which turned out to be a complete disaster in terms of marketing and branding. Coca Cola soon went back to the original and iconic taste it had previously.

When discussing brand as a concept is important to include also the discussion on brand equity which became popular especially in 1980s. It explains the reason for some different outcomes from the marketing of a branded product or not branded product (Keller, 2013, 57). What we retrieve from this fundamental view that Keller implemented in his book; is that branding of a value proposition brings advantages. It has several advantages as it brings together the customer to the market offering (Aaker, 1991).

Figure 9: Traditional and digital brand touchpoints in traditional and digital ages



Source: From Temporal, 2010, 184.

Brand plays different roles for consumers and producers. Brands offer meaning, lower risks, and can be a symbol of quality for consumers whereas they become a source of competitive advantage and financial feedback for producers (Keller, 2013, 34). Brand growth can occur from different sources (i.e. loyalty, new markets etc.) (Krüger and Stumpf, 2013, 4-5) but there are plenty of difficulties to build a brand. According to Aaker (1996, 27) these difficulties include:

- Pressure to compete on price
- Competitors
- Fragmenting of media
- Complex strategies and complex relationships
- Changing strategies
- Innovation
- Pressure to invest elsewhere.

Branding takes place in different levels such as product, corporate, endorsed branding etc. and nearly everything that we are aware of can be branded (Aaker, 1996; Hedning et al., 2008, 16; Temporal, 2010; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2013; Riley et al., 2016). However, there were some initial research that urged the necessity for a new way to consider branding (Hedning et al., 2008, 17). Some essential concepts related to branding would include brand awareness (recognizing the brand in the market) (Aaker, 1991) brand assets (patents, awareness, reputation), brand strength (i.e. the source of influence; market share, market leadership, loyalty rate etc.), brand value (financial equity) (Kapferer, 2012, 14). Even though indirectly, Kapferer (2012, 9) has recognized the the importance of actors, institutions, and ecosystem as elements that affect the brand.

One of the most acknowledged authors in the field of branding is Kevin Lane Keller. He contributed thoroughly to refine branding as a discipline. For instance, Keller (2013) describes `brand architecture strategy` as necessary because it helps marketers to:

“...determine which products and services to introduce, and which brand names, logos, symbols, and so forth to apply to new and existing products” (Keller, 2013, 386).

Despite the incremental importance of branding related branding concepts such as Brand associations, Brand audit, Brand awareness (composed of Brand recognition and Brand recall), Brand community, Brand culture, Branding elements (name, logo, colors), Brand engagement, Brand essence, Brand extensions, Brand genealogy (history of the branding family), Brand icon, Brand identity, Brand image, Brand Loyalty, Brand knowledge, Brand personality, Brand portfolio, Brand relation, Brand resonance, Brand revitalization, Brand strength, Perceived quality, Brand stretch, Brand Resonance, Brand trust and some other concepts, the focus of this research is not to explore them. This research has been focused

on representing a clear picture of the current situation, and to contribute to the literature with the necessity to consider branding from a different perspective which is focused on Service Dominant Logic. However, we do elaborate on two of these concepts that are brand positioning and brand equity as the first is concerned with the meaning of the brand whereas the latter is concerned with the value and evaluation of the brand.

Brand positioning is among the key concepts in brand management as it indicates the main reason that a brand is accepted by the customers and beyond. It brings acceptance in the market and is an important source of competitive advantage (Kornberger, 2010,104-105; Kapferer, 2012, 149). Brand positioning includes identity of the brand at the same time as brand must represent its uniqueness. In this context, the brand identity is important to every actor that meets the brand. According to the brand identity prism, identity of the brand bears different perspectives towards different players (actors) in the market that brand meets with (Kapferer, 2008, 183). The image that brands delivers is what the receiver sees. The sender on the other hand, is sending its identity. Once this meeting takes place the brand meaning is created and as a result the interpretation (Aaker, 1996,71; Kapferer, 2012, 151). Another essential contribution in branding literature that we take as valuable references for branding, is the brand resonance model by Keller. This model considers branding as sequence of steps that is concerned with the identity, meaning, response from customers but also the relationship among brand and customers (Keller, 2013, 107-108). Despite being among the most influential works in branding, we consider it as incomplete because the mindset that has been implemented is focused on dyadic relation between customer and the company (Keeling et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this becomes a valuable source for this research as it offers the backbone of branding literature.

Brand positioning refers to the advantage that one brand can have over their competitors, in the mind of consumers (Aaker, 1996,176). Based on the assumption that consumers have limited mind space for commercial messages (Heding et al., 2008, 14) it is set based on two main thoughts that are Points-of-difference (PODs-being different from your competitors) and Points-of-parity associations (POPs-being the best in your own category) (Keller, 2013, 84).

Brand equity refers to the strength that the brand has based on its performance (Kapferer, 2012, 445) and is used “...to define the value of the brand” (Balmer et al., 2017, 123). Brand equity is intangible (Heding et al., 2008, 11) and at the same time it is considered as an asset (Aaker, 1991; Aaker, 1996,7-8; Kapferer, 2008, 143; Kapferer, 2012, 444-445).

Some authors consider brand equity as opposed to brand value (Temporal, 2010, 4). Customer Based Brand Equity which is an important work in branding literature from Keller, refers (as the name implies) to the dyadic relation between customers and companies despite the truth that brand is not anymore owned by the companies but rather it is created in the mind of consumers. As stated:

“We formally define customer-based brand equity as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand. A brand has positive customer-based brand equity when consumers react more favorably to a product and the way it is marketed when the brand is identified than when it is not (say, when the product is attributed to a fictitious name or is unnamed). Thus, customers might be more accepting of a new brand extension for a brand with positive customer-based brand equity, less sensitive to price increases and withdrawal of advertising support, or more willing to seek the brand in a new distribution channel. On the other hand, a brand has negative customer-based brand equity if consumers react less favorably to marketing activity for the brand compared with an unnamed or fictitiously named version of the product” (Keller, 2013, 68-69).

This clearly reflects the nature of customer-based brand equity as a tie among two parties that are consumers and organizations. A company can only influence the creation of a perception but cannot go beyond that (Riley et al., 2016, 201). The importance of brand equity urges the necessity to evaluate correctly brand value. Brand value is the goodwill of a company (Kapferer, 2008, 505) and a reflection of company's performance (Aaker, 1991) as brands do brands have financial value (Kapferer, 2008, 10; Temporal, 2010, 285). In this research we are not interested in defining the taxonomy of brand equity, brand value, brand evaluation, brand valuation or other concepts related to brand value which have ambiguity in literature or have been used interchangeably. This requires to shift the focus of the research, and is not valuable at all neither in defining the research questions nor in defining data collection instrument due to the dyadic and narrow focus that is rooted in Goods Dominant Logic. The role of relations is valuable in both brand value creation and brand value evaluation (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 368; Temporal, 2010, 4; Balmer et al., 2017, 122).

Brand value is measured by the use of Qualitative (Free association, Adjective ratings and checklists. Projective techniques etc.) and Quantitative Measures (Brand Awareness

measuring scales, Open-ended and scale measures of specific brand attributes and benefits etc.) (Keller, 2013, 353) as a number of methods can be used to value brands (Temporal, 2010, 298-299). Different brand value measuring instruments are well-known to the market such as Interbrand or Millward Brown (Kapferer, 2008; Temporal, 2010). Again, this research is not interested in expanding the area of the research towards brand value measuring instruments. This study is concerned with the way of how different actors evaluate the value of a specific brand. To illustrate; how is evaluated a valuable or non-valuable brand according to the mindset of Service Dominant Logic? Do the actors that evaluate the value of the brand take in consideration any other actor? What do they consider from other actors? For instance, can a negative news affect the perception of banks to approve a loan for a company, and is this news affecting the judgement of this bank or not?

To conclude, one indicator that we should value brands is taking other actors` views on that brand in consideration too (Riley et al., 2016, 64). Stakeholders (in this research we do refer as actors) co-create the brand value as they interact among them (Balmer et al., 2017, 123), and are influenced by ecosystem forces. Therefore, when evaluating the brand value, the same actors get influenced by the same ecosystem forces thus brand value is co-evaluated.

2.6.2 Necessity to reconsider brand

Brand management is a strategic process. The main steps include (Keller, 2013, 59):

- Identifying and establishing Brand Positioning and values (i.e., core brand association)
- Planning and implementing brand marketing programs (i.e., mixing and matching of brand elements)
- Measuring and interpreting brand performance (i.e., brand audit)
- Growing and sustaining brand equity (i.e., brand expansion strategies)

Brand has strategic implications as it can transform the product category and is a long-term vision (Kapferer, 2008). Furthermore, brand management requires adequate brand strategy

(Temporal, 2010). So far we understand the essential importance of branding. Additionally:

“...brands often mirror consumers’ thoughts, feelings, attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and personality. Several successful brands have achieved global status because of brand management’s ability to relate to and keep in touch with consumer emotions, mirroring their minds” (Temporal, 2010, 37).

Since brand importance affects the overall financial performance of the company (Kapferer, 2008, 507) it is important the planning activities of the branding (Bureau, 1981, 3). In this context, the presence of a brand strategy increases internal and external opportunities. Moreover, a brand strategy must be *“proactive rather than tactical and reactive”* (Heding et al., 2008, 15)

The right model for expansion, understanding perception, defining a market-driven positioning, and take advantage of digitalization and co-creation opportunities given the current context are among the most useful steps to have a successful brand strategy (Schaffmeister, 2015, 385-387). Brand strategy impacts brand identity (Aaker, 1994) which in turn affects brand positioning (Kapferer, 2008, 171). Despite the potentiality to deliver brand positioning via promotional mix (Temporal, 2010, 161), is important to align the perception of the receiver and the delivery of the sender (Temporal, 2010, 36; Keller, 2013, 68).

Brand does not belong anymore to brand managers (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 364; Franzak and Pitta, 2011, 398; Pongsakornrungrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011, 305). Despite the extensive literature on branding (Tynan, 2010, 1156) still there is a blurred framework on how branding should be managed. It offers advantages that are unique to the firms (Cravens, 2006, 69; Edvardsson et al., 2006, 232) but at the same time assist customers in their choices too (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 365). Brand has different meanings (Hollebeek, 2011, 562) but Service Dominant Logic puts an end to this dilemma by stating that *“value is experiential and meaning-dependent”* (Fyrberg and Juriado, 2009,422). It is essential that in each interaction there is trust (Baumann and Le Meunier-FitzHugh, 2014, 16). Ignoring the receiver can result in catastrophic results such as for instance the companies that do not take in consideration contextual changes (Gohary and Hamzelu, 2016, 19). Brand itself has an iterative nature (Aitken and Campelo, 2011, 915) and is a key asset for organizations (FitzPatrick et al., 2013, 91). The focus must not be only on positive but also on negative outcomes of branding (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, 505-

506). Not only customers or other parties are interested in brand but also employees are interested in the brand. Furthermore, employees are part of the brand value of an organization (King and Grace, 2009, 122) and an important source of creating brand value (Merz et al., 2009, 336; Schlager et al., 2011, 498). Advantage of brand equity (Berry, 2000, 136) brings together the necessity to accurately measure it (Merz et al., 2009, 341). Some authors consider brand to have the full potential to be a separate academic field, especially under the Service Dominant Logic (Cova et al., 2009, 573). Brand is not anymore `for the customer` (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, 508-509). Service Dominant Logic under which we prepare this research is itself a powerful brand in the academia (Ford, 2011, 231). So far we understand the importance for having a new mindset to on go with branding and brand management as current practices neglect the importance of other actors. One of the most valuable studies that goes in alignment with the research logic of this study, and which assist research questions and data collection tool is the stakeholder view on branding (Balmer et al., 2017).

The authors label it as `daisy wheel model of brand equities`. In this study we go beyond and use it as the Service Dominant Branding Wheel and the research design is done accordingly.

They stated that:

“...stakeholder theory tells us that the firm is reliant on a network of relations where the firm is obliged to the members of this network (legally, contractually and morally). Why, when talking about brand equity, is only the customer discussed?...”(Balmer et al., 2017, 121).

and

“...that multiple stakeholder relations are important sources of equity for total brand equity” (Balmer et al., 2017, 128).

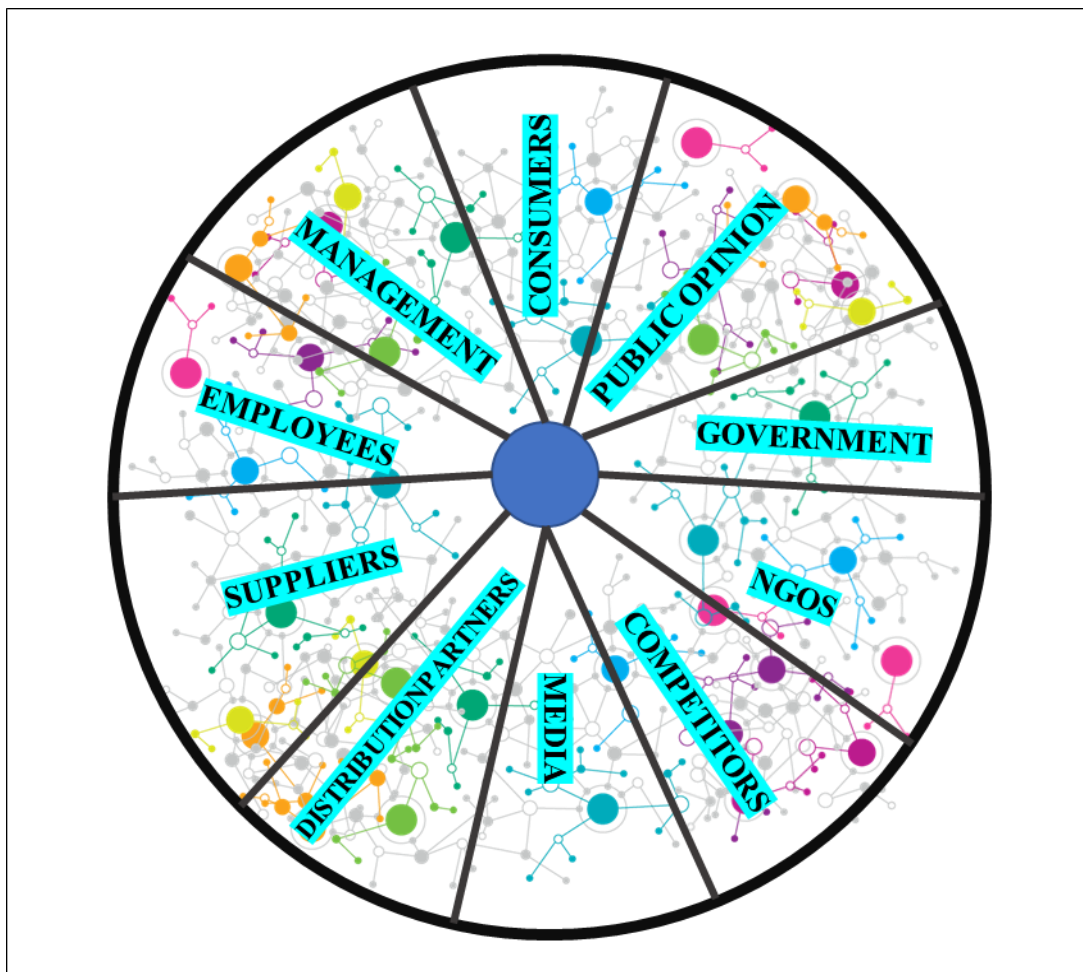
Considering that brand value is created among the interactions between actors and considering the shift towards a **co-evaluative** mindset we consider the two wheels (brand value co-creation, brand value co-evaluation) as the two wheels that under Service Dominant Logic help the company to go forward just like a bicycle or motorcycle. For this reason, the author has come out with the `**Service Dominant Logic Branding Bicycle`**. We will elaborate later this.

Figure 10 shows how the interaction takes place among the main stakeholders of an organization. We have extended further the elaboration by Balmer et al., (2017) by stating that these actors interact with each other within a dynamic environment that resembles to an ecosystem.

In this context, this research offers a new perspective on stakeholders` interactions. A dynamic context urges the necessity to rethink brand management whereas interactions among actors support the main thesis of this study that **brand value** is both **co-created** and **co-evaluated** among actors that act within an ecosystem which is characterized by dynamic context and relationships that goes far beyond dyadic relations.

Given that each actor has its own expectation from the brand, and we have constructed the data collection tool based on four similar categories for value co-creation, and value co-evaluation that are:

Figure 10: Interaction among stakeholders in a dynamic context



Source: Author`s elaboration based on Balmer et al., 2017, 120, 129

Brand Value Co-creation

- Can you define your own surrounding context? (Contextual awareness)
- What you expect and do you benefit from the brand? (Service beneficiary)
- What do you offer to the brand and other actors? (Operant resources)
- What is the relationship between you, the brand, and other actors (relationships)

Brand Value Co-evaluation

- What are the necessary resources to evaluate the brand? (Personal evaluation perspective)
- How you evaluate the brand? (Dyadic relationship evaluation perspective)
- Do other actors influence your evaluation on the brand? (Actor-perspective evaluation)
- Does the context influence your evaluation on the brand? (Ecosystem-perspective evaluation)

In the light of the above information, we conclude the necessity to rethink branding from a new and current mindset. In the upcoming sections we discuss the systemic approach on branding that has been extracted from literature, and service dominant branding.

2.6.3 Systemic approach on branding

Branding definitions are static whereas the brand itself as a concept, and the brand building concept is very dynamic (Kapferer, 2008, 52). In the section before we have defined the stakeholders that are interacting in order to co-create the brand. On the other hand, there are some elements that are conveyed by the brand. Brand is influenced by, and influence the following elements:

- Word of mouth
- HR, Employee motivation
- Brand Culture
- Standards and Behavior

- Product performance and development
- Physical premises
- Corporate event
- Public relations
- Channel management and CRM
- Packaging and design
- Promotions, Sponsorships and Endorsements
- Advertising

These are some of the touchpoints of the brand (Temporal, 2010, 244) and in the current hypercompetitive world it is a matter of concern on how brand value is created (Grandinetti et al., 2022), how is evaluated, and what are the best possible ways to sustain brand value and expand opportunities (Keller, 2013, 21). In the light of this information, and following Service Dominant Logic it is stated that:

“...that marketing is principally concerned with the co-creation of value and relationships, and linking this to a stakeholder perspective on brand value, this paper develops a model for brand managers that helps them to answer the two fundamental questions asked of all brand managers:

- *Where does our brand value lie?*
- *How is this value (co)created?” (Balmer et al., 2017, 120)*

Brand can grow only if they are considered from a wide perspective that resembles to a holistic one (Kapferer, 2008, 269). Internet and social media have become incremental actors in enabling brand to be more dynamic. In this way, customers easily became important actors that directly influence brand value, and brand value creation (Riley et al., 2016, 255). The rise of brand communities (Kapferer, 2008, 215) enabled the brand to become viral (Heding et al., 2008, 17) thanks also to the effect that relationships bear on creating brand value (Balmer et al., 2017, 135-136). Relationships make the brand to be co-created and relationships do occur among the brand and its stakeholders (Balmer et al., 2017, 142). We go beyond simple dyadic relations which are combined to form the whole picture, and we suggest that the complexity of interactions empowered by the context is the true picture of branding and brand management.

The systemic view on branding even though unintentionally has been recognized even before Service Dominant Logic. The power of skills to make the company and the brand unique, require a holistic approach as the challenges include finding the right set of competitive advantage forces (Brodie et al., 2008, 145). In this regard, Aaker (1991) recognized the importance of operant resources as a source for competitive advantage in brand management. The value proposition must be thought systemically too as it appeals to existing and new customers (Aaker, 1994; Laud and Karpen, 2017, 790).

Furthermore, the systemic view on branding requires considering the cultural context as market meaning can affect value co-creation (Akaka et al., 2013, 278). Different scholars urged on the necessity for a much more integrated and holistic approach on brand management (Brodie and Chernatony, 2009; Cova et al., 2009, 572; Healy and McDonagh, 2013, 1535) given that brand is a relational tool (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 14) which connects different actors (Brodie et al., 2006, 375; Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 366; Christodoulides, 2009, 293; Payne et al., 2009, 380).

Brand is an experience and a symbolic source that is integrated with other sources (Fyrberg and Juriado, 2009,422; Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 37). Brand is a resource that is determined within the context and is an interacting phenomenon (Gummesson, 2008a, 323) with emotional aspects (Sandstrom et al., 2008, 115) which serves as a communicator of value (Edvardsson et al., 2006, 231).

Brand changes over time, and throughout the markets thus it is required to produce different solutions (Keller, 2013, 511). Lastly, the necessity to re-think branding from a systemic perspective comes due to the view of the actors on the brand. They choose to see brand according to their context and give a meaning to the brand based on their own experiences. Nevertheless, we understand that actors interpret brand in their own, often idiosyncratic ways, meaning that `different actors have different views on the brand`:

“...the internal and external consumers of the brand interpret the brand in their own, often idiosyncratic, ways. Their interpretation will be framed by their cultural, social and political context. Hence the meaning of brands becomes embedded in power relations and interests. Emphasizing this interplay between the authors and readers of brands opens up new ways of understanding the brand as a medium. Intellectually, this is challenging, as it forces us to think more dialectically about brands; practically, it promises to reveal more of the complexity characterizing the practices through which brands are consumed” (Kornberger,

2010,39-40).

Brand management requires multidimensional thinking (Heding et al., 2008, 4) and a holistic perspective (Riley et al., 2016, 521). The need to systemically consider the brand systemically (Keller, 2013, 260) is influenced by the culture and context affecting brand management nowadays (Heding et al., 2008, 25) and the importance of other actors for the brand (Kapferer, 2012, 133). Interaction between different actors co-create value of the brand (Kornberger, 2010,131, 144).

2.7 Service Dominant Branding

2.7.1 SDL supported brand value cocreation

Service Dominant Logic provides the ground for brand value co-creation as “brand value concerns the study of how value is created” (Balmer et al., 2017, 120). The co-creational nature of brand value indicates that brand is not owned by one actor only (Aitken and Campelo, 2011, 916). It is true that some actors do have a powerful impact on brand value as consumers for example play an important role in the successful performance of modern brands (France et al., 2015, 849; Nysveen and Pedersen, 2014, 807). Brand value co-creation is supported by also by one of the keystones of Goods Dominant Logic which is customer-based brand equity (Merz et al., 2009, 334).

Managing interactions that aid brand value co-creation (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016, 104) enhances the relationship equity for the firms (Vargo, 2009, 375). Brand itself is an attribute of value creation (Ng et al., 2012, 427). Brand is a shared reality and it is co-created:

“...the meanings attached to a particular brand are located in the minds of its customers, and the wider community of opinion makers and stakeholders (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 365).

Brands have a dynamic nature (Berenguer-Contrí et al., 2020) that requires them to engage with actors in order to reach their goal. It has been recognized the need to implement a holistic view when trying to understand the behaviors of consumers in the market (Christodoulides, 2009, 292). It means that consumers are subject to complex relations, interactions, and resource integration within a definite ecosystem. As they are among the integral actors in brand management (Fisher and Smith, 2011, 330), they are affected by

other actors and this influences their view on the image of the brand (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, 507). This goes in alignment with the logic of this research which claims that brand value is co-created among actors that interrelate, interact, and integrate resources within an ecosystem (Nittala et al., 2022). Some scholars state that what is co-created is the `brand meaning` (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 365) rather than brand value. However, considering that brand meaning requires social and public domain it becomes a notion that is influenced by other actors too and as an output has the brand value. Therefore, brand value is co-created.

Service Dominant Logic supports brand value co-creation (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 369) as customers unintentionally and “*simultaneously co-create the brand and value for themselves, since the brand becomes a resource for defining their own identities*” (Lusch et al., 2008, 10). Branding must be considered in a broader view by taking in consideration other actors too (Brodie, 2009, 107) especially in the “*age of openness and co-creation*” (Christodoulides, 2009, 291). Thanks to Service Dominant Logic the brand is seen as a collaborative and integrative term (Merz et al., 2009) and has been recognized by plenty scholars (see: Gambetti and Graffigna, 2014, 4).

Several studies tried to bring together branding theories under a unifying and up-to-date lens (France et al., 2015; Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016, 64; Yuksel et al., 2016, 21) however the current literature that considers brand value and brand value evaluation from a co-creative perspective are still in initial steps (Jayasinghe et al., 2022). This research aims to fill this gap too.

Brand value co-creation is consistent with the Foundational Premises of Service Dominant Logic (Merz et al., 2009, 335; FitzPatrick et al., 2013, 91). Brand is not unilateral anymore and other actors rather than customers and companies are involved (Nguyen et al., 2012; Vallaster and Von Wallpach, 2013, 1501).

Brand value is co-created among other actors as they are resource integrators (Merz et al., 2009, 340). Understanding the network nature of relationships “*will help firms navigate away from overly trying to manage their brand, to collaborating with customers and other stakeholders to cocreate a brand*” (Akaka et al., 2012, 45-46). Brand value co-creation has been recognized in some studies such as the case study on Lego (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013) or higher education (Nguyen et al., 2012).

The support that brand value co-creation gets from Service Dominant Logic (Merz et al., 2009, 340) becomes the first step towards the second one which is the co-evaluation of brand value. This research investigates as the second research question precisely brand value co-evaluation among actors.

2.7.2 SDL supported brand value co-evaluation

One of the main actors in branding is without doubt the customer (Piacentini, Hibbert and Hogg, 2014, 201). On the importance of the actors:

“Understanding value creation from an S-D logic viewpoint encourages a wider perspective than is typically found in the mainstream marketing literature (Vargo, 2009). It brings into view not only focal actors — the focal service provider (e.g., firm) an beneficiary (e.g., customer) — but also the context — the networks of resources and resource-providing actors — available to these actors. Fortunately, the great, ongoing work in studying these actors, in various combinations, provides a rich knowledge base for exploring the broader perspective as a whole” (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 183).

The dynamic context in which brand is co-created requires to all actors` to interact with each other (Bhanja, and Saxena, 2022). In this perspective, across the ecosystem the interactions shape the perceptions and the judgement of every single actor (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 186). Service Dominant Logic concepts that are the basis in value co-creation are Actors, Resources (and resource integration), Context, Service System, Experience, Generic actor, value co-creation (Wetter-Edman et., 2014, 108; Ekman et al., 2016, 54). Service dominant branding (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, 515) sometimes is used as a concept but in the old context (Spring and Araujo, 2009; Skaalsvik and Olsen, 2015). The brand is in continuous engagement with other actors in the ecosystem (Webster and Lusch, 2013, 393). The brand is seen as co-created by the customer at first, and therefore one of the main actors that could evaluate brand value are the consumers themselves (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, 507; Wilden et al., 2017, 8)

Brand went through some shifts which justify the fact that brand is co-created, and that brand value is co-evaluated. This shift refers to four different Eras that are (Merz et al., 2009, 329):

1. Individual Goods-Focus Brand Era (1900s–1930s)
2. Value-Focus Brand Era (1930s–1990s)
3. Relationship-Focus Brand Era (1990s– 2000), and, most recently
4. Stakeholder-Focus Brand Era (2000 and forward).

Given the elaboration it is stated that brand shifts from identifier towards as a dynamic and social process (Merz et al., 2009). In the Era of Stakeholder Focus, the Cova and Dallı, 2009, 317; Christodoulides, 2009, 292; Nguyen et al., 2012) *“brand value co-creation process is a continuous, social, and highly dynamic and interactive process between the firm, the brand, and all stakeholders”* (Merz et al., 2009, 331).

Given the focus of Service Dominant Logic on service exchange (Lusch, 2006, 241) brands have been used a symbol of communication of value (Edvardsson et al., 2006, 231). However, the experience that each actor perceives is incremental in sustaining the life of a brand (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 28). Brand management implementing Service Dominant Logic focuses on benefiting customers at first (Brodjonegoro and Nasution, 2012, 509). The user-generated content about the brands using the rise of social media indicates the importance of actor-to-actor approach as essential in brand value co-evaluation (Merz et al., 2009, 329; Brodie et al., 2009, 353; FitzPatrick et al., 2013, 91-92; Vargo and Lusch, 2017, 57; Vargo and Lusch, 2017, 58).

Considering brand from a new perspective that involves other actors too indicates the emerging mindset for brand value co-creation, and brand value co-creation (Payne et al., 2009, 380; Webster and Lusch, 2013, 397; Skaalsvik and Olsen, 2014, 1212).

Service Domainant Logic and *actor-to-actor (A2A) networks with a network-centric focus* gives rise to the brand co-creation and brand value co-evaluation (Lusch and Nambisan, 2015, 160). For this we quote Lusch and Vargo (2012):

“In an A2A network all actors are operant resources that influence and shape each other; hence, they create their own context or environment. Generic actors, despite labels such as firm, household or individual do essentially the same thing. That is they integrate resources, provide service and co-create value” (Lusch and Vargo, 2012, 194-195)

and:

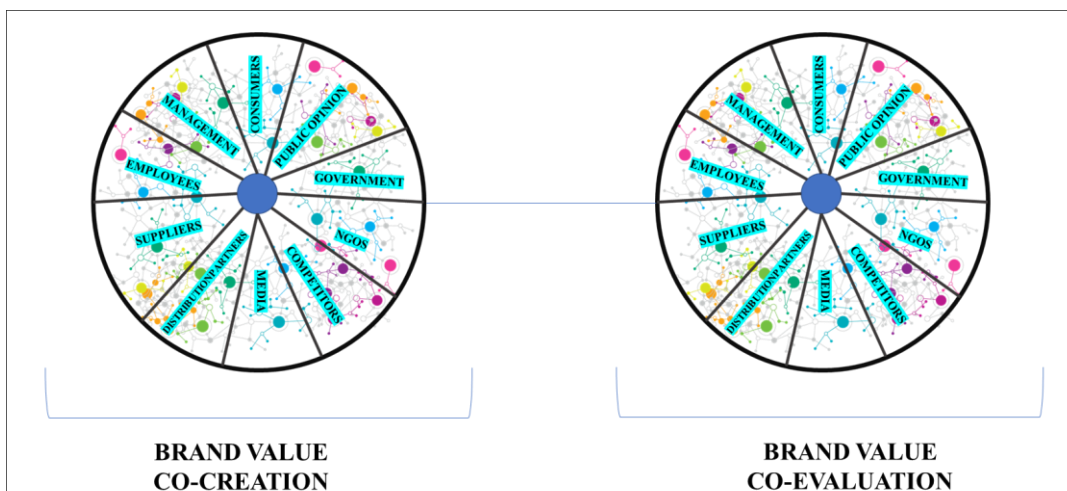
“...value creation takes place in networks, since it implies that the resources used in service provision typically, at least in part, come from other actors, as specified in FP9...implies a dynamic component to these networks, since each integration or application of resources (i.e., service) changes the nature of the network in some way. This in turn suggests that a network understanding alone is inadequate and that a more dynamic systems orientation is necessary” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, 7)

furthermore:

“To recognize that a network consists of multiple stakeholders and avoid the limitation to customers and suppliers, the general concepts of actor and actor-to-actor interaction, A2A, have been introduced. Cocreation in this broad sense also means that suppliers do not just do things to but with customers. The customer or any other actor then is an active resource and not just passive. (Gummesson, 2012, 11)

In the light of above information, it is obvious that value co-creation occurs among actors within a given ecosystem (Tajvidi et al., 2021). Therefore, the value is at the same time evaluated by each actor in its own context and background (Barrios et al., 2023). Logically, brand value is evaluated by each actor again in in its own context and background. Just like a simple mathematical equation we obtain Figure 11. The colorful dots represent the systemic interactions, and resource integrations that occur within the ecosystem.

Figure 11: Brand Value Co-creation, and Brand Value Co-evaluation



Source: Author`s elaboration

Lastly, the brand value that is co-evaluated by the actors is the novelty of this research and has been empowered thanks to the new dominant mindset in marketing, Service Dominant Logic (Ballantyne and Aitken, 2007, 366; Fyrberg and Juriado, 2009,425; Diaz-Mendez and Gummesson, 2012, 574).

3 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Gap

To the wide knowledge of the author and based on the extensive research there has been identified two main gaps that exist in the literature concerning service dominant logic brand management.

First, in this research we re-examine both the ways brand value is created and how brand value is evaluated. The necessity to reconsider brand equity (Balmer et al., 2017) brings the gap between brand management and service dominant logic. Brand value creation occurs among actors therefore it requires a holistic approach. In this context, the initial gap that has been identified, and that aims to be fulfilled by this research is the brand value co-creation process and the main influential factors. To state it clearly; this research aims to fill the gap that exists in determining how brand co-creation among actors occurs and identifying these influential factors on brand value co-creation.

Second; given that many studies stated the importance to consider branding from a contemporary lens (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016; Jayasinghe et al., 2022) and given that brand value co-creation is consistent with the Foundational Premises of Service Dominant Logic (Merz et al., 2009) it has been accepted the systemic nature of brand value. In this context, the evaluation of branding too requires a new shift. Therefore, this research fills another critical gap in the literature which is the investigation of brand value co-creation.

This research not only brings brand value evaluation from the perspective of Service Dominant Logic, but it also offers a new evaluation perspective which is co-evaluation of brand value among the actors.

To conclude, this research aims to fill these two gaps that have been identified based on a wide literature review on the matter.

3.2 Formulation of Research Questions

In this section we explain in short, the research questions. It is important to highlight the

logical background of these questions despite the support from the literature as stated above. Therefore, we start with a concise explanation on the logical flow, and later on we clearly state the research questions.

3.2.1 The logical flow behind research questions

This research is focused on presenting branding and brand management from a new perspective. As we have explained in the beginning the emerging context and the necessity for a new mindset, we have later on explained this `new mindset`. This study is grounded on Service Dominant Logic which for the first time was present in 2004. To date there are nearly two decades of research on Service Dominant Logic and as time passed this emerging mindset earned its place among the most influential theories especially in marketing (Purohit et al., 2023). It urged the rethinking of many rooted theories and frameworks. It collaborated with many emerging approaches to refine furthermore its place as a very influential emerging mindset. To date, based on the extensive readings and research in the framework of this study, the author embraces Service Dominant Logic as a theory of modern marketing.

We start to elaborate and explain for the reader what is Service Dominant Logic and why is important to be rooted in the center of this study. Based on a wide literature review we explained briefly and justified clearly the presence of Service Dominant Logic as the correct foundational theory of this study.

In chapter 4, the concept of brand was elaborated to show that brand is much more than a relationship among customers and companies. Since this study moves away from Good Dominant Logic and implement Service Dominant Mindset, we were careful to identify to which extent should current branding theory be included. It existed the risk to precipitate, get lost in details on branding and move away from the true aim. Given that the researcher himself is working as an academic staff since 2014 it was valuable to define the borders of what to include, and what not. Therefore, in this chapter we explained: what is brand, why brand management requires a new mindset, brand value, the fact that derives from literature that brand value is co-created, and we added our view (based on the literature) that brand value is co-created, **and co-evaluated** via the interaction, resource integration, contextual shapes among different actors within an ecosystem.

3.2.2 Research questions

Research questions form the heart of the research, what the researcher specifically wants to understand by doing this research (Maxwell, 2018). Punch (2011) emphasizes that what the question of a research is and determines what the method of that research will be and classifies qualitative and quantitative research according to whether they ask descriptive or explanatory questions. In other words, the research question gives information about what kind of research we are doing. According to Punch (2011: 16), description is “taking a picture of what is what, how things start and go, or what a situation, person or event looks like”. On this basis, the case study method, which deals with the phenomena in its own complex context and in depth, was deemed appropriate as a research design for this study, which tries to reveal the elements that are essentials in co-creating, and co-evaluating brand.

Therefore, our research questions are:

- 1- HOW IS BRAND VALUE CO-CREATED AMONG ACTORS WITHIN AN ECOSYSTEM?**
- 2- HOW IS BRAND VALUE CO-EVALUATED AMONG ACTORS WITHIN AN ECOSYSTEM?**

As an illustration to these research questions, and as a literature contribution we offer Service Dominant Logic Branding Bicycle (Figure 12). In this figure we see that brand value is a valuable asset primarily to the company, but it is the company at the same time that worries on how brand value is evaluated. Our main thesis is that brand value is evaluated by each actor individually, but the total value is not the sum of these evaluations as the Goods Dominant Logic implies, rather it is the interaction that occur that defines the true value of the brand (Haverila et al., 2022). For instance, suppliers do care about the daily news, about social media performance of the company or whether they have a bank loan or not. They do care about legal status of the company and potential problems that they might have. Things are interrelated. Precisely as a practical contribution to the strategic thinking and practitioners we offer SDL Bicycle. The analogy with a bicycle has different reasons. For example why not a car? Or a motorbike? It is a bicycle because it is clear (does not emit any harmful substance). It is a bicycle because whatever the topic on

branding is the only thing that matter is how value is created, and how it is evaluated. So there two main pillars to be considered in brand management. It is a bicycle because it can be suitable for any entity to ride as it is not `complex`. We claim that Service Dominant Logic Brand Management offers a valuable shift in strategic brand management thanks to its foundational theory.

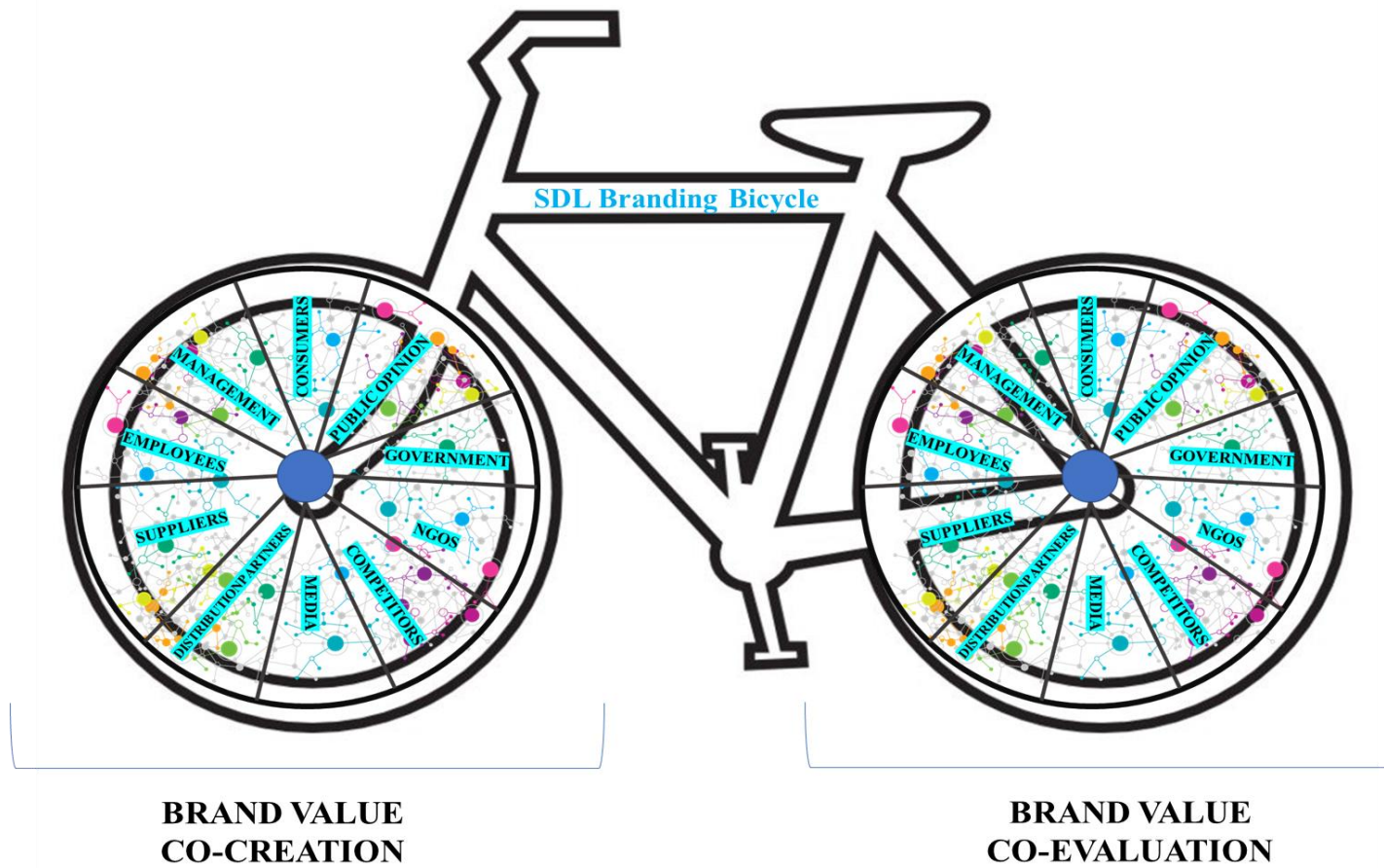


Figure 12: SERVICE DOMINANT LOGIC BRANDING BICYCLE

3.3 Research in Social Sciences

Research is a knowledge-enhancing work that is carried out gradually and systematically to reach a specific goal and solve a problem (Collis and Hussey, 2003, p.1). Research forms the basis of academic studies. Research sheds light on the innovations in business and study. The success of the research depends on whether the research method chosen is suitable for the research. Therefore, the more important the research is, the more important is the research method. Obtaining the correct results in research depends on the compatibility of the research method with the research and the correct application of the method (Yin, 1994, p. 3). The researcher should examine and compare the existing research methods, so that he/she should choose the most appropriate research method for his/her research and obtain detailed information about this method. The research method changes according to the research topic, research question and the possibilities of the researcher. Therefore, the researcher should use the most appropriate research method(s) according to these criteria. The research method changes according to the research topic, research question and the possibilities of the researcher. Therefore, the researcher should use the most appropriate research method(s) according to these criteria.

It is stated that the strengths and weaknesses of a research method will depend on three conditions (Yin, 2003, p. 1):

- Types of research questions
- The researcher's control over the researched event and emerging behaviors
- Associating current studies with past studies.

Qualitative research method has emerged in social sciences as in-depth studies are required in studies on explaining social phenomena about human beings (Sığrı 2018, 63). Qualitative research can be explained as `theory development` from the information obtained as a result of the facts and events in their natural environments, in the area they are located, as they are, one-to-one interview method, observation method, and evaluation of information/documents (Islamoğlu and Alnıçık 2014, 208). Qualitative research is an active/living/dynamic form of research. Qualitative research provides an opportunity to understand events from the eyes of those who live.

In this sense, the general characteristics of qualitative research are worth to be listed and are presented in Table 7:

Table 7: Characteristics of qualitative research

Characteristic	Explanation
Examines the phenomena that are the subject of the study as they are in the environment / natural environment.	The researcher is actively involved in the document and information gathering process. He conducts interviews with the research participants, observes, tries to catch the details in the acquisitions he is trying to achieve.
Data Collection border	Data is collected by considering the integrity of the event/facts.
Examples focus on tangibles	The examples focus on their acquisition, comprehension, and evaluation.
Follows an inductive path	Multiple techniques are used together in qualitative research. It does not depend on a single technique to carry out research.

Source: Adapted from Islamoğlu and Alnıçık 2014, 209:

Recently, qualitative research methods are frequently used as one of the research methods in social sciences. Qualitative methods are accepted by social scientists as they adopt the view that they digitize the semantic values of non-numerical texts/contents. In qualitative research, content analysis is valid on the basis of the main analysis technique, determining the codes and themes on the basis of the research questions, processing the data within the scope of code and theme lists and making inferences (Sığrı 2018, 63-64).

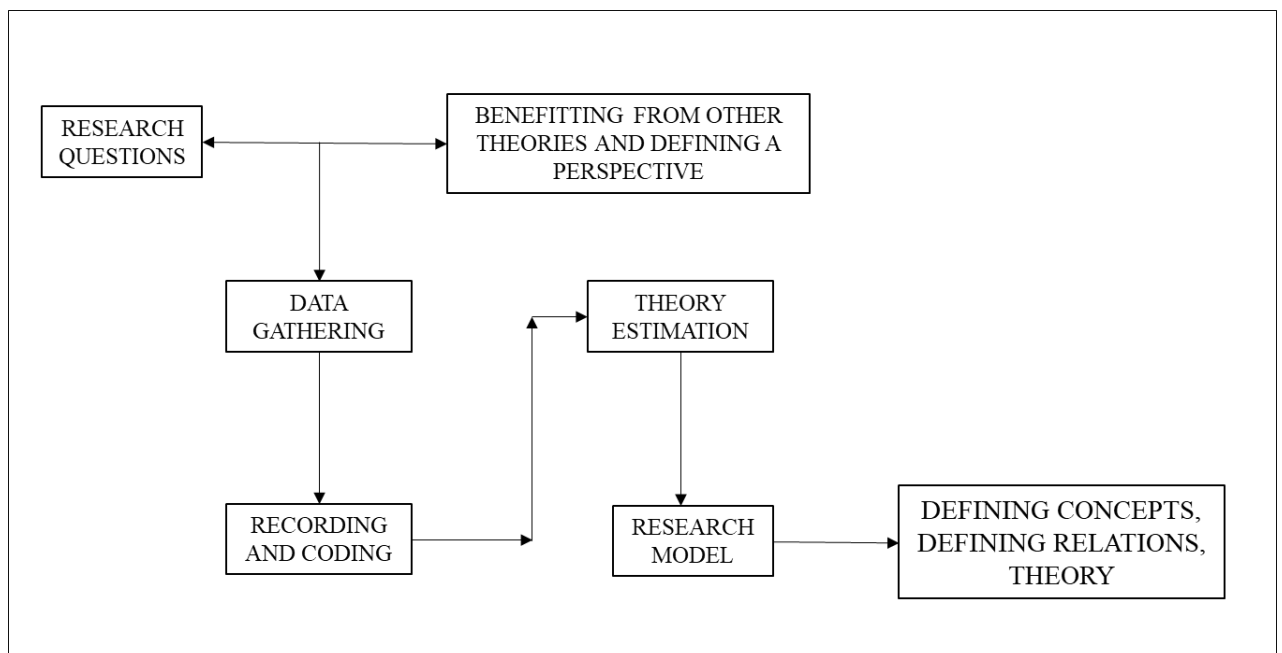
Within the scope of this research, it is aimed to make a deep analysis by focusing on the events, facts and the connections between the facts that are the subject of the research in a

certain social environment, and to reach and evaluate a deep understanding and specific data as a result of the research. For these purposes, qualitative research method was used to highlight the quality of facts and events (Baltacı, 2019).

3.4 Qualitative Research, Validity and Reliability

In the research; Within the scope of qualitative research, contextual and descriptive data analysis methods were used together. While analyzing the data/information obtained by the interview method, it is checked whether all the identified issues during the interview are related to each other, whether there are contradictions and whether they are consistent. In the analysis of data, beyond the pieces of information obtained through interviews, all data focuses on examining the whole picture/big picture (Büyüköztürk, et al. 2017, 158). In the Figure 13 it has been shown the flow of the qualitative research and this study goes in alignment with it too.

Figure 13: The steps of qualitative research



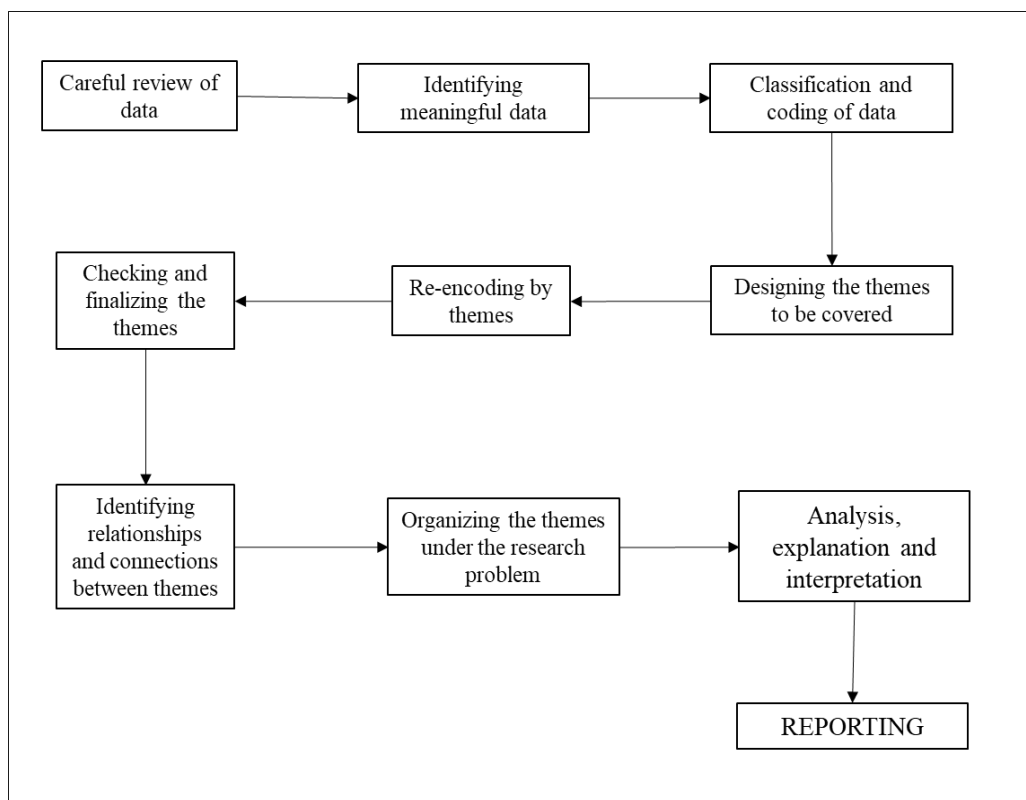
Source: Adapted from İslamoğlu and Alnıçık, 2014, p. 212)

In qualitative research, it is desired to reach the actual messages in the texts/contents. In qualitative research, the researcher also participates in the processes. The participation of the researcher in the research process is an important element in providing reliability,

validity and credibility in qualitative research (Sıgır 2018, 64). More than one data collection method is also used in qualitative research. These methods are; observation, interview/interview, analysis on documents and information. The use of more than one data collection method is also used to increase the reliability of research/studies (Sıgır 2018, 137).

As in every scientific research, there are criteria that ensure the legitimacy of qualitative research, but the number of samples cannot be a single criterion. Whitemore et al. (2001) drew attention to the difficulty of developing validity standards in qualitative research and evaluated these criteria in two stages. Primary criteria; credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity. Secondary criteria are openness, vitality, creativity, comprehensiveness, congruence and sensitivity. In this present case, the researcher made an appointment with the different and relevant actors which he thought was appropriate both in terms of uniqueness and in terms of reaching a sufficient number to achieve meaningful results.

Figure 14: Research process



Source: Author`s elaboration

The credibility of the results of scientific research and articles is related to the concepts of validity and reliability. The reliability of research/articles is related to the reproducibility of the results. Reliability is handled in two ways, external and internal reliability. Whether the results obtained with the research can be reached in the same conditions under similar conditions is evaluated within the scope of external reliability. Whether or not similar results can be achieved if the same data set is used by different researchers is also within the scope of internal reliability (Sığrı 2018, 136). In qualitative research, different methods such as `observation, interview and document analysis` are used to increase the reliability of the research (Sığrı 2018, 137). For the research that is the subject of the thesis, the researcher also carried out the observations, interviews and document analyze and evaluated the data set within this framework. The concept of validity is related to the accuracy of research results. The validity of qualitative research depends on the fact that the researcher evaluates the facts as they are and treats them impartially. The fact that the researcher receives his data from the actors that are part of the phenomenon/events take place ensures the validity of the research. The researcher can access in-depth information about the research topic, and can make long-term observations about the researched topic, and this can be considered as a factor that support validity. When the position of the researcher is evaluated, it is seen that he is close to the research area, can make long-term observations, can return to the research area and access other resources related to the research results (Sığrı 2018, 136-145).

Another essential issue is the data collection in qualitative research, which differs from quantitative research. Figure 15 shows some of the main different data collection techniques in qualitative research.

In this research, data were collected through documents, in-depth interviews, observation, direct and participant observation. Open-ended interviews were used to collect data and analyze the interviews in a healthy way. The purpose of the interviews is to collect data about the research question. For an interview to be evaluated in a qualitative context, it must reflect the characteristics that enable the research to be achieved. At the same time, the researcher's observations were added to the interview contents. A qualitative interview is a form of interview in which the real-life views of the sample group subjects participating in the interview about the realities and meanings of the facts and events that are the subject of the research are determined (Gürbüz and Şahin 2014, 173-178). The

main purpose of the research is to collect in-depth information on the subject. In this study, data were collected using an open-ended interview form.

Figure 15: Data collection techniques in qualitative research



Source: Author`s elaboration

The interview method is based on verbal communication between at least two people. In semi-structured interviews, interviews are conducted within the framework of a prepared form consisting of open-ended questions as well as predetermined question options (Büyüköztürk, et al. 2017, 158). While developing the interview form, it was first prepared in line with the questions posed by the literature review, scientific research on similar subjects, and the researcher's own observations within the institution and during the process. In-depth interview is a method based on the exploration of research with drilling and open-ended questions in line with the purpose. The purpose of the interview is to determine in depth the feelings and views of the interviewees. For this, in-depth interview technique is preferred, especially on subjects where the personal opinions of the determined people are valuable (Baş and Akturan 2017, 113). During the data collection phase, face-to-face interviews were conducted with individuals-actors that have an interest or have been affected by the company.

All scientific research should be concerned with producing valid and reliable information within ethical principles. It has been observed that only in the last two or three decades

there has been an interest in ethical concerns specific to qualitative research (Merriam, 2018). Reliability is the state of consistency between independent measurements of the same variable. Reliability is the first condition that must be met in scientific studies, and for a scientific study to be valid, it must first be reliable. The credibility of the results of scientific research can be explained by the formula reliability + validity = credibility (Sıgri, 2021). All research work must be carefully designed and implemented so that it can have one way or another effect on theory or practice in any field. It needs to present insights and results that will seem right and justified to readers, practitioners, and other researchers (Merriam, 2018).

The validity of the research has increased with the opportunity to collect detailed and in-depth information through online and/or video interviews with the researcher tele-conference method (Sıgri, 2021). In order to increase the construct validity of the research, data diversity was made (Patton, 1987), three different data sources were reached. In order to increase the internal validity of the research, deep and focused data were collected, how the conclusions were reached, and the evidence for the inferences were presented in a way that other people could access (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2008). In order to increase the external reliability of the research, the research was reported transparently, and the participants and data sources were clearly stated (Connelly, 2016).

Within the scope of external validity, which expresses the transferability of the research, a study group consisting of accessible, appropriate, and voluntary participants selected by using purposive sampling was formed. In-depth interviews were held with participants who have rich data and knowledge about the research topic in terms of both branding, and brand evaluation related to the company. Again, concerning the external reliability of the research, which expresses the verifiability of the research, the researcher tried to maintain his impartial position as a researcher throughout the research process and not to reflect his individual assumptions and prejudices to the research as much as possible. On the other hand, the researcher continued his research by presenting all the processes of the research to the expert review and getting confirmation. Accordingly, all raw data, codes, themes, findings and analyzes and individual experience information were shared with an expert. This person, who has general knowledge about the study subject and specializes in qualitative research, made a confirmation evaluation by comparing the results reached by the researcher with the raw data.

Lastly, it is important to state that internal validity and reliability of qualitative research based on Marriam hermeneutic paradigm ensuring their generalizability are as follows (Marriam, 2016: 221):

- Triangulation (the use of multiple methods or data sources)
- participant validation
- appropriate to the data collection stage, and adequate participation
- researcher position or reflectivity
- expert review/assessment
- inspection technique
- rich, dense description
- maximum diversity

3.5 Research Unit and Sampling

According to Punch (2011: 183), sample selection will be is a problem for qualitative research as well as for quantitative research. In qualitative research, rather than 'probability-based' sampling, 'purposive/intentional sampling' type is preferred. In other words, the sample most suitable for the purpose is determined beforehand. The number of selected samples is closely related to the research method approach adopted. This also raises the issue of validity and reliability of the research.

The research unit of this study is the entire population of actors surrounding the company. Interviews were requested with the relevant actors. Given the nature of the research, and the research question, it was possible to reach out the majority of all actors except customers.

The population that researchers try to explain based on observations that can be made on a sample group selected from the general population. The sample, on the other hand, is the group chosen according to the rules from a certain population, which has the power to represent the population from which it was chosen, or whose competence is accepted (Karasar 2009, 110). These are researches/studies that reveal the views of the people involved in the selected event/case/situation and are limited according to the conditions specific to the situation. Qualitative research is carried out in order to understand the behaviors, perceptions and attitudes of the events they investigate in their places/natural

environments and in accordance with the purpose of the research. In this sense, the cases are tried to be understood from the perspective of the participants/experiencers of the cases (İslamoğlu and Alnıçık 2014, 207-222). Sample selection is important in qualitative research. The group identified as the sample should be able to be formed in such a way as to reach the intended information as a result of in-depth research. It is thought that long-term interactions with the participants of the selected sample will create a reliable source of information. In this qualitative research, the sample was determined according to the selection method called purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is the case of applying to the knowledge and experience of the person/persons related to the researched subject. It is the researcher's decision on what to examine in accordance with the purpose of the researcher conducting the research. The point to be considered in the research process is that it was able to decide on a selected sample in accordance with the purpose of the research. In this study, the individuals in the study group were selected with the purposive sampling method, which is one of the two main methods that can be used for sampling in qualitative research (Sığrı 2018, 126-127). In qualitative research, if the researcher is a practitioner, it is stated that he is involved in the process in the position of "participatory observation - researcher participant". The involvement of the researcher as an observer is also called "professional practice" in the literature. Researchers involved in the observation process become a part of identifying the problem and solving the problem. It is reported that implicit knowledge can be revealed in research in which practitioners take part as observers, and since they are involved in the processes, they can intuitively determine the situation and comprehend the events (Sığrı 2018, 235-236).

In this research, it has been tried to reach the most appropriate sample in the research that will allow the best explanation of the subject and make the best contribution to the solution of the research problem (Baltacı, 2018). In this study, it is aimed to focus on detailed, deep and specific data obtained from small study groups instead of large samples. When the in-depth interviews reach a certain level and the data starts to repeat it is aimed to analyze and make sense of the data obtained. While developing purposeful sampling, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise regarding some groups to select subjects that represent this universe (Berg and Lune, 2017). In the sample design, in order to reach the appropriate sample for the research question, the researcher selected individuals which were willing essential to the problem and the central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2013). For this reasoning, purposeful sampling method was used. It is imperative to choose a sample that

one wants to understand and from which many things can be learned (Merriam, 2018: 76). After conducting the interviews, it has been recommended to stop when the outcome starts to replicate (Creswell, 2016: 189).

Lastly, the confidentiality of the research was communicated to the participants both verbally and in writing, and their consent was obtained (Maxfield and Babbie, 2005: 26).

3.6 Methodology, Data Collection instrument and Research Model

The purpose of this section is to reveal the basics of the case study method which has been used in this research. This part of the study is designed to cover the detailed introduction of the methodological choice of the thesis and the analysis of the data obtained from the field research.

Case studies, which are one of the most preferred methods in exploratory research (Yin; 2003: 1), were also preferred as the method of this study. The view based on the definition of the method in the literature is that case studies give an opportunity to examine a phenomenon/event in depth and closely (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003; 2005; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008; Punch, 2011). The individual, group, organization, society can be the subject of research, as well as the policies, processes and actions they produce. The holistic approach is central to the acquisition of meaningful knowledge. Eisenhardt (1989) emphasizes that the same is true for theory building. However, the desire to deal with a social phenomenon holistically brings with it certain preferences. Because the high number of samples to be selected from the mass to be researched will not enable in-depth understanding, the desired depth can only be reached by focusing on a small number of samples/cases. Here, the purpose of the research is essential.

Case study is a qualitative research approach in which the researcher examines one or more limited cases in time by using multiple data collection techniques and defines the cases and the themes related to the situation. In other words, it is a method in which a single case or event is examined in depth longitudinally; data is collected systematically and what is happening in the real environment is examined (Creswell, 2013). Case study is useful where it is important to understand how the organizational and environmental context has an impact on social processes`.

Since the case study is an empirical research design (Yin, 1984), which studies a current phenomenon in its own real-life framework, the boundaries between the phenomenon and its content are not clearly defined and there are more than one source of evidence and data (Yin, 1984). Case study research assumes that its context and relationship to the studied situation are integral to understanding the state of other complex conditions (Yin, 2017). Qualitative case study seeks meaning and understanding and the primary data collection and analysis tool is the researcher himself. It is possible to obtain highly descriptive results with this type of inductive inquiry strategy. Characteristics of qualitative case studies are specificity, descriptiveness, and heuristics (Merriam, 2018). The case study method is only one of the field-based research methods. These methods are; field study, field experiment and event study (Kaplan, 1986, p. 442). Case studies are studies that represent only one event (Tanis, 1997, p. 184). The case study method is explained as studies that allow to examine the activities of an enterprise in depth within a period of time (Kaplan, 1986, p. 442). Case study is defined as a detailed examination of a person, an environment, a document, or an event. In addition, it is a research method suitable for the situation in which the "how" and/or "why" questions are asked, the researcher has no control over the events and current events are examined (Yin, 1994, p. 6; Spicer, 1992, p. 10). Case study is expressed as a way of looking at what is happening in the real environment, collecting data in a systematic way, analyzing and presenting the results (Aytaçlı, 2012: 3). According to Creswell, the case study is both the product and the object of research (Creswell, 2016: 14). Based on the importance that `how` and `why` questions have for the research; the case study is the most appropriate research method to be applied. According to another definition, the systematic investigation of a particular situation is defined as a case study (Nisbet and Watt, 1982, p. 5). Some of the research fields where case study is used as a research method are as follows (Yin, 1994, p. 1):

- political science and government research,
- studies in the fields of social psychology and sociology,
- studies in the fields of organization and management,
- planning research,
- scientific research and dissertation studies in social sciences.

Lastly, it is possible to classify case studies in various ways. Yin (2003) and Stake (1994; cited in Punch, 2011) evaluated case studies in three different categories. Yin's (2003)

categories are called exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory case studies, while Stake's (1994) classification is divided into factual, instrumental, and collective case studies. In both classification examples, the last type is used for studies involving more than one case study. The general aim in all categories is related to a more comprehensive and holistic approach to the investigated phenomenon. What causes the distinction is whether the investigated phenomenon is singular or multiple, and accordingly, it is associated with the theory.

It is known that there are some steps to be followed while conducting the case study. These stages can be listed as follows (Yin, 1994, p. 6; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2003, pp. 194-202; Scapens, 1990, p. 274; Ticehurst and Veal, 1999, p. 34):

Developing Research Questions

While it is stated in many studies that questions such as "Who, What, Where, How Many, How Much" are important in research methods; Case studies, as mentioned earlier, include research conducted to answer the "Why" and "How" questions. Before starting the research, the researcher who will conduct a case study should develop research questions for the subject to be researched, and prepare research questions based on "How" and/or "Why" with the support of the company/actors where the case study will be conducted.

Developing the Sub-Problems of the Research

It is not necessary for every study to have sub-problems. However, it may be necessary to identify sub-areas of the research problem. Each sub-problem ensures that the researcher's attention is focused on a single area; Therefore, dividing the research problem into sub-fields helps to find detailed answers to the research problem.

Determining the Analysis Unit and Determining the Situation to Work

The unit of analysis is defined as the elements about which the researcher will collect information. At this stage, it is tried to determine what the event is. With a well-defined research problem, the unit of analysis can be correctly identified. The researcher should identify the situation(s) that will enable the research problem to be presented well. While doing this, it is necessary to determine whether there is a need to study more than one situation, which situations are suitable for the research problem, what level of accessibility the researcher can be to these situations, and the situation or situations that he thinks can work best, considering time and financial resources.

Selection of Individuals to Participate in the Research

According to the situation or situations determined by the researcher, who will be involved in the research should be determined by determining who is relevant to the subject at the place of study.

Collection of Data and Association of Collected Data with Sub-Problems

By identifying sub-problems, the researcher avoids the collection of data that is not relevant to the research. Because the data collection method(s) are determined by considering the sub-problems. While collecting data; It is necessary to collect data from more than one source, to clearly state how the data was obtained, and to establish a regular database. These collected data are correlated with each other at various stages so that the researcher can explain how he reached the results.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data obtained in the research should be organized by adhering to the sub-problems created, and the data that are not related to the sub-problems should be excluded from the analysis and interpretation process. In addition, it should be noted whether the results are consistent with the literature and previous studies.

Preparation of the Report on the Case Study Method

After the analysis of the data is completed, the study should be prepared as a report. There are no specific form requirements for the case study method. However, answers should be given to the main problems and sub-problems with broad and satisfactory explanations and descriptions, and these should be included in the research report.

4 CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Unigross Case Study

As the case study for this research has been selected the Italian Chain store Unigross, Unigross is an Italian company which, with over 150 points of sale, and represents the first chain of stores in Italy dedicated to home textiles and underwear for the whole family. Born from the entrepreneurial vision of its founder Giuseppe Massullo, with over 30 years of history it offers its customers the important Italian brands of underwear and home textiles. To date Unigross has 150 stores and affiliates throughout Italy. In 2013 the company decided to expand its activities beyond Italian market and they entered the Albanian Market by opening stores at ETC (European Trade Center Gallery), Kristal, Concord, and Casa Italia shopping centers, and in the city of Fier. Unigross was selling to the final customer and as a wholesaler to other companies. One of the main collaboration was with Conad Albania. The last Unigross physical store closed in 28 February 2021 due to outstanding affect from the Pandemic due to high cost and another business model began to be implemented. Currently speaking, Unigross sells online, and is a wholesaler by serving to more than 20 businesses.

It has been decided to choose this company as the researcher has worked as external marketing consultant from September 2015 until October 2020, and later as General Manager of these stores from 7 November 2020 until 26 August 2021 (Appendix 1: NBC REGISTRATION). From that period to the date, the researcher is the representative of the owner of the company `de facto` and has the opportunity to access every possible information on the company.

Data collection concrete steps:

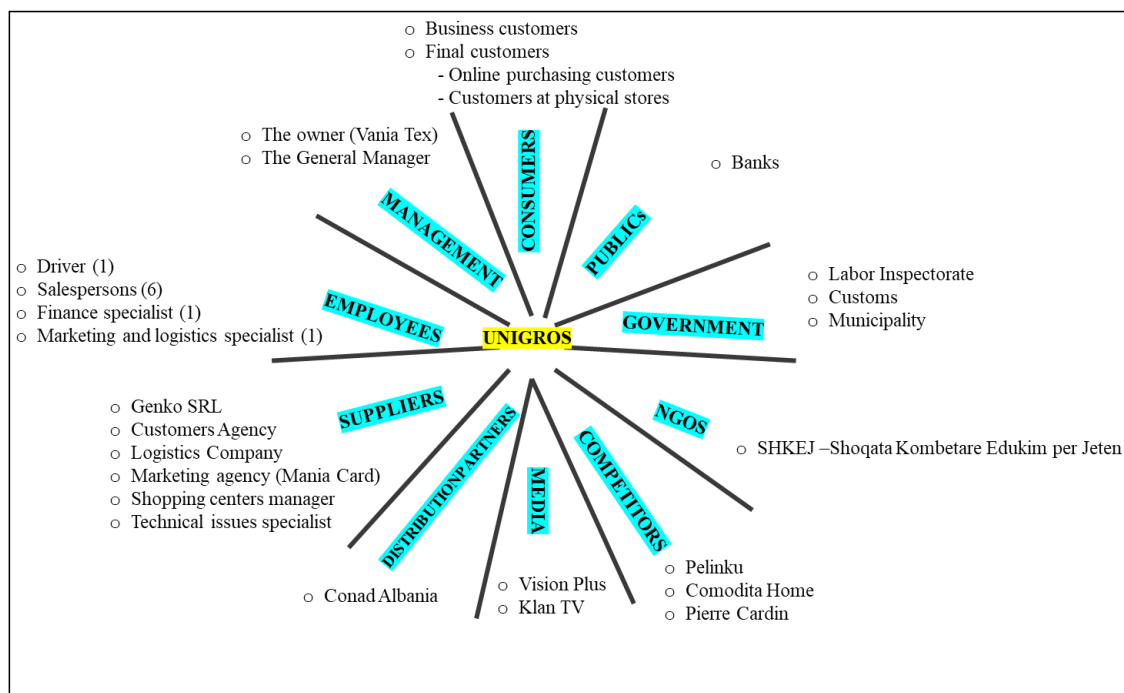
It has been decided to choose this company as the researcher has worked as external marketing consultant. In order to fulfill the data collection process, it has been undertaken the following steps:

- Defining the relevant actors from which to collect data

Given the nature of the research, the population includes a wide range of actors (stakeholders) which must be included in the research.

Figure 16 shows the actors and a set of interactions surrounding the company. Unigross is surrounded and collaborates mainly with actors indicated in the figure. These actors at the same time are the sample to be investigated. For each of them has been prepared separate interview instrument, in accordance with the stated research question and research borders that derive from the literature.

Figure 16: Actors Surrounding Unigross Albania



Source: Elaboration of the author.

- Defining the number for each actor

Another concrete step in data collection process was to define the number of each group to be included. Some group of actors had indefinite number (i.e. customers) and some groups of actors had specific number (i.e. ownership; salesforce). For this decision the main criteria has been the reachability and the readiness of the actors to share the information. Some actors (i.e. municipality) refused to share any information on the company unless we presented any evidence including verbal permission from the ownership.

- Defining the people to participate

As previously mentioned, the definite number of the actors was related to the readiness actors had in participating. For this reason, we had informal meetings prior to the interview in order to understand them the importance of their information for the research. The participants were defined based on these pre-communication face to face or mobile phone. The only group that was directly included in the interview without any pre-communication was the group of customers. We approached the customers and kindly asked them to participate in our research. In general the sense was that loyal customers were interested in sharing their remarks for Unigross Albania.

- Conduct the interviews.

Some interviews were in Albanian and some interviews were in Italian. The relevant appendix includes the set of the notes for each interviewer. The interviews were conducted face to face. The researcher met with the participants and the average duration of the interview was 8-10 minutes. One important characteristic of the interviews was the fact that participants did not want to spend much time. Rather they were specific to the questions.

Determining Interview Questions

Since the research question determines the natural limits of the research, it also directs the questions to be asked in the field. Therefore, the first stage of the research process was the determination of the interview questions. At this stage, it is as important as what questions to ask and which questions to leave out. Because, in case studies, determining where the boundaries of the research begin and end (Punch, 2011: 150) is an important issue. In this respect, the researcher should be able to draw a limit where he can deal with the case with its own context and integrity but focus on a specific subject. Because it is not possible to examine a case study in all its dimensions. Care was taken to design the interview questions to serve this purpose.

The research questions for this study are two:

1. How is brand value co-created among actors within an ecosystem?
2. How is brand value co-evaluated among actors within an ecosystem?

As it already has been stated each actor has its own expectation from the brand, and we the data collection tool has based on four similar categories for value co-creation, and value co-evaluation that are:

Brand Value Co-creation

- *Can you define your own surrounding context? (Contextual awareness)*
- *What you expect and do you benefit from the brand? (Service beneficiary)*
- *What do you offer to the brand and other actors? (Operant resources)*
- *What is the relationship between you, the brand, and other actors (relationships)*

Brand Value Co-evaluation

- *What are the necessary resources to evaluate the brand? (Personal evaluation perspective)*
- *How you evaluate the brand? (Dyadic relationship evaluation perspective)*
- *Do other actors influence your evaluation on the brand? (Actor-perspective evaluation)*
- *Does the context influence your evaluation on the brand? (Ecosystem-perspective evaluation)*

From each category there have been derived one questions and have been used in the interviews with the actors (Table 8).

Table 8: Interview Instrument and Interviewers

Actor	Sample	Details	Brand Value Co-creation	Brand Value Co-evaluation
Management	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Claudio Pavone, Owner of Vania Tex and BizAl shpk ○ Ms. Olivia Haka, General Manager of BizAl 	What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?	How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?
			What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?	What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?
			What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?	(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?
			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
Employees	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shpetim Kurtari, Driver ○ Naile Zenelaj, 	What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?	How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?
			What are the main issues, problems and	What is important for you while evaluating

		<p>salesperson</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bana Kamberi, Salesperson ○ Erlinda Haka, Salesperson ○ Klajda Allushi, Salesperson ○ Xhemile Sallufi, Salesperson ○ Valbona Ejlli, Salesperson ○ Klement mersini, Finance specialist ○ Geri Haxhiu, Marketing specialist 	<p>expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?</p>	<p>the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?</p>	<p>(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross</p>	<p>How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?</p>
Supplier	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Giuseppe Masullo, general manager of 	<p>What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?</p>	<p>How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?</p>

		<p>Genko Srl</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Edmons Pepa, TNT customs agency ○ Xhimi Kryemadhi, Logistics ○ Felix Shabani, general manager of Mania Card ○ Besmir Gjikondi, general manager of Concord Center 	<p>What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?</p>	<p>What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?</p>	<p>(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross</p>	<p>How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?</p>
Distribution partners	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Anduela Mezini, key account manager 	<p>What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?</p>	<p>How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?</p>	<p>What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What skills that you require in order to</p>	<p>(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news,</p>

			interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?	other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?
			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
Media	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Xhuliano Peza, media specialist at Vizion Plus ○ Demirel Sheta, media specialist at TV KLAN 	What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?	How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?
			What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?	What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?
			What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?	(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?
			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
Competitors	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Erban Pelinku, 	What is the type of the interaction you have	How to you evaluate (the element that you

		owner of Pelinku	with the brand Unigross?	need) the brand Unigross?
		○ Sadri Rrukaj, manager at Comodita Home	What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?	What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?
		○ Gazmir Paja, manager at Pierre Cardin	What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?	(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?
			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
NGOs	1	○ Hergert Koroveshi, Manager at SHKEJ	What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?	How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?
			What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?	What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?
			What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or	(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence

			organizations surrounding the brand?	your view on the brand Unigross?
			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
Government	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ardit stafa, Tax inspectorate ○ Enio Celiku, Customs 	What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?	How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?
			What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?	What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?
			What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?	(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?
			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
Public	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Feride Mustafa, BKT 	What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?	How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Silvia Cangu, Intesa San Paolo 	<p>What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?</p>	<p>What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?</p>	<p>(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross</p>	<p>How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?</p>
Customers	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ N/A 	<p>What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?</p>	<p>How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?</p>	<p>What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?</p>
			<p>What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?</p>	<p>(Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?</p>

			What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross	How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?
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4.2 Data Collection and Coding

In this research the interview technique, which is a collection technique, was used. In-depth interview technique is preferred on research issues where opinions are important. (Baş and Akturan, 2017: 113). Interview is expressed as the collection of data from relevant people within the framework of the questions sought in the research, and the interview is a very flexible research tool (Büyüköztürk v., 2021). The interview technique is also understanding research problem from the interviewer's perspective and how they got that perspective. Unlike surveys, the interview method; in-depth knowledge, non-verbal certain strengths such as detection of behaviors, response rate, control over the environment, completeness and flexibility. There are aspects of it (as cited in Baily, Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013: 151). It also provides an opportunity to reach new ideas and expand the subject during the meeting (Merriam, 2018: 88). The process of planning and realizing the interview method consisted of four steps. This process started with the determination of the research question. Later on, the interview forms were created. As the third step the interviewers were defined. Lastly, the interviews took place. It was stated that the identities and views of the participants would be kept confidential. To ensure the internal validity of the interview form we have conducted the steps which have been described above. Since the characteristics of the case study include using various data sources (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008; Yin, 2003) to achieve the research purpose, the researcher took care to reach various sources that would provide data richness. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2008) pointed out that a number of qualitative data collection methods such as participant observation, non-participant observation, interview, document review and archive records can be used in such studies. Data diversity is an important element in ensuring the reliability of the research. The interviews were conducted between 01 January 2021 and 31 December 2021. As a research method, in-depth interview technique, which is one of the most important data collection methods in qualitative research, which defends the claim that the depth and originality of knowledge is important rather than generalizations (Baltacı, 2019). Case studies are not limited to a single data source, and well-designed case studies benefit from multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2017). For this reason, the discourses of the participants were used as the primary data source of the research, notes were taken in these interviews as the participants were not providing the consent to be recorded due to privacy concerns. Thanks to this method, it becomes possible to collect and analyze official and/or private data on a regular basis for this case study as it

is very effective the use of the data (Zerenler, 2020). As Table 9 indicates, in the framework of this study 48 interviews were conducted. The obtained information had to be translated into English from Albanian, and from Italian. All interview were made face to face at the office of General Manager of Unigross, in state institutions offices, and one of them was conducted in Italy (the meeting with Mr. Giuseppe Masullo, an Italian Entrepreneur, the owner of Genko Srl and 150 Unigross stores in Italy-most stores owned as a property by Mr. Masullo- whose total market value according to Mr. Masullo is estimated to be 1,2 billion EUR). The researcher of this study visited Italy and on June 18, 2022 in Vinchiatturo – HQ of Genko Srl- the meeting took place.

One of the main challenges was to translate to English all 48 interviews. The good level of knowledge of English and Italian of the author was the main source of advantage. Abundant information later had to be coded.

Data collection is followed by data coding. Kuş (2006) defined the code, which he defined as the abbreviation of the category name, as a concept that combines a set of data or observations with common features. In this context, coding is the process of assigning a piece of text that is thought to exemplify an idea or concept. This process can be done through computer programs, or it can be done manually by the researcher himself. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2008) similarly defined coding as the process of assigning a name/concept to the words, sentences or paragraphs of the data. Schmidt (2004) emphasizes the importance of coding in the analysis of interviews. Coding makes it easy to classify data into small meaningful pieces and then compare these pieces, making it easy to both reveal the relationships between data pieces and conceptualize them. The process he proposes for this type of research has several steps. At first, the deciphered material is read over and over. Thus, it is ensured that the researcher penetrates the text in general and relates the research question to the text. Schmidt (2004) proposes to outline the analytical categories, in other words, the codes. Based on this suggestion, in this study, the researcher took advantage of this by creating a draft before starting the coding. While creating the draft code list, care was taken to choose the repetitive concepts as code names in all examples. In other words, while the draft code list was being prepared, not only the concepts in the strategic management literature were contented, but the guidance of the text was allowed. Thus, it is aimed to reveal the original situation that will emerge from the unique context of the business. In the third step of the process, Schmidt (2004) suggests coding the material and then mapping it. In the last stage, there is a detailed interpretation of the information.

The coding process was carried out within the framework of the basic questions of the research. The codes, which were obtained to bring together similar data within the framework of certain concepts, aimed to reflect the meaning in the best way, and which were created based on direct data, and which are suitable for the characteristics of the research data, are listed. The code list created for the organization of qualitative data has been categorized and classified under certain themes. As Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) stated, coding the collected data and classifying them according to these codes is not enough, it is necessary to find themes that can collect the codes under certain categories, based on the codes that have emerged. It was aimed to find the aspects, similarities and differences were determined. In the second stage, the data collected through thematic coding process were categorized through codes. Some of the themes in the research were predetermined according to the theoretical framework, and some were extracted from the researcher's chain reasoning (Sığrı, 2021). Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016) define two principles that should be considered while making thematic coding; refers to the principles of internal consistency and external consistency. Within the scope of these principles, it was aimed that the data revealed in this research constitute a meaningful whole and attention was paid to the fact that the emerging themes could explain the data obtained in the research in a meaningful way.

After the thematic coding, which was carried out after the detailed coding process, the stage of organizing and defining the codes and themes was carried out. The data under the themes are defined and presented in a way that shows their relations with each other according to the theme.

In addition, Silverman (2018: 107) states that taking notes during the research and the practice of keeping a diary for the researcher to gain self-awareness.

After the coding process in qualitative research, there is a need to specify the relationships between these codes with more abstract and general concepts. New units created to meet this need are called categories or themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008). For example, in the case studies, how the product innovation is made is marked with the innovation code, while this code can be included in the growth theme, which is more abstract and inclusive than itself. While determining the themes, the dual framework, which constitutes the theoretical background of the study, was used. On this basis, themes/categories were formed based on defining:

- Elements which contribute to brand co-creation

- Elements which contribute to brand value co-evaluation

Coding with NVIVO

In this section we do provide a detailed explanation of how we have coded the data by using the NVIVO package.

At first, we thoroughly reviewed the gathered data to familiarize ourselves with the data that we will work with. This step gave an overview of the content and helped to identify potential themes or patterns.

Next, we have attempted to create a coding structure that has guided our analysis. This coding structure has been based on our research questions, and emerging themes from the data. We have created a list of codes to better organize the data.

The coding structure has been tailored according to the specific research objectives and some coding structures for this research include thematic and conceptual coding. By using this adaptable and flexible coding structure we have created our own specific framework for this research. For this we have based our work on Lyn Richards which has made significant contributions to the understanding and application of coding in NVivo. One of her notable works is the book titled `Handling Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide` (2014) provides practical guidance on various aspects of qualitative data analysis, including coding strategies and techniques using NVivo. It offers step-by-step instructions and examples to help researchers effectively code and analyze their qualitative data using NVivo.

After importing the data into NVivo we have organized it and properly labeled for easy navigation. Afterwards we started coding by selecting a segment of data, such as a paragraph or a sentence. We have assigned a code or category to that segment based on its content or meaning. To some places we have applied multiple coding as the content was suitable for more than one coding category.

Thanks to coding queries we have examined relationships between codes or identify patterns across different sources. This enabled us to group relevant codes under relevant themes.

Afterwards we reorganized the codes, merged similar codes, or created new codes as we gained a deeper understanding of the data.

Table 9: Codes generated from collected data

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	MAIN THEME	SUB THEME WITHIN MAIN THEME	CODES WITHIN THE SUB THEME AND MAIN THEME	Items No
BRAND VALUE CO - CREATION	CONTEXT	DYNAMIC	Nowadays the environment is dynamic.	6
			Competition is tough.	11
			Customers have expectations.	12
			The brand cannot do whatever they want in the market.	9
			Before every move the brand should consider others too.	8
		DIGITAL	Online purchase process should be simplified.	4
			Payment methods must be augmented	6
			There should be advanced system to manage the data of customers and billing system	7
			Inventory system is crucial to keep in track with needs of customers.	9
	SOLUTION	VALUE-IN-USE	The brand is good if it helps me.	11
			Other competitors are always an alternative if I don't find what I want.	12
			The brand is not widespread.	25
	LOYALTY	REPUTATION	Good quality for the price.	5
			Medium range or low.	4
			Locations at non-convenient	6

			places.		
		BEHAVIOR	Taxes payment are problematic.	7	
			I do not get informed when new goods arrive despite, they have my information	8	
			Good store and correct brand	6	
			I discuss with others and I follow their activities	5	
		TRANSPARENCY	I don't know how discounts occur, when they occur and why salesperson change often.	7	
			I don't find the brand honest.	9	
			Sometimes I feel insecure when I interact with the brand.	7	
	PRESENCE	ADVERTISING	I don't like their advertisement. I do not watch them.	9	
			The brand does not have any ad.	4	
		SOCIAL MEDIA	I follow the brand, and I buy from social media platforms.	4	
			I see many times in sponsored content.	5	
			I share my feedback.	9	
			COMMUNICATION	The brand does not properly communicate with the actors surrounding.	7
BRAND VALUE CO-EVALUATION	FEELINGS	POSITIVE ASSOCIATION	I like the brand.	6	
			I consider important for my environment.	7	

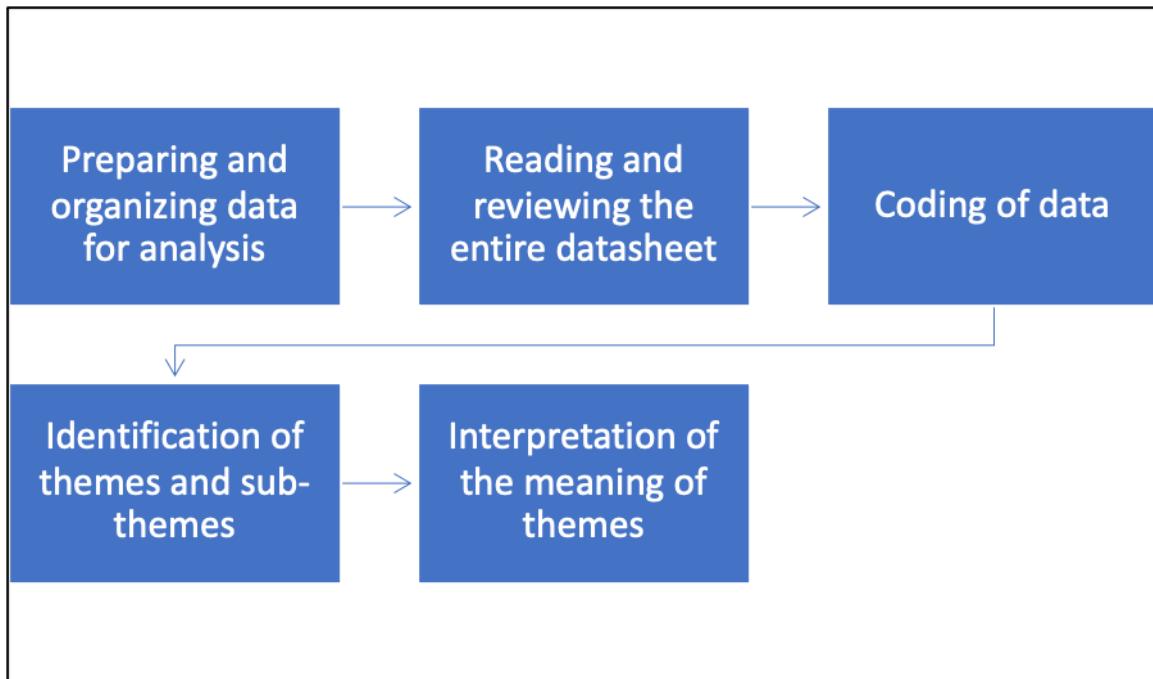
		NEUTRAL	It is just a random store.	8
			I don't have an opinion.	11
		IMPACT	The brand influences my choices.	14
			The brand is very narrowly known and does not have powerful impact.	11
	EXPERIENCE	GOOD EXPERIENCE	They have excellent people and products.	10
			The brand is Italian.	4
		BAD EXPERIENCE	They have awful people and products.	9
			The brand is just a collection of useless items.	8
			I had problems with the purchasing.	7
		NO EXPERIENCE OCCURRING	I go, I buy, I get out.	6
			I did not experience any emotional aspect.	8
			The brand is weak in catching my attention.	4
			No one speaks about it so I don't find influential.	7
		WORD OF MOUTH	SHARING THOUGHTS	I share my experience .
	I consider what others say about the brand.			9
	I share feedback.			7
	I complain in every instance if I do not get what belongs to me from the brand.			8
	INFLUENCED BY OTHERS		I rely on others` experiences.	6
			I rely on social media and marketing presence.	7

4.3 Data Analysis

As stated above, the data obtained was coded and themes based on the relationships between these codes were defined. The coding process was done after all the data was gathered in one place and read many times. However, the coding process was done with the support of a computer program to map the coded data (Nvivo 10 package program). Before proceeding to the presentation of the research, it is useful to clarify a subject related to the analysis process (Punch, 2011). It is a process that requires to undergo through some steps. The steps for data collection and coding that have been completed so far are in alignment with literature (See Figure 17). In this section, we analyze the data according to the research questions and present these to the reader. It is important to offer the logical flow of analyzing the data. The whole set of data has been combined together. It means that the difference among other actors has been neutralized as all data set entered in one single pot. Different themes and subthemes emerged. Besides, there were many items that were categorized under these themes. At the end of data analysis, we offer a framework of the main elements that contribute to the brand value co-creation and brand value co-evaluation. The data gathered justified fully what the literature suggested so far. It was obvious that actors interacted with each other. Interestingly sometimes an actor was the holder of different roles. For instance, one state authority was at the same time aware of the brand as he was a consumer. Some of the consumers had the chance to get to know the brand from other experiences. It was an interrelated and systemic relationship.

After identifying the themes, and codes we analyze our data. Rather than considering from dyadic perspective of brand with the relevant actors as Temporal (2010) did by defining the expectation of stakeholders from the brand; rather we take a systemic approach and focus on the elements that were common to all actors to aid brand value co-creation, and brand value co-evaluation.

Figure 17: **The process for data analysis**



Source: Adapted from Creswell, 2016: 197

It was found at the end of analysis that Context, Solution, Loyalty and Presence affect brand value co-creation. At first, the actors stated the importance of the **context**. According to them today's context is highly dynamic and digitalized. They stated the importance of technology incorporation in daily activities as essential for the brand to be able to adapt to this context. They stated the importance of constantly monitoring the moves of competitors, trends, and legal requirements. For instance, customers' activities require the company to be aware of Combined Nomenclature of Goods for 2022, a 820 pages document found at the website link: <https://dogana.gov.al/dokument/3841/nomenklatura-2022>. This document contains every single information that a company that imports must know. Being aware of the applying rates and other specifics assist Unigross to be efficient in making orders of goods. The highly dynamic context was represented by these codes:

DYNAMIC SUB-THEME

- Nowadays the environment is dynamic (6 times)
- Competition is tough (11)
- Customers have expectations (12)

- The brand cannot do whatever they want in the market (9)
- Before every move the brand should consider others too (8)

Another subtheme of the Context was, Digital. The actors acknowledged the importance of digitalization as a good antecedent for the increase of brand value. Managers considered digitalization as a source of competitive advantage, and as a critical instrument to maintain customer relationships. A customer relationship management database would be highly beneficiary. On the other hand, customers do liked when competitors of Unigross facilitated Online transactions and online purchasing process. State authorities considered digitalization as incremental for inventory management and billing which turned out to be important for transparency. The digital subtheme was represented by these codes:

DIGITAL SUB-THEME

- Online purchase process should be simplified (4)
- Payment methods must be augmented (6)
- There should be advanced system to manage the data of customers and billing system (7)

Secondly, the actors stated the importance of the **solution**. Interestingly the data analysis shows that this main theme has been represented by one sub-theme only which was value-in-use. The actors stated that brand is good only if can help them in finding a solution, if it can offer what other actors don't, and if it is available. It might seem as a fully dyadic relationship however it is not at all. `Doing good` is subjective and actors ere aware that they had to wait for the whole process in order to define whether it was really doing good or not. For instance, a customer purchased some underwear, and they considered as the best deal. However, when other customers shared other experiences with them, or when they saw discounts and offers from the competitors, or when the staff did not behave properly... they had a bitter taste. Therefore, value-in-use was not considered only as an instant moment but a longing one. The Value-in-use subtheme was represented by these codes:

VALUE-IN-USE SUB-THEME

- The brand is good if it helps me (11)
- Other competitors are always an alternative if I don't find what I want (12)

- The brand is not widespread (25)

The third theme under which brand value co-creation took place was **Loyalty**. The first sub-theme was reputation. The actors state the importance of economic advantages of the brand as highly influential for its reputation. Reputation according to the actors was related to the presence of the brand too. Despite online activities the physical store location did not offer opportunities for a good reputation as they were located in peripheral areas of the city. Some actors stated that reputation was incremental to turn into loyal customers and value the brand. Interestingly we found out that some employees had some bad days to the fact that was taking a long time to get to work. This reflected the interaction with customers both at stores and online. Moreover, in relation to this, the shopping centers argued that some time the stores were opened late than the official operation hour stated in the contract. The Reputation subtheme was represented by these codes:

REPUTATION SUB-THEME

- Good quality for the price (5)
- Medium range or low (5)
- Locations at non-convenient places (6)

Another sub-theme that defined loyalty from the perspective of the actors was Behavior. Management and State authorities found problematic the delays in paying municipality taxes or health insurances. This affected employees and as a turn the whole reputation of the brand. Some main aspects of the behavior was the fact that customers did not receive a feedback to their claims, needs or desires. They shared with the staff their personal information in order to get informed once new products arrive but this was not occurring. As a result, customers were angry to the staff, and were telling this to other competitors` staff. Some of them filed complains at the shopping centers help desks. The behavior subtheme was represented by these codes:

BEHAVIOR SUB-THEME

- Taxes payment are problematic (7)
- I do not get informed when new goods arrive despite, they have my information (8)
- Good store and correct brand (6)
- I discuss with others and I follow their activities (5)

Another subtheme was transparency. Transparency has been considered essential from actors in brand value. The actors did not embrace the fact that staff (salespersons) were changing frequently. This is a concern expressed from the management, shopping centers authorities, customers, the financial consultant. Some actors defined the brand as a non-honest one. The customs directorate stated that every time according to their records the brand had some payment to conduct. The state authorities were totally against any delay in paying taxes and they judged the brand very fair. Sometimes customers stated that they were not feeling secure when interacting with the brand. One of the main distribution partners stated that they were experiencing delays in receiving goods from the company whereas the main supplier Genko stated the amount of the debt collected from 2013. The transparency subtheme was represented by these codes:

TRANSPARENCY SUB-THEME

- I don't know how discounts occur, when they occur and why salesperson change often (7)
- I don't find the brand honest (9)
- Sometimes I feel insecure when I interact with the brand (7)

The last theme of brand value co-creation was **presence**. Presence was defined from the actors as one of the main pillars that ensures a brand's existence. This main theme has been followed by some subthemes. The first one is advertising. Advertising subtheme was associated with the weak marketing presence of the brand. In fact many actors stated that as customers they do not really know the brand. On the other hand, customers stated that they have discovered the brand accidentally or by word of mouth. Weak presence in national media and sponsored content on social media showed the weak points of the brand and its low recognition. The Advertising subtheme was represented by these codes:

ADVERTISING SUB-THEME

- I don't like their advertisement. I do not watch them (9)
- The brand does not have any ad (4)

The other subtheme of presence was social media. Social media in fact revealed that actors do see it as a way to get informed, to buy, and to share feedback. On contrary to what has been stated above; the actors in general stated that the brand is present in the digital

medium and this is something that makes the brand to be recognized and is valuable. The social media subtheme was represented by these codes:

SOCIAL MEDIA SUB-THEME

- I follow the brand, and I buy from social media platforms (4)
- I see many times in sponsored content (5)
- I share my feedback (9)

Lastly, the communication subtheme revealed different information and was considered as the last subtheme of presence. In general, the actors complained on the weak communication culture of the brand. Let it be for official purposes, communicative messages or discussion with clients it was observed a very weak communication culture. This for sure influenced negatively on many aspects of the brand. According to the actors this deteriorated the reputation of the brand and its value. The communication subtheme was represented by this code:

COMMUNICATION SUB-THEME

- The brand does not properly communicate with the actors surrounding (7)

These findings defined the main themes that contribute to brand value co-creation. In the findings interpretation section, we offer the model how these interactions occur.

Now we focus on analyzing the data obtained for the second research question of this study. According to the data analysis from NVivo 10, 49 codes emerged. These codes were considered to belong to 17 subthemes which at the end were separated into 7 main themes. Brand value co-evaluation is the novelty that this research aimed to bring. Despite the support that came from the literature it was required to test it among actors. As a result the followings were obtained.

It was found at the end of analysis that Feelings, Experience, and Word of Mouth affect brand value co-evaluation. At first, the actors stated the importance of the **feelings**. The actors stated the importance of positive association as essential to generate feelings. The first subtheme was Positive Association. The actors despite their views considered the brand as important for them and at the end they stated that they liked it. The positive association subtheme was represented by these codes:

POSITIVE ASSOCIATION SUB-THEME

- I like the brand (6)
- I consider important for my environment (7)

Not opposite but still very different subtheme emerged from the analysis the data. According to neutral subtheme the actors considered the brand as one of the many and they stated that they did not bear a specific meaning of did not have a specific idea.

NUTRAL ASSOCIATION SUB-THEME

- It is just a random store (8)
- I don't have an opinion (11)

The third subtheme that emerged within feelings was the Impact subtheme. Actors stated that the brand managed to influence their choices either via social media or sales persons. Another important influential factor were the discounts. Some actors stated they love the brand because of the continuous discounts. Managers on the other hand, stated the importance of controlled discounts whereas the shopping centers managers concluded that the center itself programs discounts so time by time they kindly ask the brand to reconsider wisely the discounts. As it can be seen, while some actors love the specific action of the brand some other actors find it non-appropriate. The impact subtheme was represented by these codes:

IMPACT SUB-THEME

- The brand influences my choices (14)
- The brand is very narrowly known and does not have powerful impact (11)

The next theme that emerged from data analysis and was considered influential in brand value co-creation is **Experience**. Interestingly this research indicated the three states of experience of actors. Some of them had good experience whereas some of them not very pleasant. Some actors just did not involve any emotional affection at all and according to them no experience occurred at all. For the good experience subtheme some actors were influenced by the country origin of the brand. Being Italian to them was enough to be food brand. The interpersonal relations and actions of actors with some other actors resulted in a good experience creation. The good experience subtheme was represented by these codes:

GOOD EXPERIENCE SUB-THEME

- They have excellent people and products (10)

- The brand is Italian (4)

Some actors stated the opposite. They did not find valuable at all the interaction with this brand and this influenced their systemic view towards the brand. The bad experience subtheme was represented by these codes:

BAD EXPERIENCE SUB-THEME

- They have awful people and products (8)
- The brand is just a collection of useless items (8)
- I had problems with the purchasing (7)

Some actors just do not consider the experience artifact at all. Nevertheless, non-occurring experience was to the disadvantage of the brand as it did not generate a positive judgement. Every judgement that is not positive is a disadvantage for the brand. The no experience occurring subtheme was represented by these codes:

NO EXPERIENCE OCCURRING SUB-THEME

- I go, I buy, I get out (6)
- I did not experience any emotional aspect (8)
- The brand is weak in catching my attention (4)
- No one speaks about it so I don't find influential (7)

Lastly, the third main theme that influenced brand value co-evaluation is **Word of Mouth**. The potential effect of word of mouth is widely known and accepted in marketing however it turned out that word of mouth is an incremental factor in brand evaluation too. Actors to interact with each other via in the traditional way or via social platforms. It does not matter whether word of mouth occurs in person, or it is e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) still it is a powerful element. This main theme included two sub-themes. The first one is the sharing thoughts subtheme. The actors stated that they share their experiences with others and non-necessary they share as it was. Rather they tend to re-create the experience according to their own context and interest. This indicates that it is not important to just share the experience but also the way how the actors perceive it. Many actors stated that they discuss with others if they had to interact with the brand. Before working, before any financial operation or before any purchase the actors do rely on other's experiences. Constantly the actors stated that they share feedback with the brand or if it is necessary with

other actors surrounding the brand too. Some actors considered that they go until the end to every problematic interaction they have with brands, not only Unigross in particular. The sharing thoughts subtheme was represented by these codes:

SHARING THOUGHTS SUB-THEME

- I share my experience (8)
- I consider what others say about the brand (9)
- I share feedback (7)
- I complain in every instance if I do not get what belongs to me from the brand (8)

Another subtheme that emerged during data analysis is Influenced by others subtheme. This is the real proof that today`s context is highly dependent on the view of every single actor that surrounds a brand. The interviewed actors stated that they rely on what they hear, read, or see on social media. They stated that marketing presence of the brand in the market is sign of strength, transparency and success. The influenced by others subtheme was represented by these codes:

INFLUENCED BY OTHERS SUB-THEME

- I rely on others` experiences (6)
- I rely on social media and marketing presence (7)

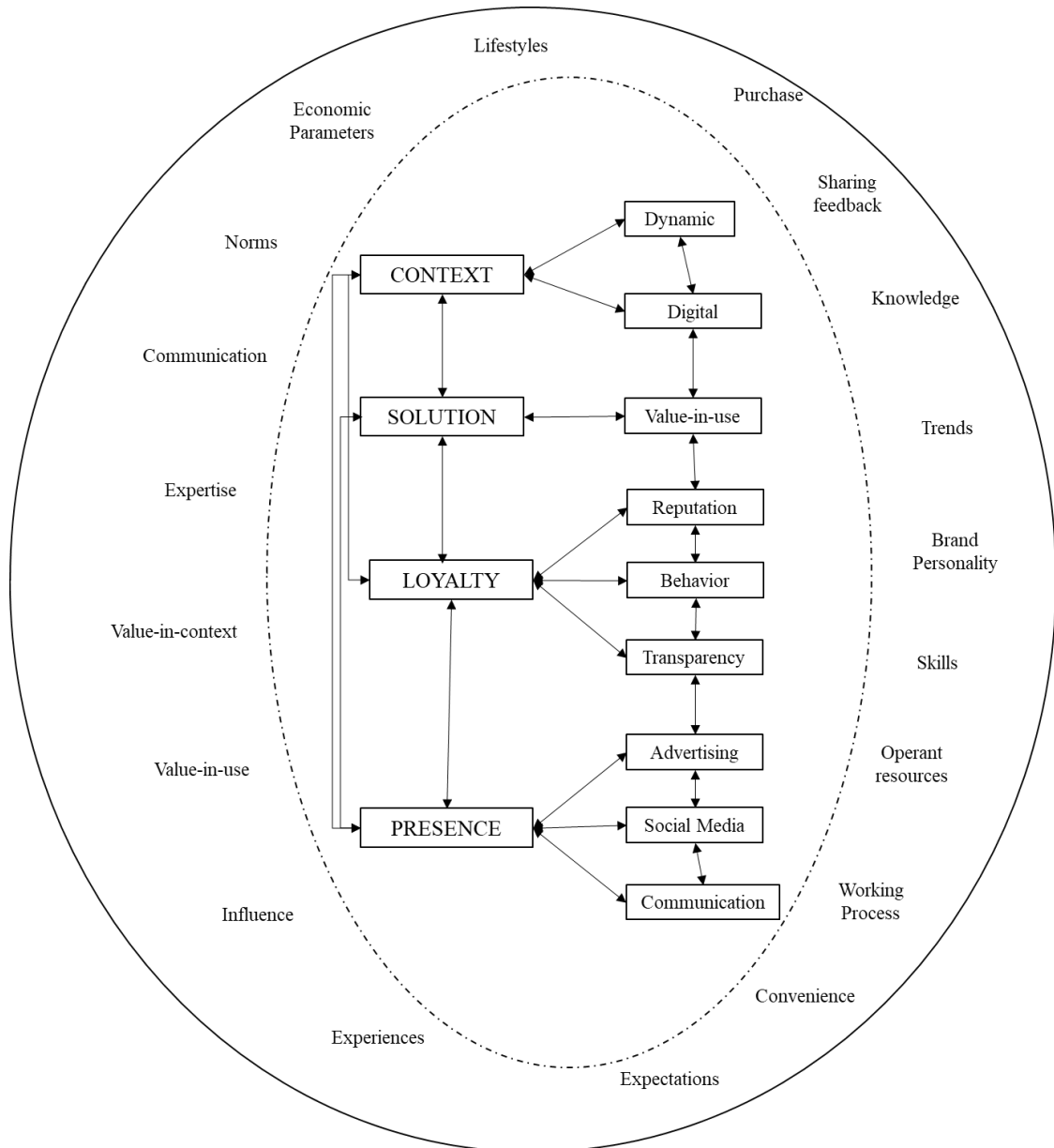
5 CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

5.1 Findings Interpretation

Our main findings answer the research questions. These findings do support the evidence from literature that brand is co-created. Furthermore, according to our findings, the evaluation of value is a complex process that takes place under the interaction of all actors. These findings indicate that brand value is co-created, and brand value is co-evaluated among actors that interact with each other within a given context in a service ecosystem. Our first research question was: How is brand value co-created among actors within an ecosystem? These findings offer a systemic view on the elements that enable co-creation of brand value. Figure 18 shows the interaction elements that take place within the ecosystem, and the elements that assist in brand value co-creation.

As our findings indicated, and as figure 18 shows, the brand value is co-created among the interaction that actors (different groups of stakeholders) have with each other. In order for the brand value to be co-created is essential the context, offering solutions, fostering loyalty and being loyal, and digital presence. The brand is not exclusively created by the company. It is shaped by actors and forces. Brand is co-created in a dynamic and digital context. The actors understand the pressure among them while making a purchase. The hypercompetitive context increased the stimuli that hit the actors. Nowadays we have much more advertising materials, tough competition, complex and detailed legal framework, interest groups for specific cases (i.e. environment protection, animal protection), changing workplaces and workforce, expectation for high profits. These are the main expectations that actors have from a brand, and a brand have to fulfill these expectations. Furthermore, the brand has to offer solutions that actors find relevant within their context. While for a customer the solution is `good products`, for the employees for instance the solution is `a good working environment` or for the management the solution is `high profits`.

Figure 18: How Brand Value is Co-created



Source: Author's elaboration

Therefore, the value-in-use that is offered by the brand is essential to determine the value of the brand in the eyes of the actors. Another aspect that came out of the findings is that brands should convey trust and should enable the creation of loyalty. Reputation of the brand which is backed up by the behaviors turned out to be essential in brand value co-creation. Another element that was considered crucial from the actors was transparency. All these elements are shaped by a set of other influencing elements. From our findings we reached the following list:

- Economic Parameters

- Norms
- Communication
- Expertise
- Value-in-context
- Value-in-use
- Value-in-use
- Experiences
- Expectations
- Convenience
- Working Process
- Operant resources
- Skills
- Brand Personality
- Trends
- Knowledge
- Sharing feedback
- Purchase
- Lifestyles

This long list of elements that shape interactions among actors was found to be crucial in brand value co-creation, and the same set of elements was found to be relevant also for brand value co-evaluation. Referring to the theoretical aspects that have been elaborated so far we see no surprise in these elements. All of them have been present in literature and having them among the findings of this study is a good backup. To conclude, in the effect of ecosystem forces interaction among actors are shaped and these interactions combine together to assist brand value co-creation.

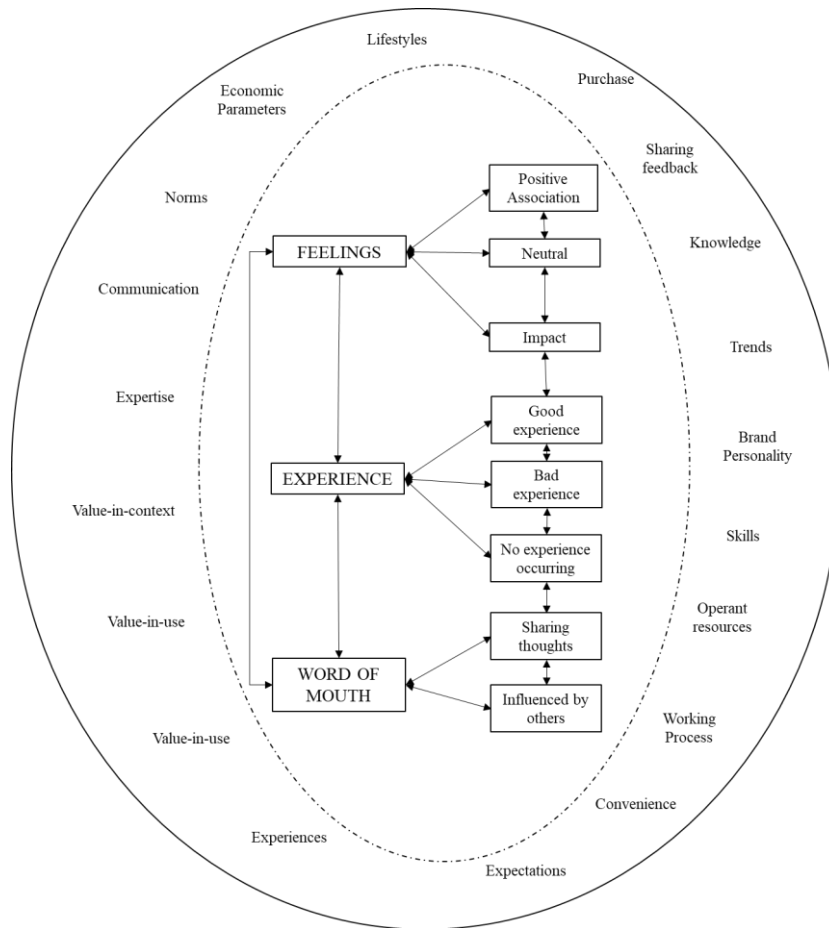
After answering the first research question and elaborating on the findings relevant to how brand value is co-created, we discuss the second research question.

The second research question of this study is concerned with the brand value evaluation. The main thesis is that brand value rather than valuated, it is co-evaluated. The finding of this study supported this thesis. Figure 19 indicates how brand value is co-created among the actors within an ecosystem.

As our findings indicated, and as figure 19 shows, the brand value is co-evaluated among the interaction that actors (different groups of stakeholders) have with each other. In order for the brand value to be co-evaluated some elements are essential. This study revealed that feelings, experience, and word of mouth were critical when evaluating the value of the brand. Each actor holds their own perspective on how the brand value is evaluated. Some actors had positive association with the brand and some other actors stated that they are influenced by the brand. Moreover, the actors stated that is important what they observe in long term rather than just one time interaction. In this regard some actors stated neutral feelings towards the brand. The experience that actors had with the brand was influential when defining the brand value. Different actors had different relationships with the brand. For instance, state authorities considered the brand as a weak one, holding negative reputation as they were passing the due date for some municipality taxes. Moreover, some actors such as suppliers were complaining because of the late payments from the brand. Employees on the other hand were very satisfied with work and conditions. Customers had positive and negative judgements and feedback but in overall the brand was valuable to them. The owners of the company on the other hand were worried about the financial performance due to the difficult times caused by Covid 19 pandemic. So, the basic question that rises on brand value is whether the brand is or not valuable? It is clear that brand value can not be evaluated only by one single actors. Rather it requires a systemic approach.

This study successfully proved that brand value is co-evaluated among different actors which interact and integrate resources with each other. These interactions take place under the influence of a long list of elements.

Figure 19: How Brand Value is Co-created



Source: Author`s elaboration

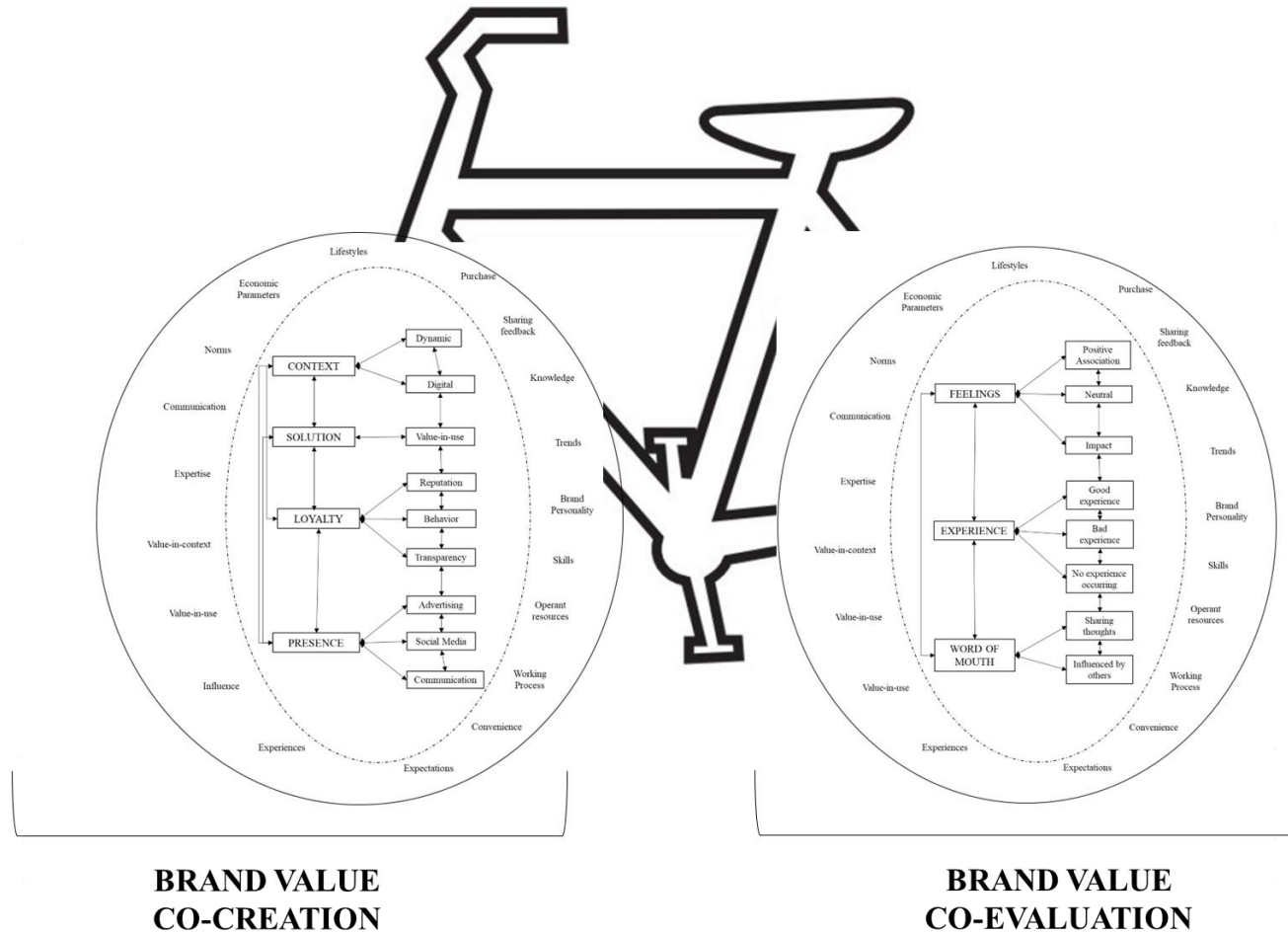
These elements are:

- Economic Parameters
- Norms
- Communication
- Expertise
- Value-in-context
- Value-in-use
- Value-in-use
- Experiences
- Expectations
- Convenience

- Working Process
- Operant resources
- Skills
- Brand Personality
- Trends
- Knowledge
- Sharing feedback
- Purchase
- Lifestyles

In the light of this information, we refine further the Service Dominant Logic Branding Bicycle by offering some insight on the interactions among actors. Figure 20 shows Service Dominant Branding Bicycle in action.

Figure 20: Service Dominant Logic Bicycle in Action



Source: Author's elaboration

6 CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Discussion

As our findings showed that brand value is co-created among the interaction that actors (different groups of stakeholders) have with each other. In order for the brand value to be co-created is essential the context, offering solutions, fostering loyalty and being loyal, and digital presence. The brand is not exclusively created by the company. It is shaped by actors and forces. Brand is co-created in a dynamic and digital context. The actors understand the pressure among them while making a purchase. The hypercompetitive context increased the stimuli that hit the actors. Nowadays we have much more advertising materials, tough competition, complex and detailed legal framework, interest groups for specific cases (i.e. environment protection, animal protection), changing workplaces and workforce, expectation for high profits. These are the main expectations that actors have from a brand, and a brand have to fulfill these expectations. Furthermore, the brand has to offer solutions that actors find relevant within their context. While for a customer the solution is `good products`, for the employees for instance the solution is `a good working environment` or for the management the solution is `high profits`.

This goes in alignment with what other authors have suggested in the literature. Brand can grow only if they are considered from a wide perspective that resembles to a holistic one (Kapferer, 2008, 269) as it is (Brand) an experience and a symbolic source that is integrated with other sources (Fyrberg and Juriado, 2009,422; Chandler and Vargo, 2011, 37). Brand is a resource that is determined within the context and is an interacting phenomenon (Gummeson, 2008a, 323) with emotional aspects (Sandstrom et al., 2008, 115) which serves as a communicator of value (Edvardsson et al., 2006, 231). Brand management requires multidimensional thinking (Heding et al., 2008, 4) and a holistic perspective (Riley et al., 2016, 521). The need to systemially consider the brand systemically (Keller, 2013, 260) is influenced by the culture and context affecting brand management nowadays (Heding et al., 2008, 25) and the importance of other actors for the brand (Kapferer, 2012, 133). Interaction between different actors co-create value of the brand (Kornberger, 2010,131, 144).

Also our findings indicated that brand value is co-evaluated among the interaction that actors (different groups of stakeholders) have with each other. In order for the brand value to be co-evaluated some elements are essential. This study revealed that feelings, experience, and word of mouth were critical when evaluating the value of the brand. Each

actor holds their own perspective on how the brand value is evaluated. Some actors had positive association with the brand and some other actors stated that they are influenced by the brand. Moreover, the actors stated that is important what they observe in long term rather than just one time interaction. In this regard some actors stated neutral feelings towards the brand. The experience that actors had with the brand was influential when defining the brand value. Different actors had different relationships with the brand. For instance, state authorities considered the brand as a weak one, holding negative reputation as they were passing the due date for some municipality taxes. Moreover, some actors such as suppliers were complaining because of the late payments from the brand. Employees on the other hand were very satisfied with work and conditions. Customers had positive and negative judgements and feedback but in overall the brand was valuable to them. The owners of the company on the other hand were worried about the financial performance due to the difficult times caused by Covid 19 pandemic. So, the basic question that rises on brand value is whether the brand is or not valuable? It is clear that brand value can not be evaluated only by one single actors. Rather it requires a systemic approach.

This study successfully proved that brand value is co-evaluated among different actors which interact and integrate resources with each other.

Brand value co-creation is consistent with the Foundational Premises of Service Dominant Logic (Merz et al., 2009, 335; FitzPatrick et al., 2013, 91). Brand is not unilateral anymore and other actors rather than customers and companies are involved (Nguyen et al., 2012; Vallaster and Von Wallpach, 2013, 1501).

The dynamic context in which brand is co-created requires to all actors` to interact with each other (Bhanja, and Saxena, 2022). In this perspective, across the ecosystem the interactions shape the perceptions and the judgement of every single actor (Vargo and Lusch, 2011, 186). Service Dominant Logic concepts that are the basis in value co-creation are Actors, Resources (and resource integration), Context, Service System, Experience, Generic actor, value co-creation (Wetter-Edman et., 2014, 108; Ekman et al., 2016, 54). The brand is in continuous engagement with other actors in the ecosystem (Webster and Lusch, 2013, 393). The brand is seen as co-created by the customer at first, and therefore one of the main actors that could evaluate brand value are the consumers themselves (Strandvik and Heinonen, 2013, 507; Wilden et al., 2017, 8).

In the light of the information shared above it is stated that findings of this study do support theoretical advancements, and contribute in enhancing it further.

6.2. Academic and Managerial Implications

In today's highly competitive and rapidly evolving business landscape, branding plays a crucial role in the success of any organization. The concept of branding has transformed significantly over the years, influenced by technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and the rise of digital platforms.

Modern consumers seek more than just products or services; they desire authentic connections with brands that align with their values. Purpose-driven branding has emerged as a dominant trend, where companies articulate their mission, values, and social impact initiatives to build meaningful relationships with their target audience. By conveying a clear purpose, brands can foster loyalty, differentiate themselves from competitors, and make a positive impact on society.

In the age of digitalization, brands must prioritize personalized experiences to engage customers effectively. Leveraging data analytics and AI technologies, businesses can gather valuable insights to tailor their marketing efforts, content, and offerings to individual preferences. By understanding customers' needs and delivering personalized experiences across various touchpoints, brands can enhance customer satisfaction, drive loyalty, and ultimately increase revenue.

Transparency has become a critical element in modern branding. Customers expect open and honest communication from brands, demanding transparency regarding product sourcing, manufacturing processes, and business practices. By establishing trust through authentic storytelling and open dialogue, brands can create stronger connections with consumers and foster long-term loyalty.

The digital era has reshaped the branding landscape, requiring businesses to have a strong online presence. Social media, websites, mobile apps, and e-commerce platforms have become integral channels for brand building, customer engagement, and sales. Brands must invest in creating compelling digital experiences, leveraging social media marketing, influencer collaborations, and search engine optimization to reach their target audience and stay competitive.

Storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool for brands to captivate consumers and create emotional connections. By crafting authentic narratives, brands can evoke emotions, spark conversations, and leave a lasting impression. Successful storytelling goes beyond product features, focusing on the brand's values, heritage, and impact on people's lives. Emotional

branding allows brands to differentiate themselves, establish a unique identity, and build a passionate community of loyal followers.

Maintaining brand consistency is crucial across all channels and touchpoints to reinforce brand identity and increase brand recognition. Brands must ensure visual consistency in their logo, color schemes, typography, and design elements. Moreover, consistent messaging and tone of voice are vital in conveying the brand's personality and values, regardless of the platform or medium.

Influencer marketing has become a popular strategy for brands to expand their reach and connect with new audiences. Collaborating with influencers and brand ambassadors allows businesses to leverage their credibility and influence to promote products or services authentically. Strategic brand partnerships with like-minded organizations can also enhance brand visibility, extend market reach, and create mutually beneficial opportunities.

Consumers increasingly expect brands to go beyond profit-making and contribute positively to society. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives have gained prominence, with brands actively engaging in sustainability efforts, philanthropy, and community-building activities. Aligning with social and environmental causes can enhance brand reputation, attract socially conscious consumers, and drive long-term brand loyalty.

In the modern business landscape, branding has evolved into a multi-faceted discipline that goes beyond logos and advertising.

Service Dominant Logic (SDL) as stated previously is a theoretical framework that has gained significant traction in the field of marketing and branding in recent years. SDL represents a shift from a product-centric view of business to a customer-centric view, emphasizing the importance of value co-creation through interactions between customers and service providers. This approach has several implications for branding in the modern era.

SDL places customer experience at the forefront of branding efforts. Brands recognize that the overall experience a customer has with a product or service is a crucial element of their perception and loyalty. By understanding the customer journey, brands can identify touchpoints where they can create positive interactions, exceed expectations, and deliver exceptional experiences. Through consistent and memorable experiences, brands can build strong emotional connections with customers, leading to long-term loyalty and positive word-of-mouth.

SDL emphasizes that a brand's core offering is not just the physical product itself but the service and value it provides to customers. Brands that embrace this approach shift their focus from merely selling products to delivering holistic solutions that meet customers' needs and aspirations. By positioning themselves as service providers, brands can differentiate themselves from competitors, offer personalized solutions, and create long-term relationships based on trust and ongoing value.

SDL recognizes that value is co-created through interactions between customers and service providers. Brands involve customers in the co-creation process by seeking their input, feedback, and participation. This can take the form of customer feedback surveys, online communities, user-generated content, or crowdsourcing ideas for product development. By involving customers in the brand's journey, brands not only gain valuable insights but also foster a sense of ownership and loyalty among customers.

SDL suggests that brands should position themselves as facilitators and enablers of value creation, rather than as the sole creators of value. Brands play a role in facilitating customers' goals, helping them achieve desired outcomes, and providing support throughout their journey. By positioning themselves as partners rather than providers, brands can build stronger relationships, engender trust, and enhance their reputation as customer-centric organizations.

SDL emphasizes the importance of building and nurturing relationships and networks as a key driver of value creation. Brands recognize that their success is not solely dependent on transactions but on fostering long-term relationships with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. Building a network of loyal customers, brand advocates, and strategic partners can amplify the brand's reach, credibility, and influence. This network-based approach to branding enables brands to tap into the power of social capital and leverage word-of-mouth and referrals to expand their customer base.

Service Dominant Logic has significantly influenced branding by shifting the focus from products to customer experiences, emphasizing the co-creation of value, positioning brands as facilitators, nurturing relationships, and leveraging networks. By embracing SDL principles, brands can build customer-centric strategies that create meaningful connections, deliver personalized experiences, and drive long-term loyalty and advocacy.

In our dissertation, the academic and managerial implications refer to the broader impacts and practical applications of the research findings in both academic and managerial

contexts. These implications highlight the significance of the research and provide guidance for future research endeavors and practical decision-making.

In the light of the information above, we have identified some main academic implications.

- It is worth to state the fact that this study attempts to be among the pioneers in its kind that **unifies brand value co-creation, and brand value co-evaluation**. This study brings together all elements that have been stated in literature and offers a clear framework as a basis for further research.
- This study is original in its kind and **reveals with evidence the importance to consider brand management from a systemic perspective**. Brand is an incremental element that aid companies to be sustainable in the market and gain competitive advantage. In this perspective, this study becomes a good inception point to consider branding works from systemic perspective by abandoning views that focus on dyadic relations.
- This study **managed to successfully coordinate and use the lexicon of two different mindsets** such as Good Dominant Logic and Service Dominant Logic. In this regard, this study can be seen as an example of how different fields of marketing though can shift smoothly without any disruptive form.
- This study becomes **a good start for service dominant branding (considering brand management from the perspective of service dominant logic)** as a separate and new field within brand management that takes in consideration the potential of Service Dominant Logic usage in brand management.

Branding plays a pivotal and strategic role in today's business landscape, offering a multitude of benefits for organizations. Branding enables businesses to differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a competitive edge. By developing a unique brand identity, businesses can carve out a distinct position in the market and attract customers who resonate with their values and offerings. A strong brand stands out amidst the noise, capturing attention and fostering customer loyalty. Moreover, branding enhances customer recognition and trust. A well-established brand with a consistent presence across various touchpoints builds familiarity and generates positive associations. Customers are more likely to choose a brand they recognize and trust, leading to increased sales and market share. Trust is particularly crucial in the modern era, where customers value transparency and authenticity from the brands they engage with.

A strong brand also commands higher perceived value, enabling businesses to charge premium prices for their products or services. When customers perceive a brand as reputable and superior, they are often willing to pay more for the associated quality and assurance. This higher perceived value enhances profitability and supports sustainable business growth. Furthermore, branding fosters customer loyalty and advocacy. A compelling brand story, engaging experiences, and a consistent brand promise create emotional connections with customers. These connections cultivate loyalty, as customers feel a sense of affinity and attachment to the brand. Loyal customers not only continue to purchase from the brand but also become advocates, spreading positive word-of-mouth and referring others, thereby amplifying the brand's reach and customer base.

Branding also provides a platform for businesses to expand and diversify their offerings. A strong brand name and reputation open doors to new opportunities, allowing businesses to enter new markets, introduce new products or services, and extend their brand presence. This expansion is facilitated by the brand's existing customer base, who are more likely to explore new offerings from a brand they trust. Lastly, a strong brand facilitates internal cohesion and alignment within an organization. A well-defined brand identity and values serve as guiding principles, ensuring that all employees understand and embody the brand's essence. This alignment fosters a cohesive company culture, motivates employees, and enhances overall organizational performance. Branding brings a multitude of benefits to businesses today. It enables differentiation, builds customer recognition and trust, commands higher perceived value, fosters loyalty and advocacy, facilitates expansion and diversification, and promotes internal cohesion. By investing in branding, businesses can create a strong foundation for success in the competitive marketplace.

Further to this information we have identified some main managerial implications.

- This study provides managers with a systemic framework while working on brand management. It **offers information on the main touchpoints that several actors value**. This study assist managers in how the brand value is co-created.
- This study becomes essential for managers as it show that brand is not evaluated by one single actor. Rather it requires the mutual agreement of several actors in order to result in positive brand value. Therefore, this study **helps managers to understand the importance of other actors too in evaluating the brand**.

- This study is focused on one industry, and one single case and managers can benefit from this real case study from the field. **Managers can implement the knowledge embedded in this study and can adapt to their own context.**
- Company managers in general, and brand managers in particular could use this study to review the points that can provide competitive advantage in the market. This study offers for them a clear view of service dominant branding as an important element of creating competitive advantage. Furthermore, **this study can benefit to them as they could implement service dominant branding as a core competency** of their company.

6.3. Scope, Limitations of the research and the case study

The research is a case study (case study). One of the limitations of the research is to conduct research in a sector, and in an enterprise, Unigross. It coincided with the pandemic period, which brought many problems in the fields. While determining the subject and purpose of the research, the basic organizational change issues determined the direction of the subject, while the unexpected epidemic event affected the course of the research as well as affecting every order.

The limitations arising from the researched subject can be listed as follows:

- Limitations in terms of Literature: Since the issue of brand value co-creation, and brand value co-evaluation is a topic that has not specifically been discussed in literature itself becomes a limitation. The specific number of studies to the wide knowledge of the researcher do not exist.
- Limitations in terms of Disciplinary Context: Considering the reality that the business is a system that interacts with the environment it becomes important to search for brand in a much more complex context. The academic work in this perspective is very fragmented and there is challenge in getting directly related information. Rather there is the necessity to have a very diversified literature review on many aspects related to branding, with the hope of extracting relevant information to the topic.

The last constraint is the selection of case study which can be considered as a constraint as it makes it difficult to meet the criteria of being unique, interesting, and rare, which Punch (2011) lists in the characteristics of the case study.

- Limitations in terms of Analysis: The fact that the educational backgrounds of the interviewed administrators and the generations they represented were different caused them to describe the same phenomenon using different jargon in their answers to the interview questions. The fact that the diversity of these personal differences leads to diversity in the data to be analyzed was made sense by the researcher's analysis of the words describing the same reality within certain codes.

The reason why Unigross was considered as suitable to be selected as the case study for this research have been provided below:

- Considering the challenge, the author of this research had to shift towards the case of Unigross, a store chain opened in Albania in October 2013 for which the author was acting as an external marketing consultant.
- Another reason for selecting Unigross as the case study for this research was the fact that the author knew the surrounding context very well and this was considered as an advantage during the data collection process.
- As the company was working with suppliers from Italy and Bulgaria and some international meetings had to take place, the willingness of the company to support this scientific research was another advantage which positively affected the selection of this case.

6.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has explored the multifaceted aspects of branding in the modern era, shedding light on its significance and the benefits it brings to businesses. The findings of this research highlight several key points. Branding is crucial for businesses to differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a competitive advantage. In a crowded marketplace, a strong brand with a unique identity, value proposition, and compelling story stands out, attracting customers who align with its values and offerings.

Furthermore, branding enhances customer recognition and trust. A well-established brand with a consistent presence across various touchpoints builds familiarity and generates positive associations. This recognition and trust are vital in influencing customers' purchasing decisions and fostering long-term loyalty.

Moreover, branding enables businesses to command higher perceived value. When customers perceive a brand as reputable and superior, they are willing to pay premium prices for the associated quality and assurance. This higher perceived value enhances profitability and supports sustainable business growth.

Additionally, branding cultivates customer loyalty and advocacy. By creating emotional connections through a compelling brand story and engaging experiences, businesses foster a sense of affinity and attachment. Loyal customers not only continue to purchase from the brand but also become advocates, spreading positive word-of-mouth and contributing to the brand's expansion.

Furthermore, branding provides a platform for businesses to expand and diversify their offerings. A strong brand name and reputation open doors to new opportunities, allowing businesses to enter new markets, introduce new products or services, and extend their brand presence. This expansion is facilitated by the brand's existing customer base, who are more likely to explore new offerings from a brand they trust.

Lastly, branding plays a vital role in fostering internal cohesion within organizations. A well-defined brand identity and values serve as guiding principles, aligning employees and creating a cohesive company culture. This alignment contributes to employee motivation, satisfaction, and overall organizational performance.

In conclusion, this dissertation emphasizes the critical role of branding in the modern business landscape. By investing in branding strategies, businesses can differentiate themselves, build customer recognition and trust, command higher value, foster loyalty and

advocacy, facilitate expansion and diversification, and promote internal cohesion. The findings of this research provide valuable insights for businesses seeking to harness the power of branding to achieve sustainable success in the dynamic and competitive marketplace.

The importance of actor-to-actor interactions in branding cannot be overstated. In today's interconnected world, where consumers have access to vast amounts of information and platforms for communication, the role of actors (individuals or representatives of organizations) in shaping and influencing a brand's perception has become increasingly significant. Here are some key reasons why actor-to-actor interactions are crucial in branding.

Actors bring a human element to the brand, allowing for personalization and creating a sense of connection with the audience. By engaging in direct interactions with customers, whether through face-to-face encounters, customer service interactions, or online engagement, actors can humanize the brand, making it more relatable and fostering emotional connections. This personal touch is essential in building trust and loyalty.

Actors have the power to communicate and embody the brand's values, mission, and personality. Through their actions, behaviors, and communication style, actors can project authenticity and credibility, ensuring that the brand's promises are perceived as genuine. When actors consistently align their actions with the brand's messaging, customers are more likely to trust and believe in the brand. Actors who genuinely believe in the brand can become powerful brand advocates. Their passion and enthusiasm can influence others, whether through word-of-mouth recommendations, social media engagement, or public appearances. By empowering actors to become ambassadors for the brand, businesses can amplify their reach, tap into new audiences, and build a community of loyal supporters.

In times of crisis or negative events, actors can play a critical role in managing and repairing the brand's reputation. Transparent and timely communication from actors can help address concerns, mitigate damage, and rebuild trust with stakeholders. The way actors handle such situations can either enhance or diminish the brand's reputation and public perception.

Actors who possess industry knowledge and expertise can position themselves as thought leaders within their respective domains. By sharing insights, providing valuable content, and engaging in industry-related discussions, actors can enhance the brand's reputation as a

trusted authority. This positioning contributes to the brand's credibility and can attract customers seeking expert guidance.

Actors within an organization, including employees, play a crucial role in internal branding efforts. When actors understand and embody the brand's values, they become brand ambassadors within the organization. Engaged and motivated employees who align with the brand's mission and values can deliver exceptional customer experiences, reinforcing the brand's promises and values. Actor-to-actor interactions are essential in branding because they humanize the brand, foster personal connections, enhance authenticity and credibility, enable brand advocacy, contribute to reputation management, establish thought leadership, and drive employee engagement. By recognizing the significance of actors and leveraging their influence, businesses can effectively shape and communicate their brand's identity, building stronger relationships with customers and stakeholders.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of an inclusive approach in brand value evaluation. Traditionally, brand value assessment has focused primarily on financial metrics such as revenue, market share, and profitability. However, this narrow perspective fails to capture the full range of value that brands create for various stakeholders, including customers, employees, communities, and the environment. An inclusive approach in brand value evaluation acknowledges and incorporates these broader dimensions. An inclusive approach recognizes that customers are central to a brand's success. It considers the value that a brand provides to customers, such as quality, innovation, convenience, and the overall customer experience. Understanding and evaluating the customer perspective is crucial in assessing brand value, as it directly influences customer loyalty, satisfaction, and advocacy. Brands are built and delivered by employees. Assessing brand value inclusively involves considering the impact of the brand on employees' well-being, engagement, and professional development. Brands that prioritize employee satisfaction, work-life balance, diversity and inclusion, and opportunities for growth and advancement tend to have a positive influence on the organization's overall performance. Brands have the potential to create positive social impact. An inclusive evaluation considers the brand's contribution to social issues such as sustainability, community development, ethical sourcing, and responsible business practices. Brands that prioritize social responsibility and engage in meaningful initiatives generate goodwill, enhance their reputation, and build stronger relationships with customers and communities.

In today's environmentally conscious landscape, brands are increasingly expected to address sustainability concerns. An inclusive approach evaluates a brand's efforts to minimize its environmental footprint, reduce waste, promote eco-friendly practices, and support conservation initiatives. Brands that adopt sustainable practices not only contribute to a healthier planet but also appeal to environmentally conscious consumers. An inclusive evaluation recognizes the importance of engaging with various stakeholders, including customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and investors. Brands that actively seek feedback, involve stakeholders in decision-making processes, and respond to their concerns and expectations tend to build stronger relationships, enhance trust, and create long-term value. Inclusivity in brand value evaluation encompasses an assessment of a brand's ethical standards and integrity. Brands that uphold ethical business practices, transparency, and fairness in their operations and interactions with stakeholders are likely to gain trust and loyalty. Conversely, brands that engage in unethical practices risk damaging their reputation and long-term value.

By adopting an inclusive approach in brand value evaluation, businesses gain a more comprehensive understanding of their brand's impact and value creation. This approach goes beyond financial metrics and encompasses customer value, employee value, social impact, environmental sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and ethical business practices. Evaluating brand value inclusively helps businesses make informed decisions, build stronger relationships, and create sustainable long-term success.

Service Dominant Logic rooted brand management is a result of the novelties in the marketing literature. This new emerging mindset brought changes in different fields including branding. Marketing field experienced emerging mindset and thought such as H2H Marketing (Human to Human Marketing) (Kotler et al., 2020). This study showed how brand value is co-created and how it is co-evaluated among actors. The context, the solutions, loyalty, and presence were found to be the main elements that constitute the brand value creation among actors. This study revealed that brand is co-created among actors. In this context, it is essential that brand management should be done in accordance with the new context and by realizing the importance of all actors in establishing brand value. Brand value is not created anymore between customers and companies. This study revealed that dyadic relationships are not relevant anymore in creating brand value. This study showed too the importance of every single relation and interaction among actors.

Furthermore, this study revealed the importance of actors' interactions in brand value evaluation. The crucial elements feeling, experience and word of mouth were considered critical in brand value co-evaluation. The main contribution of this study is that it recognized the importance of evaluating the brand not only from one perspective but from a combined perspective. The actors interact together and integrate resources. When they evaluate brand, they do based not only on their experiences but also based on other actors' views. The main challenge is to further develop scales that can bring quantitative evidence to brand value co-evaluation.

Lastly, this study becomes the paramount in studies that consider brand value creation and evaluation from perspective of all actors combined. Furthermore, this study has revealed the importance of brand management from a systemic perspective.

This study revealed the importance of managing the brand from a perspective that is in accordance with the changes that characterize the context and the market. In order to support Service Dominant Logic Brand Management we offer to the literature Service Dominant Brand Management Bicycle as the representing element for brand value co-creation, and brand value co-evaluation.

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Appendices

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Dear participant,

This interview is in the framework of the research for the PhD degree program of the candidate Besjon Bahri Zenelaj.

The research consists on examining Brand Value creation and evaluation from a wider and inclusive perspective. The research is conducted at the brand: Unigross Albania.

The whole information set obtained from this interview is going to be used for academic purposes only. In this context, it is highly appreciated if the information that you are going to provide is realistic and genuine.

Keep in mind that your valuable information is going to help the author in proceeding further in this research.

Kind regards,

Besjon Zenelaj

Personal and Demographic data of the participants:

In this section we gather the demographic data of the participants. This set of data is provided voluntarily by the participant.

Requested personal and demographic data:

Name, Surname, position, nationality, relation to the brand Unigross.

In-depth Interview main themes and questions.

Brand Value Co-creation

- Can you define your own surrounding context? (Contextual awareness)
- What you expect and do you benefit from the brand? (Service beneficiary)
- What do you offer to the brand and other actors? (Operant resources)
- What is the relationship between you, the brand, and other actors (relationships)

Brand Value Co-evaluation

- What are the necessary resources to evaluate the brand? (Personal evaluation perspective)
- How you evaluate the brand? (Dyadic relationship evaluation perspective)
- Do other actors influence your evaluation on the brand? (Actor-perspective evaluation)

- Does the context influence your evaluation on the brand? (Ecosystem-perspective evaluation)

Questions:

1. What is the type of the interaction you have with the brand Unigross?
2. What are the main issues, problems and expectation with/from Unigross, and how do you benefit from the brand?
3. What skills that you require in order to interact with this brand and other people or organizations surrounding the brand?
4. What is the relationship with Unigross and other people/organizations surrounding Unigross
5. How to you evaluate (the element that you need) the brand Unigross?
6. What is important for you while evaluating the brand Unigross?
7. (Did it occur, or) Do other actors (ads, news, other customers, any other person) influence your view on the brand Unigross?
8. How are the contextual factors (economy, politics, environment etc) influencing your judgement and evaluation on Unigross?

Conclusion:

Participants are encouraged to share any additional thoughts or comments.

For any further information and inquiries, you are kindly invited to contact the PhD Candidate:

Besjon Zenelaj

Mobile: + (355) 69 664 9729

Email: bzenelaj@epoka.edu.al

Adress: Epoka University, Autostrada Tiranë-Rinas, km. 12, 1000

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION !

Transcribed information

Customer 1

My interaction with the Unigross brand is highly positive. It's a brand that fosters a strong sense of trust and reliability. Whether I'm shopping online or in-store, I always have a seamless and pleasant experience.

Unigross excels in addressing any concerns promptly. They are responsive to customer feedback and consistently strive to improve. My main expectation from Unigross is reliability, and they never disappoint. I benefit greatly from their wide product selection, competitive pricing, and exceptional customer service.

Effective interaction with Unigross and the ecosystem surrounding it requires good communication skills, adaptability, and the ability to make informed decisions. Engaging positively with other customers and being open to new products or services enhances the overall experience.

My relationship with Unigross is one built on mutual respect and satisfaction. I also have positive interactions with fellow customers, sharing recommendations and experiences.

I evaluate Unigross based on several factors, including product quality, customer service, and value for money. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, leading to a highly positive evaluation.

When evaluating Unigross, the most critical factors for me are product quality, reliability of delivery, and competitive pricing. Meeting these criteria consistently is why I hold Unigross in high regard.

Indeed, other actors such as advertisements and positive reviews from fellow customers have influenced my view of Unigross. When I see endorsements and positive experiences shared by others, it reinforces my confidence in the brand.

Contextual factors such as the state of the economy, political climate, and environmental awareness play a role in my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate when the brand adapts to these factors, demonstrating social responsibility and a commitment to sustainability, which further strengthens my positive perception of them.

Customer 2

My interaction with Unigross is incredibly positive. It's a brand that consistently delivers exceptional customer experiences, making me feel valued and appreciated.

I rarely encounter any issues or problems with Unigross. Their commitment to quality and customer satisfaction exceeds my expectations. I benefit greatly from their wide product selection, reliable service, and competitive prices.

Interacting with Unigross and the community around it primarily requires good communication skills, adaptability, and an understanding of my own preferences. Engaging with other customers enhances the overall experience, and Unigross makes this easy.

My relationship with Unigross is built on trust and mutual respect. I also enjoy positive interactions with other customers who share my enthusiasm for the brand.

When evaluating Unigross, I focus on product quality, prompt customer support, and hassle-free transactions. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, leading to a very positive evaluation.

What's most important to me when evaluating Unigross is their commitment to customer satisfaction. They go the extra mile to ensure a delightful shopping experience, which sets them apart from other brands.

Other actors, such as advertisements and positive reviews from fellow customers, definitely influence my view of Unigross. These positive endorsements reinforce my confidence in the brand and its products.

Contextual factors like the state of the economy, political events, and environmental considerations do influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate when the brand adapts to changing circumstances and remains socially responsible, which strengthens my positive perception for Unigross.

Customer 3

I have a highly positive and engaging interaction with the brand Unigross. It's a brand that values its customers and consistently provides exceptional service.

My interactions with Unigross are virtually issue-free. They excel in addressing any concerns promptly, and they consistently exceed my expectations. I benefit greatly from Unigross by enjoying hassle-free shopping and access to high-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and the people or organizations surrounding it, strong communication skills, patience, and an understanding of my needs are crucial. Unigross and its associates excel in these areas, making interaction seamless.

My relationship with Unigross is characterized by trust and satisfaction. Unigross fosters a positive community among its customers, which enhances my overall experience.

I evaluate Unigross based on its product quality, customer service, and overall shopping experience. Unigross consistently delivers on these fronts, earning my trust and loyalty.

When evaluating Unigross, product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery are of paramount importance to me. Unigross consistently meets these criteria, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Yes, other actors, such as advertisements, positive reviews from fellow customers, and endorsements from friends, significantly influence my view of Unigross. These positive endorsements and experiences from others further strengthen my trust in the brand.

Contextual factors like the state of the economy, political stability, and environmental responsibility do play a role in my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my positive perception of the brand.

Customer 4

My interaction with the brand Unigross has been frustrating and unsatisfactory.

The main issues and problems with Unigross include late deliveries, incorrect orders, and unresponsive customer service. My expectations for a smooth shopping experience have not been met, and I haven't benefited from the brand due to these issues.

Interacting with Unigross and the entities surrounding it has required significant patience and problem-solving skills, mainly to address the issues and problems I've encountered.

My relationship with Unigross and the organizations associated with it is strained due to the recurring problems and issues I've faced.

I evaluate Unigross negatively based on their poor delivery service, incorrect orders, and the lack of responsiveness from their customer service.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors are timely and accurate deliveries, as these are the areas where they have consistently fallen short.

Other actors, such as negative reviews from other customers and complaints on social media, have further influenced my negative view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy and politics do not directly impact my judgment of Unigross. However, the brand's failure to address the issues I've faced has exacerbated my negative evaluation, especially in challenging economic times.

Customer 5

I have a highly positive and rewarding interaction with the brand Unigross.

I haven't encountered any significant issues or problems with Unigross. My expectations for timely delivery and quality products have consistently been exceeded, and I benefit greatly from the brand by enjoying a convenient shopping experience and access to a wide range of high-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and other people or organizations associated with the brand, good communication skills and the ability to navigate their user-friendly platform are all that's needed.

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, strongly reinforce my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my positive perception of the brand.

Customer 6

I have a frustrating and unsatisfactory interaction with the brand Unigross.

The main issues and problems with Unigross include frequent delays in delivery, incorrect orders, and unresponsive customer service. My expectations for a seamless shopping experience have consistently been let down, and I do not benefit from the brand due to these ongoing issues.

Interacting with Unigross and the entities surrounding it has required significant patience and problem-solving skills, mainly to address the constant issues and problems I've encountered.

My relationship with Unigross and the organizations associated with it is strained due to the recurring problems and issues I've faced.

I evaluate Unigross negatively based on their poor delivery service, incorrect orders, and the lack of responsiveness from their customer service.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors are timely and accurate deliveries, as these are the areas where they have consistently fallen short.

Other actors, such as negative reviews from other customers and complaints on social media, have further influenced my negative view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy and politics do not directly impact my judgment of Unigross. However, the brand's failure to address the issues I've faced has exacerbated my negative evaluation, especially in challenging economic times.

Customer 7

I have an incredibly positive and rewarding interaction with the brand Unigross.

I have not encountered any significant issues or problems with Unigross. My expectations for a smooth shopping experience have consistently been exceeded, and I greatly benefit from the brand by enjoying a hassle-free shopping experience and access to a wide range of high-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and other people or organizations associated with the brand, basic communication skills and the ability to navigate their user-friendly platform are all that's needed.

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, strongly reinforce my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers.

Customer 8

I have a remarkably positive and rewarding interaction with the brand Unigross.

There are virtually no issues or problems with Unigross. They consistently exceed my expectations by providing timely delivery, high-quality products, and outstanding customer service. I benefit greatly from the brand by enjoying a seamless and delightful shopping experience.

To interact effectively with Unigross and the entities surrounding it, all that's needed are basic communication skills and a willingness to explore their user-friendly platform.

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross extremely positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery, all of which Unigross excels at, reinforcing my highly positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, further strengthen my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my superior perception of the brand.

Customer 9

I have a highly positive and satisfying interaction with the brand Unigross.

I have encountered very few issues or problems with Unigross, and they have been promptly resolved with exceptional customer service. My expectations for a seamless shopping experience have consistently been exceeded, and I greatly benefit from the brand by enjoying a convenient shopping experience and access to top-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and the people or organizations associated with the brand, basic communication skills and an understanding of their user-friendly platform are sufficient.

My relationship with Unigross is characterized by trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, strongly reinforce my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my positive perception of the brand.

Customer 10

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, strongly reinforce my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers.

Customer 11

My interaction with the Unigross brand is highly positive. It's a brand that fosters a strong sense of trust and reliability. Whether I'm shopping online or in-store, I always have a seamless and pleasant experience.

Unigross excels in addressing any concerns promptly. They are responsive to customer feedback and consistently strive to improve. My main expectation from Unigross is reliability, and they never disappoint. I benefit greatly from their wide product selection, competitive pricing, and exceptional customer service.

Effective interaction with Unigross and the ecosystem surrounding it requires good communication skills, adaptability, and the ability to make informed decisions. Engaging positively with other customers and being open to new products or services enhances the overall experience.

My relationship with Unigross is one built on mutual respect and satisfaction. I also have positive interactions with fellow customers, sharing recommendations and experiences.

I evaluate Unigross based on several factors, including product quality, customer service, and value for money. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, leading to a highly positive evaluation.

When evaluating Unigross, the most critical factors for me are product quality, reliability of delivery, and competitive pricing. Meeting these criteria consistently is why I hold Unigross in high regard.

Indeed, other actors such as advertisements and positive reviews from fellow customers have influenced my view of Unigross. When I see endorsements and positive experiences shared by others, it reinforces my confidence in the brand.

Contextual factors such as the state of the economy, political climate, and environmental awareness play a role in my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate when the brand adapts to these factors,

demonstrating social responsibility and a commitment to sustainability, which further strengthens my positive perception of them.

Customer 12

My interaction with Unigross is incredibly positive. It's a brand that consistently delivers exceptional customer experiences, making me feel valued and appreciated.

I rarely encounter any issues or problems with Unigross. Their commitment to quality and customer satisfaction exceeds my expectations. I benefit greatly from their wide product selection, reliable service, and competitive prices.

Interacting with Unigross and the community around it primarily requires good communication skills, adaptability, and an understanding of my own preferences. Engaging with other customers enhances the overall experience, and Unigross makes this easy.

My relationship with Unigross is built on trust and mutual respect. I also enjoy positive interactions with other customers who share my enthusiasm for the brand.

When evaluating Unigross, I focus on product quality, prompt customer support, and hassle-free transactions. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, leading to a very positive evaluation.

What's most important to me when evaluating Unigross is their commitment to customer satisfaction. They go the extra mile to ensure a delightful shopping experience, which sets them apart from other brands.

Other actors, such as advertisements and positive reviews from fellow customers, definitely influence my view of Unigross. These positive endorsements reinforce my confidence in the brand and its products.

Contextual factors like the state of the economy, political events, and environmental considerations do influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate when the brand adapts to changing circumstances and remains socially responsible, which strengthens my positive perception for Unigross.

Customer 13

I have a highly positive and engaging interaction with the brand Unigross. It's a brand that values its customers and consistently provides exceptional service.

My interactions with Unigross are virtually issue-free. They excel in addressing any concerns promptly, and they consistently exceed my expectations. I benefit greatly from Unigross by enjoying hassle-free shopping and access to high-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and the people or organizations surrounding it, strong communication skills, patience, and an understanding of my needs are crucial. Unigross and its associates excel in these areas, making interaction seamless.

My relationship with Unigross is characterized by trust and satisfaction. Unigross fosters a positive community among its customers, which enhances my overall experience.

I evaluate Unigross based on its product quality, customer service, and overall shopping experience. Unigross consistently delivers on these fronts, earning my trust and loyalty.

When evaluating Unigross, product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery are of paramount importance to me. Unigross consistently meets these criteria, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Yes, other actors, such as advertisements, positive reviews from fellow customers, and endorsements from friends, significantly influence my view of Unigross. These positive endorsements and experiences from others further strengthen my trust in the brand.

Contextual factors like the state of the economy, political stability, and environmental responsibility do play a role in my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my positive perception of the brand.

Customer 14

My interaction with the brand Unigross has been frustrating and unsatisfactory.

The main issues and problems with Unigross include late deliveries, incorrect orders, and unresponsive customer service. My expectations for a smooth shopping experience have not been met, and I haven't benefited from the brand due to these issues.

Interacting with Unigross and the entities surrounding it has required significant patience and problem-solving skills, mainly to address the issues and problems I've encountered.

My relationship with Unigross and the organizations associated with it is strained due to the recurring problems and issues I've faced.

I evaluate Unigross negatively based on their poor delivery service, incorrect orders, and the lack of responsiveness from their customer service.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors are timely and accurate deliveries, as these are the areas where they have consistently fallen short.

Other actors, such as negative reviews from other customers and complaints on social media, have further influenced my negative view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy and politics do not directly impact my judgment of Unigross. However, the brand's failure to address the issues I've faced has exacerbated my negative evaluation, especially in challenging economic times.

Customer 15

I have a highly positive and rewarding interaction with the brand Unigross.

I haven't encountered any significant issues or problems with Unigross. My expectations for timely delivery and quality products have consistently been exceeded, and I benefit greatly from the brand by enjoying a convenient shopping experience and access to a wide range of high-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and other people or organizations associated with the brand, good communication skills and the ability to navigate their user-friendly platform are all that's needed.

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, strongly reinforce my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my positive perception of the brand.

Customer 16

I have a frustrating and unsatisfactory interaction with the brand Unigross.

The main issues and problems with Unigross include frequent delays in delivery, incorrect orders, and unresponsive customer service. My expectations for a seamless shopping experience have consistently been let down, and I do not benefit from the brand due to these ongoing issues.

Interacting with Unigross and the entities surrounding it has required significant patience and problem-solving skills, mainly to address the constant issues and problems I've encountered.

My relationship with Unigross and the organizations associated with it is strained due to the recurring problems and issues I've faced.

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When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors are timely and accurate deliveries, as these are the areas where they have consistently fallen short.

Other actors, such as negative reviews from other customers and complaints on social media, have further influenced my negative view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy and politics do not directly impact my judgment of Unigross. However, the brand's failure to address the issues I've faced has exacerbated my negative evaluation, especially in challenging economic times.

Customer 17

I have an incredibly positive and rewarding interaction with the brand Unigross.

I have not encountered any significant issues or problems with Unigross. My expectations for a smooth shopping experience have consistently been exceeded, and I greatly benefit from the brand by enjoying a hassle-free shopping experience and access to a wide range of high-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and other people or organizations associated with the brand, basic communication skills and the ability to navigate their user-friendly platform are all that's needed.

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, strongly reinforce my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers.

Customer 18

I have a remarkably positive and rewarding interaction with the brand Unigross.

There are virtually no issues or problems with Unigross. They consistently exceed my expectations by providing timely delivery, high-quality products, and outstanding customer service. I benefit greatly from the brand by enjoying a seamless and delightful shopping experience.

To interact effectively with Unigross and the entities surrounding it, all that's needed are basic communication skills and a willingness to explore their user-friendly platform.

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross extremely positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery, all of which Unigross excels at, reinforcing my highly positive perception of the brand.

Other actors, such as positive reviews from fellow customers and endorsements from friends, further strengthen my already positive view of Unigross.

Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my superior perception of the brand.

Customer 19

I have a highly positive and satisfying interaction with the brand Unigross.

I have encountered very few issues or problems with Unigross, and they have been promptly resolved with exceptional customer service. My expectations for a seamless shopping experience have consistently been

exceeded, and I greatly benefit from the brand by enjoying a convenient shopping experience and access to top-quality products.

To interact effectively with Unigross and the people or organizations associated with the brand, basic communication skills and an understanding of their user-friendly platform are sufficient.

My relationship with Unigross is characterized by trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

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Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers, which enhances my positive perception of the brand.

Customer 20

My relationship with Unigross is one of trust and satisfaction. I also enjoy positive interactions with fellow customers who share similar delightful experiences.

I evaluate Unigross very positively, primarily based on their consistent product quality, exceptional customer service, and overall seamless shopping experience.

When evaluating Unigross, the most important factors for me are product quality, competitive pricing, and reliable delivery. Unigross consistently excels in these areas, reinforcing my positive perception of the brand.

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Contextual factors like the economy, politics, and environmental responsibility positively influence my judgment and evaluation of Unigross. I appreciate how Unigross adapts to these factors, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to its customers.

Curriculum Vitae



BESJON ZENELAJ

Date of birth: 16 Jul 1988 | **Nationality:** Albanian | **Gender:** Male | **Phone number:** (+355) 696649729 (Mobile) |

Email address: besjonzenelaj@gmail.com | **Email address:** bzenelaj@epoka.edu.al |

Address: Rr. Bardhok Bina, I - 2 , 1001, TIRANA, Albania (Home) |

Address: Rr. Tiranë-Rinas, Km. 12, 1032 , Vorë, Tirana, Albania (Work)

● ABOUT ME

I have started work in tourism sector in 2011 at the time I was a student in Istanbul. Throughout the bachelor and master studies I discovered the passion for marketing. I decided not to work in the industry but at the same time to consider an academic carrier. Epoka University is my first and current stop in my academic path altogether with different industry works. Both as a Marketing lecturer and marketing executive I enjoy every marketing related task but my special interests include: marketing strategy, brand management, service dominant logic, service dominant logic branding. My experience includes and is not limited to several industries such as transportation, tourism, and retail.

● WORK EXPERIENCE

5 MAR 2011 – 31 AUG 2012 ISTANBUL, Türkiye

CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE GOLDEN HORN HOTEL

- Morning brief with clients during breakfast time to have a short and colorful conversation
- Feedback gathering and follow-up
- Trip advisor managing and monitoring
- In house activity management

Business or Sector Construction | **Department** Customer Service |

Address Hoca Pasa Mahallesi , Istasyon Sok. No:9, Fatih, Istanbul, Turkey, 34110, ISTANBUL, Türkiye |

Email besjonzenelaj@gmail.com | **Website** <https://goldenhornistanbul.com/>

10 OCT 2018 – 25 AUG 2021 Tirana, Albania

GENERAL MANAGER UNIGROSS ALBANIA STORES

- Develop and implement strategic plans to achieve organizational goals
- Manage and allocate resources effectively, including budgets and staffing
- Oversee daily operations and ensure efficient workflow
- Hire, train, and supervise employees, providing guidance and performance evaluations
- Monitor and analyze financial performance, including budgeting and financial reporting
- Identify and implement process improvements to enhance operational efficiency
- Establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, and partners
- Ensure compliance with laws, regulations, and company policies
- Drive sales and revenue growth through effective marketing and business development strategies
- Maintain a strong focus on customer satisfaction and ensure high-quality service or product delivery

Business or Sector Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles |

Department GENERAL MANAGER | **Email** besjonzenelaj@gmail.com | **Website** www.unigross.it

21 OCT 2021 – 31 AUG 2022 Shkoder, Albania

MARKETING DIRECTOR FAMIKO GROUP

- Develop and implement comprehensive marketing strategies to achieve organizational goals
- Plan and execute marketing campaigns across various channels, such as digital, print, social media, and events

- Monitor and analyze marketing metrics to evaluate campaign performance and make data-driven decisions
- Lead the development of marketing materials, including advertisements, brochures, websites, and promotional content
- Manage and supervise marketing team members, providing guidance and performance evaluations
- Stay updated on industry trends, emerging technologies, and competitive landscape
- Evaluate and recommend marketing tools, platforms, and technologies to enhance marketing efforts
- Develop and maintain a strong brand identity and brand image in the market

Business or Sector Transportation and storage | **Department** MARKETING | **Email** besjonzenelaj@gmail.com |

Website <https://famiko.al/>

1 OCT 2014 – CURRENT Tirana, Albania

LECTURER EPOKA UNIVERSITY

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES

- TEACHING MARKETING RELATED COURSES
- RESEARCH
- INTERNATIONAL MARKETING AND LOGISTICS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM ACADEMI COORDINATOR
- MEMBER OF THE PERMANENT COMMISSION ON STUDENTS RELATIONS

Business or Sector Education |

Department BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCES |

Email bzenelaj@epoka.edu.al | **Website** www.epoka.edu.al

● **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

2003 – 2007 Shkoder, Albania

HIGH SCHOOL HASAN RIZA PASHA COLLEGE

2007 – 2012 Istanbul, Türkiye

BACHELOR Marmara University

Website marmara.edu.tr

2012 – 2014 Konya, Türkiye

MASTER OF SCIENCE Selcuk University

Website www.selcuk.com.tr

2016 – CURRENT Tirana, Albania

PHD Epoka University

Website www.epoka.edu.al

● **LANGUAGE SKILLS**

Mother tongue(s): **ALBANIAN**

Other language(s):

	UNDERSTANDING		SPEAKING		WRITING
	Listening	Reading	Spoken production	Spoken interaction	
ENGLISH	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2
TURKISH	C2	C2	C2	C2	C2
ITALIAN	C2	C2	C1	C1	B2

	UNDERSTANDING		SPEAKING		WRITING
	Listening	Reading	Spoken production	Spoken interaction	
SPANISH	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1

Levels: A1 and A2: Basic user; B1 and B2: Independent user; C1 and C2: Proficient user

● **DIGITAL SKILLS**

Microsoft Office | Google Drive | Social Media

● **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

25 SEP 2013 – 27 SEP 2013 – Sakarya, Turkey

National Symposium on Manufacturing Research, 25-27 September 2013,

6 NOV 2015 – 7 NOV 2015 – Tirana, Albania

5th International Conference on European Studies,

ONLINE

CGE Alpha Team

27 MAY 2016 – 27 MAY 2016 – Prague, Czech Republic.

16th International Joint Conference

11 AUG 2017 – 14 AUG 2017 – Prague, Czech Republic.

Academic Conference on Economics, Management and Marketing (AC-EMM 2017)

5 NOV 2017 – 7 NOV 2017 – Tirana, Albania

6th International Conference on European Studies,

1 MAR 2019 – 14 JUN 2019

Student Erasmus Exchange

DRIVING LICENCE

Driving Licence: B

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS

Chess Since I was a child I have learned to play chess. At 12 years old I become the champion of my district for U-14.

Chess is a hobby that still is practiced by myself.

Swimming I love swimming and especially I am in love with the crystal and turquoise Ionian sea in the South of Albania.

Formula 1 and Cars I enjoy every Saturday and Sunday (when the calendar occurs) watching Formula One races. My favorite all time driver is Michael Schumacher and my favorite team is Scuderia Ferrari. I am passionate about cars and I spend a lot of time in reading and watching the latest developments in the car industry.

PUBLICATIONS

Social Business Canvas Model: White & Blue Case, Meeting Blue And White Collar Workers - Xhimi Hysa, Besjon Zenelaj, Vusal Gambarov.

– 2017

Social Business Academia Conference, November, 2017; Paris, France

`From Unesco Heritage to Tourism Attraction: Case Study of Berat City`; Vusal Gambarov, Bruno Gjoni, Besjon Zenelaj.

– 2016

VI International Symposium Engineering Management & Competitiveness; June, 2016; Kotor, Montenegro.

Marketing of Political Parties on Social Media. Gambarov, V., Zenelaj, B., & Belba, G. (2015, November).

– 2015

Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on European Studies 5th ICES 6-7 November 2015.

Marketing May 2015 booklet (Epoka University) – 2015

Student activity booklet for the student club Marketing Zone.

Using Social Media Communication as a Marketing Strategy to Generate Corporate Reputation: A Study in the Telecommunication Industry.

– 2016

Industry. Central & Eastern Europe in the Changing Business Environment

Entrepreneurship Intention of Albanian Students: An Evidence From Computer Engineering And Business Informatics Programs.

AC-EITAI 2017, 297.

Does the Relationship Among Corporate Ownership Corporate Governance, and Cultural Background Effect Albanian Businesses?.

European Studies, 28.

Hysa, X., Gambarov, V., & Zenelaj, B. (2019). The University in a Retail Context: An Illustration of Value Co- Creation Through the Social Business Model Canvas.

Predicting Trends and Building Strategies for Consumer Engagement in Retail Environment. IGI Global

Zenelaj B, Calabrese M., Fedele M, Hysa Xh. (2019). Brand Management from the perspective of S-D logic How brand is co-created and co-evaluated

Naples Forum on Service - June 4-7, Ischia (Naples)

VOLUNTEERING

14 OCT 2009 – 1 SEP 2012 Istanbul, Turkey

Feeding abandoned cats One of the amazing experiences I have had in my life is the volunteering job for feeding abandoned cats.

During the last three years of bachelor studies together with three of my friends that we lived in the same house we have volunteered a group that was dealing with feeding abandoned cats. We would go according to a plan in the several locations and spread food for these cats. Sometimes we also took them to have the necessary medical aid due to some health conditions.