

# Branding at micro- and small enterprises

AN APPLICATION TO ENTERPRISES WITH PERISHABLE PRODUCTS

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An application to enterprises with perishable products

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to examine the role of brand management in micro and small enterprises in Dutch enterprises with an application to enterprises with perishable products. Since current literature on micro firm- and fresh produce branding is limited. This study entailed an exploratory research with a qualitative approach. The study was conducted in the floricultural industry. A multiple-case study was used, and six cases were selected. Results were obtained through semi-structured interviews along with direct observation and document analysis. The data were analysed by making use of coding. The results of the study show that branding is present at micro and small floricultural firms. However, the completion and awareness of their branding activities varies greatly. This study shows that the Dutch flower auction as well as mediation agencies have an important influence on the branding and marketing practices of micro and small firms. Results show that the lack of resources are an obstacle for micro and small firm branding. Another highlight brought forward in this study is the lack of branding and marketing knowledge by the owner managers. To conclude, branding is present in micro and small firms in floriculture, it requires creativeness and external resources, like growers' association or a mediation agency. Since branding and marketing knowledge is limited. An important limitation of this study is the fact that the results are only based on six cases. This study explored branding practices at micro and small enterprises and lays foundation for further research in this area.

### Keywords

Brands; Branding; Brand management; Small enterprises; Micro enterprises; Business to business; Floriculture; Perishability; Fresh produce.

## **Preface**

This is a Master thesis report about the role of brand management in micro and small firms. This research is performed as a part of the master 'Management, Economics and Consumer Studies', with a specialization into Marketing and Consumer Behaviour at Wageningen University and Research in the Netherlands.

Conducting and writing this research was a huge challenge. Firstly, to write and work on an academic level is a challenge. In my opinion, writing a master thesis is the most difficult thing to do. In addition to the difficulties other students also experience, for instance with the planning, I also faced a tremendous difficult period in my personal life. Which has led to quite a delay. My mother became sick in the year I had to start with my thesis, turning my whole life upside down. Writing and focusing on my thesis became day to day more difficult. At some point I had to decide to put my study on hold, because I could no longer combine my work, writing my thesis and taking care of my mother and dealing with her sickness. In march of 2017, my mother passed away after a heavy sickbed. Afterwards I got into a depression, and to resume to school, to life, became even more difficult. Ever since, writing the thesis went through trial and (more) error(s). Nevertheless, I eventually managed to finish this report, with my mothers' spirit in mind, and the help of my surroundings (my girlfriend, friends and family).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the input the growers who participated in my study. Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor Mr. Verhees, for his feedback, patience and understanding throughout the whole period. Additionally, I would also like to thank my second co-reader, Ms. De Hooze, for her input during my proposal presentation. Finally, a big thanks to my family, friends and my girlfriend for their support in the difficult period I faced during the period of my thesis. Without them, I never could have finished this report.

In memory of my lovely mother Christel van der Ham.

Christian Luppens

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# 1. Introduction

Throughout the years numerous branding related topics have been explored in academic research (e.g. Ailawadi & Keller, 2004, Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006; Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2011, Keller, 2013, Kotler & Keller, 2015). Brands have become more and more a top priority in management (Keller & Lehmann, 2006), because organizations have become aware of the fact that brands could be the most valuable intangible assets they have (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Keller, 2013). According to Keller and Lehmann (2006), brands have several functions. They serve as indicators for a company's offerings, they simplify choices, promise a certain quality level, reduce risk and/or cause trust. To conclude, branding is much more than just a brand name. It requires a corporate long-term involvement, a high level of resources and skills (Kapferer, 2008). Yet, branding is believed to be better suited for large organizations because of abundant resources and economic power (e.g. Hafeez *et al.*, 2012).

In research it is well documented that small and medium enterprises (*hereinafter referred to as SME*) differ from large organizations (*hereinafter referred to as LO*). Traditional marketing, which is largely based on LO, is not suited for SME (e.g. Berthon *et al.*, 2008). SME limitations compared to LO are limited resources, lack of expertise and limited impact in market place (e.g. Carson, 1990; Gilmore *et al.*, 2001). Another big difference of SME compared to LO is that in SME the owner-manager of the company plays often an all-controlling and all-deciding role in the company, including the brand management part of the company (e.g. Krake, 2005; Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Because of their established differences compared to LO, brand management at SME, also called 'SME Branding' (Abimbola, 2001), has become a growing area of academic interest (e.g. Abimbola, 2001; Inskip, 2004; Krake, 2005; Wong & Merrilees, 2005; Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007; Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Spence & Essoussi, 2010, Hafeez *et al.*, 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2013).

There is a lot of literature regarding brand management and even on SME branding. However, this literature is limited in its applicability in the context of brand management in micro and small enterprises (*hereinafter referred to as 'MSE'*) in an industrial context. For example, both Krake (2005) and Berthon *et al.* (2008) studied 'SME brand management' and both focused within SME on the medium sized enterprises. However, there is still a difference in resources between medium sized companies and micro- and small companies, as defined by the European Commission (2003):

*'A medium enterprise employs fewer than 250 persons and has an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million. A small enterprise employs fewer than 50 persons and its annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million. A microenterprise employs fewer than 10 persons and its annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million'* (European Commission, 2003).

Most markets are dominated with micro- and small enterprises (CBS, 2017). For example, 98 percent of all Dutch enterprises are entitled as a microenterprise (less than 10 employees).



The sector with the most companies listed in the Netherlands is the agricultural sector, consisting mainly of agricultural and horticultural enterprises. This sector is also dominated by micro firms. Yet, this sector also faces another challenge: perishability of fresh produce. In other words, these products have a very limited shelf life (Ferguson & Ketzenberg, 2006). According to Dechering (2013), Fresh produce markets are dealing with spiral of cost orientation and low profit margins. Therefore, branding could be a way to achieve more distinctiveness for fresh produce (Dechering, 2013).

The objective of this research is to contribute to existing branding literature, by focusing on micro and small enterprises with perishable products. This research combines these concepts since both MSE branding and branding of perishable products are very limited in academic research. The objective is to increase knowledge about how and to what extent MSE with perishable products are managing a brand. Since research is limited, this will be an exploratory study conducted from a company perspective.

To research the objective, the following main research question has been formulated:

- *"How are micro and small enterprises with perishable products managing their brands?"*

The following sub-questions are proposed to support the main research question:

- Are micro- and small enterprises of fresh produce involved with branding?
- Does perishability of fresh produce influence branding activities of micro- and small enterprises?
- Are there any other particularities of micro- and small enterprises of fresh produce that could influence branding activities?

To summarize, this study elaborates further on the concept of branding in micro and small enterprises. Therewith, it responds to the call for research into SME branding into different industry contexts (e.g. Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Mitchell *et al.*, 2012; Hafeez *et al.*, 2012; Agostini *et al.*, 2015) and brand management in small and micro firms (e.g. Krake, 2005).

In order to answer the questions above, this paper starts with a literature review. Based on the literature review, the important concepts specific to micro and small firms with perishable products will be provided. Thereafter, a qualitative research will be adopted with an application to a specific branch or sector. The findings from interviews with small and micro firms are presented and are followed by a discussion. In the end, conclusions along with managerial and research implications are presented.

## 2. Literature review

This chapter reviews relevant literature related to brands and branding. Since literature on branding at micro- and small enterprises of fresh produce is still very limited. This literature review is used more deductively as a sort of background to see how it is applied in other settings or contexts (Boeije, 2010). The review is divided into four pillars: brands and branding in general; brands and branding for small and medium enterprises; branding at micro and small enterprises; and perishability of fresh produce. This approach of a funnel is used to explore the most important concepts on branding and to learn the differences on branding between the different firm sizes.

### 2.1. Brands and branding

This section discusses brands and branding in general, its definition, its relevance and its importance. Subsequently, brand equity and brand management will be discussed.

In research there are different brand definitions. A widely used definition in research is:

*A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of the previously mentioned, which is intended to identify products or services of one particular seller (or group of sellers) and to differentiate it from its competitors' (Kotler, 1991; American Marketing Association, n.d.).*

Brands are everywhere and play an important role, because it helps making decisions (e.g. Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Kapferer, 2008). For example, they simplify customers' choices by offering points of differentiation between competitive offerings (Wood, 2000; Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Brands can be seen and measured from various perspectives (e.g. Kapferer, 2008). Wood (2000) investigated brand definitions and found that definitions can be divided into two groups: definitions with emphasis on benefits for the company or with emphasis on benefits to the consumer. The proposed brand definition by the American Marketing Association (n.d.) can be seen as a company oriented definition, as the definition focuses mainly on the product and its visual features. For example, Keller (1998 *as cited in* Kapferer, 2008) took a more customer oriented perspective. According to Keller a brand is a "*set of mental associations, held by the customer, which add to the perceived value of that product or service*". These mental associations should be unique, strong and desirable (Kapferer, 2008). Both company oriented and customer oriented definition, as given above, comprise the aspect of added value and differentiation. Thus, one could argue that differentiation is a key point of brands and branding from various perspectives. An example of a brand definition which captures this particular aspect of 'added value' is given by De Chernatony (2009, p.104):

*A brand is a cluster of values that enables a promise to be made about a unique and welcomed experience. This definition captures the way that emphasis may initially be placed on functionally oriented values, which then become augmented with emotionally oriented values, as brand management sophistication increases, driving a visionary promise that adds value to all stakeholders.*

If only based on the above mentioned reputable definitions of a brand in literature, it can be concluded that brands are more than just a mark and logo that are put on a product or service (e.g. Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Keller, 2008; Kapferer, 2008; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). A brand cannot exist without a product or service. The product or service is in fact

the embodiment of the brand (Kapferer, 2008). In other words, without the brand the product or service is just a common good, but branding improves it in a way it becomes more valuable, through differentiation (Bettbury, 2002, *as cited in Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006*). In conclusion, combining all different definitions, simplify its definition, one could say that a brand is about achieving competitive advantage for enterprises, through differentiation (Wood, 2000). This report focuses on brand management from a company perspective. Because, the extent to which MSE are using brand management, depends on its benefits and whether they are aware of these benefits.

Branding is relevant, because it has the capacity to influence (Abimbola, 2001). Branding ensures the continuity and interconnection of a company with its environment (including customers). Therefore, a brand serves as an important factor in successfully linking the effectiveness and competence of a company to its environment (Abimbola, 2001). Because of its capacity to influence it can lead to several marketing advantages and increase competitive position for companies (e.g. Keller, 2003). In case of introductions of new products into the market it is known that an established brand has more chance of success compared to unestablished brands (Abimbola, 2001; Abimbola & Kocack, 2007). Because of the ability to make comparisons with previous brand products, the customer feels more confident to make a decision. This could be due to the fact that strong brands transfer feelings of familiarity, trust and ensure risk reduction (e.g. Keller, 2003; Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007, Ohnemus, 2009). Brands have the ability to linger in the hearts and minds of customers, or in other words a brand has personality (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006).

Thus, branding is important for companies. A strong brand could ensure competitive advantage, as it can provide attributes which are difficult to copy for competitors (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007). Because of its importance brands are seen as key assets for a firm, long term corporate assets (e.g. Abimbola, 2001; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006; Kapferer, 2008).

#### **2.1.1. Brand equity**

It has become clear that brands are relevant, have value and are important to both customers and companies. This section discusses the value of a brand, often called 'brand equity' (e.g. Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

As noted, in research there is lots of debate about the definition of a brand. There are numerous definitions with slight difference to one another. The same applies to the concept of 'brand equity'. In research there are different meanings as well as approaches for 'brand equity'. For instance, a marketer tends to view the concept from a different perspective than an accountant does (Wood, 2000). According to Wood (2000), brand equity has been brought to life in an attempt to define the relationship between customer and brand. There are two well-established paradigms on building, measuring and managing brand equity: 'customer-based brand equity' and 'company-based brand equity' (Keller & Lehmann, 2006, Keller, 2008, Kapferer, 2008; Keller, 2013). Customer-based brand equity is a

differential effect of brand knowledge on customer's response towards marketing efforts of a brand (Keller, 1993). Thus, the power of a brand has to do with what customers have learned, seen, heard about a brand as a result of their experiences of over time (Keller, 2010). Company-based brand equity views from a company perspective as brands serve many purposes. For instance, and generally known, a brand helps to separate a product or service from competition (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Keller and Lehmann (2006) even mentioned a third approach: 'financial-based brand equity', since brands are assets and can be brought to the market to be bought and sold.

Aaker (1991) identified five sources of brand equity which are applicable across products and markets. These concepts are brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty and other proprietary assets such as patents and trademarks. Keller (2003) has further identified four hierarchical levels for building a strong brand: from brand identity to brand meaning, brand responses and finally brand relationships. Brand equity is influenced by company controlled events as well as external factors (Keller & Lehmann, 2006).

A widely cited definition of brand equity in research is the one Leuthesser (1988, *as cited in Kapferer, 2008*) proposed:

Brand equity is '*the set of associations and behaviour on the part of a brand's customers, channel members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name*'.

Leuthesser proposes a broad definition of brand equity, and includes all different parties (channel members) related to the brand (Kapferer, 2008). In fact, a brand involves everybody, thus its value stems from every involved party.

In summary, brand equity is all about consumers responding more favourably towards a specific brand and its marketing actions than they do towards competitors (e.g. Keller, 2010; Spence & Essoussi, 2010). In fact, interactions with customers and other stakeholders influence and contribute to the brand equity of the firm. Because the more positive they are, the stronger the brand and the greater the reputation for the organization (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). Hence, brand equity comprises all company's (marketing) activities, whom all affecting the brand (Keller, 1993).

### **2.1.2. Brand management**

The introduction of brands and branding in the previous section made clear that brands and branding are important and relevant for companies. This section discusses the activities regarding brands and branding, also known as 'brand management'.

Brand management can be defined as all activities to build, measure and manage brand equity (e.g. Keller, 2013). According to Keller (2013), brand management consists of four main steps: (1) identifying and developing brand plans; (2) designing and implementing brand marketing programs; (3) measuring and interpreting brand performance; (4) growing and sustaining brand equity. According to Keller and Lehmann (2006), brand

management consists of five topics: (1) developing brand positioning; (2) integrating brand marketing; (3) assessing brand performance; (4) growing brands, and (5) strategically managing the brand. Based on these five topics, they developed a systems model and the model stated that the overall evaluation of a brand is not only determined by company actions, but also conditions/actions within the market. Although both definitions (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Keller, 2013;) slightly differ, the overall goal of brand management remains the same: to create value, to differentiate, to influence buyers with the brand, so the brand service becomes a purchase criterion (Kapferer, 2008). According to Wood (2000), brand management should be strategic and holistic, because this is contributing to longevity.

There are different approaches toward brand management, which are called brand management paradigms (Louro & Cunha, 2011). Each paradigm has its own focus, own definition of brand management, own brand role and different structure compared to the other. It determines a company's understanding of brands, their brand strategy and to what extent it helps in gaining competitive advantage. In other words, each paradigm has a particular view on the role of customers and brands in the process of value creation (Louro & Cunha, 2001). There are four paradigms, namely: product-, projective-, adaptive- and relational paradigms (Louro & Cunha, 2001). In summary, the 'Product paradigm' focuses on the product as the locus for value creation. Whereas the 'Projective paradigm' complements the product paradigm by focusing on the strategic dimension of branding, in a way that brand management is performed through the creation, development and communication of a coherent brand identity. The 'Adaptive paradigm' posits customers as the main builders of brand meaning. This means that brand management focuses primarily on brand image. Thus, customer response is the leading determinant in firm performance. Contrary to this is the 'Relational paradigm' which has a relational orientation, seeing branding as an ongoing dynamic process in which value and meaning of the brand is co-created between firms and customers (Louro & Cunha, 2001).

Brand management is important in all industries; Business-to-Business (*hereinafter referred to as B2B*) and Business-to-Consumer (*hereinafter referred to as B2C*). Because, it allows to establish long term competitive advantages (e.g. Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). However, branding in B2B is not the same as in B2C markets (e.g. Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). This is important to take in consideration when talking about branding in B2B, because a lot of research has taken a B2C approach on branding (e.g. Kapferer, 2008; Ohnemus, 2009; Keller, 2013). Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) discussed the most important differences between B2B and B2C. These differences are: complexity of industrial products and services; nature and diversity of industrial demand; organizational buying process (i.e. buying centre); customer characteristics (i.e. significantly fewer number of customers, larger volumes per customer and longer-lasting supplier-customer relationships). Important (B2B) brand functions are: increase information efficiency, reduce risk and

creates added value or image benefit creation for customers (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). These branding advantages are especially relevant in case of increasing complexity of products and services, hyper-competition and/or high price pressures (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Markets are often full of 'me-too products' who quickly dominate a market after a successful introduction, for example with the I-pod. If the product-market combination is affected by these copycat products, innovation or financial resources becomes less important for creating sustainable competitive advantage (Ohnemus, 2009). To conclude, branding could be a very effective barrier against competitors (Ohnemus, 2009).

B2B-companies usually are focusing on traditional managerial practices because there is a lot of uncertainty about branding (Reijonen *et al.*, 2015). This could be the result of a lack of (cohesive) academic theory (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). This study focuses on branding of micro and small enterprises in B2B markets.

## **2.2. SME brands and branding**

This section discusses brands and branding in small and medium enterprises (*hereinafter referred to as SME*) and its differences with large organizations (*hereinafter referred to as LO*). Subsequently, SME brand equity and SME brand management will be discussed.

Most of research regarding branding is aimed at large organizations (e.g. Keller, 2003, Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Kapferer, 2008). The overall tendency regarding the concept of branding is that one is usually convinced that branding is more suited for LO because they have got the recourses to develop tools to deploy branding (e.g. Abimbola, 2001; Wong & Merrilees, 2005, Hafeez *et al.* 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2013). This means that most branding literature adopt large organizations perspectives, which are either not relevant or not applicable to smaller organisations. Though, both are active in the same market and besides all companies have been started small. For example, even the top-3 global brands in the world, like Apple, Microsoft and Google (according to Forbes, n.d.) have started small. Branding at SME has become a growing interest in research. Abimbola (2001) was one of the first who concluded that branding is relevant to all sizes of organizations. Although it is relevant, it does not mean that it is also a priority for SME. It is viewed as a reductive concept involving only the logo, the product or service the company sells (Inskip, 2004). Still, branding in SME involves in basic the same principle as in larger firms. SME share many similarities with LO, however, their approach to brand building differs in many ways (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007). Compared to SME branding, there has already quite some research been done on SME marketing (e.g. Carson, 1990; Carson *et al.*, 1995; Carson & Gilmore, 2000a; Carson & Gilmore, 2000b; Hill, 2001a; Hill, 2001b; Gilmore *et al.*, 2001).

One of the biggest, if not the greatest, difference between LO and SME acknowledged in academic research is (limited) resources, both budget and time, available to SME (e.g. Abimbola, 2001; Krake, 2005; Wong & Merrilees, 2005; Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007,

Ojasalo *et al.*, 2008). These limited resources are called brand barriers (Wong & Merrilees, 2005).

Research into 'SME Branding' has concluded that despite the limited resources compared to LO (major brands), SME do have some clear advantages over LO in branding. This is due to their more flexible structures and processes (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). This seems to be due to the fact that in LO, branding and other corporate identity elements are distributed through different departments within an organization (e.g. marketing, sales and top management), while in SME such activities are all bundled with the owner manager. On the other hand, branding, organisational identity and reputation call for a holistic brand management, which is better suited to SME than LO, according to Abimbola & Vallaster (2007). In addition, another advantage of SME branding over LO practices, according to Abimbola & Kocak (2007), is that competitiveness is more determined by economic influence than by firm size.

Therefore, the traditional marketing planning processes and practices do not represent SME branding. Important principles in SME practice are concepts that fit entrepreneurship, like innovation, creativeness and inventiveness (Abimbola, 2001; Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). The importance of creativeness and entrepreneurship in SME branding, have also been acknowledged in other research (e.g. Krake, 2005, Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Ojasalo *et al.*, 2008).

### **2.2.1. SME brand equity**

As has become clear, branding is different in SME compared to LO. This also applies for measuring brand equity in SME.

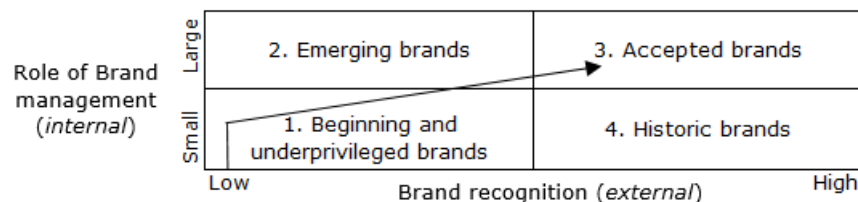
Brand equity can only be assessed if it can be measured. This seems not to be a problem for LO, since there are different methods developed. In addition, despite the fact that LO and SME are alike regarding the need to deliver relevant and desirable brands, LO have certainly better tools towards understanding, monitoring consumer needs and measuring effectiveness of past actions (Berthon *et al.*, 2008). In case of SME, their internal systems are more collegial and less formalized (Spence & Essoussi, 2010). The fact that measuring SME brand equity is more difficult, was also concluded by Krake (2005): '*There are no objective criteria for measuring the recognition of a brand in SME and absolutely none for measuring them in relation to each other*'.

In SME, the owner manager (*hereinafter referred to as OM*) plays a key role in brand management, and thus also for brand equity (e.g. Krake, 2005, Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Spence & Essoussi, 2010; Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Brand equity is estimated based on informal appraisals (Krake, 2005; Spence & Essoussi, 2010; Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Usually it is evaluated on owner managers' personal vision, knowledge, and objectives. (Hill, 2001a).

Although, in theory there seem to be not a difference between SME brand equity and LO brand equity. Yet, the evaluation of the concept is different. Thereby, SME' interpretation regarding measuring brand equity remains unanswered in the current literature (e.g. Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Perhaps this is due to limited resources. There are no fundamental guidelines for brand equity or measuring brand equity. In SME, the owner-manager is the embodiment of the brand (Mitchell *et al.*, 2015).

### 2.2.2. SME Brand management

The role of brand management in SME varies considerably. Krake (2005) stated that there are companies with little brand recognition (yet), who are putting the whole organization into gaining recognition. On the other side, there are companies that had a high level of brand recognition, while putting little (conscious) effort to it (Krake, 2005). The relationship between the role of branding and the (external) brand recognition results in Krake's (2005) 'brand development model', see figure 1. It must be taken in to account that there is for SME no objective criteria for measuring brand recognition (Krake, 2005).



**Figure 1.** Brand development model small and medium enterprises (Krake, 2005)

Brand management is all about creating a strong brand. Brand management is relevant to all industries, to all types of companies and thus also relevant for SME. Despite the fact that branding is relevant, there is not a basis stating the principle activities for brand management in SME. The first and also one of the few authors who focused on SME by adapting Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity model was Keller (Horan, 2009). Keller adapted the model and focused particularly on SME, creating a five step guideline to create a strong brand for SME. Despite the fact Keller was one of the first to create guideline specifically for SME, it was not quite clear how he came up with this particular five lines (Krake, 2005). Abimbola (2001) also defined five guidelines specifically for SME, see Table 1. The biggest difference between the two authors is point four. Where Keller (1998) suggest a combined push- and pull marketing campaign, Abimbola (2001) suggest to target a specific audience with a design tailored to them. Abimbola (2001) suggests to search for effective and low costly promotions by using word of mouth and networks. At last, Krake (2005) studied the guidelines of Keller (1998) and discarded two of the five guidelines and replaced them. The reason to discard guideline 4 and 5 is that SME usually is not into co-branding nor cooperation with other companies in branding. By adding three other guidelines Krake (2005) acknowledges and highlights the importance of the entrepreneur in SME branding.



**Table 1.** Overview of small and medium enterprises brand management guidelines.

<b>Keller (1998)</b>	<b>Abimbola (2001)</b>	<b>Krake (2005)</b>
1. Concentrate on building one (or two) strong brands.	1. Consider corporate branding or emphasize only one or two strong brands.	1. Concentrate on building one (or two) strong brands.
2. Focus a creatively-developed marketing program on one or two important brand associations, to serve as the source of "brand equity".	2. Focus a creatively designed marketing program on specific brand associations.	2. Focus a creatively-developed marketing program on one or two important brand associations, to serve as the source of "brand equity".
3. Use a well-integrated mix of brand elements that support both brand awareness and brand image.	3. Create a well-integrated set of brand elements that enhance both awareness and brand image.	3. Use a well-integrated mix of brand elements that fully support both brand awareness and brand image.
4. Design a "push" campaign that aims to build the brand, and a creative "pull" campaign that will attract attention.	4. Design an appropriate campaign for a specific audience.	4. Be logical in your policy and consistent in your communications.
5. Broaden the brand with as many secondary associations as possible.	5. Leverage as many secondary associations as possible.	5. Ensure that there is a clear link between the character of the entrepreneur and that of the brand.
		6. Cultivate a passion for the brand within the company.

### 2.3. Branding in micro and small firms

This section discusses the gap between SME and MSE and the applicability of SME branding literature on micro and small enterprises.

Most of the SME branding research focuses either on the medium firms in their studies (Krake, 2005; Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Agostini *et al.*, 2015) or uses a mix of small and medium enterprises (e.g. Mowle & Merrilees, 2005; Abimbola & Kocak, 2007; Spence & Essousi, 2010; Merrilees *et al.*, 2011; Mäläskä *et al.*, 2011; Centeno & Hart, 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2012; Reijonen *et al.*, 2012; Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Yet, there is still a large difference in resources between a microenterprise (*max. 10 employees; annual turnover <2 million EUR*) and a medium enterprise (*max. 250 employees; annual turnover <50 million EUR*) (European Commission, 2003). This makes it implausible to generalize results of a medium enterprise to a small- or micro firm.

A research solely on small business entrepreneurs (Laukkanen *et al.*, 2016) found that both market- and brand orientation are of importance to the success of small firms. Yet, its effects are indirect through brand performance, rather than direct on financial performance. Mitchell *et al.* (2015) study contained mostly micro and small firms and found that also for these firms branding is a possibility for differentiation and gaining competitive advantage. Other studies who mainly focused on small firms in their research on SME branding are for example Ojasalo *et al.* (2008) and Horan *et al.* (2011). On the other hand, small firm marketing is better known in literature (e.g. Carson, 1985, Carson 1990, Gilmore *et al.*, 2001; Bumgardner *et al.*, 2011; O'Donnell, 2014).

A study, which solely aims to develop a theory on micro firms branding is performed by Sandbacka *et al.* (2013). They investigated branding at micro industrial service companies and found that micro companies are able to build a brand without having to tap on extra resources. Though, the industrial service companies are quite different to approach

compared to other industries, making it difficult to generalize its findings to other industries (Sandbacka *et al.*, 2013).

To conclude, questions that rise regarding brand management in micro firms remains unanswered in the current branding literature. This is, as mentioned, due to the fact that most literature is focusing on large organizations or medium enterprises.

## **2.4. Fresh produce**

Companies who have fresh produce, face another challenge: perishability and (possible) quality variation as a result. In addition, fresh produce markets are different than other commodity markets, due to the fact that the products are perishable. Important characteristics of fresh produce markets: price is largely determined by supply and demand; every stakeholder in the chain acts in its own interest; growers have to accept the price and attempt to cut costs; due to perishability retailers have to sell what stock they have as fast as they can; consumers face limited choice (Lewis *et al.*, 2014).

Regarding brand management for fresh produce, it seems that perishability could impede branding practices, since fresh produce means limited shelf life (e.g. Ferguson & Ketzenberg, 2006) and (possible) quality variation (e.g. Riezebos & Zimmerman, 2005). The high degree of perishability is due to damaged and exposed tissues and lack of protective skin (Watada & Qi, 1999; Soliva-Fortuny & Martín-Belloso, 2003; Francis *et al.*, 2012). The quality could be affected by various factors: weather conditions; biological variation; seasonality; variations in production; minimal processing operations; storage conditions; travel time (Cook, 1990; Watada & Qi, 1999; Trienekens & Zuurbier, 2008; Cummins *et al.*, 2009; Francis *et al.*, 2012).

Fresh produce are often relatively unprocessed and do not have clear brands, mostly they are unbranded commodities (Pay *et al.*, 1996; Lewis *et al.*, 2014). The only form of branding to differentiate products seems to be various types of labels (Pay *et al.*, 1996). Docherty (2012) defined four common brand types in agriculture: producer-, varietal-, geographical- and certification brands. In a study on branding fresh products, Nijssen and Van Trijp (1998) defined the concept 'consumer franchise'. Consumer franchise is defined by consumer's awareness, its favourable attitudes towards and their willingness to buy (or repurchase) a brand (Nijssen & Van Trijp, 1998). This means the stronger a brand, the stronger its consumer franchise. Important factors determining a brands' consumer franchise are: product quality, promotional resources; order of market entry (first mover is lead); physical possibility to brand (type of product); control in supply chain (quality variation factors) and shelf-life (Nijssen & Van Trijp, 1998). However, research on consumer franchise and fresh produce branding in the context of micro firm remains unanswered.

To summarize, branding fresh produce is different and to some extent more difficult than other non-fresh due to its perishability and the characteristics of its markets. Yet, branding

is possible. Branding could help in achieving more distinctiveness for fresh produce and in the process, escaping the low profit margins (Steenkamp, 1997 *as cited in* Nijssen & Van Trijp, 1998; Dechering, 2013).

## 2.5. Case concepts

This section follows up on the literature review by highlighting important concepts in brands and branding literature. The concepts are shown in a framework, as given in figure 3. It is important to stress that the concepts given in this section are largely based on small and medium enterprises, since literature about branding in micro- and small enterprises, and especially micro enterprises, is very limited.

Since the main objective of this study is to examine how micro and small enterprises with perishable products are managing their brands, this study has chosen 'Brand orientation' and 'Brand equity' as main concepts of the research. First, the main concepts will be discussed, after that, the other concepts will be explained.

### 2.5.1. Brand orientation

In literature it is suggested that branding should be part of a company's strategic planning process. However, branding has usually a low priority in small and medium enterprises (e.g. Hirvonen & Laukkanen, 2013; Spence & Essousi, 2010). However, research has shown that some small and medium firms do something with brand management, yet the extent to which it is conducted is different (Krake, 2005; Hirvonen & Laukkanen, 2013). The completion is formatted into the concept 'brand orientation'. At brand-oriented enterprises branding plays an important role in all of the company's decisions (e.g. Wong & Merrilees, 2005). In other words, brand orientation is a choice of strategy, helping to gain competitive advantage (Simões & Dibb, 2001; Wong & Merrilees, 2005). Thus, brand orientation determines the branding activities.

Wong and Merrilees (2005) identified three branding archetypes which states the role of brand orientation in relation to brand-marketing performances, see figure 3. A minimalist- is short-term oriented with a production approach. Thus, branding activities are minimalistic. With embryonic-, a company is more involved with marketing and branding, yet branding activities are still limited, more considered as an optional part in marketing. Integrated brand orientation applies to firms who integrated branding as a vital part of their marketing. It is not used as optional tool, but forms a pivotal role in creating competitive advantage and brand distinctiveness (Wong & Merrilees, 2005).



**Figure 2.** Three Branding archetypes identified by Wong & Merrilees (2005).

In summary, this study follows Wong and Merrilees' (2005) definition of brand orientation: *"brand orientation refers to the extent to which branding plays an important role in the company's strategy, aiming to create distinctiveness"* (Wong & Merrilees, 2005; Reijonen *et al.*, 2012).

### **2.5.2. Brand equity**

A brand can be evaluated from various points of view, as discussed in the literature. The value of a brand, often called 'brand equity' can be measured from various perspectives (e.g. Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Brand equity attempts to define the relationship between customer and the brand (Wood, 2000). This study takes into account that small and medium enterprises do not have the tools to measure and monitor brand equity (Berthon *et al.*, 2008). Brand equity in small and medium enterprises is largely based on informal appraisals of the owner manager (e.g. Hill, 2001a; Krake, 2005, Spence & Essousi, 2010, Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Thus, this research focuses on branding and the success of branding for micro and small firms. Therefore, this study sees brand equity as all company's activities which involves the brand (Keller, 1993), where brand equity is about customers responding more favourably towards a specific brand than they do towards competitive brands (e.g. Keller, 2003; Spence & Essousi, 2010).

### **2.5.3. Product characteristics**

Product characteristics is the first concept to mention besides the main concepts. This study indicates that product characteristics, for instance perishability, have a moderating effect on the relation between a firm's branding practices and their brand equity. The factor perishability is one of the main reasons to state 'product characteristics' as an important concept.

### **2.5.4. Resources**

Another important concept in the relation between branding and brand performance are resources. Simply put, resources are the amount of money and time available for branding (e.g. Reijonen *et al.*, 2015). Limited resources (for branding) are, as acknowledged in research, one of the biggest differences between small and medium enterprises and large organizations. Wong & Merrilees (2005) called these limited resources 'brand barriers'. In other words, resources are important and at the same time one of the biggest challenge for micro and small firms' branding practices. This study also assumes that there is a relationship between brand equity and resources (available) for branding practices.

### **2.5.5. Owner manager**

Compared to large organizations, micro- and small enterprises do not have different departments which are solely responsible for one thing, for example marketing, sales or finance. In micro- and small enterprises these activities are all bundled with the owner manager (e.g. Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). SME Branding practices are performed by the owner manager or in some cases by a small management team. Thus, the owner manager is lead in brand building (Krake, 2005; Ojasalo *et al.*, 2008; Spence & Essousi, 2010; Mitchell *et al.*, 2012). Owner manager's personality plays an important role in small and

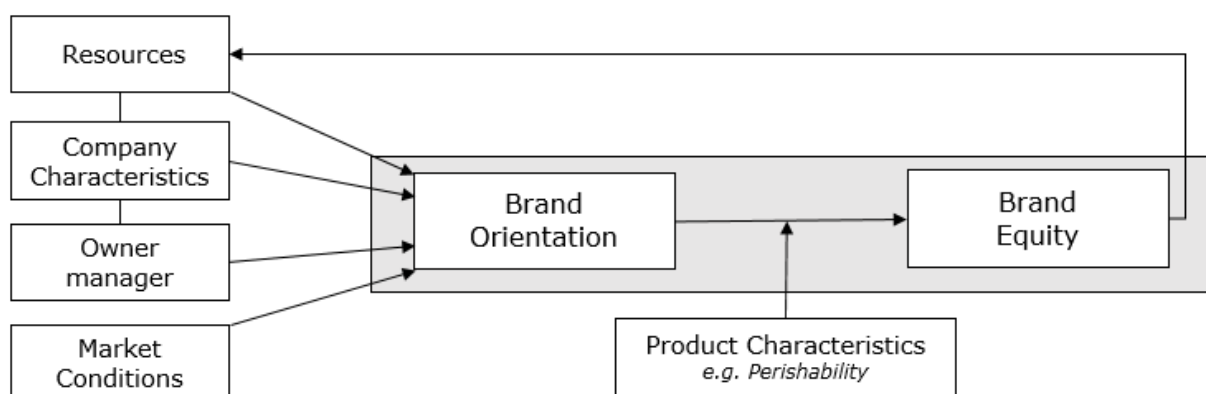
medium enterprises branding, because the owner manager is seen as the embodiment of the brand (Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). The owner manager also plays an important role in evaluating brand equity, because in micro- and small enterprises, brand equity is largely estimated on informal appraisals (e.g. Krake, 2005; Spence & Essousi, 2010; Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). Thus, based on literature, it can be said that the owner manager plays an important role in micro and small firm branding.

#### 2.5.6. Company characteristics

Company characteristics is also a concept to mention regarding branding practices of micro and small firms. Company characteristics are internal influencers on branding practices. Besides the often discussed factors: firm size, resources and the owner manager, also other characteristics are of influence on branding practices. For example, according to Krake (2005), branding practices are largely determined through a company's strategy and objectives. Also personnel can be of influence regarding the brand and brand performance (e.g. Keller & Lehmann, 2006). To conclude each company has its particularities which influence branding practices. Therefore, company characteristics is mentioned as an important concept.

#### 2.5.7. Market conditions

Market conditions are influencing branding externally, and therefore included as concept. Examples of external influences are competitors (state of the market, state of the competition), governmental bodies, interest groups, partners' actions (Krake, 2005; Keller & Lehmann, 2006). The type of market also determines what role brand management plays within a company (Krake, 2005). Branding is not the same in every market. For example, a B2B market is not the same as B2C markets, i.e. the nature and diversity of demand, customer characteristics (e.g. Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). In a fresh produce market price is largely determined by supply and demand. This influences brand management (Lewis *et al.*, 2014). To conclude, each market has its own specific characteristics which influence a company's branding practices.



**Figure 3.** Complete overview of the concepts of branding in micro and small enterprises.

Figure 3 gives an overview of all the concepts that are believed to be of influence on branding in micro and small enterprises.

### 3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the design of the study, the data collection method and case selection. Furthermore, this chapter also includes the method to analyse the data.

#### 3.1. Study design

As literature on branding at micro and small enterprises (*hereinafter referred to as MSE*) with fresh produce is still very limited, this study entailed an exploratory research. A qualitative approach is appropriate to understand branding with perishable products from an MSE perspective. A (multiple-)case study is a common methodology in exploratory studies relating branding and SME (e.g. Krake, 2005, Wong & Merrilees, 2005, Ojasalo *et al.*, 2008; Spence & Essoussi, 2010, Mitchell *et al.*, 2011; Horan *et al.*, 2011; Sandbacka *et al.*, 2013). A case study is [...] "*an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomena within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident*" (Yin, 2003, p.13). A case study is especially relevant since little is known about the phenomenon MSE branding in fresh produce. Another advantage of cases studies is that theory building from case studies is not dependent on previous literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case studies could have various goals (Eisenhardt, 1989), but in this study its goal is to explore and map branding practices by MSE with perishable products in order to contribute to the limited current literature on this topic.

#### 3.2. Data collection

Since this study had an exploratory nature, data was collected through face-to-face interviews with the owner manager of the company. This study has chosen to interview owner manager because they play an important role in MSE (branding). These personal interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions (see Annex I for an overview of the questions). In addition to the interviews, results were also be obtained through direct observation (by interviewer throughout the interview) and document analysis (read: website, social media, catalogue and other online and offline information). Direct observation and document analysis were used to triangulate the information gathered from the interviews to the best possible. Combining qualitative and quantitative collection methods allows for synergy (Eisenhardt, 1989). In fact, a case study design relies on multiple sources of evidence, for triangulation of data (Yin, 2012). Furthermore, it also helped in being able to create a more complete representation of branding.

#### 3.4. Case selection

This study focuses on branding practices at micro and small enterprises with perishable products. Perishable products are of course linked to the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector consists of agricultural and horticultural enterprises. Both can be divided into numerous subsectors, like floriculture. In the Netherlands there are almost 5,000 companies in the floriculture sector. According to Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics more than 91 per cent of the companies have less than ten employees (CBS, 2018), thus micro firms are dominating this sector. This study chooses to conduct research in floriculture.

As concluded by Riezebos & Zimmermann (2005) floriculture is not the typical industry, since the Dutch flower auction (FloraHolland) plays an important role in it. FloraHolland provides clock trade and is also an intermediary agency between growers and customers (Ossevoort *et al.*, 2012). Supply and demand are dynamic and relatively insecure, meaning the whole chain needs to be flexible. Other important actors in the value chain of floriculture, besides FloraHolland, are the growers, auctions, traders, logistic partners and of course the sales channels (retail or auction) (Ossevoort *et al.*, 2012).

Branding is relevant to all sectors, thus also floriculture. Koelemeijer *et al.* (1992) were one of the first to state that branding could be a promising tool for growers to obtain higher prices and to strengthen the market position. The importance of branding for the sector was also acknowledged by Dutch organisation of agriculture and horticulture (LTO Glaskracht). Dechering (2013) stated: *'Brands are ultimately the only way to achieve more distinctiveness for fresh products such as fruit and vegetables and flowers and plants, and to escape the spiral of cost orientation and low profit margins'*. This is due to fact that floriculture has a traditionally cooperative market structure, limited economies of scale, product oriented market approach and limited influence on maintaining product quality in retail (Riezebos & Zimmermann, 2005).

However, none of the literature of fresh produce or floricultural branding takes the size of firm into consideration. And, again, branding has shown to be relevant to all industries, to all types of organizations or firm sizes, yet the interpretation and execution of branding activities are different. Based on the author's experiences, the contention in this study is that branding is present in floriculture. However, micro and small firms are assumable not importunately busy with branding, due to markets characteristics and firm's resources. Needless to say is that every subsector and every product has its own particularities. Therefore, results of one product is not necessarily applicable to the other product and/or sector.

Regarding the selection of cases for the case study. It was difficult to find and select appropriate cases for a number of reasons: First, floriculture is not a transparent market, which makes it difficult to define an appropriate population for the study. In other words, it was difficult to find companies who met the criteria of being a micro or small enterprise. This study used the criteria of the European Commission (2003) to decide whether a company can be labelled as micro-, small- or medium enterprise. A microenterprise employs fewer than 10 persons and annual turnover/balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million' (European Commission, 2003). Since companies are not willing to share financial data, and it is difficult to get insight in these data, the number of employees was the most important indicator for labelling the size of the organization. To get a good view on the possible population, this study sought assistance at FloraHolland, the Dutch Flower auction, an important actor in the Dutch Floriculture. Unfortunately, FloraHolland was not willing to help in any form at all. Another obstacle in finding and selecting participants was

the findability of micro- and small enterprises, as most of these companies were hard to find due to being invisible on the internet. Therefore, the author has used his own network in floriculture to find and select appropriate companies. Companies suspected of being suitable to participate in the study were contacted by e-mail and telephone. However, finding suitable cases was still challenging as companies were not eager to participate and either not reacted or mentioned that they lacked time to participate.

Regarding to the number of cases, ideally one should stop adding cases when saturation is reached. In other words, a sufficient number of cases is reached, when incremental learning becomes minimal (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, this study had to take pragmatic consideration into account (like time pressure), since it was difficult in finding and selection suitable cases. Despite these obstacles, this study founded and six suitable cases, willing to cooperate.

### 3.4.1. Case descriptions

As mentioned, this study has found six cases willing to participate in helping to explore branding practices in micro- and small enterprises who have fresh produce. The six cases are all active in the Dutch floriculture sector, five of them are growers and one is a sales broker for growers. All the interviews were held with the owner manager of the company. Table 2 provides the case descriptions. Due to the confidential and anonymous nature of the study the company names have been encoded and changed into letters.

**Table 2.** Case descriptions.

	Duration	Founded	Legal form	Size	FTE	Floricultural sector
<b>Company A</b>	40 min.	2008	Sole trader	Micro	1	Sales broker
<b>Company B</b>	29 min.	1990	Business Partnership	Small	13	Pot plants
<b>Company C</b>	52 min.	1977	Business Partnership	Micro	1	Pot plants
<b>Company D</b>	39 min.	1996	Limited company	Micro	3	Garden plants
<b>Company E</b>	30 min.	2007	Sole Trader	Micro	1	Pot- and bedding plants
<b>Company F</b>	52 min.	2008	Limited Company	Micro	5	Pot- and garden plants

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The goal of the study was to increase knowledge about how and to what extent MSE with perishable products are managing a brand. Since current literature is limited, the interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions to gather in depth information on the different proposed themes (see Annex I). Due to the exploratory nature of the study it was very important to keep the interview as open as possible. Since this research is built on a multiple case study, semi-structured interviews were preferred. They allow for some unitization, while still having the flexibility to keep asking more and/or other questions based on the given answers by the interviewee (Kumar, 2011).

The interviews were semi-structured by making use of themes. The questions were not asked in a specific order, but were ordered based on the given answers. The themes for the questions were largely based on the literature review and the case concepts that followed from it. Questions could vary among the cases, depending on the given answers



and the information of the case. Added to that, questions were also raised based on documentation analysis prior to the interview. All available input from online and offline documentation of the case were used in creating questions applicable to that case.

Regarding the interview questions set up in advance: The interviews started with more general questions about the company, aiming at subjects like the foundation of the company, number of employees, active in which sector. In order to get a good insight in the company characteristics, among others, the following questions were asked: *'Could you please tell me something about the history of your company?'*, *'Wat is your goal as a grower (your strategy)?'*. Another important question regarding the company characteristics was: *'How would you describe your organization?'* Examples of questions regarding product characteristics are: *'Could you describe the main product and its characteristics?'* *'Is the quality of the product always the same?'* *'What factors influence the quality of the product?'* To cover the subject market conditions, the following question was leading: *'How would you describe the market you are active in?'* Prior to the questions concerning branding practices, questions about marketing were asked. These questions could help in defining the role of marketing in micro and small firms and its relation to branding practices. Do they see marketing and branding as two different things or is it one and the same. Example questions are: *'Could you describe the marketing activities of your organization?'* *'Who is your target audience?'* and *'How do you find your customers?'*. Questions like, *'who is responsible for the marketing activities?'* gave a good view on the role of the owner manager, where question like *'How do you determine the budget for you branding and marketing activities?'*, helped in understanding the concept of resources in micro- and small firms. At last, regarding 'branding practices', questions like, *'How do you differentiate your product from competitors?'*, *'What are unique characteristics that differentiate your brand?'* and *'How do you communicate your brands?'*, were asked. The question *'How do you measure the success of the branding and marketing activities?'* helped in understanding MSE brand equity, whereas *'Does your branding activities contribute to your firm's performance?'* helped to understand the successfulness of MSE branding.

Annex I gives an complete overview of all the semi-structured questions asked. It is important to mention that questions and order of questions varied among the different cases. Based on the given input by the interviewee different or extra questions were asked or not asked. The researcher also took learning outcomes of the previous to the next interview.

Qualitative data analysis consists of a stream of activities from segmenting the data to reassembling them, and that each of these activities have components of both thinking and doing. Throughout this whole process, key concepts were elaborated on (Boeije, 2010). Firstly, the data was segmented in what the researcher thought to be relevant and meaningful. While going through the prepared data (transcripts) different topics (concepts)

will arise in the raw data. The process of naming these fragments, by giving them a summarizing label, is called coding ('t Hart *et al.*, 2009). Coding is seen as the most important aid in conducting qualitative analysis (Boeije, 2010). To summarize, the analysis part, the study started with open coding. This is the process where the 'raw data' is broken down into fragments. The fragments were categorized and labelled with a code. Secondly, the data was put together in new ways by describing and making connections between the categories. Lastly, selective coding was used to make sense out of the codes and the data and to formulate a conceptual framework resulting from the data and the generated codes (Boeije, 2010).

## 4. Results

This chapter provides the results of this study. Appendix II gives an overview of all the results per case, as well as the codes created per case. All the codes are clarified with a quote.

As mentioned, the transcripts have been analysed, and the 'raw data' was split into fragments and were coded. The labels are studied and overarching concepts were defined, linking the different labels. These overarching concepts link back to the case concepts as discussed in the literature review. First, the general results are discussed. Second, the results will be discussed by means of these case concepts: In addition, there are three new concepts, who did not fully integrate with the main codes: 'network', 'role of auction' and 'mediation agency'.

### 4.1. General results

The results were derived from six cases: five micro firms and one small firms. All the cases are active in different sectors (other products) within floriculture. Therefore, the results or circumstances of one product or case are not applicable to the other product or case. Thus, it is difficult to compare or 'quantify' results, since every sector has its own particularities. General results regarding the cases are presented in table 3.

Nevertheless, results have shown that brands are present in floriculture, in all sectors, and also in micro and small firms. However, the implementation of brands and branding varies greatly. Of the six cases, two cases deliberately mentioned to have a brand and two cases deliberately mentioned not to have a brand. The remaining two cases also mentioned not to have a brand. However, on a subconscious level both cases consistently mentioned their 'brand' and branding activities. They appear to be unaware of branding, which brings up another interesting highlight, namely knowledge. The overall situation regarding the cases is that owner managers' knowledge regarding marketing and branding is very limited. A quote to illustrate this is: *"The problem here is that many growers are no sellers. Many are family business, thus there is a lot of professional knowledge (know-how), but sales (and marketing) is underexposed"* (owner manager Company B). The owner manager of company A believes that making offers via internet is part of online marketing, since it is done via internet. This indicates that marketing and branding knowledge is limited. Lastly, the cases faced a lot of difficulties in answering the questions due to their lacking overall knowledge on branding and marketing practices.

The lack of branding and marketing knowledge is also illustrated by the level of brand orientation. This study followed Wong and Merrilees (2005) and their definition of brand orientation, whereby they defined three branding archetypes. These are found to be highly applicable to describe the branding activities of the cases. Four of six cases can be assigned to minimalist brand orientation. In other words, their branding activities are minimalistic, these cases have a production approach. 'Embryonic brand orientation' applies to the other

two cases. These company are more involved with branding and marketing. However, branding activities are still limited, and more or less interpreted as optional (Wong & Merrilees, 2005).

Lastly, the lack of knowledge in marketing and branding is also shown in the fact that four of the five growers outsourced their marketing and sales activities to a mediation agency.

**Table 3.** General results

	<b>Case A</b>	<b>Case B</b>	<b>Case C</b>	<b>Case D</b>	<b>Case E</b>	<b>Case F</b>
<b>Product sector</b>	Mediation agency	Pot plants	Pot plants	Garden plants	Pot -bedding plants	Pot-garden plants
<b>Firm size</b>	Micro	Small	Micro	Micro	Micro	Micro
<b>Number of FTE</b>	1	13	1	3	1	5
<b>Brand</b>	Partially	No	No	Yes	Partially	Yes*
<b>Brand activities</b>	Present	N/a	N/a	Small-scale	Very limited	Deliberately*
<b>Level of brand orientation</b>	Minimalist-	Minimalist-	Minimalist-	Embryonic-	Minimalist-	Embryonic-
<b>Marketing</b>	Yes	Limited	Very limited	Yes	Limited	Very limited
<b>Marketing knowledge</b>	Present	Limited	Nil	Present	Very limited	Clearly present
<b>Mediation agency</b>	N/a	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Believes branding to be possible</b>	Yes, but related to quality	Yes, but related to firm size	Not mentioned	Absolutely	Yes	Yes, but related to firm size

*\*via a Growers association*

## 4.2. Brand orientation

Brand orientation, the concepts which stands central in this study, is defined to the extent to which branding plays an important role in a company's strategy aiming to create distinctiveness. Table 4 gives an overview of the labels that link to brand orientation.

**Table 4.** Labels found linked to the concept brand orientation

<b>Brand orientation</b>		
Brand strategy	Brand attributes	Brand hearsay
Generics	Product labels	Brand recognition
Brand awareness	Growers' association brand	Brand protection
Business-to-business brand	Product license	

Brand orientation differs per company. As mentioned, there are two companies with a brand. These two companies have a clear strategy regarding their brands. For example, company D its goal is to *"increase brand recognition, if the brand will get stuck in the head of the consumers, and if I will persevere for ten years, they will eventually only ask for my brand"*. Company D legally protected the brand and spends time checking whether their brand is used correctly. The other company with a brand is company F. Company F has a brand with a growers association. They decided to bundle forces and cooperatively launch a brand: *"We saw a lot of opportunities for brand X. We believed that we could learn from one another, the growers within the association"*. Company F also has a clear brand strategy: *"We want to maintain a certain level with our brand" and "... the better garden centers will only sell our brand. Thus, the quality products. Despite the fact that the same quality products is sent to other retailers it goes without the label of our brand. We do not want that it will compete with each other"*.

Company A mentioned not to have a brand, because their new name was still too early. Remarkable is that unconsciously, the company answers are all related to brand building. For example, they decided to change their name into a more snappy (catchy) name and *"it was also created with an eye to the future, so that perhaps a future sales colleague, who wants to start in a similar way, but do not have the resources, can board under this concept (-name). Then we can split costs and continue together."* This is also applicable to company E, who mentioned not to do anything regarding marketing and branding, and yet continuously talked about 'brand X': "I am currently busy with the 'brand X-line, with the 'company name', the 'Brand X-line'.

Company B does not have a brand, however they do create generics (variety names). Yet, the owner manager believes it does not make a difference: *"A generic for cultivation is for growers and sellers not important (...). Sometimes it can be important, if the products contain special features. However, if it goes with the mass, generic names are subordinate"*.

### 4.3. Brand equity

Brand equity is defined as the value of a brand, in a way that consumers are acting more favorably towards a brand than towards a competitive brand or product. Table 5 present the labels linked to brand equity.

**Table 5.** Labels found linked to the concept brand equity

Brand equity		
Brand equity	Successfulness of branding	Relevance of branding

The companies are unified in their conception that branding is relevant in floriculture. However, most of them argued that it is only reserved for larger organizations. For example, *"Of course there is demand for brands, if you are big enough and distinctive", "You need to be able to market a certain volume"*. Company F believes that branding is not possible for smaller firms: *"I do not believe it can be done by them (...) I believe you need to have a certain market share, to be a certain party to force certain things"*.

Considering branding in relation to quality, Company A believed branding to be successful in floriculture as long *"as the grower keeps the brand in mind and retains quality. Because you can also break it down just as hard as you built it up..."*. Regarding the success of competitors brands, Company E experiences the following: *"Yes they really need Brand I (competitor brand), than they tell me Brand I, we need Brand I. (...) Despite the fact that my product is qualitatively the same"*.

All the companies also indicated that brand equity is difficult to measure. Company D is convinced that branding contributes to their company's success: *"Absolutely, it is recognition, and because of that your products are being seen and bought more easily. However, it is not measurable"*. Company B on branding: *"Unfortunately it is obviously advertising, because that is what it is about, which is very difficult to account for (to*

measure)”. Company F has a growers association brand and notices the success of their branding efforts: *“Well in the past few years the market of Brand X has become a demand market. That is really nice, that there is more demand than we can offer (...) This is the result of marketing efforts, genetics.. And that are the revenues of years of investments in marketing, genetics and cooperation with our suppliers at first and later on our colleagues (so to say)”*. Company F also indicated that their branding success is very difficult to measure.

#### 4.4. Product characteristics

Product characteristics are all factors related to the product. Product characteristics could be of influence on branding possibilities, for example perishability of plants and flowers. Table 6 present the labels linked to product characteristics.

**Table 6.** Labels found linked to the concept product characteristics

Product characteristics		
Factors affecting product quality	Perishability	Type of product (traits)
Product quality	Product development	Shelf life
Dealing with different quality		

Product characteristics was mentioned in this study as an important concept, mainly because of the perishable aspect of the products. However, perishability did not clearly demonstrate to be an issue for the growers. Only company A, a mediation agency for growers, mentioned the role of perishability in branding: *“Perishability, ... of course it plays a role, especially in case of more pricey products (...) So it is bound to a certain purchase price”*. Company A also stated that for established brands perishability plays no role, those products have a better shelf life: *“No then, they ask for ‘product X’ instead of product (...) No, because of the shelf-life, that has a proofed shelf-life, appearance. It is excellent. In case of quality variation they are still using the same name (brand): “Growers will always deliver under the same name (brand). They cannot deliver under different names, so they attach a different quality label to it. In case of different quality, they will not put an image label to the product. However, the brand is still linked to the grower, so customers will still see the brand..”*

Product quality is affected by various factors: climate and cultivation circumstances, water, nutrition, burden of disease, transport and inbreeding by young plant suppliers (according to Company B). Whereas company C mentioned that the watering system is an important actor in product quality. The importance of product quality in relation to branding: *“Of course quality needs to be perfect, no matter what. For example, you can have a beautiful air balloon, but if it cannot hold the air in it, it will explode anyhow. So, quality is always leading...”* (Company F). Regarding shelf life, Company F stated the following: *“Within Brand X, we are quite busy with shelf life .. how we can improve shelf life” We try to consult with parties in the chain as much as possible, to control..”*. To summarize, products are influenced by various factors. However, results do not show that these factors are influencing branding.

#### 4.5. Resources

Resources are important and at the same time considered as one of the biggest challenges for micro and small firms. Resources related concepts are often mentioned by interviewees. All the concepts related to resources, are presented in table 7.

**Table 7.** Labels found linked to the concept resources

Resources		
Lack of Time	Lack of knowledge	Lack of resources
Firm size	Lack of financial resources	Lack of marketing knowledge
Lack of cooperative marketing		

Resources are often mentioned by the owner managers of the companies. Company A assists growers with their marketing and sales activities. In fact, company A targets companies who do not have any knowledge in marketing and sales, or do not have the time or network to do so. An example regarding lack of marketing knowledge: *"Marketing is actually a poor relation in our family business"* (Company B). Lack of time is also mentioned, *"... I have simply not enough time for it.."* Firm size is also mentioned: *"our company is too small for that.."* or *"I am too small to promote, to market, and to do research on how my product is received"*. To summarize, resources and the lack of it is often mentioned by the companies to explain why they are not able to do certain things (themselves).

#### 4.6. Owner manager

Results show that the owner manager of a micro or small firm plays an important role. They are responsible for all companies' decisions and strategy. Table 8 shows the labels that are linked to the concept of owner manager.

**Table 8.** Labels found linked to the concept owner manager

Owner manager		
Entrepreneurial orientation	Personal background	Personal motives

Since all cases are micro or small enterprises, all activities are bundled with the owner manager of the company. Thus, all marketing and branding activities depends on the owner manager. The overall contention based on the cases is that the owner managers are growers and less entrepreneurs. This is demonstrated by: *"The problem here is that many growers are no sellers. Many are family business, thus there is a lot of professional knowledge (know-how), but sales is underexposed"* (owner manager company B). Owner manager of company F also acknowledges this: *"However, if you are a grower, the sweetest thing to do is growing plants, to grow the most beautiful plants.. And if you see what comes with it, of course it is part of doing business. However you need to do where you are good at, I use to say..."*. Thus, the type of owner manager, also captured by 'entrepreneurial orientation', determines the branding activities.

#### 4.7. Company characteristics

Company characteristics are all internal factors influencing company's branding. Table 9 shows all labels linked to this concept.

**Table 9.** Labels found linked to the concept company characteristics

Company characteristics		
Company strategy	Market orientation	Sales strategy
Marketing activities	Marketing budget	Market research
Target group		

An important company characteristic resulting from this study is that all five of the six cases are real family businesses. Additionally all cases are business-to-business and thus not involved in any private sales. Results show that the cases are limited in their marketing activities. Especially those who do not have a brand. Their activities concerning marketing are nihil. Company B has an explanation for that: *"I would like to emphasize that in most family farms, (marketing) has grown like this. That marketing is on the down low, people are good in growing and sales is subordinate to it. This is due to the auction and also how it is used to be"*. This is also confirmed by Company D: *"From what I see is that too little growers are doing marketing. The same applies for myself"*. The cases do also not work with a marketing budget, but act on what they believe is needed.

Results show that marketing is subordinate, cases have a production approach. Because of this, the auction plays an important role. Cases either sell via clock trade or via the mediation agency of the auction. The interviewees faced difficulties in answering the questions regarding their strategy and goals as a grower. One of the few with a clear company strategy was Company D: *"...my goals as a grower, yes that is to grow a good product from beginning until the end of the cultivation, while remaining in control. Sales and cultivation, actually I am doing everything by myself and that is fine, that is great"*. There are clear differences between the cases regarding company characteristics. As the results concerning this concept show, like strategy, marketing activities and marketing budget give a good insight in a company's brand orientation.

#### 4.8. Market conditions

Market conditions are all external factors, that could have an influence on a micro- or small firm's branding practices. Table 10 presents all found labels that fit within the concept 'market conditions'.

**Table 10.** Labels found linked to the concept market conditions

Market conditions		
Competition	Competitive pressure	Market transparency
Buying behaviour	Business-to-business limitations	Market restrictions

Despite the fact that all the cases are active in different sectors due to different products, these market conditions are of influence on branding. Yet, the extent of its applicability is different. The state of the market, for example competition or competitive pressure, determines the possibilities or even the necessity for branding. For example, Company B stated that it was not possible to be distinctive in their market, only by price. However, company B does not have a brand. Company F believes that customers rather choose at ease and product quality is less important. This could be of influence on branding. Business-to-business also influence branding: *"However it, will go not any further than the*



wholesalers and the purchasers, but you will never reach the consumer” (Company D’s product is a cut flower, which are traded unnamed). Branding can also be a solution to market restrictions. For example, company D decided to brand since breeders’ right was not possible for her product: “[...] we had seedlings which cannot be protected by breeders’ right, so the only way to get recognition in the market was via a brand.”

#### 4.9. New concepts

The results highlight three new concepts in relation to the conceptual framework given in chapter 2. These concept are presented in table 11.

**Table 11.** Labels found linked to new concepts

New concepts		
Network	Mediation agency	Role of auction

First concept to mention is ‘network’ or the importance of networking. The first case who mentioned the importance of a network is company A; *“The reasons for growers not to market and sell themselves has to do with resources, but also due to the absence of a network”*. The success of a network was stated by company B: *“I am still leaning on the relations we have built back in the day”*. Company F indirectly also highlighted the importance of a network by stating that there is an open exchange of information between the growers within the growers association. Network can be considered as a resource.

Second important concept to mention isolated is ‘mediation agency’. Company A is a mediation agency assisting companies who do not have the resources to do marketing and sales themselves. Company A has fourteen micro- and small floricultural enterprises as a client (website company A, n.d.). All other cases (except for company C) are using a mediation agency to help with marketing and sales, since they do not have the resources to do it themselves. A mediation agency can just like ‘network’ also be considered as a resource for micro and small firms.

Last concept is ‘role of the auction’. The Dutch flower auction plays a big role within floriculture. This is also evidenced by the results since this was brought up by each case. Considering the role of the auction, company B stated: *“The auction cooperative has played a very big role, only what we see is that the mediation function it used to be, is now finished. It is now a link between buyers and sellers. Especially, for payment transactions and logistics, but they do not longer market actively for growers.”* Company C stated only to sell via the auction: *“two-third via mediation of auction and a third via clock trade”*. The same applies to company F, only the numbers differ: *“Yes we are member of the auction, so basically everything is sold via the auction. However, only 5% is done via clock trade and 95% is direct sales.”* The auction is also used to avoid risk of invoices and problems in logistics with trolleys (Company C). Regarding clock trade, Company F believes the clock is a perfect tool as a sort of shop window. To summarize, the Dutch Flower auction is an important actor, and plays an important role at micro and small firms in floriculture.

## 5. Conclusions

This chapter provides the main conclusions for this study by answering the research questions and sub-questions. It is important to stress that it is difficult to compare results, due to nature of this study, the selection of the cases and due to the fact that the all cases have different products and therefore are active in different branches of floriculture.

The goal of this study was to increase knowledge about how and to what extent micro and small enterprises of fresh produce are managing a brand. This study was conducted in the Dutch floriculture. This study has shown, concerning the first sub-question (*'Are micro- and small enterprises of fresh product involved with branding?'*), that branding is present in micro and small firms in floriculture. Yet, the completion and awareness of their branding activities varies greatly among growers. With few resources, innovativeness and creativity is desired. Only one of the six cases has a brand. It is important to stress that this brand was born out of necessity, since the product could not be protected by plant breeders' rights. Therefore, this grower believed the only way to protect the product was to brand. The brand arose out of necessity rather than strategy. The other company who has a brand, has a brand via a growers association. They bundled forces and resources and therewith respond to micro and small firms limitations of few resources. The company by itself did not have the resources to brand on its own and stated clearly that the company's own marketing and branding activities for their products were nil. Thus, to conclude the first sub-question: branding is also present in micro- and small enterprises with fresh produce, however the implementation as well as awareness varies greatly according to the study.

Concerning the second sub-question; *'Does perishability of fresh produce influence branding activities of micro- and small enterprises?'*. Prior to the study it was assumed that perishability could be of great influence on branding. However, in this study it did not come forward as a big issue for growers in relation to product quality or branding activities. In case of quality variation, transparent communication with buyers is desirable, or the product is shipped to the auction with a 'lesser quality mark' and often sold without product label. Concerning perishability in relation to branding, there was one case who believed perishability has no influence on a brand, because branded products in floriculture have a proofed shelf-life. This indicates that brands are perceived as products with less issues regarding perishability.

To respond to the question; *'Are there any other particularities of micro- and small enterprises of fresh produce that could influence branding activities?'* This study showed that resources and the lack of it is a central theme in micro and small firms. The lack of time, for instance, was explicitly brought forward as an issue for micro and small firms. Among the cases was also a strong believe that branding cannot be done with few resources.

Another interesting result from this study is the lack of knowledge by owner managers in marketing and branding. This is an important factor that limits branding activities. So, based on the results of this study it can be said that growers like to grow and cultivate plants, and marketing and sales are subordinate to that. They are production oriented. This is also where the importance of the Dutch flower auction comes into play, allowing growers to lean back. The Dutch flower auction unburdens the growers by providing clock trade, assist in direct trade, helping in logistics and business transactions. Because of the Dutch auction there is no need for growers to market actively, there is always a way to sell their products. In the past the flower auction even functioned as a mediation agency between growers and buyers. Lack of resources, like time, financial and knowledge and the fact that the auction is not mediating in sales anymore, growers had to find other ways to make up for that. That is where the importance of the mediation agency is brought forward. Results show that four out of five growers in this study are making use of a mediation agency (sales broker) to help with their marketing and sales activities. The importance of a mediation agency for micro- and small growers is also illustrated in the fact that company A, a mediation agency for growers, has fourteen growers as clients to represent their marketing and sales activities. Last important conclusion brought forward in this study, is the importance of having a network. Having a network allows for growers to lean back. There is also the perception that buyers are selling at ease which emphasises the importance of a network.

To come back and to answer the main research question, *"How are micro and small enterprises with perishable products managing their brands?"* This study has shown that branding is limitedly present in micro and small firms in floriculture. However, since it is so limitedly present, and based on the results from this study, it is difficult to answer the part of *'how are they managing their brand'*. Therefore, further research is needed. However, based on this study it can be said that branding for micro and small firm is a challenge and requires creativeness and external resources. For example via a growers' association or via a mediation agency. Since there is a lack of resources, but also a lack of knowledge by the owner managers. From this study it can also be concluded that the Dutch flower auction plays a very important role for micro and small firms.

## 6. Discussion

This chapter provides the discussion for this study. The chapter is divided into four sections. Firstly, the contribution to the literature will be discussed. Next to that, managerial implications, limitations and possibilities for further research will be discussed.

### 6.1. Theoretical contribution

This study contributed to the limited current literature on micro and small firm branding with fresh produce. This study explored and mapped branding practices of micro and small enterprises in floriculture. It can be said that the contribution to the literature was plural. It contributed to the literature on micro and small firm branding. Secondly, it contributed to the literature on fresh produce branding and branding in floriculture.

Since literature on micro and small firm branding still is limited, it is interesting to compare this study's results with literature on small- and medium enterprises. SME limitations, like limited resources, lack of expertise and limited impact in the market place (e.g. Carson, 1990, Gilmore *et al*, 2001) also corresponds to the results in this study. The biggest difference between large organizations and their smaller counterparts in literature are limited resources (e.g. Abimbola, 2001; Krake, 2005; Wong & Merrilees, 2005; Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007, Ojasalo *et al*, 2008). Obviously, this also appears in this study. The lack of resources is a huge challenge for micro firms, especially the lack of time and the lack of knowledge. This study found that companies are seeking external help to compensate for it, like hiring mediation agency for marketing and sales. Another interesting result is to brand via a growers' association. The lack of time can also be clarified by firm size.

As SME branding literature stated that the owner manager has an all-deciding and all-controlling role within the company (e.g. Krake, 2005, Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). This also applies to micro- and small enterprises, as demonstrated in this study. In micro enterprises with fresh produce the role of the owner manager is perhaps even bigger, since there are less employees and the owner manager is also responsible for the cultivation. After all, its main core function is being a grower and all other tasks were found to be subordinate to that. From this study it can be said that branding is no priority for growers (Inskip, 2004). In order to do branding with few resources, creativity as well as entrepreneurship is required. This has also been acknowledged in other research (e.g. Krake, 2005, Berthon *et al.*, 2008; Ojasalo *et al.*, 2008).

Branding is important for companies since a strong brand could ensure competitive advantage, as it can provide attributes which are difficult to copy for competitors (Abimbola & Kocak, 2007). This was also experienced by the selected cases in this study. The advantages and relevance is acknowledged in this study. However, 'brand equity' is difficult to measure for micro and small enterprises. Solely on the results of the study it can be said that brand equity is estimated on informal appraisals, like owner managers' personal vision and knowledge (Hill, 2001a; Krake, 2005; Spence & Essoussi, 2010, Mitchel *et al.*,

2015). Sandbacka *et al.* (2013) found in their study on micro service firm branding that networking is one of the five main activities in brand building. In this study, the importance of a network is also brought forward, but in another way. In floriculture, having a network allows for micro firms to lean back, and thus making activities like branding even less a priority, though it is present.

Riezebos and Zimmermann (2005) stated that floriculture has a traditionally cooperative market structure, limited economies of scale, product oriented market approach. This is also reflected in this study. Resulting from this study, it can be said that the Dutch flower auction plays a bigger role in the industry, as initially anticipated, especially for micro- and small firms. The auction plays a central role within the practices of micro and small firms.

Branding could be a way to achieve more distinctiveness for fresh produce (Dechering, 2013). However, this study shows that growers have limited knowledge, and lack of resources to make branding a priority. The role of branding in micro and small firms in floriculture can be best described by reference of the three branding archetypes of Wong and Merrilees (2005). In floriculture growers can best be described as 'minimalist brand orientation' meaning they are short term oriented with a production approach. Thus, their branding activities are minimalistic to nil. Whereas some growers are considered to be embryonic- meaning they are more involved with branding and marketing, yet branding activities are still limited and considered as optional. In this study the two firms who had a brand can be considered as 'embryonic brand orientation'. There was no evidence found of a company who integrated branding as vital part of their strategy and organization (integrated brand orientation).

To summarize, this study contributed to the literature by exploring and mapping branding practices at micro and small enterprises within floriculture. Micro and small firm branding as well as fresh produce branding is currently underdeveloped in literature. This study was set to explore and lay foundation for further research.

## **6.2. Practical contribution**

Regarding the practical contributions or managerial implications of this study. This study explored and mapped branding practices at micro and small firms in floriculture. Different insights on branding practices by micro and small enterprises in different sectors are given. These different insights on branding could help owner managers as well as other stakeholders in the industry regarding branding practices.

Despite firm size and lack of resources, two cases showed that branding is relevant and possible for micro and small firms. As one case demonstrated that branding has advantages, as the brand itself created a demanding market. Though this company was due to lack of resources not able to do it on its own, but bundled forces with other companies and launched the brand via a growers' association. Cooperative branding or bundling forces could be a solution for micro and small companies with lack of resources.

This study also has shown that there is a lack of knowledge on branding and marketing. Mediation agencies have shown to be of importance for micro and small enterprises and could be a solution for companies who lack resources, both knowledge and time.

Thus, this study learns that despite the fact that micro and small firms face issues regarding resources, it is possible to brand. In addition, branding is relevant within floriculture and has several advantages as acknowledged within the case study.

### **6.3. Limitations**

An important limitation of this study is the fact that the study is based on solely six cases, which raises problems in reliability, validity and generalizability. This can be explained by a couple of reasons: First, it was very difficult to find companies who met the criteria of this study; to be a micro or small enterprise in the floriculture. Secondly, companies who met the criteria were not eager to participate in the study. Most of times argument not to participate was lack of time: *"I am sorry, but I am too busy right now"*. Because of this, and also resulting into pressure of time, it was decided to leave it at six cases. Thus, this study had to take pragmatic considerations into account, like time pressure, since it was so difficult in finding and selecting suitable cases. As Eisenhardt (1989) concluded, a researcher should stop adding cases when saturation is reached. It is ambiguous to say that saturation was reached in this study. However, based on the overall results of the cases, the researcher was in the belief that given the time pressure and obstacles in finding new cases was not going to result in remarkable discoveries.

As stated by Boeije (2010) inductive thinking is essential in qualitative studies. Micro- and small firm branding of fresh produce is explored in this study, serving as a starting point for theory building and future research. However, the study started by using existing theory on small firm branding to take notice of previous literature in a different setting to prevent the wheel keeps on getting reinvented (Boeije, 2010). However, this influences the researcher to keep open minded and could block the researcher inductive reasoning while undertaking the qualitative approach. On the other hand, literature in advance allowed to identify a gap in existing knowledge (Boeije, 2010).

Another limitation to take into account is the execution of the interviews. The researcher had no prior experience in conducting a qualitative study. This is of course linked to the quality of the study which in turn is linked to reliability and validity (Boeije, 2010). The same applies to interpreting the rich and descriptive data, which was subjected to one researcher only. Another limitation is the lack of knowledge by the interviewees which interfered with the intention of the thematic interviews. The interviewees had a lot of problems with answering the questions, which made it more difficult to dig deeper. Semi-structured interviews were set to allow for some unitization. However, the input was so diverse, that intention of the interviews did not remain intact. This made it very hard to seek for links in results. Therefore, the input as well as the output per case varies greatly.

However, on the other hand, since it was a qualitative approach, researcher had to keep an open view, to prevent biases as much as possible.

The processing of the transcripts also needs to be mentioned in the limitations. Since the interviews have been transcribed, non-verbal behaviour is lost (Boeije, 2010) and this had been intercepted by the observation of the researcher, which leads to possible biases. Moreover, the transcripts had to be translated to English, which results in possible 'translation errors' of the researcher. For example, with metaphors and Dutch figures of speech.

Lastly, this study was conducted in a specific industry, namely the floricultural industry from a company perspective. This threatens the possibility to generalize the results to different industries or countries. The study was conducted solely in the Netherlands, where the Dutch flower auction plays an important role in the floriculture industry. It is uncertain whether this is also applicable in other countries.

#### **6.4. Recommendations for further research**

This study contributed to the literature on micro- and small firm branding as well as to fresh produce branding. Since this study had an exploratory nature, this study laid the foundation for further research in this area. To begin with this study could be expanded, to increase its reliability and validity. In other words, future research could aim for more cases in floriculture allowing to analyse differences more thoroughly. Additionally, this study only focused on micro and small firms, it could be interesting to analyse differences with larger firms with successful brands. This study was conducted from a company's perspective in a business-to-business market, where future research could explore micro- and small firm branding from a different perspective. For example, from a customer or a consumer perspective. This is especially relevant for further research, since this study has shown that micro firms' branding activities are very limited. It could be very interesting to study the role or the influence of a brand for customers as well as consumers in this industry. Another recommendation for further research could be to study the role of the Dutch flower auction more thoroughly. Since the auction plays an important role for micro- and small firms.

Also, other directions can be taken, like researchers could expand research into other industries. For example, fresh produce branding can be expanded by aiming for instance on the meat industry or the fruit- and vegetable industry. And, since micro- and small firm branding, with a focus on micro firms is quite underdeveloped in research, research could expand to multiple industries and other perspectives.



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# Appendices

## Appendix I Interview questions

The interviews are conducted and transcribed in Dutch. This section gives an overview of the interview questions. The questions have been translated into English. The interview questions were semi-structured by making use of themes. This means that the questions were not asked in a specific order and that the questions asked varied among cases. Undermentioned presents example questions per theme.

### **General information**

- Company Name:
- Name and function interviewee:
- Founded in:
- Number of employees (fte):
- Sector:

### **Product characteristics**

- Could you describe the products your company is offering?
- Could you describe the (main) product, and its characteristics?
- Why these products?
- What is the sales strategy (sales ratio and business sales ratio)?

### **Product quality**

- Is the quality of the product always the same?
- What factors influence the quality of the product?
- In case of quality variation, how do you communicate this to your customers?
- How is quality monitored throughout from production until delivery instore?

### **Company Characteristics**

- Could you please elaborate on the history of the company?
- How did you end up becoming a grower?
- What is your goal as a grower? (your strategy?)
- How would you describe your organization?

*(in case the interviewee does not know of anything to answer the question, the following hints will be given: E.g. culture, mission, vision, strategy, objectives)*

- Wat do you think of marketing?
- Could you describe the marketing activities of your company?
- Who is responsible for the marketing activities of your company?
- How many hours do you spend on marketing per week?
- Do you work with third parties in the field of marketing?
- Could you describe your target audience?

## **Market**

- Could you describe the market?

*(in case respondent does not know of anything to answer the question, the following hints will be given: e.g. state of the market, competitors, competitor intensity, supply and demands, (channel) partners)*

## **Branding**

- To what extent is your company distinctive with respect to competitors?
- How do you communicate these unique selling points?
- Do you have a brand?
- How many brands does your company have?
- To what extent is the brand protected (e.g. trademarks)?
- How do you differentiate your product from competitors?
- What are unique characteristics that differentiate your brand?
- How do you communicate your brands?
- How did you come up with the design of the brand (name, logo, slogan)?
- Who do you target with your brand? customers or consumers? Why?
- Does your branding activities contribute to your firm's performance?
- How do you measure the success of the branding and marketing activities?
- Who is responsible for the branding practices?
- How many hours do you spend on branding activities?
- How do you determine the budget for you branding and marketing activities?
- Are you satisfied with your current branding activities?
- What would you like to change?

## **Extra**

- Is there anything else you would like to add/mention regarding your product?
- Is there anything else you would like to add/mention regarding branding?
- Is there anything else you would like to add/mention regarding market?

## Appendix II Interview results

This section provides all case results. The results consists of a short case description, observational memos and codes per interview. All the codes are clarified by an illustrative quote of the interviewee.

### Company A

Company A is a company who offers commercial services for floricultural companies (growers). This comprises activities like sales advice and marketing and sales support. There are different reasons for floriculture companies to outsource their sales and marketing activities to company A, but resources is a called argument. As company A mentioned: *"the goal of the company is to unburden those companies in marketing and sales, of which they do not have any knowledge, or do not have the time or network to do so..."* (Interview company A). This was also the biggest reasons to include company A as a case to this study. Since this company has a lot of experience marketing and sales activities for micro and small enterprises, because these type of enterprises have outsourced these activities to this company. Company A also has a lot of experience, knowledge of the floriculture. Finally, company A is also a micro company, since it is a sole trader. Thus, company A was used to explore the floriculture industry, and the role of marketing and branding in it. The questions for this case was twofold, on the one hand to explore its own branding activities and on the other hand to learn its view on branding and marketing in the floriculture.

### Observational memos, document analysis

From the researcher's point of view, company A does not have a lot of knowledge regarding branding and marketing. Researcher is also aware that these are dangerous statements, since this results from observations, and interpretation of document analysis. Regarding the interview, the interviewee had some problems with specifically answering the questions, instead interviewee revolved around the questions. For example, interviewee's website states that they are using innovative marketing tools, however during the interview interviewee could not clearly elaborate on it. Another example on limited marketing knowledge: *"Proactively offering is a form of online marketing, since it is done via internet"*.

Code – Label	Quote from interview
Brand strategy	<i>"I decided to change the company name 'X' into a more snappy (catchy) name, part of the name comprises the sector, the other part is sales, and that is what I do. Both are used a lot in social media, blogs etcetera"</i> <i>"I also created it with an eye to the future, so that perhaps a future sales colleague, who wants to start in a similar way, but do not have the resources, can board under this concept (-name). Then we can split costs and continue together."</i>
Target group	Interviewee confirmed that the company's target group were companies who do not have any knowledge in marketing and sales, or do not have the time or network to do so...
Marketing activities	<i>"Acquisition in widest sense, support at fairs, making quotations, proactively offering, support in concepts, monitor trends and developments in the market, monitor Flower auctions..."</i> <i>"(...) Social media, like Instagram ...."</i>

Brand attributes	<i>"It is a driving fair, with appearance of 'X', be represented everywhere with the appearance of 'X'. This could be coming from a printed pen to a printed car." "It had to be a compact and powerful name. My son did some analysis, who is studying in a commercial direction. He did that and he came up with the name. And, my first son, who is industrial designer, made the first logo ..."</i>
Brand hearsay	<i>"Yes, so.. anyhow, it happens while trying to sell the products of the listed growers. But in the meantime, my name is circulating around"</i>
Brand equity	<i>"No, I did not get really some feedback. Surely that it is a good name, that I hear. However, I cannot tell that it is all becoming more fluently. Or I know what..."</i>
Marketing budget	<i>"I do not decide in advance how much to spent. I must of course be able to afford it (...) But if it is right, and my 'gut-feeling' is right, I can afford it, it has added value for 'X', dan I will go for it.. "As long as I can afford it, and it is good, looks good and works good, I will do it.."</i>
Entrepreneurial orientation	<i>"I would like to change the systems, who are currently used with customers and flower auctions (...) They built a system for me..." "(...) You become innovative, you have to find business opportunities"</i>
Mediation agency	<i>Growers use to sell via mediation agency of the Flower auctions. This is over. In the past it was created to work on a cooperative base for the growers. Now it is the other way around. Company A substitutes for what used to be done by the flower auction, for growers who did not have the time, knowledge or resources to sell personally.</i>
Lack of resources Importance of networking	<i>"The reasons for growers not to do market and sell themselves has to do with resources, but also due to missing of a network."</i>
Relevance of brands	<i>Several of my customers have a brand or using the breeders' brand.</i>
Successfulness of branding	<i>Interviewee sees advantages of a brand in floriculture. However, only: "Yes, if it is bound to quality, it can also be a disadvantage at the same time". However, I can assume that those who are branding, are 100% committed to keep market it in a good way.  Branding can be successful as long; "as the grower keeps the brand in mind and retains quality. Because you can also break it down just as hard as you build it up, in case of break down, it will go twice as hard"</i>
Shelf life	<i>"No then, they ask for 'product X' instead of product (...) No, because of the shelf-life, that has a proofed shelf-life, appearance. It is excellent."</i>
Perishability	<i>"Perishability, ... of course it plays a role, especially in case of more pricey products (...) So it is bound to a certain buy-in price."</i>
Dealing with different quality	<i>"Growers will always deliver under the same name (brand). They cannot deliver under different names, so they attach a different quality label to it. In case of different quality, they will not put an image label to the product. However, the brand is still linked to the grower, so customers will still see the brand.."</i>

## Company B

Company B is a floricultural company, who grows pot plants. Company B can be classified as a company in-between micro and small, since the number of personnel varies throughout the year. Company B is a business partnership between husband and wife. Lastly, company B is one of those companies who outsourced their marketing and sales to a mediation agency like company A due to insufficient time and knowledge. This is also one reason to include company B as well as company A as a case.

### Observational memos, document analysis

Company B murmured a lot during the interview, so often that the researcher found it necessary to filter all these 'uh' and 'uhm' in order to get a readable transcript. These murmurings could be interpreted as uncertainty or ignorance, but perhaps it is just a



character trait. However, it is important to mention as it could be of influence. The perception that there is limited knowledge and skills in marketing and branding, was also applicable to this case. Also, company B revolved a lot around the questions and was mostly not able to specifically answer the question. Remarkable was the fact that this company mentioned no to use any brand at all, however document analysis found that there indeed is a brand for the products of 'X'. Their website indicated that they are using the brand of the breeder for their products. This brand is also mentioned on their image labels for their products as well as on their catalogue.

Code – Label	Quote from interview
Market orientation	<p><i>"It stems from a vegetable nursery, who switched to pot plants. Back in the day, things were going downhill in olericulture, there were to many 'open ground growers' who then searched for different cultivation"</i></p> <p><i>In olericulture everything was merged (...) So, you could not distinguish in terms of quality (...) Therefore I switched to pot plants, because then you are always distinctive.</i></p>
Importance of network, Entrepreneurial orientation	<i>"Because I had a lot connections, due to internships and due to interviews I held, just as you. Because of that I saw the market opportunities to do market it myself and therefore pot plants"</i>
Company strategy	<p><i>"I would like to stress that with Product X we have it all in-house from A to Z, so from mother plants to cutting production"</i></p> <p><i>"We do not any private sales. People who cannot sale through regular trade, will end up selling privately.. Our biggest sales take place via the auction. There are two methods: we have clock trade (...) and in addition there is also a mediation agency" (orchestrated by the auction)</i></p>
Product traits (Type of product)	<i>"The most important trait of Product Y is that it is a flowering houseplant, or actually a flowering garden plant, because actually all flowering plants are garden plants (...) so visually appealing that you can also put it inside, not that the plant likes to be put inside, but compare it with a bouquet of flowers, who holds it ten to fourteen days, well Product Y will hold up to three to four weeks maximum, because it is a chilling product. But what you are doing basically it market a visually appealing product in a period that there are almost no visual appealing products."</i>
Factors affecting product quality	<p><i>Product quality is something everybody strives for, but "you are always dependent of a lot factors, like milieu (climate, cultivation circumstances, water, nutrition, burden of disease"</i></p> <p><i>"Trough breeding, appearance traits are improved, but usually a result of inbreeding, resulting into weaker plants, having more problems."</i></p> <p><i>Transport is crucial regarding to perishability of the products: "Once we decided to transport ourselves, and not by third parties, we saw the turnover rate rise drastically and customers were selling a third more, and it lead to less loss" (perishability)</i></p> <p><i>"What we have learned from mistakes in the past, is that you try to act preventively, so we are using pesticides preventively to prevent problems"</i></p>
Buying behaviour	<i>In the market it is important to market a uniform product. You want to sort it in such a way that a tray, a trolley all have the same product size, thus the same uniformity (...) The more uniform it is, that is what customers accept"</i>
Role of auction	<p><i>The auction cooperative has played a very big role, only what we see is that the mediation function it used to be, is now finished. It is now a link between buyers and sellers. Especially, for payment transactions, logistics, but they do not longer market actively for growers. That is a big change.</i></p> <p><i>In the past you were charged annually for what you had done outside the auction. They used to check and charge you provision.</i></p>

Lack of marketing knowledge	<p><i>"In any case, the vision is about quality... I can never tell them apart". Interviewee murmured a lot, difficulties to formulate sentences.</i></p> <p><i>"Marketing is for companies the most important thing. Without it, you basically do not have any sales, normally. However, we have an auction in the Netherland, allowing growers to lean back and offer their products (throughout the auction)".</i></p> <p><i>"The problem here is that many growers are no sellers. Many are family business, thus there is a lot of professional knowledge (know-how), but sales is underexposed"</i></p> <p><i>"Marketing is actually a poor relation in our family business".</i></p>
Importance of networking	<i>"In the early years, when I was young, I had the energy to lobby actively (...) I am still leaning on the relations we have built from back in the day"</i>
Marketing activities	<i>"There is little point to advertise, since we act as wholesale for garden centres. What makes sense is participate in trade fairs, especially those organized by the auction. For that we have promotion material and a catalogue".</i>
Entrepreneurial orientation	<p><i>"Not even an hour per week".</i></p> <p><i>"I would like to emphasize that in most family farms, (marketing) is gotten like this. That marketing is on the down low, people are good in growing and sales is subordinate to it. This is due to the auction and also how it is used to be"</i></p>
Competition	<i>(...) there will be an easy supply of raw material (young plants) and then you see that Dutch growers will start off big on spec, hoping they will create sales. Abroad is different.(...) there are no cooperative auctions there, like here. Thus, they will set up very moderately."</i>
Competitive pressure	<i>"Uh, to someone who produces same quality, we cannot be distinctive. We do not produce additional value to the product. Therefore, you can only be distinctive by price, if you produce the same quality."</i>
Target group	Interviewee mentioned consumers and not its customers when asked about target group. Evidence of missing market segmentation.
Mediation agencies - Lack of knowledge - Firm size (resources)	<i>"Currently I am working with a third party (in marketing and sales). We knew that those are a poor relation of us, and that the company is too small to do it ourselves. We cannot hire a representative ourselves because A: company is too small for that and B: a lot of knowledge is needed for that. Therefore we decided to hire a mediation agency, who works for 12 growers and we split the costs."</i>
Generics (brands)	<p><i>"(...) we do not brand"... We do create generics, all are varieties.</i></p> <p><i>"A generic for cultivation is for growers and sellers not important (...). Sometimes it can be important, if the products contains special features. However, if it goes with the mass, generic names are subordinate"</i></p>
Successfulness of branding	<p><i>"Of course there is demand for brands, if you are big enough and distinctive"</i></p> <p><i>"Brands have their effect, however it is also shown that market-based offer is more decisive than the brand."</i></p> <p><i>"In case of over-production you will see people will hold to labels, until a certain point, if the price will go down even further, than the label will no longer be propagated and price become leading".</i></p> <p>Branding is possible, and can be successful, however according to the interviewee: <i>"You need to be able to market a certain volume"</i></p>
Brand equity	Discussing the importance of branding: <i>"Unfortunately it is obviously advertising, because that is what it is about, which is very difficult to account for (to measure)"</i>

### Company C

Company C is a floricultural company, who grows pot plants. Company C can be classified as a micro firm, since the owner manager is the only employee listed. Though, during the interview it was found that the wife of the owner manager is also involved in the company, mainly with sales and bookkeeping. Company C makes use of an independent contractor to assist him with his work and during peak period temporary agency workers are used.

Company C can be described as a typical micro firm grower and is therefore included as a case.

### Observational memos, document analysis

Company C can also be interpreted as a company with limited to none marketing and branding activities. During the interview it came on to record that also this firm has lack of marketing and branding knowledge. Short answers as well as mumbling made it in sometimes difficult to transcript and interpret given answers. During the interview and document analysis it came also on to record that the owner manager is a grower and not a marketer. This is acknowledged in the fact that there are limited to no marketing activities, there is even no website. The wife of the owner manager is responsible for the activities regarding sales.

Code – Label	Quote from interview
Company strategy - objectives  Personal motives	Interviewee chooses products based on personal motives. There is no market research or anything prior to it. This is evident from: (...) <i>"Because I am 63 now, and I like it to not be so busy in summer (...) So during summer you have a good life. That's why I choose to grow Product X"</i> Throughout the interview, interviewee mentions his age a couple of times.
Competition Competitive pressure	<i>"That is why changed to grow Product X. However, more growers decided to start cultivate it, so therefore 2017 was very disappointed, because there was simply too much. I expect that this year will be the same"</i>
Sales strategy Role of auction	Company C sells passively. Via his breeder he got an order on contractual basis. Actually, he only sells via the auction: <i>"two-third via mediation of auction and a third via clock trade"</i>
Buying behaviour	Uniformity is important: <i>"Sometimes they are feeding back that you need to sort better, too uneven. This year we will pay more attention to product sorting, because that is where you are being measured by"</i> . So, there is quite some quality variation with Product X, you correct this by sorting into uniform batches? <i>"Yes, that is the way to describe it"</i> .
Factors affecting product quality	Product X is difficult to cultivate: <i>"Especially if your watering system is not perfect, then you will immediately see plants that are lagging behind, and they keep a growth retardation. (...) Little plants will remain little, resulting in much more extra work to sort them."</i> <i>"Could be in case the plants are stored too wet and stuff like that"</i>
Product labels	Company C made their own product labels: <i>"to stand out, to distinguish yourself from another"</i> . However there is no strategy for using the label: <i>"We have one label for all of our products in product size 12"</i> This means that all the different sorts
Buying behaviour Role of auction	<i>"There are more and more 'buying lines' who will not buy via clock trade. This is called 'buying at distance' (...) that is way a photo is needed with each batch"</i>
Lack of resources – firm size	<i>"My company is too small for marketing, but I believe marketing plays an important role in the industry"</i>
External resources  Lack of cooperative marketing	Company mentions it would be nice if more promotion is made for their product (externally): <i>"via advertisements in newspapers or something like that (...) or via television programme"</i> . In terms of marketing, if I understand you correctly: Marketing plays a very minor role because your firm is too small for these type of activities. Therefore, you are leaning onto the activities done by the auction: <i>"Yes, yes, it would be nice if there will be more promotion via the media for product X"</i>
Marketing	Absence of website: <i>"Yes I could improve it with a website"</i> Wife: <i>"You know what it is, He has a certain age what... He just likes cultivating so much..."</i>
Role of the auction	All customers need to be settled up via the auction: <i>"Well we settle everything via FloraHolland, because the risk of invoice (...) I do not like the way of direct selling, because via auction you are not dealing with trolleys. You will book the auction transaction, and you will get your money and trolleys within two weeks"</i>

	<i>"Yes, it is a mediation agency, payment agency, clock trade etcetera"</i>
Buying behaviour	<i>"A lot is also ordered in small orders" – "Buyers will not keep any stock" – "No stock, no risk"</i>
Brand strategy	Interviewee mentioned not to do branding, however, he mentioned that a brand could be an option, however: <i>"You need a name to fill in"</i> . Additionally, interviewee used his full name as company name. His responds to the question why?: <i>"Simply no attention paid to it"</i>

## Company D

Company D is a floricultural company who breeds and sells pot- and garden plants. The company breeds and sells young plants, but also its mother plants. So, the company is a breeder as well as a grower. The company is a real family business, who wants to work with resources and people at least as possible (Owner manager Company D, 2018). Thus, company D is eminently a micro firm. The owner manager works, her parents are listed as employees, and total number of employees does not exceed eight people. Company D is selected as a case, since it is a micro firm, but also since it is the only micro firm with a brand, where the researcher was aware of (personal knowledge of the author of the industry).

### Observational memos, document analysis

Despite the fact that company D is a micro firm and wants to operate as few resources as possible, the company is able to brand. Creativeness seems to be key in their branding activities, reach as many people with little resources. The owner manager has a clear vision and did not mumble or hesitated a lot while answering the questions. The owner manager envisions the whole chain: *"What I want is; to sell a product, what benefits everybody, throughout the chain"*.

Code – Label	Quote from interview
Owner manager <i>Background</i>	<i>"No it was not obvious for me to join the family business.. I looked around and eventually went to horticulture school. Then I found out I liked it best at home"</i>
Company strategy	<i>"We are a real family business, very small-scale, who wants to work with resources and people at least as possible"</i> <i>"What I want is; to sell a product, what benefits everybody, throughout the chain"</i> . <i>Company D handles everything themselves from A to Z. And sells young plants as well as pot plants: "Pot plant is on behalf of the young plants"</i>
Buying behaviour	<i>"It is mainly aimed at producers abroad"</i> <i>"It is demanding market, it is difficult nowadays to get you money for it"</i>
Market research	<i>"Uh, I sell, and in relation how it works, how it harvest, the durability, how the market receives it, what the prices are, based on that we decide whether to maintain a product in our assortment"</i>
Mediation agencies	<i>"Regarding sales, there is a lot mediation, and I have also a sales broker to do it for me"</i>
Lack of time	<i>"That is correct, I have way simply not enough time for it, to sell it myself"</i> <i>"... if I got time for it"</i> <i>"I wish I could spent more time on it"</i>
Firm size	<i>"I am too small to promote, to market myself and to do research on how my product is received"</i>
Personal motives	<i>There are a lot of good sales men, but less good breeders, so I prefer doing what I do best (which is breeding young plants)"</i>
Competition	<i>"It is a niche market at the moment, to give you an idea; thirty years ago there was around 50 acre, which has dropped to 10 to 15 acre"</i> <i>"There are a handful of growers, but I see them as colleagues rather than competitors"</i> (Product Y)

Market transparency	<i>"It is difficult to figure out, because nobody is giving numbers.. What is traded via auction is just a fraction of the real market (Product X)"</i>
Product development	<i>"It used to take almost three years for Product X to flower (...) now I am at the point where ninety per cent is flowering in the first year"</i>
Marketing activities	<i>"From what I see is that too little growers are doing marketing. The same applies for myself" "Around 2 hours maximum per week"</i>
Brand recognition	<i>To increase brand recognition, if the brand will stuck in the head of the consumers, and I will persevere for ten years, than eventually they will only ask for my brand" "To gain more brand recognition in the market"...</i>
Brand attributes	<i>"Yes the only thing I do, basically, with few resources, is to show my product as much as possible, at trade fairs, usually by third parties. I make material available for them, but I am not present myself. Also a lot of social media" – It is about to see and be seen, which is for me a very cost effective way, with less costs and time, to promote as much as possible" "Everything what is sold is branded: "No! Nothing is sold unbranded" "I believed my name will stick around in the market, because I am a woman in a man's world, so that is way I decided to choose for this brand name"</i>
Brand equity	<i>"It is of course difficult to measure..." Branding contributes to company D's success: "Absolutely, it is recognition, and because of that your products are being seen and bought more easily. However, it is not measurable"</i>
Marketing budget	<i>"I do not have a set budget, but if you will estimate it, then probably around 10,000 maximum"</i>
Market restrictions	<i>"When we started to breed, we had seedlings which cannot be protected by breeders' right, so the only way to get recognition in the market was via a brand"</i>
Brand protection	<i>"I have legally protected my brand worldwide" – Logo and name.</i>
Brand – Market research	<i>"I spend a lot of time, to check whether my brand is used correctly"</i>
Successfulness of branding	<i>"If one brand is successful the other products will benefit from it" "Absolutely, it is recognition, and because of that your products are being seen and bought more easily. However, it is not measurable"</i>
Business to Business limitations	<i>"Basically, your company name is also your brand – trademark' in combination with product labels with your brand on it. However it, will go not any further than the wholesalers and the purchasers, but you will never reach the consumer" (Product Y is a cut flower, which are traded unnamed"</i>
Target Group	<i>"Consumers, but also traders, growers, all intermediaries throughout the chain. "Indirectly, I try to reach as much as people possible"</i>
Product quality	<i>"For me quality is just a plant that does not let the consumer down" "Thus, personally quality is for every product different" "I believe quality is eventually that what meets consumers expectancy, and if you are communicate it properly towards the consumer, it will not lead to problems if there would be any problems regarding the cultivation or afterwards"</i>
Entrepreneurial orientation	<i>"I love a challenge, it should not be too easy, because then everybody can do it"</i>

## Company E

Company E is a floricultural company, who grows mainly bedding plants. Company E can be classified as a micro firm, since the owner manager is the only employee listed. Company E mainly works with temporary workers and independent contractors in peak period. This company was included since it can be described as a typical micro firm.

### Observational memos, document analysis

As well as the previous cases, also company E can be entitled as a company with limited to no knowledge on marketing and branding. This was also acknowledged by the grower himself. Company E is involved in brand building, however, the grower does not mention it specifically or is aware of it. Presumably since knowledge on these matters is limited.

Interviewee gave a lot of short and confirmatory answers. Furthermore, company E is active in a sector (of product) where branding is relevant and the success of his competitors' brand is noticeable by company E: *"It is very hard to intervene between 'brand I' and 'brand II'. That are the big suppliers. They have a brand, where customers specifically ask for"*. Despite the fact that quality is the same, customers need that specific brand. Currently, Company E is in particular leaning on the auction and his mediation agency regarding his sales and marketing activities.

Code – Label	Quote from interview
Owner manager Background	<i>"While I was still in school, we found out that school was not really my thing, and I discovered I wanted to become a grower, since my father is also a grower. However, without education it was quite difficult. With the help of my father I was able to rent a greenhouse (...). So, I started when I was sixteen with my own firm, and started with all kinds of bedding plants"</i>
Company strategy	<i>"Oh, yes, my goals as a grower, yes that is to grow a good product from beginning until the end of the cultivation, while remaining control myself. Sales and cultivation, actually I am doing everything by myself and that is fine, that is great"</i> <i>"I want to produce bulk, maximize cuttings, as many plant per square meter, maximize numbers. That is best for me, because I have got quite surface greenhouse."</i> <i>"First things first, first my own colours, my own line, optimize it, getting the best plants"</i>
Brand strategy	<i>"... of course it is my goal to create my own line, and to brand it"</i> <i>"I am currently busy with the 'brand X-line, with the 'company name', the 'Brand X-line'."</i>
Relevance of branding Brand equity	<i>"Yes the really need Brand I (competitor brand), than they tell me Brand I, we need Brand I. (...)"</i> <i>Despite the fact that my product is qualitatively the same. They need that product of brand I. The difference is that they will sell for 75 and mine 65 (...) The quality is not different. It is the brand, hence difference is explained by licence fees (10)"</i>
Product traits (type of product)	<i>"Product X is a bulk, you can pot big numbers. We already had one department with it, and decided to continue with it. Also, because we continued with license free varieties, we want to enter the market"</i> <i>"License free varieties have low cost, resulting into higher revenues compared to licence types"</i>
Product development	<i>"Because of that we are getting more sales, because our product becomes better and better"</i>
Factors affecting quality	<i>"If we have got a stable winter with normal temperatures, dan it is good possible to deliver good quality 'product X', throughout the whole season"</i> <i>"Light and winter period"</i> <i>"You have to play a lot with your climate system, to get the plants to flower"</i>
Sales strategy	Company E works with orders on contractual basis: <i>"You have to deal with your contracts, you have to deliver.."</i>
Product quality	<i>"If quality is less, then you will try to find a customer and report the poor quality (...) or you auction them off with a 'less quality label'"</i>
Competition	<i>"I believe I am one of the competitors, most of the growers cultivate same quality. They also want to take over the market, however they are restricted to a certain cost price due to license varieties"</i>
Mediation agency	Company E also works with a mediation agency who helps with sales and marketing: <i>"Yes, he works on commission, and works for multiple growers"</i>
Network	<i>"He sends it to all his customers, which is a base of more than 800 contacts, always seems to come up with a response"</i>
Marketing activities	In response to what is marketing activities are: <i>"Not much, not much.. That is... We do not participate at trade fairs, there is little point to do so"</i> <i>"No I do not use any labels or anything"</i>
Target group	<i>"Mostly retail, mainly retail. Most of the times supermarkets..."</i>
Brand strategy	<i>"I want to work towards that, that I can market 'Brand X-light or Brand X-White"</i>

	<i>'It has been derived from my name, it is just my company name.. But I want to work towards it, since I am known in the industry, that we will eventually get the 'brand X-line' "</i>
Brand attributes	<i>"Once I produced a 'Brand X' pot, but that turned out to be a huge mistake. I simply needed a blank pot. In the end I had been swamped with calls, from private individuals.. No, never again.."</i>
Product License	<i>If you want to license your own varieties, you need to subject your variety several test in a lab, where: "There they will compare mine to licences types, if it is too close to an existing license type, then they will tell me: Sorry... In that case I have lost around 6,000-7,000 euros for one colour"</i>
Marketing budget	<i>"If I am going to sell my cuttings, yes in that case is the budget, does not matter, than it has to be perfect ..."</i>
Lack of knowledge	<i>"No I am not good enough to do it myself. I will search for someone who will do it for me"</i>
Lack of Time	<i>"No, I also do not have the time for it"</i>

## Company F

Company F is a horticultural company, who not only sells pot- and garden plants but also breeds vegetable seeds. The owner manager of company F also derives from a real floricultural family. In this document it was decided to classify company F as a small enterprise, due to what unclarities regarding number of personnel. Data in the chamber of commerce suggested that there were sixteen people listed as employee, yet the owner manager only mentioned five people together with some temporary- and student workers.

### Observational memos, document analysis

The owner manager of company F has a clear vision on what he does and what he wants to achieve. Compared to the other cases, this owner manager did not had any problems answering the questions. This, together with the answers given, the documentation available, suggested that this company has knowledge on marketing. Company F is part of a growers association and together they have developed a branded, under which their products are marketed.

<b>Code – Label</b>	<b>Quote from interview</b>
Owner manager <i>Background</i>	<i>"I studied in Delft, Horticulture school, higher horticulture school. I have also had the intention to become an entrepreneur"</i>
Company strategy	<i>"We are not a big firm. We have quite a flat organizational structure. We have five employees, myself and my father included"</i> <i>"We have an informal business, close links. Uh yes, basically not a large organizational structure or something like that"</i> Regarding strategy and product assortment: <i>"Yes it is a conscious choice. Thus, I do not want to bet all on one product"</i> <i>"We seek different pot sizes, exclusive products, to distinguish ourselves from the mass... So, we aim for the better retail, garden centres.."</i>
Entrepreneurial orientation	<i>"...Thus, the establishment, logistics it is not that perfect over here, so therefore I am not driven by cost of production. Of course cost of production is important, but my margins, rendement is much more important"</i>
Brand strategy	<i>"We put it under an, well, exclusive, at least tried, a brand, not among consumers, but a brand aimed at wholesalers, distributors. Thus, to establish a brand in the market. We saw opportunities in it, to expand"</i>
Market research	Interviewee acknowledges that they do market research before they decided to add a product to their assortment: <i>"Yes, that is correct ..."</i>
Market orientation Competition	<i>"We saw opportunities for the future to grow, that it was market with opportunities. However, that it would grow so excessively, was unexpected"</i>
Sales strategy Role of Auction	<i>"Yes we are member of the auction, so basically everything is sold via the auction. However, only 5% is done via clock trade and 95% is direct sales"</i>

	<i>"Although, I sometimes do believe the clock is a perfect tool, as a sort of shop window"</i>
Brand awareness	<i>"We are part of Brand X – association, we pay a lot of attention towards brand awareness" "We want to create brand awareness at shop level, so that the shops are aware of Brand X.."</i>
Brand – Growers association	<i>"We saw a lot of opportunities for brand X. Also because we believed that we could learn from one another, the growers within the association."</i>
Brand strategy	<i>"We want to maintain a certain level with our brand" "... the better garden centres will sell our Brand. Thus the quality products. Despite the fact that the same quality products is sent to other retail it goes without the label of our brand. We do not want that it will compete with each other" "We want to be in store with our brand all year round" "With our brand we want to constantly on the shelves, constantly with Brand X in the eyes of our customers" "To us it is very important that we grow with our products and Brand X, but it needs to be products that fit within the philosophy of Brand X, needs to include exclusivity, distinctiveness, and qualitatively it needs to be perfect". "We also have our own labels, however it is not similar to the labels of Brand X. Of course we will not label bad quality, that will get an inspection code (lesser quality). So it leaves with label or no label at all".</i>
Business to business brand	<i>"We want to market Brand X, we do not have deceive ourselves by believing we will reach consumers, although we try to create awareness."</i>
Relevance of branding	<i>"Well in the past few years the market of Brand X has become a demand market. That is really nice, that there is more demand than we can offer (...) This is the result of marketing efforts, genetics.. And that are the revenues of years of investments in marketing, genetics and cooperation with our suppliers at first and later on our colleagues (so to say)"</i>
Brand equity	<i>Interviewee notices the success of the brand: "Yes, we certainly notice that, however to what extent, that is very difficult to measure of course."</i>
Lack of financial resources	<i>"If you are to brand.. On you own, as a grower, then you need to be of such a size, and to have such financial resources, to be able .."</i>
Product Quality	<i>"Usually you do not send your best products to trade via clock, preferably you send those to your customers, and so clock trade is sort of subject to direct sales, where you will send lesser quality to trade via clock"</i>
Sales strategy	
Successfulness of branding	<i>"I believe that customers rather choose us over our competitors" "They have a good assortment, however similar material is qualitative equally, however they cannot label it with Brand Y. Because of the label Brand Y the can ask 30/40 per cent more for it"</i>
Mediation agency	<i>"I have a sales broker on contract, from company X"</i>
Product quality	<i>Of course quality needs to be perfect, no matter what. For example you can have a beautiful air balloon, but if it cannot hold the air in it, it will explode anyhow. So, quality is always leading..."</i>
Marketing activities	<i>"And what we actually do regarding marketing is actually nil. I participate at trade fairs, and we send week lists, try to update FloraXchange and stuff like that, but it is not that I am weekly sending brochures"</i>
Firm size	<i>"I do not believe it can be done by them. That is my judgment at least. I believe you need to have a certain market share, to be a certain party to force certain things".</i>
Shelf life	<i>"Within Brand X, we are quite busy with shelf life .. how we can improve shelf life" We try to consult with parties in the chain as much as possible, to control.."</i>
Brand attributes	<i>"Once a while we change logo etcetera, once every 5/6 years"</i>
Buying behaviour Network	<i>"From my experience, it is not the product quality, the rather choose at ease; oh we already doing business with them, or that link is already settled.."</i>
Lack of time	<i>"To be honest, I do not have the time myself, and eventually everything you do is still to less, whatever we do" Shortage of time: "Yes, yes, time or priority it is.."</i>
Personal motives	<i>"However, if you are a grower, the sweetest thing to do is growing plants, to grow the most beautiful plants.. And if you see what comes with it, of course it is part of doing business. However you need to do where you are good at, I use to say, and.."</i>