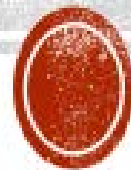


# EXPLORING BRANDING IN SMALL DUTCH FARM FIRMS.



MCB – 80433 MSc Thesis Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

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# Exploring branding in small Dutch farm firms.

**Abstract** Although the importance of branding and that the majority of the business activities globally belongs to small firms, the most of the marketing literature focusses on large firms and multinational corporations. Furthermore, some studies do not take into account that the brand management issues in small firms are diverse and almost all the related existing literature is not focused solely on small firms, but on small-medium sized firms together. So, the problem is the lack of branding in farm firms and even more so in small farm firms. This exploratory study sought to create a new conceptual framework to answer its research question about what should a small farm firm do in order to create a strong brand. Literature review, in combination with 5 case research interviews and secondary data that collected for triangulation, helped in the development of the new conceptual framework. The findings of the study illustrate the differences between small farm firms and small firms from other sectors. Additionally, the results of this exploratory study show the diversity between the small firms in the agribusiness sector. Moreover, the most important and noteworthy differences are observed between dairy-based small firms and the other participating small farm firms. The major limitation of the study is that it is limited to just 5 case studies. Furthermore, contribution to the existing marketing literature, managerial implications and recommendations for further research outlined.

## Introduction

There are differences between countries regarding the definition of a firm's size and the distinction of small firms from micro and middle-sized firms. One of the dominant definitions is the one from the European Commission (2003), which defines small firms as businesses with more than 9 and less than 50 employees. Furthermore, small firms are businesses with annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total of more than 2 million euros and less than 10 million euros (European Commission, 2009). Their main problems are marketing, human resources and general management related, and their advantages are the flexibility, the fast response time and the quick recognition of market opportunities (Huang and Brown, 1999; Krake, 2005).

Brand management and strategy are important due to the value that brands add to the products of firms. The majority of firms pays attention to a brand management system with the goal of building strong and prosperous brands. Strong brands have their characteristics, requirements and benefits. There are some specific guidelines towards the creation of a strong brand. (Aaker, 1991, 2002; Keller, 2003, 2009).

The difference between farm firms and any other firm, is that land is the most important resource. However, there is a lot of variety in the sector, from small greenhouse firms to large livestock farming firms (Stanton, 1991). The owners of farm firms, based on their entrepreneurial style, firm's size, capital requirements and employers' number are categorized in pluriactive farmers, resource-exploiting entrepreneurs and portfolio entrepreneurs (Alsos et al., 2003). There are several characteristics that influence the operation of farm firms and also their management decisions (Perner, 2008; Ondersteijn et al., 2003).

The crucial point is that most of the marketing literature focusses on large firms and multinational corporations. Moreover, it neglects that the majority of the business activities globally belongs to small firms and more specifically, more than 95% of all the enterprises globally are small and medium-sized firms (Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Berthon et al., 2008). As a consequence, the above lack of attention creates uncertainty about the implementation of successful branding in small firms and how it should be implemented. Guidelines to build strong brands refer mainly to big firms (Aaker, 2002). Furthermore, some studies do not take into account that the brand management issues in small firms are diverse (Keller, 2003; Kotler and Keller, 2012; Krake, 2005). In other words, these brand management issues are differentiating based on the business sector. For instance, there are differences in brand management, between manufacturing and farm firms.

Most agricultural products are marketed as unbranded products, despite the fact that marketing policies like branding, could help farm firms to add value to their products (Lewis et al., 2014; Nijssen and Van Trijp, 1998). The main reason behind this lack of branding, is the consistency in product quality and attributes that is required for branded products. Agricultural products are characterized by high levels of inconsistency. As a consequence, agricultural products demand high levels of control in order to be consistent. Mainly large corporations have the above ability, like Chiquita Inc. (Docherty, 2012; Pay et al., 1996).

Small farm firms, in turn, are production-oriented. To explain, due to the limited resources and the lack of time, their management attention is focused mainly on whatever they produce. Therefore, they do not pay attention to marketing techniques and branding strategies to add value to their products and building a relationship with their customers (Lewis et al., 2014). An option for small farm firms, could be to adapt a niche branding strategy and to focus on a narrower segment of consumers. The oxymoron is that, the above entails to supply this segment of consumers with high-quality products. In order to do that, small farm firms should not reduce their attention to production processes to become more sales and market oriented. As a consequence, the balance between the above processes is a challenge for small farm firms (Dentoni and Reardon, 2010).

The problem is the lack of branding in farm firms and even more so in small farm firms, despite the importance of brand management in marketing. There are mechanisms at play that suppress the pursuit of branding by small farm firms, but are they severe enough to ignore branding entirely and its potential benefits? Considering this problem, it becomes essential to do more research in this field. The main objectives of the study, are to make a contribution to the existing branding knowledge with the focus on small farm firms and to give practical implications to small farm firms. In order to meet the above objectives, this exploratory study attempts to answer the following research question: *What should a small farm firm do in order to create a strong brand?*

In the literature review the study, firstly, defines what establishes a firm as a small one and analyses their issues. Secondly, it describes the brand management concept and its significance. Also, the characteristics and what is a strong brand, the benefits of strong brands, and what a firm should do in order to build a strong brand. Thirdly, it analyses what is a farm firm, the categorization of a farm firm and several characteristics of a farm firm. Fourthly, the study focuses on branding in small firms, by referring to the differences with the large ones and by addressing some branding guidelines. Furthermore, it analyses branding in farm firms, by addressing the current situation, the benefits, the challenges, the requirements, the branding types of farm products and finally, it describes some successful examples. Finally, it analyses branding in small farm firms.

## Literature review

To explain the process of building a strong brand by small farm firms, the study proposes a conceptual framework (*Figure 2*) showing the connection between activities of small farm firms and strong brands, with mediating concepts. Small farm firm activities are: market segmentation, market targeting, consumer research, competitor analysis, (developing the) brand promise, value delivery, brand communication. Strong brands are based on high brand awareness, strong brand associations and brand relevance, which are branding activities that also operate as mediators on the relation of small farm firms and strong brands. Due to the fact that this study is exploratory, prior work helps in the creation of a framework (Yin, 2013). So, the concepts in the conceptual model were introduced in the following literature review. Furthermore, the framework provides insights of the mediating effect of production capabilities on value delivery.

### Definition of Small Firms

In this part, the study addresses the definition of small firms, and then it analyses the issues that small firms face.

There are differences between authors (Bolton, 1971; Storey, 1994) and between countries (USITC, 2010; European Commission, 2003) considering the definition of small firms. The most useful and practical way to define the small firms is by taking for granted the definition of the European Commission recommendation in 2003. Probably the most official and highly recognized source in EU. Based on this recommendation, a firm is any organization/entity involved in financial activity regardless of its legal form, including partnerships, associations, family firms and self-employed persons. A small firm is defined as a firm which employs more than 9 and fewer than 50 employees. Furthermore, a firm is qualified as small when, the annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total surpasses the 2 million euros and does not surpass the 10 million euros. Above these thresholds, firms are defined as middle-sized firms and below these thresholds as micro-firms. More than 23 million firms in EU, are micro, small or middle-sized firms. Additionally, the above divisions are obligatory for national State aid schemes and Community programs since 2005 (European Commission, 2009). These aid schemes and programs are vital for small firms in order to survive in the competitive environment.



Considering the issues that small firms run into, the most frequent problems of small firms are marketing, human resources and general management related problems. For instance, promotion, market research and branding problems (Huang and Brown, 1999). The above problems result from limited resources and also from the extreme focus of small firms on production and sales processes. As a consequence, there is not so much attention to branding processes (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Hill, 2001). Strong marketing points of small firms are the flexibility, the fast response time and the quick recognition of market opportunities (Krake, 2005).

### Brand Management

In the following part, the study addresses the concepts of branding and brands in general. Additionally, it describes the characteristics, definition, and benefits of a strong brand. Finally, it analyses what a firm should do in order to build a strong brand.

Branding gives the power of brands to products and services. It provides firms with the ability to reveal to their consumers the supplier of the product. Additionally, branding facilitates the consumers during the decision making process, by creating mental structures that help consumers systematize their existing knowledge about products and services (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

The definition of a brand could be derived from different perspectives. For instance, could be derived from the firm's perspective or from the consumer's perspective. Additionally, it could be derived from the brand's purpose perspective or even by the brand's traits (Wood, 2000). Due to the focus of this study, a more firm-oriented definition is taken, such as the definition of the American Marketing Association. "A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. The name, term, sign, symbol, or design are brand elements" (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Brands are structures, which help firms to enhance products with firms' sentimental and functional values. This, in turn, helps the consumers during decision making processes, to identify firms' values and to realize if these values match with their own personal values. When consumer's and firm's values match, the probability of product purchase and repurchase increases (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). An important process is to create and maintain a positive brand image, which means favourable, strong and unique brand associations in the consumer's memory. In turn, this leads to better brand reputation.

While brand image is the perceptions about a brand in consumer's memory at a given moment, brand reputation is the combination of different images over time. Because brand reputation is a more stable than brand image, which is constantly changing, brand reputation is more suitable evaluation of a brand than brand image. So really crucial for a firm (de Chernatony, 1999; Keller, 1993, 2009; Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990).

Consistency and difference are the basic characteristics of a strong brand. A brand is a strong one, when a branded product is consistent during the whole life cycle of a product. Consistent means that the quality and the attributes of a branded product are not changing. Respectively, a brand is strong when it is different from the brands of the competitors; when it is unique in its product or service category. (Keller, 2009; Kay, 2006; Charters, 2009). When a brand is strong, it bonds its consumers with the branded product and as a result, these consumers act like representatives of this brand (Keller, 2001). Based on the customer-based brand equity model of Keller (2009), a brand is strong when it fulfils four specific objectives. High/deep, broad brand awareness; points-of-parity and difference; positive, accessible reactions; and intense, active loyalty. Strong brands are brands with high/deep brand awareness. This means that these brands are the first brands that come to our mind, when we try to recall or identify a brand in a specific product or service category, under different circumstances. Strong, favourable and unique brand associations are important as points-of-difference. In other words, a positive brand image. Brand responses towards a brand are what consumers think or feel about the brand. They distinguish between brand judgements and feelings. The judgements come from the "head" and the feelings from the "heart". A brand is strong, when these responses are positive and accessible (i.e. come to the consumers' mind easily). Furthermore, a strong brand has intensive and active loyalty. Intensive loyalty, when there is a strong attachment to the brand and active, when there is a high frequency of purchase and consumption (Keller, 2001, 2009; Dolak, 2005).

The benefits of strong brands are: bigger profit margins; influence during consumer decision making process; elastic consumers response to reduction of prices and inelastic response to rise of prices; more effective marketing communication; enhanced promotion and advertising actions; better collaboration and support in trade; greater access to distribution channels; quicker spread and better market potential for products; space for price premium and increase number of premium pricing products; enhanced perceptions of product performance; less susceptibility towards the

actions of the competitors; better employee recruiting and retention; less vulnerability to marketing crisis; facilitate extension programs of firms; space for brand supplementary licensing; and finally better financial market returns (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2009; Dolak, 2005; Kotler and Keller, 2012; Keller and Lehmann, 2006).

Building of a strong brand requires the fulfilment of four specific steps. Firstly, creating a suitable brand identity, so creating breadth and depth of brand awareness. Breadth, is the range of purchase and consumption circumstances, where a brand is recalled. Depth, is how easily consumers recall or identify a brand. In the creation of a suitable brand identity, careful choosing of the brand elements is required. Secondly, developing of a proper brand meaning through strong, favourable and unique brand associations or in other words, through a positive brand image. Thirdly, evoking of favourable and accessible brand responses. Finally, shaping of intense, passionate and active brand relationships with the consumers. The above four steps, translate into four basic questions by consumers towards brands, respectively. *Who are you?, what are you?, what do I think about you? and what about our association?* (Keller, 2001, 2009; Farhana, 2012). The pyramid of *Figure 1* by Keller (2009), illustrates the above steps. The fulfilment of the above steps, in turn, entails establishing of six minor brand-building blocks which are: Brand salience, performance, imagery, judgements, feelings and resonance. Brand salience is how easily and frequently consumers think about a brand under specific conditions. For example, when Chiquita Inc. has ensured that its consumers think about its bananas during potential overlooked consumption situations. For instance, as a desert after lunch. Brand performance and brand imagery belong to the same level, due to the fact that brand performance refers to the functional associations in consumer's mind and brand imagery to the abstract associations. Brand performance is how properly a branded product satisfies consumer's needs. As aforementioned, consistency and difference are the main characteristics of a strong brand. They are close related with the brand-building block of brand performance. To explain, there are several types of attributes that determine brand performance. One of them, is the product reliability, which refers to the consistency of a product performance. Moreover, brand performance determines the differentiation of a brand. Therefore, in order to become strong ones, brands should differentiate from the competition and additionally, should have high consistency. However, these means can be difficult to implement, especially considering the farm products where, the seasonality is a dominant characteristic. Brand imagery is how a

branded product satisfies the psychological and social consumer's needs. For instance, when the bananas of Chiquita Inc. have established in its consumers' mind with high quality and exotic imagery. Brand judgements and brand feelings belong to the same level, because as aforementioned, the first comes from the "head" and the second from the "heart". Brand judgements is how consumers evaluate brands, by putting together all the various performance and imagery associations for the brand. Brand feelings is how consumers react and response emotionally towards brands. For example, when Chiquita Inc.'s consumers judge its bananas in a positive way and in the same time, they feel a sense of fulfilment during the consumption. Brand resonance, which is connected with the concept of Brand Relevance, is the most important block that, reflects an absolutely harmonic relationship between brands and consumers. It takes place when all the other blocks meet the needs, wants and desires of consumers. For instance, when Chiquita Inc. has built a strong bond with its consumers and they participate in the improvement of its product, by making suggestions through the firm's website. (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Keller, 2001, 2009; Kay, 2006). Establishing of a strong brand is not an easy task and diverges from brand to brand (Aaker, 2002; Kay, 2006). A strong brand needs accurate planning, long-term commitment and creative marketing (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Considering advertising as a tool to build a strong brand, despite the fact that advertising is a tool to build the aforementioned blocks, excessive advertising does not inevitably lead to a strong brand. Especially, when a branded product is not well positioned, has low quality and is constantly changing (Kay, 2006).

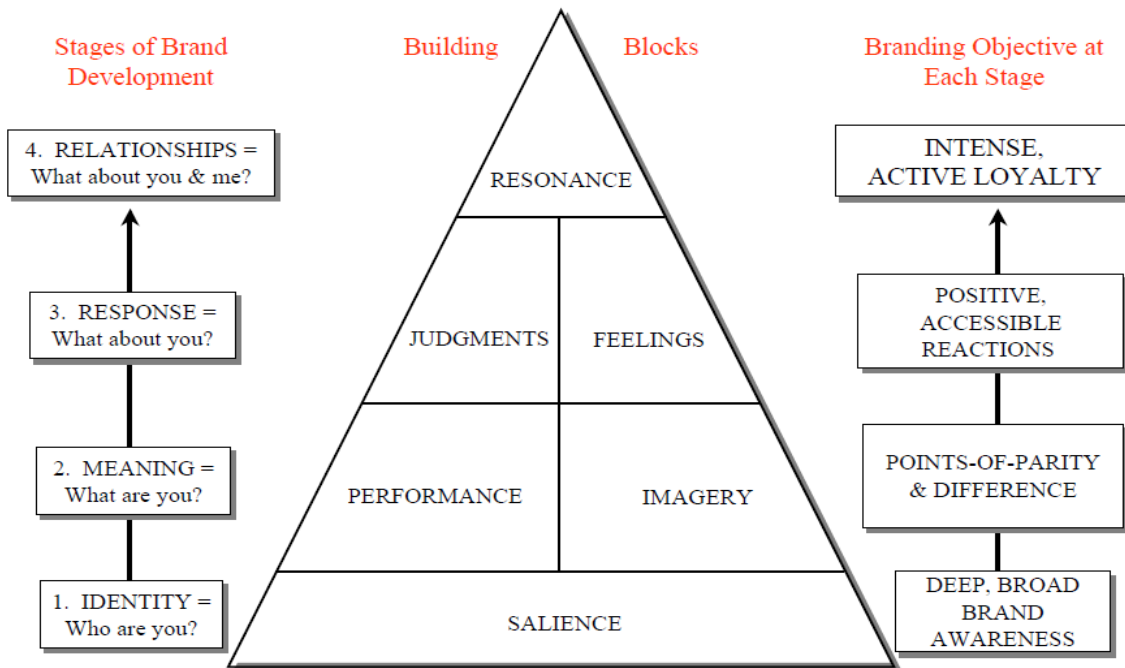


Figure 1. Customer-based brand equity model pyramid. (Keller, 2009)

## Farm Firms

In this part, the study analyses what is a farm firm, the categorization of farm firms and finally some characteristics of farm firms.

Farm firm is a business unit which combines land, labour and physical capital in order to produce farm products such as crops, aquatic products and livestock (Breimyer, 1965; D'Agostino and Luna, 2014). In contrast with typical firms, the main resource of farm firms is its land (Stanton, 1991). Farm firms usually are small scale, capital demanding, risky, and use debt capital and renting of farm land (Barry et al., 2000). In the European Union, farm firms used to run into a completely different financial and political environment compared to other firms. However, the liberalization of markets leads farm firms to a more entrepreneurial model (Phillipson et al., 2004).

Based on the farm-based entrepreneurs, the categorization of farm firms, is in pluriactive farmers, resource-exploiting entrepreneurs and portfolio entrepreneurs. Pluriactive farmers who have other income resources beside farming, are mainly owners of micro farm firms, with low capital requirements and family member's employees. In contrast with pluriactive farmers, resource-exploiting entrepreneurs are owners of small farm firms, with several capital requirements, not

only with family member's employees and focus on non-farm activities as well. Portfolio entrepreneurs are owners of large farm firms with high capital requirements (Alsos et al., 2003). Furthermore, based on their organization structure sole or individual proprietorships are the most common type of farm firms worldwide, due to the simplicity of operation and understanding. The farmer is the owner with exclusive control over the management of the firm and almost always is a small farm firm. Furthermore, the owner has unlimited personal liability considering everything about the firm (Buhler, 2001; NCAT, 2013; CSU, 2011).

There are several farm production characteristics, that influence and affect the operation of farm firms. There are high crop variations, due to climate conditions and environmental factors. The combination of the latter and the inelastic demand for farm products, affect the farm market. Another important characteristic is the seasonality of farm sector. When some farm products have high demand on specific periods and other farm products have specific periods of production. Furthermore, other farm production characteristics, are the increased production levels of some farm products due to technological advances and the high concentration in specific geographical places (Perner, 2008). Considering the farmer characteristics that influence the management decisions, are the age of the owner, the phase of lifecycle of farm and most important the education level of the farmer. These characteristics influence the motivations and the goals of farm firms' owners. (Ondersteijn et al., 2003).

### [Branding in Small Firms](#)

In this part, the study focuses on branding in small firms by addressing the differences with the large firms and by mentioning some useful branding guidelines.

The limited resources are the main reason behind the differences between small firms and the large ones, considering the extent to which they implement branding and the steps that are required to build a strong brand. Furthermore, as it is obvious, there are also differences between high and low performing small firms (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Berthon et al., 2008). Furthermore, other problems that small firms face, are the narrow understanding of brand management, the lack of time, and the considering of brand management as unimportant (Wong and Merrilees, 2005).

Despite the above constraints towards the building of brands, a lot of small firms have managed to create strong and successful brands. Noteworthy examples of such small firms which managed to

create strong brands and finally became well-known firms, are the Stonyfield Farms, the Ben & Jerry's, and the Glacéau. Close attention in marketing programs, fully understanding of what branding entails, involving of the whole firm in the brand building in a passionate way and existence of creativity can minimize the aforementioned constraints (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Kay, 2006; Abimbola, 2001). Branding guidelines for small firms are: Adapt a niche branding strategy and focus on a narrower segment of consumers; Creatively conduct low-cost marketing research. For instance, by request low-cost marketing research from universities in order to realize the consumer's needs; Concentrate on building only one or two strong brands, based on one or two key associations which serve as points-of-difference; Employ a unique and well-integrated mix of brand elements, that improves brand awareness and brand image as well. These brand elements should be meaningful and easily recognisable. Most of the time, small firms use family names, which on the one hand could give some uniqueness but on the other hand are less meaningful, memorable, and sometimes less pronounceable; Be logical in policy and consistent considering the communication with the consumers; Create buzz and a loyal brand community. In this way, the loyal consumers spread the messages of the small firm via word-of-mouth. It is a cost-effective way for a small firm to establish its position, gain loyalty and eventually a positive brand image, in contrast with the expensive traditional promotional programs; Ensure that there is a clear link between the owner's personal traits and the brand; Leverage as many secondary associations as possible. Such as places, affiliated firms, things and persons that are related to the brand and help the quality and credibility of it (Kotler and Keller, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2015; Abimbola, 2001; Keller, 2003; Krake, 2005; Dentoni and Reardon, 2010). However, the above guidelines neglect the differences between small firms. In other words, maybe there are brand management differences between different sectors, like differences between farm and manufacturing small firms.

### [Branding in Farm Firms](#)

In the following part, the study analyses the current situation of branding in farm firms and the potential benefits of this. Additionally, it describes the challenges for farm firms towards branding and the requirements for branding. Finally, it analyses the branding types for farm products and it addresses some successful examples.

Most of the farm products like fruit and horticultural products, are mainly unprocessed, unbranded and traded in bulk. The most of the branded ones, are mainly geographical or varietal brands, and are mainly developed by groups of farmers and suppliers. It is not usual for farm products to be branded based on their attributes or to be developed by solely farmers (Nijssen and Van Trijp, 1998; Pay et al., 1996).

Branding could have potential benefits for farm firms and consumers as well. A lot of consumers have a lack of time and knowledge in order to select high-quality farm products, so a branded farm product that is known to them could save time and effort for these consumers. Consumers might want farm products that are different in their category and also the consumers might be willing to pay a price premium for them. Furthermore, branding could help farm firms to add value to their products, to enhance the differentiation of their products and finally, to survive from the competition (Nijssen and Van Trijp, 1998; Lewis et al., 2014; Hayes and Lence, 2002; Pay et al., 1996).

Branded farm products should have high quality and consistent, quality and attributes. Branding is a crucial way to communicate the high and consistent, quality and attributes of farm products to the consumers, due to the fact that it is an important extrinsic quality cue to the consumers. It is obvious that this is a challenge for farm firms and their products, which are the result of a biological growing process and as a result, there is variability of product attributes within the same product line. Mainly due to the climate and environmental conditions. Furthermore, there are 5 obstacles towards branding in farm firms, especially for those farm firms which do business in developing countries. These obstacles are: consumers who do not distinguish between similar farm products due to their physical similarity; products that cannot have consistent quality and fail to meet export standards; markets that are not interested in smallholder produce, because they cannot purchase large amount of products from them and as a consequence, they cannot achieve high profits; lack of resources for successful development and branding; branding is not of high priority in farm firms (Nijssen and Van Trijp, 1998; Docherty, 2012; Pay et al., 1996).

As a result, branding in farm firms is related to the level of control a farm firm has over the consistency of its farm product quality and attributes. Such control methods are the grading of farm products by colour, size, weight and fat content. Another way for farm firms in order to maintain the consistency of product quality, is by controlling their products genetically. However,



these methods could change some product attributes, like the taste (Pay et al., 1996). Another important requirement of branding in farm products, is the farmer control over the quantity supplied. Furthermore, successful branding in farm firms requires a high level of communication and relationship between the different value chain firms. Furthermore, the creation of a formal mechanism in order to collaborate and share knowledge about consumer needs, would be helpful for all the value chain firms (Lewis et al., 2014; Hayes and Lence, 2002).

There are 4 branding types considering the farm products. Producer, varietal, geographical and certification brands. They are different considering their ownership and purpose. Producer brands like Chiquita bananas, are brands which are owned basically by primary producers and processors. The purpose of these brands is to distinguish between different products and their producers. Varietal brands like Pink Lady apples, with purpose to be distinguished among different varieties within the same product line. Geographical brands like Idaho potatoes, that are owned mostly by regional associations or public sector bodies, and with purpose the differentiation through geographical origins. Finally, certification brands like organic or Fair-trade, with the purpose to be different through ethical or social standards (Docherty, 2012).

The farm firm Chiquita Inc. and its Chiquita bananas, is an example of how a farm firm could add value to its products by branding. The characteristic trademark of Miss Chiquita distinguishes the bananas of the firm from those of the competitors. The branding policy of the firm in combination with strong domestic distribution in different regions, established the firm as the leader in the sector. Furthermore, the successful branding gives the opportunity for price premium and as a result, Chiquita Inc. sells its branded Chiquita bananas for higher prices than those of the competitors. Another example of successful branding in farm firms, are the pre-washed, fresh and ready-to-eat lettuce leaves, that are branded according to premium quality, and are common worldwide. A distinguishing example, is the prepared lettuce salad of Florette Inc., probably the most well-known firm in the sector of prepared salads worldwide (Docherty, 2012; Lewis et al., 2014).

## Conceptual Framework

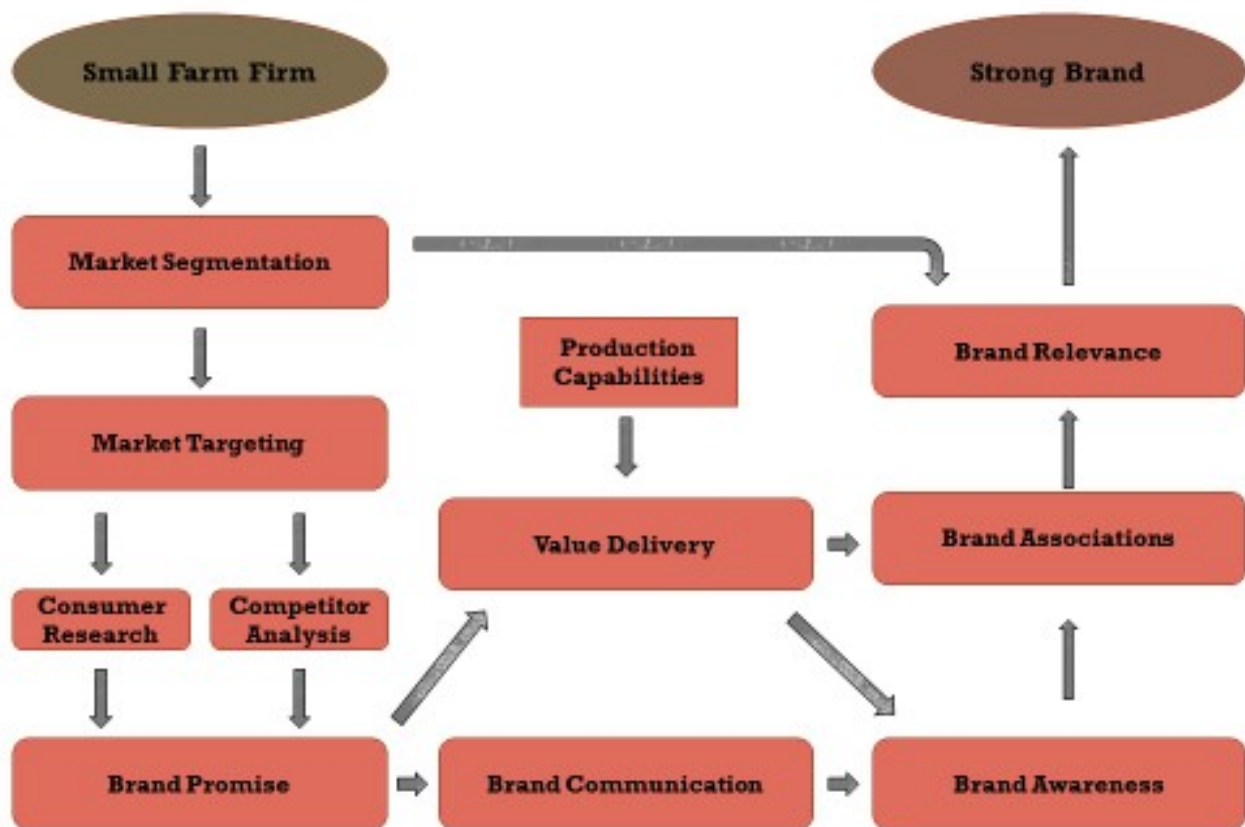


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

## Methodology

### Design of the Study and Data Collection

Due to the limited literature considering branding in small farm firms, the exploratory research of the study is built on a multi-case study. In order to gain access to the branding activities of small farm firms and to answer the research question, a qualitative study based on personal interviews with semi-structured open-ended questions was undertaken (Annex 1). Furthermore, case studies should have multiple sources of evidence to have more robust results and increase construct validity. So, to triangulate the information gathered through the interviews, secondary data were

collected via the websites and social media pages of the participating small farm firms and via web portals (Yin, 2013). This particular type of methodology is common in studies about branding in small firms (Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Dentoni and Reardon, 2010; Spence and Hamzaoui Essoussi, 2010).

Respondents of the personal interviews are owners or managers of small farm firms. In order to contact these respondents, e-mails had been sent to around 100 farm firms in the Netherlands after an extensive search in databases and firm lists, which are found via google search, like europages.com, companiess.com, listofcompaniesin.com, dutchagrofood.com, companylist.org and hollandfreshguide.com. Some of these farm firms did not reply, some did not have the time to participate and some others did not fulfil the criteria of the study. Finally, 5 farm firms that fulfil the criteria of the study, accepted to participate in the personal interviews. The aforementioned two-dimensional criteria are that they are farm firms that employ more than 9 and less than 50 employees, and they brand their products in a successful way, so to represent confirmatory cases. Furthermore, in order to be theoretical diverse cases, they should be diverse considering their production (Yin, 2013).

Since there is not a precise guideline according to how many interviews are required for a qualitative research and considering the time pressure in the completion of the study, these 5 small farm firms are chosen as the case studies. Specifically, the 5 small farm firms are from 3 different farm sectors in order to gain some diversity among the respondents. More specifically, 2 small farm firms with general dairy products, 1 small farm firm with cheese products, 1 small farm firm with apples and 1 small farm firm with paprika products. So, the goal of theoretical diverse cases is reached by the time that 3 small farm firms are animal-based producers and the other two plant-based ones. The other goal that is achieved, was to approach successful small farm firms considering their branding attempts, in order to confirm or disconfirm the concepts in the framework of the study and as a consequence the proposed guidelines towards a strong brand for small farm firms. The above differences and commonalities between the cases, led to interesting insights.

## Data Analysis

The content of the interviews is coded and analysed with ATLAS.ti (7.5.7). The goal was to figure out which of the steps towards a strong brand are followed by the small farm firms. The created codes are separated into three categories. Firstly, the ones that derived from the framework of the study, like “use of consumer research” and “no use of consumer research”, “meaningful brand elements” and “meaningless brand elements”. A quote coded as “use of consumer research” when a small farm firm gave a response like “We obtain consumer insights and also, we make our own researches.” and as “meaningless brand elements” when for instance it responded “The one is called Boer “X”, so it is Farmer “X” which is the name of my father”. Secondly, the codes that referred to the successfulness of branding in small farm firms and eventually, prove if these small farm firms could be included in the analysis of the study. These codes are “successful branding” and “unsuccessful branding”. For instance, the “successful branding” code appeared when a small farm firm believes that branding contributes to its performance. Thirdly, the codes that referred to more general information considering these small farm firms, like “attention to marketing activities” and “no attention to marketing activities”. For example, the “attention to marketing activities” code appeared when a small farm firm has a specialised full-time employee for marketing activities or cooperates with an external marketing agency. An extensive table (*Table 1*) for how and under which criteria each quote is coded, is followed in the results part of the study. Furthermore, a complete table (*Table 4*) with all the codes and quotes in the interviews is presented in the *Appendix* of the study. Due to the anonymity and confidentiality in the interviews, the real brands’ and firms’ names are replaced by the variables “X”, “Y” and “Z”.

The questions in the questionnaire are derived from the concepts in the framework of the study. As for how each concept in the framework is operationalised by a certain question in the questionnaire, considering the concepts of Market Segmentation and Market Targeting, and in order to exploratory measure these concepts, the study includes the following questions. “Please describe your target market. What about size, unique needs, and descriptive characteristics of the target market?” and “How do you choose/select your target market?”. The answers to these questions shows us what market targeting strategy small farm firms choose among mass marketing, segmented marketing, niche marketing and micromarketing. Considering the concepts of Consumer Research and Competitor Analysis, in order to figure out if the respondents make use

of these researches and if so, how, the following questions are constructed. “What consumer research or competitor analyses did you use?” and “If so, how did you obtain this research?”. The concept Brand Promise, is measured by the question “What should your brand be/mean for your customers?”, in order to figure out what are the benefits and experience of the brand for the consumers. Considering the concept Brand Communication, is measured by the question “How do you communicate your brand to your customers?”, in order to show us which communication tools the small farm firms use in order to communicate their promise to their consumers. As for the concept of Brand Awareness, the question is “How did you choose the name, the logo, the colour etc. of your brand?”. In this way, the study figures out, if the small farm firms consider a lot about their brand elements, in order to be recognisable for the consumers. Considering the Brand Associations, it consists of four subsidiary concepts due to the complexity of this concept and as a consequence there are four different questions. Firstly, the question “What did you choose as the name, the logo, the colour etc. of your brand?”, to figure out if the small farm firms use meaningful brand elements. Secondly, the simple question “How many different brands do you have?”. Thirdly, the question “How is your brand different from your competitors? Which differences do you emphasize towards customers?”. The answer to this question give us information about the number and the content of the points-of-difference associations. Finally, the question “Do you try to connect your brand to a specific place, person, or event?”. With this question, the study attempts to figure out if the small farm firms make use of secondary associations. As for the Brand Relevance concept, the study does not use a question like it does in the other cases. So, in order to measure this and to figure out if the small farm firms focus on the relevance of their brands, the study looks at what the small farm firms deliver to their customers and if this meets the needs, wants and demands of their target segment. Considering the concept of Value Delivery, the question in order to measure it, is the following. “Is your product always the same? For example, the quality? Do you sell the product in a different way when the quality is less than usual? For example, due to the weather.”. The answer to this question shows us, if the small farm firms deliver what they promise to their consumers. Finally, as for the Production Capabilities concept, the obvious question is: “What do you do to monitor the quality of your produce, from production to sales?”. In this way, the study figures out, if the small farm firms focus on the consistency of their

brands. Almost all the above questions are followed by the questions “Anything else?” or “Any other way?”, in order not to miss any possible important information.

Furthermore, the questionnaire includes several more general questions in order to figure out the importance of branding for the small farm firms, the successfulness of their branding and the issues of their branding. These questions are the following: “Do you have any specialist on marketing?”, “How many hours per day does your firm spend on marketing activities?”, “Do you believe that branding contributes to your firm’s performance?”, “Do you consider your branding successful? If so, why?”, “What problems/issues have you faced since you started your branding activities?” and “Anything else that you want to add considering your branding?”.

## Results

As aforementioned an extensive coding table (*Table 1*) for how each quote coded is created. Furthermore, and based on the *Table 1*, a concentrated table (*Table 2*) is followed with the summary of the results for all the small farm firms, to check for differences and commonalities among them. Additionally, another one concentrated table (*Table 3*) is created based on the more general questions in the interviews. Finally, a new conceptual framework is created based on the literature review, in combination with the responses of owners/managers of small farm firms and the investigation of the related documents (*Figure 3*). All the participating small farm firms are considering themselves as branding successfully due to the fact that branding contributes to their firm’s performance. So this new framework could confirm or disconfirm the applicability of the theoretical model (*Figure 2*) in small farm firms. In order to confirm a specific concept in the framework, the requirement is that at least 4 out of 5 of the respondents give answers that confirm this concept. Furthermore, in order to provide additional insights and to confirm the information derived from the interviews, content analysis of the websites and social media pages of the participating small farm firms and of several web portals was undertaken. These web sites and web portals are not presented in the reference list due to confidentiality. The symbol © is presented in the *Table 2* and *Table 3*, whenever information is confirmed.

Table 1. Coding Table

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Example Quotes</b>	<b>Criteria for coding</b>
<b>focus on a narrow segment of consumers</b>	“We aim to a smaller segment of consumers”	Niche Marketing – Micromarketing
<b>focus on a broad segment of consumers</b>	Absence of quote for this code in interviews	Mass Marketing – Segmented Marketing
<b>use of consumer research</b>	“We use consumer insights. We obtain them through several companies that contact consumer researches, like Nielsen for example.”	Use of
<b>no use of consumer research</b>	“No, we are not doing anything like this. We know our clients well and so we learn from them what exactly is happening and what is going on in the market.”	Do not use of
<b>use of competitor analysis</b>	Absence of quote for this code in interviews	Use of
<b>no use of competitor analysis</b>	“No, we are not doing competitor analysis.”	Do not use of
<b>explicit brand promises</b>	“We have the consumers and for them, our brand is a safe product. It does not count as biological because it is not cultivated on the ground but, is even safer as a product from biological ones, because we have everything under control. For the retailers, we help them with products, with packaging, with product sales etc. so they earn more money. They have good margin from our product, so for them, our brand is an interesting and profitable brand.”	Have a clear idea about what they promise
<b>vague brand promises</b>	“A natural product that gives a happy feeling and when the consumers eat it, they really enjoy it”	Have a more generic idea about what they promise
<b>use of low-cost communication tools</b>	“We use social media, so Facebook for the most and Instagram too, and as we have a lot of distribution right now, we communicate through leaflets and sometimes we have advertised, but that is really small. Furthermore, there are food expos that we attend to.”	Use of
<b>no use of low-cost communication tools</b>	Absence of quote for this code in interviews	Do not use of
<b>consideration about the impact of brand elements</b>	“We are one of the few that engraving the cheeses in the Netherlands, so it gives a different appearance and also a state of quality. The name is chosen because it gives an idea of that it is a farm estate. As for the colour that we use on the stickers of the cheeses, we choose them based	Attention on how they choose the name, the logo, the colour etc.

	on their herbs, and so we want to give the same appearance as the herbs inside the cheeses.”	
<b>no consideration about the impact of brand elements</b>	“We have try to make a package and a logo which is fit to our brand name, which is a very natural image”	No attention on how they choose the name, the logo, the colour etc.
<b>meaningful brand elements</b>	“The agency asked us what do we think about “X” as a brand name, and we thought that is nice and easily recognisable, so we chose it.”	Avoid family names
<b>meaningless brand elements</b>	“The one is called “X”, so it is Farmer “X” which is the name of my father and that is very small and only for distribution from our local shop.”	Use family names
<b>focused brands</b>	“We have only the “X”. And we sell our four types of cheese under this brand.”	Frequency of mention of that code (1 focused brand to confirm the concept)
<b>points-of-difference associations</b>	“Apart from the stickers that are different from our competitors,” - “we try to promote our brand as a normal apple and not as a luxury apple. A normal one, but a good alternative for the luxury ones.”	Frequency of mention of that code (1 or 2 points-of-difference to confirm the concept)
<b>secondary sources of brand associations</b>	“The name of our brand comes from the nearby natural park and so, we want to connect it with our natural product.”	Frequency of mention of that code (at least 3 secondary sources to confirm the concept)
<b>achieving brand relevance</b>	“We make very deep research in the market and know our consumers and retailers well. So we have concepts considering what they exactly want”	Meet the needs, wants and demands of their target
<b>not achieving brand relevance</b>	“A natural product that gives a happy feeling and when the consumers eat it, they really enjoy it” while “Our target market is people that can spend more money on cheese, so people that search for more luxury products.”	Do not meet the needs, wants and demands of their target
<b>stable quality attributes</b>	“If they are not first class products and do not fall under our requirements, we do not brand them.”	Do not brand the products that do not meet their standards
<b>unstable quality attributes</b>	“We have a certain small percentage that is not good every year. But we sell all our cheeses under the brand because the name is crafted upon the cheese from the beginning.”	Brand the products that do not meet their standards



<b>attention to the levels of control</b>	“We monitor our production by harvesting our products in the same way. Also, we have a quality manager in our distribution centre who checks the quality”	Modern techniques for quality control
<b>no attention to the levels of control</b>	“We do it by hitting the cheese and then hearing through the holes. In that way, we can understand the quality. In other words, through experience and we are good in this.”	Old-fashioned techniques for quality control
<b>successful branding</b>	“Yes, I think so. When we were selling our product as a private label it was more difficult, and now with our own brand we gain more awareness.”	Branding contributes to their performance
<b>unsuccessful branding</b>	Absence of quote for this code in interviews	Does not contribute to their performance
<b>attention to marketing activities</b>	“We are working together with a company, so they are doing our sales and marketing. They have a full-time person to our products.”	Have a specialised full-time employee for marketing activities or cooperate with an external marketing agency
<b>no attention to marketing activities</b>	“No, we are marketing ourselves. No one helping us. In one way is really easy because we do what we want to do and we can control everything.”	Marketing themselves
<b>problems/issues considering branding</b>	“We have a few of problems. It is a very common name and we have problems with the intellectual property rights of the name. That is why we have a lawyer that handles this kind of problems.”	Have
<b>no problems/issues considering branding</b>	“Not something specific.”	Do not have

Table 2. Concentrated Results

		<b>First Small Dairy Firm</b>	<b>Second Small Dairy Firm</b>	<b>Small Cheese Firm</b>	<b>Small Apple Firm</b>	<b>Small Paprika Firm</b>
<b>Framework related</b>	focused segment of consumers	narrow	narrow	narrow	narrow	narrow
	use of consumer research	no	yes	no	no	yes
	use of competitor analysis	no	no	no	no	no
	brand promises	explicit ☉	vague	explicit ☉	explicit ☉	explicit ☉
	use of low cost communication tools	yes ☉	yes ☉	yes ☉	yes ☉	yes ☉
	consideration about the impact of brand elements	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
	brand elements	meaningful ☉	meaningless ☉	meaningful ☉	meaningful ☉	meaningful ☉
	focused brands	more than one ☉	more than one ☉	one ☉	one ☉	more than one ☉
	points-of-difference associations	a few ☉	a few ☉	a few ☉	a few ☉	a few ☉
	secondary sources of brand associations	use a few ☉	use a few ☉	use a few ☉	use a few ☉	use a few ☉
	achieving brand relevance	yes ☉	no	yes ☉	yes ☉	yes
	quality attributes	stable ☉	stable ☉	unstable	stable ☉	stable ☉
	levels of control	attention ☉	attention ☉	no attention	attention ☉	attention ☉

Table 3. General Results

		<b>First Small Dairy Firm</b>	<b>Second Small Dairy Firm</b>	<b>Small Cheese Firm</b>	<b>Small Apple Firm</b>	<b>Small Paprika Firm</b>
<b>General inputs</b>	branding	successful ☉	successful ☉	successful ☉	successful ☉	successful ☉
	marketing activities	attention ☉	attention	no attention	attention	attention ☉
	problems/issues considering branding	no	yes	yes	yes	yes

The first two concepts of the study are confirmed due to the fact that all the small farm firms focus on a narrow segment of consumers. The reason behind this could be concluding based on the quote of one of the respondent: “we have few group of consumers that we have to be aware of so, it is easy to handle their needs in that way”.

Despite the importance of consumer research and competitor analysis, they are disconfirmed based on the responses of the small farm firms. None of the respondents make use of competitor analysis and as for consumer research, only 2 of them use it. Specifically, one of them uses consumer insights from market research firms and the other one apart from consumer insights, it contacts consumer researches itself. The reason behind this disconfirmation is that the other 3 firms count only on information they receive from their clients. So, these 3 firms make use of consumer research, not in a traditional marketing way but in a more primary level. Noteworthy is the fact that the two small farm firms which make use of consumer research, have more than one brand.

Considering their brand promises, 4 out of 5 of the small farm firms have explicit brand promises and only one has a vague one, so the Brand Promise concept is confirmed. This shows that almost all the small farm firms pay attention to what their brand(s) should mean for their consumers. This also confirmed by their clear description about their brands on their websites. Furthermore, this illustrates the difference between the dairy-based firms and the rest.

The concept of Brand Communication is confirmed because all of the respondents use low-cost communication tools. All of them make use of social media and almost all of them are participating in various events like food fairs and exhibitions. The above confirmed by observation of social media pages, where all of them have active accounts. Furthermore, on their websites, there are records about the food fairs and exhibitions they attend to.

Almost all of the firms (4 out of 5) consider about the impact of their brand elements on their consumers and it is proven by the fact that almost all of them pay attention on how to choose their name, logo and colour. Only one small farm firm does not pay attention to this impact and this illustrates a diversity between dairy-based small firms and the others. As a result, the Brand Awareness concept is confirmed.

Considering the concept of Brand Associations, it is partly confirmed due to the fact that two of the subsidiary concepts are confirmed. The first is confirmed because almost all of the small farm

firms avoid meaningless brand names by avoiding family names for their brand(s). Only one of them makes use of its owner's name, and this illustrates once again the difference between dairy-based small firms and the others. Additionally, the one with the meaningless brand elements is the one with the vague brand promise. As for the second concept, it is disconfirmed due to the fact that 3 out of 5 of the small farm firms concentrate their efforts on more than one brand. Here we can see that dairy-based and vegetable-based small firms do not need to focus on one brand to have successful branding. The few points-of-difference associations sub concept is confirmed, because all of the respondents gave answers that prove they focus on few points-of-difference associations, by focus on 1 or 2 points-of-difference associations each of them. Considering the secondary sources of brand associations, is something that all of the small farm firms do, but only by using 1 or 2 secondary sources of brand associations. As a consequence, this subsidiary concept is disconfirmed. The results are supported by the fact that all the above subsidiary concepts are confirmed by the content analysis of web sites and portals, where there are records about the name and number of their brands, as well as about the different associations they use.

As aforementioned, the Brand Relevance concept is not exploratory measured by a specific question, but by looking at what the small farm firms deliver to their customers and if this meets the standards of their target segment. For instance, a small farm firm stated "We produce an organic brand" while its consumers are looking for products at specialised organic shops. As a result, due to the fact that 4 out of 5 of the respondents have achieve Brand Relevance, this concept is confirmed. Once again the difference between dairy-based small firms and the others is illustrated, as well as the fact that the small farm firm with vague brand promises is the one which did not achieve brand relevance. The above confirmed by records on the websites of 3 of the small farm firms.

Considering the concepts of Value Delivery and Production Capabilities, they are confirmed too. Specifically, 4 out of 5 of the small farm firms deliver products with stable quality attributes by not branding the products that do not fall under their standards and requirements. Additionally, the same respondents stated that they pay attention to the levels of control in their production, by using modern techniques for quality control. The only one firm that does not pay attention to the levels of control in its production and brand all of its product despite the quality is the cheese-based one,

and its owner reasoned its choice due to the fact that its brand name is crafted upon its products from the beginning and also has the experience to understand if a product is of A-quality or not. Furthermore, this firm's practices are justified by the fact that its products are sold out every year. Remarkable is the fact that this particular small cheese firm is the one with the most records in web portals, even from other countries than the Netherlands and additionally, has an adequate number of awards for the quality of its products.

As for the more general questions about the importance of branding for the small farm firms and the problems/issues considering their branding, the study figured out that almost all of the participating small farm firms (4 out of 5) pay attention to marketing activities and have some minor problems/issues considering their branding. Finally, all of them believe that their branding is successful as they stated that it is contributing to the performance of their firms. This is proved by the content analysis of web portals, because there are records about all of them considering their success stories. The latter proves that these small farm firms are suitable for the analysis of the study.

## Conclusions and Discussion

The study sought to create a new conceptual framework to answer its research question about what should a small farm firm do in order to create a strong brand, while these firms are characterised by limited resources, and almost all the related existing literature is not focused solely on small firms, but on small-medium sized firms together. So, as a consequence of the above results in combination with the literature review, and with the help of the Concentrated Results (*Table 2*), a new conceptual framework is created and is presented (*Figure 3*).

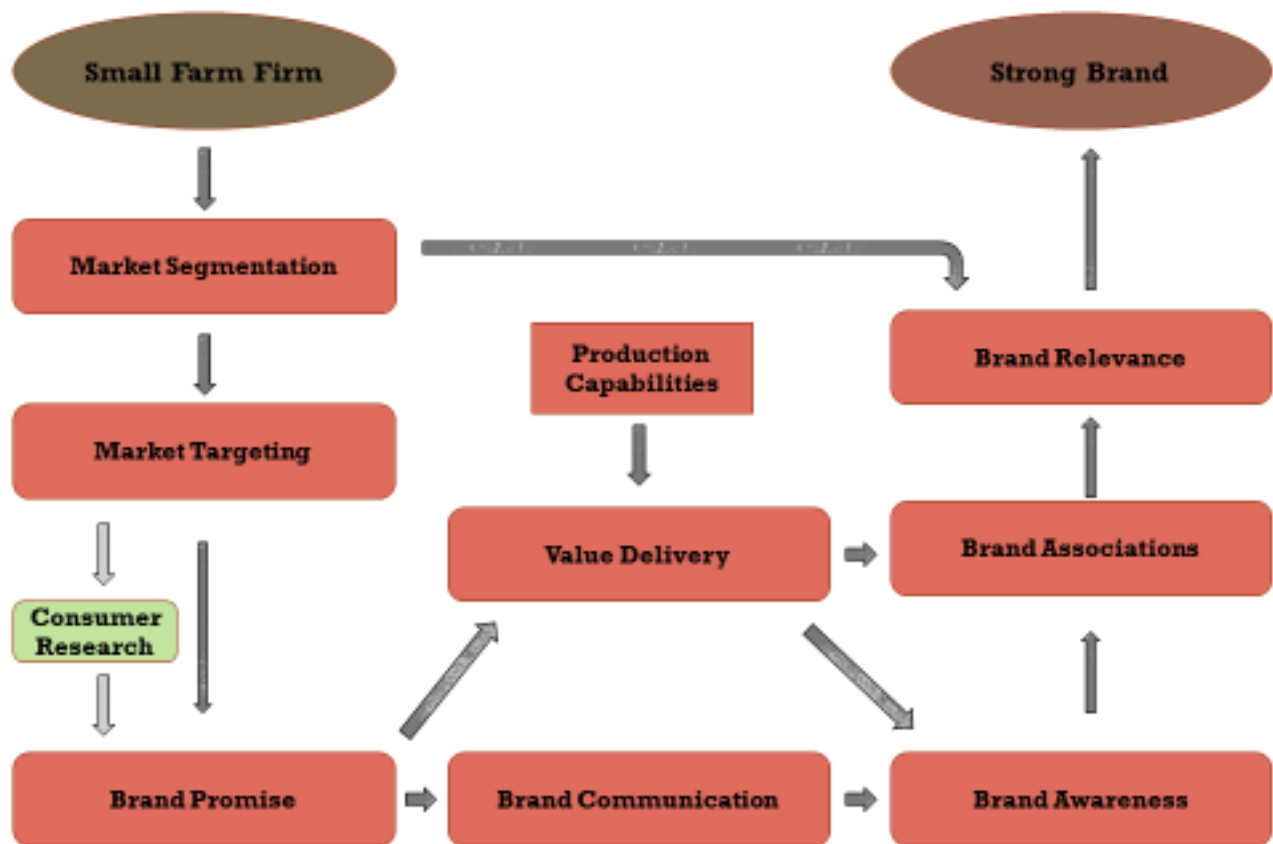


Figure 3. New Conceptual Framework

Based on the results and on the new conceptual framework (Figure 3), some propositions are developed. Specifically, a small farm firm in order to create a strong brand should: focus on a narrow segment of consumers by adopting a niche marketing or micromarketing strategy and deliver to this segment the brand(s) it asks for; have explicit brand promises and choose carefully its brand elements; use low-cost communication tools like social media, events and word-of-mouth; consider about the impact of its brand elements on consumers to be recognisable for them; focus on meaningful brand elements by avoiding family names and focus on few points-of-difference associations to be different from its competitors; deliver products with stable quality attributes by paying attention to the levels of control in its production as using modern techniques for quality controls.

Furthermore, the above new conceptual framework illustrates the differences between small farm firms and small firms from other sectors. More specific, it is illustrated that small farm firms in

contrast with small firms from other sectors, do not need to use a lot of secondary sources of brand associations and to focus only on one brand in order to build a strong brand. Furthermore, they do not need to make use of competitor analysis. As for the concept of consumer research, despite the disconfirmation, is important and useful at least at a primary level and by gathering information just from their clients. So, consumer research should not be neglected.

Additionally, the results of this exploratory study show the diversity between the small firms in the agribusiness sector. Considering the small farm firms that obtain consumer research from marketing agencies, it seems to give them a better understanding of the market and in turn, this gives them the capability to have more than one brand. Additionally, and in contrast with cheese and fruit-based small firms, dairy-based small firms could focus on more than one brand due to their various products and likewise, vegetable-based small firms due to the easy and low-cost modification on their cultivation. Moreover, the most important and noteworthy differences are observed between dairy-based small firms and the other participating small farm firms. These differences are illustrated due to the wide range of products in dairy-based small firms.

#### [Contribution to the Existing Marketing Literature](#)

As it is expressed before, the most of the marketing literature focuses on large firms (Aaker, 2002) and when it refers to small firms the most of the times examines them together with the medium-sized ones (Krake, 2005; Wong and Merrilees, 2005; Berthon et al., 2008). Furthermore, the existing marketing literature neglects the differences between the farm sector and other ones, like the manufacturing sector (Keller, 2003; Kotler and Keller, 2012; Krake, 2005). So, the study makes a conceptual contribution to the existing marketing literature by creating a new conceptual framework that focuses solely on small firms and more specifically on the agribusiness sector. Furthermore, this exploratory study shows the diversity between the small firms in the agribusiness sector and more specifically, between dairy-based small firms and the others, mainly as a result of their relative large assortment size.

#### [Managerial Implications](#)

The study has considerable managerial implications for owners and marketing managers of small farm firms. The importance of the study lies in the fact that it puts the scope of branding in the context of small farm firms and it pinpoints specific branding concepts as important for the creation

of a strong brand. The new conceptual framework that is created, could be a practical guideline for small farm firms due to the fact that it is not just based on the investigation of the existing literature, but also on real small farm firm case studies. In that way, owners and marketing managers of small farm firms could fully understand the steps towards the creation of a strong brand. Furthermore, the diversity between the small firms in agribusiness gives different insights to owners and marketing managers depending on the sector they do business.

### Critical Reflection

This study is limited to just 5 case studies and probably this is the most critical limitation of the study and obviously, this creates validity issues. This limitation could be justified by the fact that most of the around 100 farm firms that are approached, did not reply to the invitation for an interview. Furthermore, from the positive farm firms towards the participation in the study, a lot of them did not fulfil the criteria of it. As a consequence, and under the pressure of time, 5 case studies are used.

Another limitation that arises due to the few case studies, is the investigation of case studies only from general dairy, cheese, fruit and vegetable sectors. Therefore, important sectors on agribusiness like meat industry, aquatic farming and horticulture, are not covered.

Considering triangulation, secondary data were not collected for the confirmation of Market Segmentation, Market Targeting, Consumer Research and Brand Promise concepts, as a result of lack of records for these concepts.

Finally, the investigation of branding in small farm firms only from the firms' perspective and not from the consumers' as well, is a clear limitation.

### Recommendations for further Research

The results of this exploratory study provide space for further research in the field of small firm branding and more specifically, for small firms in the agribusiness sector. The future research could be improved by including more case studies to increase reliability and validity. Even more so, by contacting interviews in other areas of the agribusiness sector, like in meat industry, in aquatic farming and in horticulture. Furthermore, the differences between small firms in agribusiness sector could be analysed thoroughly. Considering the new conceptual framework that



is created in this exploratory study, further research could include deeper investigation in each of the branding concepts that are included in the new conceptual framework. Finally, further research in the field of small farm firms branding, but from the perspective of consumers and how they react towards branded farm products from small-scale firms, could give completely different and extremely interesting insights.

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## Appendix

### Annex 1. Interview questionnaire

#### Branding Related Questions:

1. Do you have any specialist on marketing?
2. How many hours per day does your firm spend on marketing activities?
3. Do you believe that branding contributes to your firm's performance?
4. Do you consider your branding successful?
5. What problems/issues have you faced since you started your branding activities?  
Anything else?
6. Please describe your target market. What about size, unique needs, and descriptive characteristics of the target market?
7. How do you choose/select your target market? Anything else?
8. What consumer research or competitor analyses did you use? Anything else?
9. If so, how did you obtain this research?
10. What should your brand be/mean for your customers? Anything else?
11. How many different brands do you have?
12. How do you communicate your brand to your customers? Any other way?
13. How did you choose the name, the logo, the colour etc. of your brand? Anything else?
14. What did you choose as the name, the logo, the colour etc. of your brand? Anything else?
15. How is your brand different from your competitors? Anything else? Which differences do you emphasize towards customers? Anything else?
16. Do you try to connect your brand to a specific place, person, or event? Anything else?
17. Do you focus your efforts on existing customers or new customers?

18. Is your product always the same? For example, the quality? Do you sell the product in a different way when the quality is less than usual? For example, due to the weather.
19. What do you do to monitor the quality of your produce, from production to sales?  
Anything else?
20. Anything else that you want to add considering your branding?

General Info/Questions:

- Name:
- Contact:
- Firm's name:
- Farm sector:
- Firm's age:
- Brand(s)'s age:
- Location:
- Employees' number:
- Interviewee position/ function:

## Annex 2. Codes and quotes in interviews

Table 4. Codes and Quotes

Small Farm Firms	Codes	Example Quotes
<b>First Small Dairy Firm</b>	focus on a narrow segment of consumers	“We focus on specialised organic food shops. Specifically, we sell our products in around 200 shops in the Netherlands.” – “We choose only shops who sell organic foods.”
	no use of consumer research	“No, we did not..”
	no use of competitor analysis	“No, we did not..”
	explicit brand promises	“We produce organic dairy products, which are produced in a traditional way and they are coming directly from the farm. That is our unique selling point.”
	use of low cost communication tools	“We advertise our products in magazines of organic food shops, we have taste testing in shops, and we use social media. Mainly Facebook but also Twitter”
	no consideration about the impact of brand elements	“We have try to make a package and a logo which fit to our brand name, which is a very natural image”
	meaningful brand elements	“For the one brand, for which we use the milk from our farm, we have the “X” brand. “X” is a natural park and “X” means dairy. As for the other brand, for which we collect milk from 25 farmers, is the “Y” brand and it is a biodynamic product. The name means Pure Dairy.”
	focused brands [2]	“We have two brands.”
	points-of-difference associations [1]	“We produce our products in a more traditional way and our recipes are more traditional. So, no mass production in a factory, but a small scale one which is good for the products and in order to be organic.”
	secondary sources of brand associations [1]	“The name of our brand comes from the nearby natural park and so, we want to connect it with our natural product.”
	achieving brand relevance	“We focus on specialised organic food shops. Specifically, we sell our products in around 200 shops in the Netherlands.” – “We produce organic dairy products, which are produced in a traditional way and they are coming directly from the farm. That is our unique selling point.”
	stable quality attributes	“All our products meet our internal standards and if some of them do not meet these standards, then we do not sell them.”
	attention to the levels of control	“Every day we have a tasting in our factory from our production leader, someone else from the production, someone from the quality department and someone from the marketing and sales department. Furthermore, we send samples to an external laboratory in order to receive microbiological results for the products.”
successful branding	“Yes, I think so and our customers ask it from us.” – “Yes, because our customers ask is from us.”	
attention to marketing activities	“Yes, we have a commercial team, myself as the commercial manager and my colleague who is responsible for the marketing activities.” – “Around 30 hours per week.”	



	no problems/issues considering branding	“Not something specific.”
<b>Second Small Dairy Firm</b>	focus on a narrow segment of consumers	“Our target market is people that can spend more money on cheese, so people that search for more luxury products. We aim to a smaller segment of consumers. For example, with young cheese you target to a larger segment, but with our cheese the opposite.”
	use of consumer research	“Through consumer insights. We obtain them through several companies that contact consumer research like Nielsen for example.”
	no use of competitor analysis	“No, we are not doing competitor analysis.”
	vague brand promises	“A natural product that gives a happy feeling and when the consumers eat it, they really enjoy it. So the quality is at the highest level of importance.”
	use of low cost communication tools	“We use social media, so Facebook for the most and Instagram too, and as we have a lot of distribution right now, we communicate through leaflets and sometimes we have advertised, but that is really small. Furthermore, there are food expos that we attend to. We are at the biggest food expo in the Netherlands every year, and also we are at Amiga and at CIAL. CIAL is at Paris once in two years and Amiga is in Germany.”
	consideration about the impact of brand elements	“We have cheeses with topping, so with herbs on top and there are stickers at them with the logo, but we also have the natural variety and then the logo is engraved on the cheese. We are one of the few that engraving the cheeses in the Netherlands, so it gives a different appearance and also a state of quality. The name is chosen because it gives an idea that it is a farm estate, so that is why we call it “X” which means farmer and “Y” because we are proud of the product. Well, we thought about it in general but we didn’t do any research about it. As for the colour that we use on the stickers of the cheeses, we choose them based on their herbs, and so we want to give the same appearance as the herbs inside the cheeses.”
	meaningless brand elements	“The one is called “X”, so it is Farmer “X” which is the name of my father and that is very small and only for distribution from our local shop here in Deuringen. As for the other one which we focus on, the “Y” is for the Netherlands market in general or even for export. Therefore, we use the same stamp and logo but it is communicated in a different way. For the logo, we chose the house because the same house is standing here at Deuringen, so it is a graphic of the house. The colours are the same with the herbs of the cheeses”
	focused brands [2]	“We have two brands”
	points-of-difference associations [2]	“It is different due to the quality and the way we produce it,” – “but we also communicate the origin of the product that is very important and something that a lot of competitors cannot do. We can show how the cows are fed and milk, and also the cheese production. As a consequence, we can link them together.”
	secondary sources of brand associations [2]	“Apart from the family name in one of our brand,” – “the name “Z” is the name of the family that lived here before, like 100 years before and we kept this name.”
not achieving brand relevance	“Our target market is people that can spend more money on cheese, so people that search for more luxury products.” – “A natural product that gives a happy feeling and when the consumers eat it, they really enjoy it.”	
stable quality attributes	“If they are not first class products and do not fall under our requirements, we do not brand them.”	

	attention to the levels of control	“We look at the fat, the humidity, and that sort of things. But also on the bacterial level and we taste the product before leaving our farm.”
	successful branding	“Yes, I think so. When we were selling our product as a private label it was more difficult, and now with our own brand we gain more awareness.” – “Yes”
	attention to marketing activities	“We are working together with a company, so they are doing our sales and marketing. They have a full-time person to our products.”
	problems/issues considering branding	“Right now we want to patent the name in our logo and this is the main difficulty.”
<b>Small Cheese Firm</b>	focus on a narrow segment of consumers	“The market is changing always and every year more and more. It was really different 10 years before. We are in several markets, mostly in the Netherlands. Around 60-65 % of production is for domestic distribution. Furthermore, we sell our cheese in Germany, Belgium, France, USA. What we do abroad, is to search for certain shops or companies that provide cheese to a very small part of the top market. For example, in Germany and USA we sell our cheese in shops and restaurants that provide them at the top of the market because our cheese is really expensive. In the Netherlands, we provided the majority of our cheeses in organic shops in the past but, that has changed. We changed the substance of our cheese and after that, the organic shops could not sell them easily. So, we started to focus on specialised cheese shops and we increased the prices for about 30 %. Since then we are successful in specialised cheese shops. Furthermore, we sell our cheese directly to restaurants. They do not buy a large amount of products, but we sell our cheese to a lot of restaurants. So we can say that our marketing strategy is niche marketing by selling our cheese to restaurants, cheese shops and organic shops. But no to wholesalers and supermarkets, because they cannot tell our story. ”
	no use of consumer research	“No, we are not doing anything like this. We know our clients well and so we learn from them what exactly is happening and what is going on in the market.”
	no use of competitor analysis	“No, we are not doing anything like this. We know our clients well and so we learn from them what exactly is happening and what is going on in the market.”
	explicit brand promises	“The experience of a real luxury brand and a cheese with different taste. When he/she is going home and taste a completely different cheese and then search for our brand on the internet.”
	use of low cost communication tools	“Except the word-of-mouth by the owners of the shops, we also use Facebook. But the most of our communication comes through our website. We renew and update it regularly and we have a lot of visitors. For instance, last month we had 5.500 unique visitors, a number quite big for our firm. Furthermore, as for events and expo, we are in the exhibition of Berlin and also, in the big cheese event of Bra but through one of our customers and not directly.”
	consideration about the impact of brand elements	“Well, is an old story and the name comes from 1650. We choose this because our farm is surrounding by oak trees. We have still 2 km of those old oak trees outside. For us, the most important is the truth. And no one else can use our name. In the beginning, we were the only one in the Netherlands with jersey cows making cheese and probably in Europe because we make cheese for 40 years. In the beginning, I could choose the name Jersey cheese but, I am so happy that finally chose “X” as a name. Cause now there are a lot of

		organic jersey cheeses and the consumers could be sure that this is “X”. Furthermore, “X” is a good choice for the German market too, our second biggest market after the Netherlands. This is a real meaningful and easy pronounceable name for them, and could stay in their mind.”
	meaningful brand elements	“We craft the name “X” upon the cheese. As for our cheese ghee, we use also the name of our farm with the name “X” in the logo. Also, we have the figure of a jersey upon it.”
	focused brands [1]	“We have only the “X”. And we sell our four types of cheese under this brand.”
	points-of-difference associations [2]	“Our brand is different, because we have a real brand compared to the most of our competitors. A lot of them try to make a brand like us and that means a lot for us.” – “Furthermore, we are honest about our natural way of production and that is important for the market.”
	secondary sources of brand associations [1]	“Apart from the name of our farm in the logo of our cheese ghee, no.”
	achieving brand relevance	“What we do abroad, is to search for certain shops or companies that provide cheese to a very small part of the top market. For example, in Germany and USA we sell our cheese in shops and restaurants that provide them in the top of the market, cause our cheese is really expensive. In the Netherlands, we provided the majority of our cheeses in organic shops in the past but, that has changed. We changed the substance of our cheese and after that, the organic shops could not sell them easily. So, we started to focus on special cheese shops and we increased the prices for about 30 %.” – “The experience of a real luxury brand and a cheese with different taste. When he/she is going home and taste a completely different cheese and then search for our brand on the internet.”
	unstable quality attributes	“We have a certain small percentage that is not good every year. But we sell all our cheeses under the brand because the name is crafted upon the cheese from the beginning.”
	no attention to the levels of control	“We do it by hitting the cheese and then hearing through the holes. In that way we can understand the quality. In other words, through experience and we are good in this.”
	successful branding	“Yes, I do” – “Yes, branding is very important for us because it belongs to the farm and it is not just the name but the knowledge behind it too. Everyone knows that “X” stands for natural and you can frame that. We do not work with big companies and the name is derived from the farm here. Furthermore, you can see the movies and how we do our cheese and also come to our open days and see yourself. Also, people talk with other people about it and they can ask about us. Like word-of-mouth and this is the best promotion, with the combination of honesty.”
	attention to marketing activities	“No, we are marketing ourselves. No one helping us. In one way is really easy because we do what we want to do and we can control everything.”
	problems/issues considering branding	“No, apart from the issue that the patenting of our brand costs a lot of money, because we did not just patent the name “X” but also the types of cheeses.”
<b>Small Apple Firm</b>	focus on a narrow segment of consumers	“We sell our products to small retailers and to some big supermarkets. Our target market and the one that we focus on social media too, is mainly older women. That is why we have this little boy on our logo, in order to focus on women older than 30.” – “We choose this target market, because they are the ones that do the most of the grocery shopping. We want to sell to everyone, because everyone like fruits. But we try to focus on this specific

	target group, because we think they are the largest consumer group that we can target to at this moment. We are not that big yet so, we have to focus on a specific segment.”
no use of consumer research	“No, we did not..”
no use of competitor analysis	“No, we did not..”
explicit brand promises	“A healthy product, that tastes good and lasts very long without spoiling very fast. And the supermarkets are interesting on the life cycle of the fruits.”
use of low cost communication tools	“We make short movies with the farmers and we show to the consumers how the apples are cultivated and how they are stored. We also create pictures to post them on social media. We also have big signs of “X” at the farms and nurseries of our growers. Furthermore, we are participating in exhibitions in Germany, Belgium and Italy. We do it in order to find retailers. Also, we have a marketing campaign now, with tasting of our products outside train stations, where girls give apples to people as promotion”
consideration about the impact of brand elements	“The marketing agency came up with the concept of the yellow sticker with the pink “X” in the middle, with the two leaves that represent kisses. The yellow colour in order to pop out of the apple, because the stickers are small and in order to be different for the other apples. The pink colour represents the pink colour of the apple. The agency asked us what do we think about “X” as brand name, and we thought that is nice and easy recognizable, so we chose it.”
meaningful brand elements	“We have upon the apples yellow stickers with pink letters of our brand name. Furthermore, in the logo there two leafs in the shape of lips.” – “The agency asked us what do we think about “X” as a brand name, and we thought that is nice and easily recognisable, so we chose it.”
focused brands [1]	“We have 3 varieties of apples. The A-quality apples are sold under the brand name “X” and the other ones as apple juice or by sending them to industries. We have another brand for the juice, but we focus more on “X”, because they taste better and is our best property. So, we have two brands, but focus on one of them.”
points-of-difference associations [2]	“Apart from the stickers that are different from our competitors,” – “we try to promote our brand as a normal apple and not as a luxury apple. A normal one, but a good alternative for the luxury ones.”
secondary sources of brand associations [1]	“We have the story on our website and in flyers about where the variety comes from. It is made like 5 km from our firm’s location, a specific place in the Netherlands.”
achieving brand relevance	“Our target market and the one that we focus on social media too, is mainly older women. That is why we have this little boy on our logo, in order to focus on women older than 30.”
stable quality attributes	“As I mentioned before, when they are not A-quality we sell them as juice or sell them to industries unbranded.”
attention to the levels of control	“It depends on the harvest, the colour and the size of apples. We have a sorting line and all the apples are going through there. So automatically they are checked through there.”
successful branding	“Yes, I think so. “X” is a recognizable name, with 4 letters and everybody can pronounce it. Even people from other countries.” – “Yes, I think so. Actually, a marketing agency came up with the logo and the name.”

	attention to marketing activities	“Yes. He was an intern for 6 months and now he has a contract with the firm.” – “He is working full-time and is busy with all our social media and updating our Lola App, with which we communicate with our growers.”
	problems/issues considering branding	“We have a few problems. It is a very common name and we have problems with the intellectual property rights of the name. That is why we have a lawyer that handles this kind of problems.”
<b>Small Paprika Firm</b>	focus on a narrow segment of consumers	“Our target market are retailers. The countries that we deliver to are several. Apart from the Netherlands, we sell our products to Germany, to Scandinavian countries, to the UK and also, other European countries. We mostly focus our marketing activities on B2B marketing and for sure not to mass marketing, because the group of our consumers is not a thousand groups. So, a relatively small segment. Mass marketing is too much waste. The most marketing that we are focus now is the inbound marketing because has the techniques we can use easier now. Like email marketing, LinkedIn and that kind of things, because we can monitor better the needs of our clients. As I said we have few group of consumers that we have to be aware of so, is easy to handle their needs in that way.”
	use of consumer research	“We obtain consumer insights and also, we make our own researches.” – “We obtain consumer insights from the branch offices. We use them because they research a lot but, they are researching more about the big picture. Furthermore, our sales department makes online researches with companies which are specialised on this sector. Also, we visit supermarkets to see how the consumers buy their products.”
	no use of competitor analysis	“No, we are not doing competitor analysis.”
	explicit brand promises	“We have the consumers and for them our brand is a safe product. It does not count as biological because it is not cultivated on the ground but, is even safer as a product from biological ones, because we have everything under control. For the retailers, we help them with products, with packaging, with product sales etc. so they earn more money. They have good margin from our product, so for them our brand is an interesting and profitable brand.”
	use of low cost communication tools	“As for our existing consumers we make use of email in order to inform them. Also, we advertise through LinkedIn and we have a platform about food in which we introduce our brand to. And we make a little bit of print because not all of our target segments are into online platforms due to the fact that they are relatively old. We use social media but not so active. We have Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, YouTube channel but we do not use them a lot. I think we should use them a lot in order to communicate with our consumers.”
	consideration about the impact of brand elements	““X” is a brand that our company started back to 1969. They chose that variety of paprika and decided to use it as a brand also. A couple of years ago we created a logo for it, with the help of an advertising agency. “Y” is a name that derived from the history of our company. We use it for a new variety and it is introduced last year. We checked it with consumers beforehand in order to figure out if they like it. We are also in the process of a new brand with a help of an agency but we did not introduce it yet. Actually the agency came up with a name after we make a briefing to them about what we want and how is our product etc.”

meaningful brand elements	“If you run to our website, you could see the different colours, fonts and styles that we use for every one of our paprika. They are different for every brand we have.”
focused brands [3]	“We have one product but, we have different qualities, different packages and different concepts. We are also part of a big cooperation with other vegetable and fruit companies. The “D” partnership. We have “X” which is a variety itself and we use it as a brand name too.” – ““Y” is another brand” – “and “Z” is another one but this is more like a concept. So we have 3 brands as firm. We have a new brand name also that we did not introduce yet”
points-of-difference associations [2]	“The one thing that we are different compared to the others, is that we are specialised in paprika, especially in this specific variety. We are big suppliers and market leaders on this variety. We are specialised in growing this variety. I think worldwide there is no one like us to be so into this variety.” – “We make very deep research in the market and know our consumers and retailers well. So we have concepts considering what they exactly want. We try to connect all the above to our brands”
secondary sources of brand associations [1]	“We have the brand “Y” which is a connection with Mexico and is a chilly paprika. Actually this is a cross branding with an A-brand from the “S”, a popular company for Mexican kitchen. We combined those two worlds in order to inspire people. Also, this is interesting for “S” company too.”
achieving brand relevance	“We make very deep research in the market and know our consumers and retailers well. So we have concepts considering what they exactly want”
stable quality attributes	“If they are not first class products and do not fall under our requirements, we do not brand them.”
attention to the levels of control	“We monitor our production by harvesting our products in the same way. Also we have a quality manager in our distribution centre who checks the quality”
successful branding	“I think B2B branding of the company is successful.” – “But in the B2C branding we are not at the same level because it is something that we do not spend time and money, because the company itself thinks that is something not worthwhile.”
attention to marketing activities	“Yes, I am the one.” – “I work full-time, so 8 hours per day.”
problems/issues considering branding	“Well as for the problems, we do not have problems with the market, but we have more internal conflict problems. The company does not want to spend a lot of money to consumer branding and this is something that costs money. Also, marketing is always a very difficult thing to analyse in your internal investment and especially in our sector. That is why is not used in our sector.”