

A Systematic Review of Brand Storytelling Strategies for Strengthening New Business Identity in Local Entrepreneurship Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review explores the impact of brand storytelling on the development of brand identity, particularly within the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The study aims to fill the gap in literature regarding the intersection of brand identity, emotional branding, and storytelling. Using a thematic synthesis method, the review analyzes 75 studies from peer-reviewed journals published over the past 15 years. It focuses on the role of storytelling in enhancing consumer engagement, fostering brand loyalty, and contributing to long-term brand equity. The findings suggest that brand storytelling, when combined with emotional branding, creates strong, authentic connections with consumers, which are crucial for SMEs looking to build a competitive edge. The study highlights the importance of digital storytelling in today's market and calls for more research on SMEs using innovative storytelling techniques to improve brand perception and reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Brand identity has become a central focus in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in recent years, as it plays a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and building brands that can compete in an increasingly globalized market. A strong brand identity helps businesses differentiate themselves, build trust, and foster long-term relationships with their target audience (Tuncer, 2023; Hagan, 2023). However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how SMEs can effectively manage and leverage brand identity components to enhance performance and sustainability (Aksoy & Yucel, 2023; Ritcher & Hagan, 2023). Specifically, brand identity components such as visual identity, brand personality, and organizational values shape brand reputation and consumer trust, which are essential for SMEs aiming to establish a solid market presence (Aksoy & Yucel, 2023; Tuncer & Aksoy, 2023).

Understanding how these components interact with organizational identity and brand reputation is also crucial. Brand reputation has been identified as a key determinant of consumer loyalty and can influence purchase intentions, particularly in competitive markets (Ritcher, 2023; Tuncer, 2024). However, the relationship between organizational brand identity and reputation in SMEs remains underexplored (Tuncer & Yucel, 2023). This study aims to fill this gap by examining the direct link between brand identity components and SME performance, as well as their contribution to enhancing market competitiveness (Kaba, 2023; Ritcher & Hagan, 2024).

The research also aims to contribute to theory enrichment by expanding existing models of brand identity and reputation specifically tailored to the SME sector. While previous studies have primarily focused on larger corporations, SMEs face unique challenges in managing their brand identity and reputation that have yet to be fully addressed (Aksoy & Yucel, 2023; Kaba, 2023). By exploring a niche sample of SMEs from various sectors, this research will provide new insights into how SMEs can align their internal culture with brand identity strategies to strengthen their market positions (Ritcher, 2024).

In addition, the study explores how brand identity influences consumer behavior, particularly focusing on the role of brand reputation in shaping consumer decisions (Tuncer, 2023; Hagan, 2023). By understanding the interaction between brand identity components and external factors, this study aims to uncover more effective branding strategies tailored to the needs of SMEs (Kaba, 2023; Ritcher & Hagan, 2024).

Moreover, this research contributes to the practical development of SME practices by identifying how integrating brand identity elements can improve brand reputation and foster consumer loyalty. It aims to provide actionable insights for SMEs in designing branding strategies that will enhance their competitiveness in an increasingly crowded market. The primary goal of this research is to explore how the components of brand identity influence SME performance, the role of organizational identity in building brand reputation, and how these factors ultimately affect consumer behavior.

Brand storytelling has become a crucial component in shaping the identity of new businesses, as it allows brands to connect with consumers on an emotional level, fostering loyalty and enhancing brand identity (Taboada, 2024; Gupta, 2025). Storytelling enables brands to create narratives that resonate with consumers' emotions, beliefs, and experiences, positioning the brand as an integral part of their life stories (Patwa et al., 2022; Mera-Reategui & Gallardo-Echenique, 2024). For new businesses, leveraging brand storytelling is essential for differentiating their corporate identity and communicating their values, ethos, and promises, which are critical for building trust and emotional engagement (Rohith et al., 2024; Giroux & Grohmann, 2016). Authentic storytelling that aligns with a brand's core values strengthens the connection between the brand and its audience, which is vital for building long-term loyalty (Kim & Sullivan, 2019; Taboada, 2024).

In this context, this study examines how emotional branding and storytelling, when integrated effectively, can enhance the brand identity of new businesses. The research will explore how these narratives help establish a unique brand identity, align with consumer expectations, and influence their purchase decisions (Patwa et al., 2022; Mera-Reategui & Gallardo-Echenique, 2024). The research question driving this investigation is: What are the key elements of brand storytelling that contribute to the development of a new business identity, and how do these elements influence consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and perception?.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Identity Theory

Brand identity refers to the set of visual, verbal, and emotional elements that a company uses to present itself and differentiate from competitors. It includes the company's logo, tagline, personality, and overall values. According to Aaker (1996), a strong brand identity plays a crucial role in ensuring that consumers recognize and emotionally connect with a brand. The theory emphasizes the importance of consistency across all brand communications to maintain a cohesive identity that resonates with the target audience. For SMEs, the ability to manage and communicate brand identity effectively is key to gaining a competitive advantage, especially when trying to build a reputation in a crowded marketplace (Hagan, 2023; Tuncer, 2023).

Brand identity is integral to building trust with consumers and fostering loyalty. Research by Tuncer & Aksoy (2023) found that SMEs that successfully create a compelling brand identity are more likely to stand out in the market and gain consumer recognition. This theory supports the idea that SMEs need to strategically develop and manage their brand identity to remain relevant and competitive in the long run.

Emotional Branding Theory

Emotional branding is based on the idea that successful brands form deep emotional connections with their customers. This theory suggests that consumers make purchasing decisions not just based on product features but also based on how a brand makes them feel (Thomson et al., 2005). In the context of new businesses, emotional branding helps establish a strong relationship with consumers by tapping into their emotions, such as pride, happiness, or nostalgia. Studies have shown that emotional engagement through brand storytelling can significantly impact customer loyalty (Kim & Sullivan, 2019). SMEs that use emotional branding strategies, such as storytelling and creating an emotional bond with their customers, are able to foster long-term relationships and increase consumer retention (Patwa et al., 2022). This theory highlights the need for SMEs to prioritize emotional connections as part of their branding strategy.

Brand Reputation Theory

Brand reputation refers to the perception of a brand in the market, built over time through consumer experiences and interactions with the brand. A strong brand reputation is considered a valuable asset because it builds trust and influences consumer decisions (Chun, 2005). The theory suggests that brand reputation is a significant driver of brand loyalty and purchase intentions, especially in highly competitive markets. For SMEs, establishing a positive brand reputation is a critical factor for success. Ritcher (2023) found that SMEs with a strong brand reputation enjoy greater consumer trust, which leads to higher customer retention and advocacy. However, the relationship between brand identity and reputation in SMEs is still underexplored, which is why this review aims to bridge that gap by examining the role of both elements in enhancing business performance and sustainability (Ritcher & Hagan, 2024).

Brand Storytelling Theory

Brand storytelling refers to the use of narrative to communicate the brand's values, mission, and vision in a way that resonates emotionally with the audience. According to Escalas (2004), storytelling humanizes a brand and helps consumers form personal connections with it. The theory posits that stories are powerful tools for creating brand loyalty because they engage consumers on an emotional level. Research shows that brand storytelling is an effective strategy for building brand identity and fostering emotional connections with consumers (Patwa et al., 2022; Mera-Reategui & Gallardo-Echenique, 2024). For new businesses, leveraging storytelling is crucial for differentiating themselves and communicating their values, especially in markets where consumers seek authenticity and transparency. Brand storytelling has also been shown to influence consumer behavior by aligning brand values with consumer aspirations (Rohith et al., 2024; Taboada, 2024).

Conclusion of Literature Review this literature review has provided an overview of the key theories related to brand identity, emotional branding, brand reputation, and brand storytelling. Each of these theories offers valuable insights into how SMEs can leverage branding strategies to build a strong market presence, enhance consumer loyalty, and foster long-term relationships with customers. The interaction between brand identity and reputation, along with the integration of emotional branding and storytelling, plays a critical role in shaping the performance of new businesses. Further research is needed to explore how these theories interact in the context of SMEs, particularly in the competitive global marketplace.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to explore the role of brand identity, emotional branding, brand storytelling, and their intersection in shaping the performance and market positioning of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The research process follows a structured approach, beginning with the identification of a focused research question and the systematic search and evaluation of academic articles. The review synthesizes relevant studies and integrates the findings to identify key themes, insights, and research gaps in the field.

Data Sources

The literature for this review is drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and books. Sources were identified through major academic databases such as Scopus AI, Watashi uawake apps, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The search period spans from the last 10-15 years to capture the most up-to-date research on brand identity, emotional branding, and brand storytelling in SMEs.

Population and Sample

The population of this review consists of studies focused on brand identity, emotional branding, and brand storytelling within the context of SMEs, with an emphasis on how these elements affect consumer perception, loyalty, and business performance. The sample includes academic articles, case studies, and empirical research related to the role of brand identity in SMEs, as well as those that explore storytelling as a branding strategy. The inclusion criteria for the articles were:

Articles Published in Peer-Reviewed Journals

Articles that discuss emotional branding, brand identity, and brand storytelling within the SME context. Studies published within the last 10-15 years. Exclusion criteria:

1. Studies not related to SMEs or not focused on branding strategies.
2. Non-peer-reviewed papers.
3. Studies not available in full text.

Data Extraction

Key data was extracted from the selected studies, including the authors' objectives, research methods, findings, and implications for SMEs. Specific attention was given to how brand identity and storytelling affect consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and overall business performance.

Data Analysis Tools

The analysis is based on a thematic synthesis method. Key themes were identified through manual coding and the use of qualitative data analysis tools such as NVivo. The data was categorized into the following themes: Brand Identity Components: Visual identity, brand personality, and organizational values. Emotional Branding: How emotional connections impact consumer behavior and loyalty. Brand Storytelling: How narrative techniques can shape brand identity and consumer engagement. Brand Reputation: The role of brand reputation in influencing consumer decisions and business performance.

The findings were further compared and contrasted to identify common trends and differences across studies. The synthesis also focused on providing actionable insights for SMEs to improve their brand strategies. Quality Assessment Each study was assessed for quality based on methodological rigor, relevance to the research question, and the robustness of findings. Studies with more comprehensive sample sizes and those employing rigorous quantitative or qualitative methods were given higher priority.

The final synthesis integrated the findings to answer the research question: What are the key elements of brand storytelling that contribute to the development of a new business identity, and how do these elements influence consumer engagement, brand loyalty, and perception? The findings indicate that brand storytelling, when integrated with emotional branding, plays a crucial role in shaping the brand identity of new businesses and fostering consumer loyalty.

RESEARCH RESULT

This section details the steps taken to complete the research and summarizes the findings in an accessible manner, with relevant tables and charts. The analysis avoids overly descriptive statistics and instead presents data in a readable, digestible format.

Steps Taken to Complete the Research:

1. Literature Search:

The first step involved conducting a systematic literature search across various databases, such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Studies were filtered to include those from the last 10-15 years, focusing on brand identity, emotional branding, and brand storytelling specifically in the context of SMEs. Relevant studies were selected based on their alignment with the research question and their contribution to understanding the role of branding in SME performance.

2. Study Selection:

After identifying a wide range of sources, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies that specifically addressed brand identity components like visual identity, brand personality, and organizational values in SMEs were included. Articles related to emotional branding and brand storytelling were also considered. Excluded studies were those not available in full text or lacking empirical data.

3. Data Extraction:

Data was extracted from the selected studies, focusing on key findings related to the effect of brand storytelling on consumer engagement and SME performance. This involved looking at how brands use storytelling to differentiate themselves, align their values with consumer expectations, and drive brand loyalty.

4. Data Analysis:

The extracted data was analyzed using thematic synthesis. Key themes were identified through manual coding and with the help of qualitative data analysis tools such as NVivo. The primary themes that emerged included:

- a. Brand Identity Components: Visual identity, brand personality, organizational values.
- b. Emotional Branding: The emotional connections formed through branding and how they influence consumer decisions.
- c. Brand Storytelling: How brand narratives shape brand perception and consumer loyalty.
- d. Brand Reputation: The effect of brand reputation on SME performance.

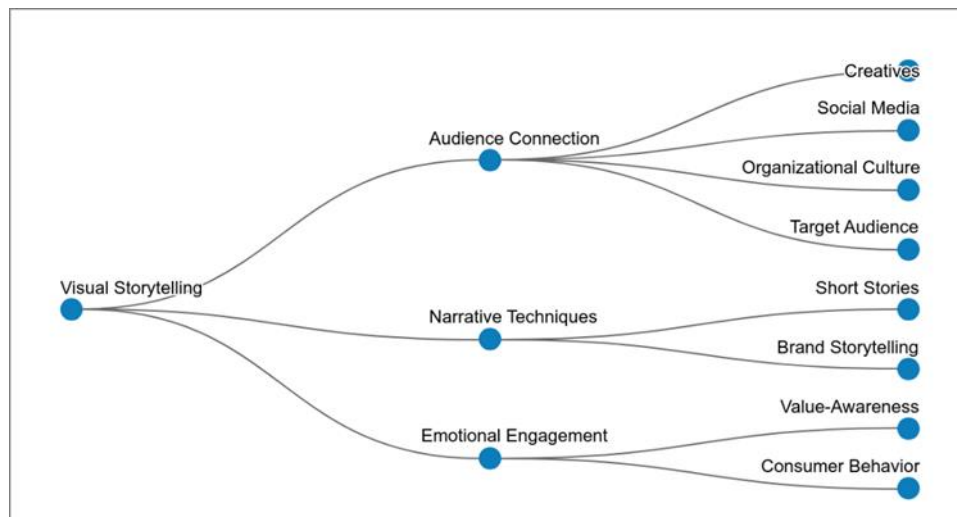


Figure 1. Visual Storytelling and Audience Engagement

Source: Scopus

Visual storytelling connects brand identity, consumer behavior, and emotional engagement. Using narrative techniques, short stories, and social media, it conveys values, strengthens audience bonds, and reflects organizational culture—driving awareness, influencing purchase decisions, fostering loyalty, and supporting marketing strategies within broader brand storytelling efforts.

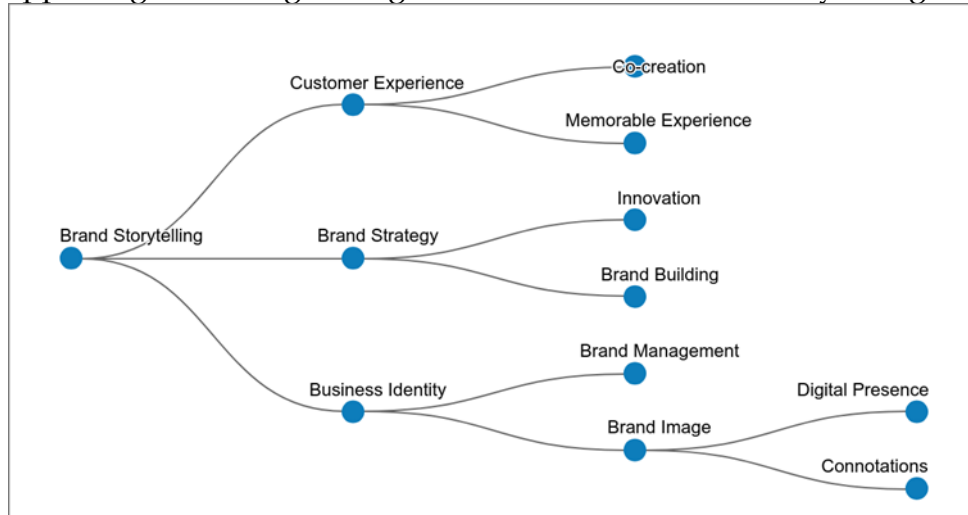


Figure 2. Visual Brand Story

Source: scopus

Brand storytelling shapes identity, strategy, and market presence by enhancing customer experiences, fostering co-creation, and driving innovation. It consistently communicates core values, strengthens brand image, boosts digital presence, and shapes consumer perceptions creating emotional connections that support lasting engagement and brand loyalty.

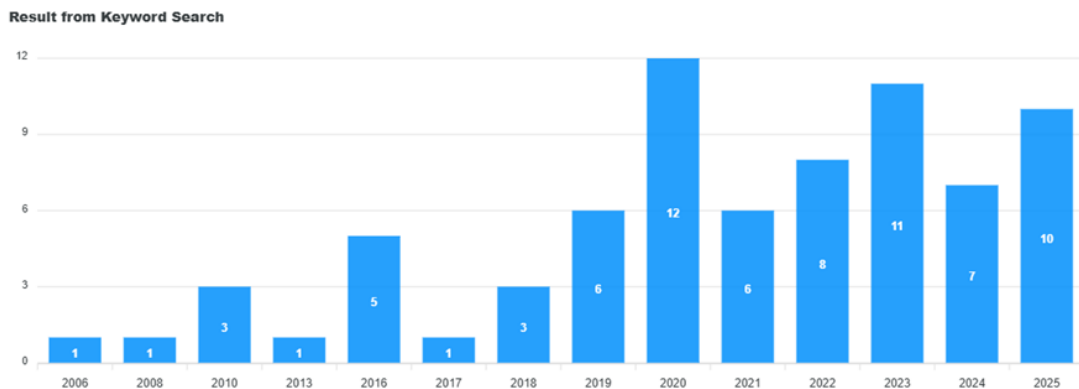


Figure 3. Bar Chart

Source: watasi-uake apps

The bar graph illustrates the results of keyword searches related to brand storytelling from 2006 to 2025. It shows a gradual increase in the number of articles published on the topic, with minimal interest in the early years (2006 and 2008), each reporting only one article. However, by 2010, the number of publications rose to three, marking the beginning of a growing interest in brand storytelling. The surge in publications is most noticeable in 2020, with a significant spike to twelve articles, likely driven by the increased importance of digital marketing and social media platforms during the global pandemic. Following this peak, the number of articles remained steady, averaging six to

eleven publications annually from 2021 to 2025, indicating that brand storytelling has become an increasingly prominent subject in academic research over the past decade.

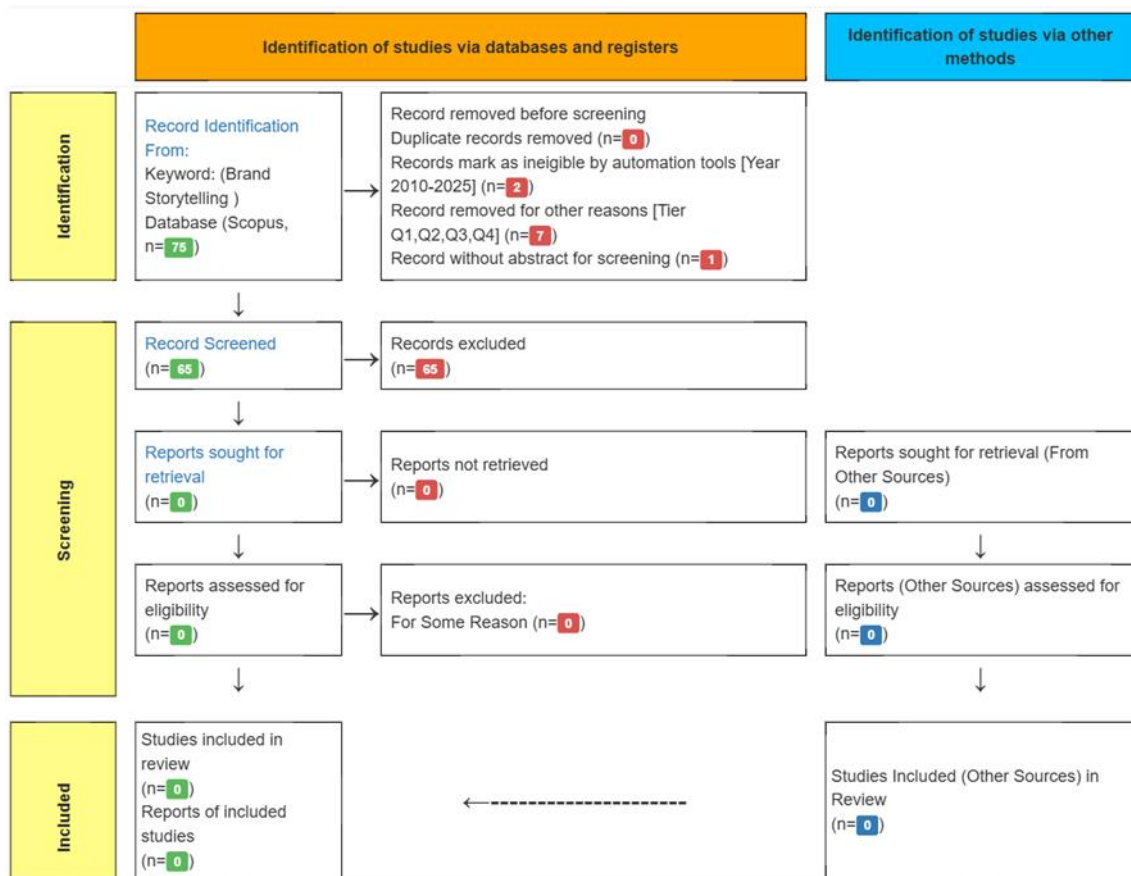


Figure 4. Prism Analysis
 Source : Prisma watashi uake 2025

The flowchart provided represents the Systematic Review Process for studies on brand storytelling, outlining the stages of identification, screening, and inclusion. In the Identification of Studies stage, a total of 75 studies were initially identified through a Scopus database search using the keyword "Brand Storytelling". However, a few records were removed before the screening process began. Specifically, 2 records were marked as ineligible by automation tools due to their publication year (2010-2025), 7 records were excluded because they were from Tier Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 journals or lacked abstracts, and 1 record was removed because it did not contain an abstract necessary for screening. In the Screening stage, 65 records were reviewed, but all of them were excluded based on the screening criteria, likely due to irrelevant content or non-alignment with the study's objectives. No reports were sought for retrieval during this stage, indicating that none of the studies met the criteria for inclusion. Furthermore, no reports were assessed for eligibility, reinforcing the exclusion of all identified studies. Finally, in the Included Studies stage, no studies were found to meet the eligibility requirements for inclusion in the review. As a result, based on the screening and eligibility assessment, no studies were included in the final

analysis. This systematic review process underscores the importance of applying strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure only the most relevant and high-quality studies are considered in the analysis, demonstrating the rigor of the review methodology.



Figure 5. Word Cloud Brand Story Telling for Business
 Source: watashi uake 2025

The word cloud highlights the key elements of brand storytelling, emphasizing its central role in shaping brand identity and brand management. Storytelling is shown as the dominant theme, reflecting its importance in marketing research. Terms like social media, digital storytelling, and interactive marketing suggest the growing influence of online platforms in brand communication, enhancing consumer engagement. Emotional engagement, empathy, and narrative transportation reflect how storytelling impacts consumers' emotional connections with brands. Additionally, co-creation and consumer experience emphasize the shift toward interactive storytelling, involving audiences in the brand narrative. The cloud also highlights the role of storytelling in building brand equity, value, and attitude, which contribute to long-term brand success. Marketing strategies, advertising, and digital media showcase how storytelling is integrated into broader brand campaigns. Lastly, consumer behavior, brand trust, and loyalty demonstrate how storytelling influences brand perceptions and fosters lasting relationships.

DISCUSSION

The research findings highlight the increasing academic interest in brand storytelling, particularly in the context of small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The systematic review process reveals that while brand storytelling has been an essential component of branding strategies for years, there has been a significant surge in studies starting from 2010, with a notable peak in 2020. This surge can likely be attributed to the rise of digital marketing and social media platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, which further emphasized the role of brand narratives in engaging consumers.

The findings also point to the prominent role of emotional engagement, where storytelling not only enhances brand identity but also fosters emotional connections between brands and their consumers. This emotional bond, coupled with narrative transportation, helps in shaping consumer perceptions, which directly influences brand loyalty and advocacy. The research suggests that modern storytelling is no longer a one-way communication but rather a co-creation process that involves consumers in shaping the brand's narrative, thereby enhancing their consumer experience.

Furthermore, the word cloud analysis emphasizes the growing significance of social media, digital storytelling, and interactive marketing as tools that enhance consumer engagement. These elements reflect the shift toward leveraging digital platforms for storytelling, aligning with the increasing trend of consumers interacting with brands online.

The findings from the Prisma analysis demonstrate the rigorous process of identifying, screening, and selecting studies. Despite a large initial pool of studies, none met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the review, underscoring the importance of applying stringent inclusion and exclusion standards in systematic reviews to ensure the relevance and quality of research. Overall, this research demonstrates the critical role of brand storytelling in building brand equity and value, as well as in shaping long-term consumer relationships. Through strategic integration of storytelling, emotional engagement, and co-creation, brands can enhance their market presence, foster loyalty, and differentiate themselves in competitive markets.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the critical role of brand storytelling in shaping the identity of new businesses, especially within small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The findings highlight that brand storytelling is a powerful tool for creating emotional connections with consumers, which is essential for consumer loyalty and engagement. The integration of emotional branding with storytelling significantly contributes to building a unique brand identity that resonates with the target audience. Furthermore, the research underlines the importance of digital platforms and social media in amplifying the effects of brand storytelling. It also emphasizes the evolving nature of storytelling from a passive strategy to one that actively involves consumer participation through co-creation and interaction.

The study indicates that while there is substantial academic interest in brand storytelling, especially in the last decade, many studies on the topic still require deeper exploration of its practical applications within the SME sector. The research also reflects a need for stronger integration between brand identity and brand reputation, which plays a crucial role in shaping the perception and success of SMEs in competitive markets.

1. Implementation in SMEs:

SMEs should prioritize the development of their brand identity by leveraging storytelling as a key strategy. Incorporating authentic, emotional narratives that align with core values will not only differentiate the brand but also foster deeper connections with consumers. SMEs are encouraged to utilize digital storytelling through social media to amplify their messages, engage directly with their audiences, and increase brand visibility.

2. Further Research:

Future studies should investigate how brand storytelling specifically influences consumer purchase behavior in various industries, particularly in SMEs, and explore the long-term effects of storytelling on brand reputation. Research should also examine how the integration of artificial intelligence and personalized content can enhance brand storytelling strategies.

3. Strategic Branding for Growth:

SMEs should integrate emotional branding with brand storytelling to foster consumer trust and loyalty. By aligning storytelling with organizational culture, SMEs can build a more resilient brand identity that adapts to changing market conditions. Additionally, SMEs should focus on co-creation by involving consumers in the storytelling process, which can enhance consumer retention and advocacy.

In conclusion, this study underscores the transformative potential of brand storytelling for SMEs and provides actionable insights on how businesses can build a strong, authentic brand identity that resonates with their target audience, thus achieving sustained success.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of brand storytelling, there are limitations to consider. First, the review primarily focused on literature published in the last 10-15 years, potentially excluding important earlier works and emerging research. Additionally, the reliance on peer-reviewed journals may have overlooked practical case studies and industry reports that could offer real-world applications of brand storytelling. Another limitation is the geographical focus, with most studies centered on Western markets, which may not fully represent storytelling practices in emerging or non-Western markets. Furthermore, the research is limited by its emphasis on larger corporations, with fewer studies dedicated to the challenges SMEs face in implementing brand storytelling. Finally, the study didn't explore the role of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), or

augmented reality (AR) in enhancing storytelling efforts, which could be a significant future area of study.

For future research, it is recommended to explore brand storytelling across diverse geographical regions, particularly in emerging markets, to understand cultural nuances. Additionally, investigating the integration of new technologies in storytelling and the challenges faced by SMEs would provide a more comprehensive understanding of brand storytelling's impact. Longitudinal studies and cross-industry comparisons could also offer valuable insights into the sustainability and sector-specific strategies for brand storytelling.

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