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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Bricolage and Entrepreneurial Branding in Finnish Tourism Business SMEs

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Abstract

The literature on entrepreneurial marketing has grown over the past 25 years, but entrepreneurial branding remains understudied. The purpose of the present study was to conceptualize entrepreneurial branding in the context of tourism small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Firstly, this study seeks to add to the literature on entrepreneurial branding by developing a new definition of entrepreneurial branding, by looking at literatures on both 'entrepreneurial' and 'branding' addressing the limitations of existing definitions to offer a more complete conceptualization. Secondly, it explores whether and how tourism business SMEs employ bricolage in their entrepreneurial branding. The study adopts a qualitative approach with abductive reasoning. In total, 20 interviewees representing 16 Finnish tourism SMEs were interviewed. The findings demonstrate resource constraints faced by tourism SMEs in entrepreneurial branding. Unique features of the place, such as history and heritage of place, were significant sources for building a unique brand identity for the SMEs, often at little cost. The study exemplifies how companies use domains of bricolage (Baker and Nelson in Administrative Science Quarterly 50(3):329–366, 2005) to manage resource constraints. The study offers new insights into the contents of entrepreneurial bricolage domains (physical inputs, labor, skills, customers, and the institutional environment) within a specific context, while also suggesting a new bricolage domain in entrepreneurial branding—namely, *media bricolage*. This domain refers to companies' innovative and proactive generation of unpaid or low-cost media coverage in different channels for the purposes of brand building.

Keywords Definition · Entrepreneurial bricolage · Media bricolage · Resource constraints · Entrepreneurial branding · Entrepreneurial marketing · Tourism · SME

Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that marketing is vital for small businesses to grow and succeed (e.g., Hogarth-Scott et al. 1996), but traditional marketing strategies are not often suitable to them. Aiming at new opportunities in resource-constrained and uncertain market environments, small business owners must make use of innovative approaches to handle such restraints (Becherer and Helms 2016). The study of entrepreneurial marketing has evolved from papers discussing the entrepreneurial and marketing orientations of firms in conjunction (e.g., Morris and Paul 1987), and it has been approached as 'marketing with an entrepreneurial mindset' (Kraus et al. 2009, p. 19). In the last 25 years, a growing body of literature has been published in this field (e.g., Stokes 2000; Morris et al. 2002; Hills et al. 2008; Kraus et al. 2012; Eggers et al. 2020). Vallaster and Kraus (2011, p. 373) argue that 'entrepreneurial branding is about making a few values core to the entire company.' The entrepreneur is an integral part of an SME's branding, and the entrepreneur's vision typically defines brand identity (Abimbola 2001; Kusi 2020a; Suomi et al. 2024). An owner's ability to build a clear identity for the SME is important for stimulating demand and creating competitive advantage for the enterprise (Abimbola 2001; Suomi et al. 2024).

Despite the rich literature on entrepreneurial marketing, the specific area of entrepreneurial branding remains understudied (Kusi 2020a). Peters et al. (2010, p. 27) described entrepreneurial branding as 'Corporate branding for entrepreneurial, i.e., innovation- or growth-oriented, small enterprises.' Paralleling entrepreneurial branding with corporate branding, Peters et al. (2010) definition might be criticized for its lack of depth and specificity in distinguishing

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entrepreneurial branding from traditional corporate branding. Furthermore, the definition does not explain what branding itself entails or what elements it encompasses. Kusi (2020b, p. 85), in turn, defined entrepreneurial branding as 'The discovery, enactment, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities to create, develop and manage brand(s) domestically or across countries.' Kusi's (2020b, p. 85) definition uses elements that are more about entrepreneurship than branding, because it does not explicitly address what constitutes a brand or the essential elements of branding. Further, there are various approaches to entrepreneurship (e.g., Prince et al. 2021), beyond the procedural stages mentioned by Kusi (2020b, p. 85), based on understanding of entrepreneurship by Shane and Venkataraman (2000). This approach to entrepreneurship has gained critiques, for example, for being too process-centric, too opportunity-oriented, and limited in addressing the complexities, uncertainties, and diverse forms of entrepreneurial activities (e.g., Zahra and Dess 2001; Davidsson and Tonelli 2013; Arend 2014).

This study specifically examines tourism business SMEs, a sector where resource limitations are particularly pronounced, especially in peripheral regions. In these areas, geographic isolation often restricts access to critical resources (Korsgaard et al. 2021). Typically, these enterprises manage with resource constraints in their brand building (e.g., Suomi et al. 2024), and thus engage in creative resourcing behavior (e.g., Yachin and Ioannides 2020). The concept of bricolage explains the process that entrepreneurs may follow when facing a shortage of resources (Baker and Nelson 2005) to handle resource acquisition and resource mobilization (Bhardwaj et al. 2023). The core ideas of entrepreneurial bricolage emphasize leveraging the resources at hand, recombining resources for purposes they were not initially meant for, and refusing to enact limitations dictated by the environment (Baker and Nelson 2005, p. 333). That said, this study focuses on bricolage in entrepreneurial branding of tourism SMEs.

Although the concept of bricolage was originally introduced by a French anthropologist (Lévi-Strauss 1967), it has been widely studied in entrepreneurship (e.g., Baker et al. 2003; Rönkkö et al. 2013; Davidsson et al. 2017) and to some extent also in management and organization (Duymedjian and Rüling 2010). However, research linking it to marketing in general and branding in particular is scarce. Some studies on entrepreneurial marketing note bricolage, but only a few discuss it further (Kannambuzha and Suoranta 2016; Yang 2018; Li and Wang 2022). To the authors' knowledge, no previous studies have examined bricolage in conjunction with entrepreneurial branding, or any kind of branding, except for Russell and Tyler (2005), who discussed the concepts of 'bricolage' and 'branding' in relation to the transitional experiences of gendered consumer culture.

Thus, specifically, this study seeks to (1) *add to the literature on entrepreneurial branding by developing a comprehensive definition of entrepreneurial branding*, and (2) *explore whether and how tourism business SMEs employ bricolage in their entrepreneurial branding.*

In the theory section below, a new definition for the purposes of this study is developed. As we see it, a comprehensive definitions able to convey the essential meaning of the concept are still needed. We considered it necessary to start by looking at literatures on both 'entrepreneurial' and 'branding' to produce a comprehensive yet concise definition of entrepreneurial branding. In this, we have attempted to avoid circularity, meaning that we do not use a term being defined in its own definition. We also seek to ensure that the definition is consistent with the current research literature on the topic (e.g., Burge 1993). To explore whether and how tourism business SMEs employ bricolage in their entrepreneurial branding, interviewees representing Finnish tourism SMEs were interviewed.

By doing so, the study enriches the literature on entrepreneurial marketing, particularly focusing on entrepreneurial branding, which is recognized as a crucial aspect of entrepreneurial marketing (Peters et al. 2010).

This research contributes a new, more nuanced definition of entrepreneurial branding, enhancing conceptual clarity in the area. Furthermore, by examining how tourism business SMEs utilize bricolage in their branding strategies, it extends the entrepreneurial bricolage discussion (Baker and Nelson 2005) into the realm of branding—an area still scantily addressed in current research. This study not only advances academic understanding but also offers practical insights for practitioners, illustrating how SMEs can innovatively overcome resource limitations. It underscores the importance of entrepreneurial bricolage, which is an adaptive strategy (e.g., Bhardwaj et al. 2023), in branding, providing important insights for entrepreneurs navigating the complexities of a post-pandemic and geopolitically turbulent environment. Accordingly, recent study notes that bricolage improves the capacity of SMEs to survive to times of crisis (Baier-Fuentes et al. 2023). The study contributes to a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial dynamics in geographically marginalized contexts.

Theoretical Background

Entrepreneurial Branding—Constructing a New Definition

Entrepreneurial branding has been regarded as a central domain of entrepreneurial marketing (Peters et al. 2010). The literature on entrepreneurial marketing has evolved from a combination of marketing management and entrepreneurship literature (Miles et al. 2015; Suomi et al. 2024). Stokes (2000, p. 2) argued that entrepreneurial

marketing is 'marketing carried out by entrepreneurs or owner-managers of entrepreneurial ventures.' Turning to entrepreneurial branding, it can be noted that in addition to literature on entrepreneurial marketing, the scarce literature on entrepreneurial branding has a linkage to the literature on SME brand management (e.g., Kusi 2020a). However, there are also differences: SME brand management studies seem to take branding issues as their theoretical background, for example, brand orientation typologies (Yin Wong & Merrilees 2005; see also Berthon et al. 2008; M'zungu et al. 2019), whereas entrepreneurial branding considers the issue from entrepreneurship theory perspectives, for example, effectuation theory (Kusi et al. 2022; see also Ahonen 2008).

Mitchell et al. (2015) suggested that SME branding is a holistic activity, where the owner-manager is a brand manager and adaptive entrepreneurial marketing practices are employed. Further, Vallaster and Kraus (2011) argued that in an entrepreneurial context, a corporate brand is a relevant factor for success as companies grow. According to Rode and Vallaster (2005) for the corporate branding model to be effective in the context of start-ups, the entrepreneur needs to be the focal point. Entrepreneurial branding can help decrease the uncertainty and ambiguity often associated with company growth, as it may serve both as an orientation to strategically manage opportunities in business and to integrate fragmented decisions. In other words, the brand can be perceived as authentic also in times of strong growth (Vallaster and Kraus 2011).

As mentioned, to form a new definition for entrepreneurial branding, which draws from extant literature, we first considered both literature on becoming 'entrepreneurial' and the literature on 'branding' distinctly. According to Williams-Middleton et al. (2021), first, in becoming entrepreneurial, agency is emphasized because taking action in spite of uncertainty and possible risk-taking requires dedication and courage on a personal level. Second, novelty, or envisioning and exploring something new and different, is noted as relating to becoming entrepreneurial. Third, the core in becoming entrepreneurial is the pursuit of new value for and with others, and this may be achieved in ways other than only through new companies (see also Fayolle 2007; Lackéus 2018; Palich and Bagby 1995). In addition, learning is a part of becoming entrepreneurial, as value creation can be developed through trial and error (Lackéus et al. 2020; Williams-Middleton et al. 2021; see also Lackéus 2018). Moreover, characteristics such as proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking relate to being entrepreneurial or demonstrating entrepreneurial orientation (e.g., McDougall and Oviatt 2000).

Turning to branding, extant studies on brands typically suggest that branding refers to building a unique identity, that is, brand identity (e.g., Ghodeswar 2008; Srivastava 2011) for a company or other organization (Balmer and Gray 2003), a product, a service (e.g., Dall'Olmo et al. 2000; American Marketing Association 2024), or another entity, such as a destination (e.g., Aro et al. 2018, 2023) or person (e.g., Scheidt et al. 2020). Not only brand owners/brand managers but many stakeholders, both internal and external, are involved in the process of building brand identity, particularly in the era of social media (e.g., Iglesias et al. 2013). Companies use their unique identity to communicate their distinctiveness from other players in the market (e.g., Nandan 2004; American Marketing Association 2024) and create brand value for and with stakeholders (Iglesias et al. 2013; Suomi et al. 2020). Scholars have suggested that customers are not only the receivers of marketing/branding information; they can also respond to the information as value creators. This may happen, for example, when they behave interactively online (e.g., Foroudi et al. 2019; Tarafdar and Zhang 2008). Thus, companies, customers, and other stakeholders together create brand value through social interactions (Merz et al. 2018).

Based on earlier literature (e.g., McDougall and Oviatt 2000; Ghodeswar 2008; Kraus et al. 2009; Srivastava 2011; Iglesias et al. 2013; Lackéus et al. 2020; Williams-Middleton et al. 2021) and the above discussion on 'entrepreneurial' and 'branding,' for the purposes of this study, a new definition for entrepreneurial branding is proposed. We suggest that entrepreneurial branding occurs when *'being proactive and innovative in building and communicating a unique identity, i.e. brand identity, for a company, a product, a service, or another entity and thus creating new value for that entity and for and with its stakeholders, by learning from implementing.'*

Further, as the field of entrepreneurial branding is still underdeveloped, it is essential to understand it more fully, for example, based on effectuation logic (Kusi 2020a; see also Kusi et al. 2022). Like bricolage, effectuation is a method where entrepreneurs build a business based on the resources they possess (Sarasvathy 2001). In other words, both effectuation and bricolage start with the resources at hand. Nevertheless, 'a bricoleur' can achieve both an unspecified goal with the existing means, in other words, resources (effectuation) and a predefined goal (causation) using the existing resources (Baker et al. 2003; Kannampuzha and Suoranta 2016). Further, whereas the main emphasis in effectuation is in a decision-making logic employed in an uncertain new venture creation environment and has been opposed to causation (Sarasvathy 2001), bricolage, in turn, stands for resourcing behavior that enables companies to manage with constraints (Baker and Nelson 2005; Fisher 2012; see also An et al. 2020). As we see it, in branding there might be both effectual and causal elements. Thus, in the current study, we employ the concept of entrepreneurial bricolage, which is discussed next.

Entrepreneurial Bricolage

Lévi-Strauss's (1967) concept of bricolage is often described as managing with 'whatever is at hand' (Baker and Nelson 2005, p. 330). It can be defined as 'making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities' (Baker and Nelson 2005, p. 333), and 'creating something from nothing' (Baker and Nelson 2005; Fisher 2012, p. 1022). It has also been approached as strategy of innovation (Mateus and Sarkar 2024). Chang et al. (2024), in turn, note that entrepreneur bricoleurs are both resource creators and resource seekers.

Enterprises in low-resource contexts frequently depend on bricolage (Busch and Barkema 2021), in other words: *resources at hand,* which refers to resources that are available without cost or very cheaply, often because others have abandoned them as useless. Thus, bricolage is characterized as leveraging existing resources in new ways, for example, using existing resources or existing contacts, instead of seeking them from outside (Baker and Nelson 2005). In turn, studies concentrating on resource leveraging, which is another approach for managing in events of resource shortage, have tended to emphasize acquiring resources that are not yet available to an entrepreneur, that is, external resources (e.g., Brush et al. 2001; Wilson and Appiah-Kubi 2002; Kannambuzha and Suoranta 2016). Bricolage is a form of resource mobilization (Clough et al. 2019), which can occur as *the recombination of resources for new purposes,* referring to the combination and reuse of resources to purposes they were not initially intended for, or used to, which is a central theme in studies focusing on bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005). *The making do* aspect of bricolage highlights dynamic involvement over extensive planning (Baker and Nelson 2005). In Baker and Nelson's study (2005, p. 335) of resource-constrained firms, 'actors consciously and consistently tested conventional limitations' in resource environments. This leads to the conclusion that the social construction of resource environments can be as important as the objective limitations of environments in determining behavior.

Baker and Nelson (2005) used the term *parallel bricolage* for when something is created from nothing in nearly all aspects of a company's operation. They identified five distinct domains of bricolage: physical inputs, labor, skills, customers, and the institutional environment. First, as relates to physical inputs, a bricoleur may turn materials forgotten, discarded, and considered worthless by other companies into valuable ones in new use. Second, as regards labor, by involving customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders in projects, it is sometimes possible to generate labor inputs. Third, the bricoleur may see skills in amateurs and self-taught people that other companies would regard as unqualified. Fourth, the bricoleur may also provide products and services that are not otherwise available in markets or are unobtainable to some customers. Finally, the bricoleur may refuse to enact limitations, for example, related to standards and regulation. The bricoleur may not know the rules or may not consider them limitations, thus creating solutions that would otherwise appear impermissible: they sometimes do things that surprise people. Companies that employ selective bricolage generate something from nothing in fewer domains and are regarded as more able to focus on growth than those using parallel bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005; see also Fisher 2012; Rönkkö et al. 2013; Onwuegbuzie and Mafimisebi 2021; Steffens et al. 2023).

Studies on corporate reputation in an entrepreneurial context align with the findings of Baker and Nelson (2005), as it has been suggested that founders actively sought regular, primarily informal, feedback regarding how the start-up was perceived by its external audience. Personal connections with the company's stakeholders were the most valuable sources of information (Rode and Vallaster 2005). Another study suggests that SMEs could benefit from the reputation of the cluster to which they belong. Cluster reputation refers to the esteem in which a particular cluster is held by various stakeholders for its expertise in the specific field practiced by the interconnected firms and institutions within that region (Zyglidopoulos et al. 2006).

Turning to studies combining bricolage and marketing, Kannampuzha and Suoranta (2016) examined bricolage in the marketing of an Indian social enterprise in collaboration with a Finnish university. They found two distinct processes of bricolage in the marketing strategy development of the enterprise. One was the network bricolage through which the social enterprise obtained resources. The other process was the entrepreneurship education bricolage that happened when multidisciplinary and multicultural students of the university were used as a resource in marketing strategy development. Yang (2018) examined the use of bricolage by marketing managers in multinational companies and suggested that bricolage is not only generated by a resource-constrained environment but also triggered by environmental uncertainty.

Finally, as our study context is tourism business, we acknowledge the concept of spatial bricolage, defined as 'making do by applying creative combinations of the resources at hand in the immediate spatial context to new problems and opportunities' (Korsgaard et al. 2021, p. 148). Thus, the notion of 'at hand' can be extended to include resources in the entrepreneur's immediate environment. Concentrating on entrepreneurs in peripheral locations, Korsgaard et al. (2021) identified three specific activities undertaken by entrepreneurs in order to defeat a lack of optimal resources. The activities comprised local sourcing, commodification through storytelling, and community involvement. As regards spatial bricolage, Yachin and Ioannides

(2020) also noted community involvement and, in addition to that, emphasized resourcing behaviors that build on the reinterpretation of existing resources and the unique features of the destination.

Methodology

This study leans on the ontological position of constructivism where social phenomena and their meanings are understood as 'in a constant state of revision' and continuously accomplished by social actors in social interaction (Bryman 2001, pp. 16–18 in Grix 2002). Interpretivism is the epistemological position of the study, as the authors grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman 2001, pp. 12–13 in Grix 2002). Further, this is a qualitative study adopting abductive reasoning (Kovács and Spens 2005). As regards data gathering, face-to-face and video-call interviews were conducted with owner(s) of SMEs and, in three companies, with an employee (CEO, marketing manager, and COO of the company in question). Primarily, we asked for SME owners to be interviewed, but in some cases our call was forwarded to other people in the company. However, as entrepreneurial branding, as is seen in this study, is not limited to entrepreneurs/SME owners, we conducted interviews with employees as well.

When choosing companies for the study, we concentrated on SMEs, mostly small businesses and a few medium-sized companies in tourism, whose branding was expected, based on the authors' discussions and prior knowledge of the companies, to reflect more or less aspects of being 'entrepreneurial' (e.g., innovativeness and proactiveness). We anticipated that many of these companies may face resource constraints and employ bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005).

Interviewees represent 16 tourism SMEs in total. One interview was in English, and the other fifteen in Finnish. There were 20 interviewees in total as from some of the companies, instead of one person, two or three participated. The companies selected for the study geographically represent southern, northern, western, and eastern Finland. Video-call interviews were made to save time and money and to avoid carbon emissions, as distances to some of the enterprises were considerable. Interviewees' preferences whether to conduct the interview online or on-site were also heard. Authors' field notes, companies' websites and social media accounts, articles published in local and national media and by SME owners, as well as authors' visits to some of the locations complemented the data. Table 1 shows the tourism sectors that the companies represent.

The first author was responsible for all the interviews, and the second author participated in some of the interviews with her. Two interviews (Interview ID A1 and A2) were conducted in 2022 as a part of another research project. Thereafter, small adjustments were made to the final interview protocol to be used for the rest of the interviews, conducted in 2023 (Appendix 2). Data were coded and qualitatively analyzed (e.g., Rivas 2012) by the first author.

An existing framework, entrepreneurial bricolage, and particularly the domains of entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005) had a guiding role in coding and thematic development; in other words, abductive logic underpinned the analysis. Also, authors' pre-understanding of the branding literature aided in the data analysis. Analysis of the data started with reading all the transcriptions through to obtain familiarization with the data. In this stage, notes were added to transcriptions (Thompson 2022). Nvivo 1.4 software for qualitative data analysis assisted in the analysis. Although the prior theoretical framework (Baker and Nelson 2005) guided the analysis, the aim was in spirit of abductive research to maintain openness for new ideas. Thus, all the material that was considered meaningful information for the research aim was coded (Baker and Nelson 2005). This phase resulted in 70 + first-level codes in total.

Next, codes were read and arranged into second-level codes, resulting in 20 codes (Thompson 2022). Thereafter, the codes were arranged to themes by searching for relationships between different codes and sorting them based on their ability to collectively explain the phenomenon behind the data, in which prior literature allowed us to form an understanding about (Thompson 2022). Theorization of data involved looking back at the theoretical framework, in this case the five domains of entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005). While the data analysis moved 'back and forth' between empirical observation and theory (e.g., Dubois and Gadde 2002), it was possible to explain most of the data with the framework. While the theoretical framework provided a foundation, receptiveness to emerging patterns was maintained to accommodate novel findings. It was also noted that the analysis brought new knowledge on the contents of domains in the study context, namely entrepreneurial branding of tourism SMEs, because the original framework (Baker and Nelson 2005) was not concentrating on branding. Second-level codes were compared in parallel to the framework by creating a mind map. Observations related to the generation of unpaid media attention did not fit into the existing types of bricolage. We call this theme 'media coverage' For the rest of the data, placing the observations within the mind map was straightforward (Thompson 2022). In qualitative study, reliance on subjective judgment when interpreting data is inherent (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). To avoid biases, the authors of the study, frequently discussed the study's observations together.

In the spirit of a qualitative approach, extensive use is made of direct quotations from the dataset to strengthen and exemplify the analysis (e.g., Silverman 2001). Direct extracts from the data were translated from Finnish into

Table 1 Description of the data for the study

Company, time of interview	Interview ID	Size class of the company (estimations given by interviewees)	Primary data-interviews Duration of interview
Agritourism enterprise 1 6/2022	A1	About 12 people (throughout the year fewer)	Interview with three members of the owner family (face to face) 1 h 9 min
Music festival 6/2022	A2	Throughout the year 3 people (2 of them part-time employees). During the festival up to 220, mainly outsourcing, volunteers, and agency workers	Interview with an owner (face to face) 1 h 1 min
Distillery Visiting Centre 3/2022	A3	Parent company 28, visiting center's part of this 15 people	Interview with the CEO (employee) of the visiting center (video call) 1 h 46 min
Adventure Park 4/2023	A4	Throughout the year 3 people, during the best season about 35	Interview with an owner (face to face) Duration: information missing, about 45 min*
Scenery café 5/2023	A5	3 people + 1–3 seasonal workers	Interview with two owners (face to face) Duration: information missing, about 40 min*
Agritourism enterprise 2 5/2023	A6	2 people	Interview (face to face) with two owners 50 min
Winery 5/2023	A7	4 people	Interview (face to face) with an owner 56 min
Hotel and Spa 5/2023	A8	Whole enterprise group about 230–250, hotel and spa's part of this about 70 people	Interview (face to face) with an owner 1 h 8 min
Finnhorses' farm 5/2023	A9	7	Interview (video call) with owner 41 min
Dog sledding (husky safaris) company 5/2023	A10	9 people year-round, and in winter 13 seasonal workers	Interview (video call) with owner 53 min
Tourism resort 5/2023	A11	30–150 people depending on the season (including employees from outsourcing companies)	Interview (video call) with marketing director (employee) of the company 1 h 4 min
Pizza restaurant chain (five restaurants) 5/2023	A12	50–90 people depending on the season	Interview (video call) with the COO (employee) of the restaurant chain 31 min
Company with two island tourism resorts 6/2023	A13	Fewer than 10 people	Interview (video call) with two owners 42 min
Camping, café, terrace, boutique, marina for visiting boats and yachts 6/2023	A14	About 10–50 people depending on the season	Interview (video call) with owner 1 h 6 min
Accommodation company (including camps for disabled people) 6/2023	A15	2 people	Interview (video call) with owner 43 min
Bike rental and bike riding tours 6/2023	A16	2 people	Interview (video call) with owner 46 min

*All recordings were deleted once transcriptions were ready. This transcription was without mention of duration. Duration was estimated by the interviewer

English by the first author, except for the one interview conducted in English.

Results

This section reports how the tourism SMEs addressed resource constraints by bricolage in their entrepreneurial branding. The results give insights into how bricolage was employed in branding with regard to different resources put into action for building and communicating brand identity (Baker and Nelson 2005).

First, findings related to the 'physical input' domain are reported: in other words, managing a lack of material/content in entrepreneurial branding. In this, attention is paid to both material and immaterial inputs (Korsgaard et al. 2021). Second, the 'labor input' domain addressing lack of time and human resources in entrepreneurial branding is discussed. Third, 'skills input' is demonstrated addressing a lack of personnel with marketing education for entrepreneurial branding. Fourth, the 'customers/markets' domain is discussed, that is, providing new products and services to the market. Fifth, the 'institutional environment' domain is demonstrated: managing with laws in entrepreneurial branding. Finally, the section turns to 'media coverage,' a new domain of bricolage in entrepreneurial branding identified in this study.

Physical Inputs: Leveraging Resources for Branding

Unique Features of the Place

In some companies, building a brand identity was seemingly a rather logical process and differentiated the company well from other players in the market. Broadly, in most companies, there had been considerations of an identity around which brand building evolved. An insightful quote about a seemingly straightforward process of brand identity building was from an entrepreneur with a prison hotel. In this case, the place's original great awareness among Finns provided a robust ground for building a unique identity for the company.

> 'As X's [old prison's] brand is notable, we have of course gained awareness from it, we don't have to so much explain what Y [hotel] is, as people know it… everyone knows it as a legend, but nobody has had chance to come and look [when it was a prison], but today there are so many activities here…This is X's] history, this is Finnish history and will stay that way… This is a private hotel [not a chain]. This whole brand is being built on X.' (A8).

History and the heritage of the old prison also act as a "treasure chest" to draw stories and content (material) to branding the hotel, and beyond:

> 'We have year-round and at summertime everyday prison tours, where we tell the prison's stories, about individual prisoners and guards…She [the guide] has collected all possible knowledge and stories from old guards and also interviewed old prisoners and in that way obtained documents and stories.' (A8).

In a similar vein, many of the companies were building their identity on the awareness, history, and heritage of the place where their company is located, or historical people of the place. This is visible, for example, in terms of wordplay, the use of dialect of the town/village where the company operates, email signatures with clever associations with the brand, and in the development of own sayings and even words. One of the companies (A2) focused in its brand building on the citizens of the host city and their dialect, which is rather strong and well known among Finns. The above-mentioned examples represent entrepreneurial branding with (almost) no cost at all.

Customers and Community

It was felt by many that it is important to engage customers in joint value creation in brand building. Customers act not only as "brand ambassadors" sharing word-of-mouth but also in many other roles such as content creators for social media. The next quote illustrates customers' roles in content creation for brand communication:

> 'We like to turn to of course, our customers, not only their view, but these days their selfies and their tags and their check-ins, and all these things are important to make sure that you have a constant presence happening. If it's not your own content being shared on that day, it can also be someone else's content being shared that day.' (A10).

Also being a part of the local community was emphasized by many. Based on the interviews, support was often two-way in nature.

Labor inputs: Engaging Stakeholders in Branding

Doing brand building oneself (SME owners and possible employees) was apparently not only a matter of lack of resources for all companies, as some of the interviewees told us how they wanted to stay in charge of brand building.

> 'If some small company outsources everything to some advertising or marketing agency, they can't [the agency] understand the core [of the identity]. It's easier to do yourself, even if you have to work more, but you're clear with what you do and you're so deep in the game.' (A2).

Accordingly, this interviewee underlined that he wishes to read all texts produced, for example, for social media before publishing so that he can be sure that the texts represent the company's 'own' language.

The smallest companies in our sample indicated that they wished to be seen as deliberately homely and small. This was also related to being authentic. Thus, it seems that employing bricolage is often a necessity to get marketing and branding practices done despite resource constraints, but it also a strategic choice.

Learning by doing widely characterized the stories of the interviewees.

Entrepreneurs Themselves, Family, and Friends

Free labor input from family was gained in many companies. A young scenery café owner explained:

> 'I think we were 15 years old when we bought this [scenery café]…with a loan guaranteed by our parents…Instagram and Facebook are our main channels, we ourselves add pictures…our parents have helped us a bit there…We've never paid for ads to Facebook or Instagram.' (1/A5).

Although many of the interviewees do much brand building themselves or with the help of family, they also acknowledged the importance of their collaborators, such as customers, influencers, partners, other entrepreneurs, and local and national visit organizations, as is discussed next.

Customers and Influencers

The role of customers as 'free marketing labor' was acknowledged by interviewees. Customers may write reviews and blog entries, post pictures from the location, and participate discussions on social media platforms related to a company.

> 'I would ask my customers at the end of the tour, if you have enjoyed our tour, please review us on TripAdvisor. And this helped us break through TripAdvisor, in 2013, when we started using TripAdvisor, within two or three months, we were the number one ranked activity in X [the city where the company is located]… We're very open to influencers, bloggers, anyone who wants to come here and take videos, make a blog, write something. We also have an open-door policy for film crews.' (A10).

Discussions with customers and receiving feedback from them also provided companies important possibilities to improve their business and brand building, and to learn from mistakes.

Partners

Other companies' input was seen as important in building awareness for the brand. For example, a company operating in Lapland (A16) noted valuable collaboration between companies in the area. Even though this company offers bike rentals, it often gives customers restaurant suggestions in the area. In a similar vein, its customers often hear about it from other companies. Thus, it is important that SME owners know about other companies in the area and recommend each other. Also, partners, for example, a company's own B2B customers, may be important:

> 'Restaurant X sent a release to wineries that they would need good products from Finnish [wineries]. We were pretty fast. I know their sommelier, I told [them] that we're coming to Y [the city where the restaurant is located]. So, if that's okay, we'll bring samples. And they said that they'll make a proper order from us…They weren't a Michelin restaurant at that time…Then after a year they announced to us that they got a Michelin star and they said, be prepared to have enough products…Yeah, restaurant X promotes us very much. They speak very positively about us there.' (A7).

The quotation above also demonstrates the importance of proactiveness in seizing on opportunities, which was underlined in many other interviews as well.

Skills Inputs: Utilizing Informal Expertise in Branding

Broadly, it seems that interviewees did a lot of brand building and communication themselves, and many of them did not have a marketing education. Thus, they often used self-taught skills and learned by doing. They also received skills input from sources such as family, employees, development projects, and university collaboration.

Entrepreneurs Themselves, Family, and Friends

Often, spouses, children, parents, and other family members seemed to share their skills (whether based on formal marketing education or self-taught skills) in branding when there were less resources (or was less willingness) to outsource these tasks:

> 'Our oldest daughter's child said she can do the [web] sites. She's now in the last year of an upper secondary school.' (interviewee 1/A6).

Employees

Interviewees also tried to engage their personnel, no matter what their job actually was, to product material for communicating brand identity, for example, to record authentic situations with animals, in nature, etc., for future brand communication purposes. This was considered bringing authenticity to brand communication and also something that would be probably difficult for an external marketing professional to do. The next quotes demonstrate this:

> 'If I would buy some professional to make a TikTok video about our X [company name] ice cream kiosk…so

it doesn't mean that if I pay for that to some commendable advertising agency, it's better that if your 15-year-old colleague [employee]does that. Because they catch their own age people better than some advertising thing made with big money.' (A14).

Development Projects and collaboration with educational institutions

Some of the companies had participated in different kinds of development projects, for example EU projects, and some also had earlier experience with university collaboration. Collaborations with educational institutions were seen as beneficial by many:

'If I could find some marketing student who would be interested [about thinking branding of the company], it would be nice to start developing it with 'new eyes,' so to speak.' (A15).

Customers/Markets: Adapting to Market Opportunities Through Branding

Decisions related to offering new products and services to markets are important from the brand building point of view, regardless of whether the company has decided to build a company brand, or brand(s) for its individual product(s)/service(s), or a hybrid of these. Interviewees described how the Covid-19 pandemic had affected their business as some of the companies created new products and services. Partly, this was a forced thing because of pandemic restrictions, but they also had more time to innovate. One example of this is from a winery:

'In the beginning, we had a plan of focusing on producing wine…and sell it to bars and restaurants, but then corona happened…We just started to innovate things [side products and services]…We've been like a chameleon, changing color every year based on what can be done, what we're allowed to do.' (A7).

Today, the company offers many kinds of products and services, such as wine tasting and catering. The distillery company (parent company of the visiting center) had announced a layoff of employees because of decreasing sales of alcohol, but it eventually withdrew the layoff because it developed a hand sanitizer and sold it under the company's brand name. There was demand for the hand sanitizer, and the company was even able to hire some new seasonal workers.

Institutional Environment: Navigating Regulatory Challenges in Branding

As regards managing with laws, the interviewee from the distillery center described how it is impossible to build an alcohol *product brand* in Finland because of Finnish law. The interviewee explained how they founded a subsidiary in Germany, and one reason for that was that in other areas of the EU, the company can do marketing and branding for products. For example, in Germany, pictures of bottles are permitted when the company has a subsidiary there:

'A part of our ingenuity is a bit forced because we sell products [alcohol] of which marketing is forbidden in Finland…So in Finland everything has to be based on the parent brand, the X distillery company and the visiting center. In Finland, marketing is challenging as every word…if we even mention whiskey, gin, or alcohol a little in a wrong way, Valvira [National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health] will contact us.' (A3).

Media Coverage: Leveraging Innovative Approaches to Low-Cost Brand Visibility

Unpaid Media Coverage in Newspapers and Radio

Braveness in grasping opportunities and being innovative were visible in the data as a way to gain brand awareness for free or with almost no cost. Obviously, unpaid media publicity played an important role for many, but the level of employing it intentionally seemed to vary. In general, interviewees seemed happy with receiving unpaid publicity, for example, in terms of articles in local newspapers, but some of the interviewees had obviously thought more about it and were themselves proactive toward newspapers and other media in order to generate free publicity if something special was happening, and apparently also sometimes without a 'proper' reason through some artifice. Traditional press releases still had their role, but in our data more creative approaches were emphasized. Naturally, customers' positive social media postings about companies and their services served as earned media for companies and helped them in increasing awareness.

Competitions

Participating in different kinds of competitions may bring unpaid media coverage to tourism SMEs. One of the interviewees (A12), for example, told us how the company's brand building started a few years previously when the owner won Finnish TV reality competition. In this case, the owner's personal brand offered positive spill-over to the company's brand. Another interviewee (A3) described that in 2015, a significant milestone was reached when a beverage industry competition was won, which felt like creating something from nothing. This achievement opened numerous opportunities and provided a substantial boost to the

business. Without this success, the circumstances would likely have been quite different. The expectation before the competition was that the larger, more established brands would dominate the competition. At that time, such an outcome was beyond what could have been imagined.

Media Stunts and Humor

Some of the companies used humor intentionally in their brand communication in one way of another, for example, to increase likes and shares in social media. One of the companies (A2) organized different kinds of funny, and often bold, media stunts, particularly in the early years of their business, to gain publicity for free or with few resources. For this company, ironic humor was even at the core of its brand identity, and it was balancing between being bold but not inappropriate in order not to insult potential participators. In using its peculiar humor in brand communications, it was able to create unpaid media coverage and co-create value and awareness for the brand with stakeholders, not to mention entertainment value for its customers and followers in social media. Obviously, social media users engaged in the company's humor and storytelling and participated with their own comments on company's postings.

Topical Events and News

Companies seemed to employ bricolage cleverly by drawing from topical events and news and improvising, for example, related to the buzz around the Eurovision song contest arranged at the time of the data gathering. One of the companies (A3), for instance, added through image processing bright green boleros to people in a brand-related photo to imitate the Finnish competitor's peculiar clothing and thus created a positive association between the popular competitor and the brand. By doing this, they attracted likes and attention from social media users.

TV Documents and Series

Some of the tourism companies had attracted interest from television media as well. For example, one of the interviewees (1/A13) stated that a small Finnish TV company wanted to do a program in the location during the Covid-19 pandemic. A couple of companies among the biggest companies in our data had even hosted international filming crews who did documentaries and series in these locations, and this had brought media publicity to these companies. In interviews, it was not discussed, however, what kind of contracts they had with the groups (e.g., whether this caused costs to companies, such as accommodating and catering for the TV crews), but based on discussions, this kind of collaboration was seen as beneficial for the companies.

The above-mentioned approaches naturally also result in *earned social media coverage*.

Summary

The results section overall and the summary provided in Table 2 demonstrate how the tourism SMEs in this study employed bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005) in their entrepreneurial branding.

To summarize the findings, overall, there seemed to be understanding about the importance of brand building among interviewees. However, as regards brand identity, it appears that some of the interviewees had a fuller understanding of the importance of building a unique and clear identity for an organization (or product/service) than others. In some cases, the rationale for a clear brand identity was not fully understood or, if it was, there were challenges in the process of building it. It appeared that not all were yet at the same point, and it was not necessarily easy for all the interviewees to say what actually was the core of their company's (desired) brand identity. Clearly, some of the interviewees saw brand building more as brand communication (which is a part of brand building) and 'visual things' only, but others understood it as a larger phenomenon: almost everything that is done and said can impact the brand. We consider this wider understanding of brand building as a good start (see also Mitchell et al. 2015).

The extent to which bricolage was employed also varied between companies. In general, it seems that in the biggest companies in the data, bricolage was more selective than in smaller ones (Baker and Nelson 2005; see also Fisher 2012; Rönkkö et al. 2013).

Although there were no questions as such related to Covid-19 or war in Ukraine in our interview protocol, many of the interviewees described how these had affected their business. Based on the data, it appears that exceptional conditions made some of the interviewees employ bricolage more than normally as they tried to manage new types of problems, for example, solving difficulties in supplies with the help of existing networks or inventing new types of products and services because they were not able to produce their normal ones due to restrictions.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study adds to the literature on the intersection of entrepreneurship and branding, which is still an understudied area (see Kusi 2020a). The purpose of the study was to conceptualize entrepreneurial branding in the context of tourism enterprises. Specifically, this study aimed

Table 2 Summary: Managing resource constraints by bricolage in entrepreneurial branding

Resource constraint (Baker and Nelson 2005)/problem in entrepreneurial branding	Managing resource constraints in entrepreneurial branding
Physical input (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of material for branding	Unique features of the place Customers Community
Labor input (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of time and human resources for branding	Entrepreneurs themselves, family, and friends Customers and influencers Partners Other entrepreneurs
Skills input (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of personnel with marketing education	Entrepreneurs themselves, family, and friends Employees Development projects Collaboration with educational institutions
Customers/markets (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of customers and problems in access to markets	New products to markets
Institutional environment Laws and regulations (Baker and Nelson 2005) Regulatory challenges in branding	Managing with laws
Media coverage (authors' own elaboration) Lack of paid brand communication	Unpaid media coverage in newspapers and radio Competitions Media stunts, humor Topical events and news TV documentaries and series Earned social media coverage

to (1) add to the literature on entrepreneurial branding by developing a comprehensive definition of entrepreneurial branding, and (2) explore whether and how tourism business SMEs employ bricolage in their entrepreneurial branding.

To the authors' knowledge, no other studies have reported on how SMEs manage resource constraints by bricolage in their brand building. Thus, this study continues and expands the path opened by a few studies showing how bricolage can be used in marketing by small companies (Kannambuzha and Suoranta 2016; Li and Wang 2022) but also by multinational corporations (MNCs) (Yang 2018). The motivation for the study lies in adding to understanding of the intersection of entrepreneurship and branding in general, and as regards the entrepreneurial bricolage framework (Baker and Nelson 2005) in branding in particular. The study makes significant contributions, which are discussed next.

First, the study contributes by providing a new definition of entrepreneurial branding, which was formed based on earlier literature on 'entrepreneurial' (McDougall and Oviatt 2000; Lackéus et al. 2020; Williams-Middleton et al. 2021; see also Kraus et al. 2009) and 'branding' (e.g., Ghodeswar 2008; Srivastava 2011; Iglesias et al. 2013) as occurring when *'being proactive and innovative in building and communicating a unique identity, i.e. brand identity, for a company, a product, a service, or another entity and thus creating new value for that entity and for and with its stakeholders, by learning from implementing.'* As we see it, this definition is more comprehensive than earlier definitions of entrepreneurial branding (Peters et al. 2010, p. 27; Kusi 2020b, p. 85) and better conveys the full meaning of the concept, thereby enhancing our understanding of the topic.

Second, the study contributes by showing how entrepreneurial bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005) is a relevant framework also as regards branding in SMEs. The findings and the summary in Table 2 demonstrate resource constraints that companies in our data faced in their entrepreneurial branding. The study thus brings new knowledge on the contents of domains of entrepreneurial bricolage in a particular context: the entrepreneurial branding of tourism SMEs. Further, a potential new domain of bricolage, called media coverage, or *media bricolage*, is suggested. This domain refers to companies' innovative and proactive generation of unpaid media coverage for the purposes of brand building. This kind of creative resource construction is considered important in building and communicating unique identity for a brand and increasing brand awareness in resource-scarce settings. Our study revealed that SMEs were innovative in attracting unpaid media coverage by newspapers, radio, and even TV. In addition to traditional media, tourism SMEs engage social media users to like, comment, and share their posts to gain awareness and exposure. Companies engaged in creative activities, utilizing media stunts and humor and participating in topical discussions about events and news in their own way (Suomi et al. 2020). In engaging in activities that attract media attention, companies do well by staying true to their brand identity, for example, by engaging in funny stunts if (and only if) their current or ideal brand identity is based on humor. Otherwise, their acts can dilute the company's brand identity and be perceived

as fake by audiences (Suomi et al. 2020). That said, we agree with Eggers et al. (2012), who noted that entrepreneurial marketing (or in this case entrepreneurial branding) is not a 'one type fits all' approach. Further, it is appropriate to acknowledge that naturally in media bricolage, SMEs may utilize other subtypes of bricolage, such as network bricolage (e.g., Yang and Leppäaho 2023), for example existing relationships to journalists, or spatial bricolage (Yachin and Ioannides 2020; Korsgaard et al. 2021), in terms of highlighting unique characteristics of a place to attract media coverage (Yachin and Ioannides 2020), but the underlying logic of media bricolage renders it distinct from other subtypes, and it is thus suggested here as its own subtype or domain of bricolage, one existing in the context of entrepreneurial branding. Media bricolage explicitly aims at communicating brand and increasing brand awareness through earned media and storytelling. It leverages creativity to obtain unpaid or low-cost exposure in various media channels (newspapers, radio, TV, social media). Media bricolage heavily relies on utilizing external platforms (e.g., social media, news outlets, television) and engaging stakeholders like journalists, influencers, or social media users to achieve its goals. While other bricolage domains might also involve external stakeholders, they often focus on obtaining direct support or collaboration (e.g., labor or skills input from partners or community members). Media bricolage, however, seeks to gain attention and publicity through indirect influence, such as by creating stories that these external stakeholders will amplify. On one hand, media bricolage places a strong emphasis on storytelling and the strategic creation of narratives that align with the brand identity, aiming to capture media interest in long term. Media bricolage, on the other hand, often operates on a temporal and opportunistic basis, taking advantage of current events and trends to create publicity. Media bricolage is the way inventive entrepreneurs create media publicity from almost nothing, both in traditional and social media. In this, entrepreneurs proactively engage in activities that they expect will result in media coverage. Our study has provided a few examples of how this can be done at no or low cost, but it is likely that there are many other ways of generating free media coverage beyond those discussed in the current study (see also Luonila et al. 2016, 2019). We argue that media bricolage may democratize branding by making it accessible to enterprises of all sizes. Deeper examination of this also provides useful paths for future studies. It is also important to note that, although a few earlier studies (in fields other than business) have mentioned the term 'media bricolage,' it has been used in different ways and contexts (see, for example, Pidduck 2022, for archival media bricolage), and therefore, it is not discussed further here.

Third, the study contributes by adding to understanding of bricolage as both strategy and practice in entrepreneurial branding. Yang (2018) discussed how marketing managers of MNCs used entrepreneurial marketing strategies and practices. Accordingly, the current study found that SMEs in tourism use bricolage both as strategy and practice. For instance, looking more closely at the concept of media bricolage introduced in this study, it can be seen how bricolage is employed both as a proactive strategy and a reactive practice. As a deliberate strategy, media bricolage involves entrepreneurs planning and actively seeking unpaid media coverage opportunities aligning with their brand identity. This reflects a proactive approach where the focus is on strategically building and communicating brand rather than merely reacting to immediate constraints or challenges. Conversely, media bricolage can also function as a practice, where companies seize opportunities presented by responding quickly and improvising to increase brand visibility.

Yang (2018) noted that bricolage is not only generated by a resource-constrained environment but also facilitated by environmental uncertainty. The results of this study are in line with Yang (2018), as we noted that SME owners engaged in bricolage because of resource constraints and their willingness to be authentic and homely—but also in confronting the environmental uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine.

The results also support Korsgaard et al.'s (2021) study concentrating on spatial bricolage. In our study, storytelling was highlighted in entrepreneurial branding by interviewees. Community involvement, for example, in terms of collaboration with other local SMEs in awareness building, was also mentioned. Our study also demonstrates the role of the unique features of the destination in bricolage, in line with Yachin and Ioannides (2020).

This study highlights the role of customers, communities, and other stakeholders in co-creating brand identity and communicating it. This insight enriches the brand co-creation literature (e.g., Tähtinen and Suomi 2022; Nibras et al. 2024) by showing that, in resource-constrained contexts, SMEs engage in creative forms of brand co-creation, for example, in terms of media bricolage.

Regarding managerial implications, this study reports concrete examples of how SMEs may implement brand building with scarce resources and use resources at hand to attract free media coverage. Unpaid media coverage allows SMEs to share their stories and build a unique brand identity. Unpaid media coverage may provide SMEs with visibility and exposure that SMEs often cannot afford through paid advertising. Further, free media coverage is typically more trusted among customers and other stakeholders than commercial advertising. The study also demonstrates how tourism SMEs can engage family and friends, employees, customers, and other stakeholders to be involved in entrepreneurial branding.

The limitation of the study is that it focused on tourism SMEs in one country. In Finland, many SMEs in tourism are located in rural and peripheral regions, which places a strong emphasis on self-reliance and resourcefulness, which may have influenced the results of this study. Similarly, the deep

appreciation of nature, history, and local identity in Finnish culture likely shaped the branding strategies observed, as many companies built their brand identities around these culturally important elements. Thus, future studies could expand the view and study bricolage in the entrepreneurial branding of companies operating in other cultures, as well as other sectors. Further, future studies could concentrate on one domain of bricolage (Baker and Nelson 2005; Mateus and Sarkar 2024), and for more in-depth scrutiny than was possible in the current study. More studies concentrating on media bricolage, introduced in the present study, could add to understanding of how SME owners employ or could employ bricolage in gaining free media coverage and thus increase brand awareness for free. By collecting quantitative data from a large group of SMEs across different industries and countries, more insights can be gained into bricoleurs, various contexts, processes, as well as antecedents and outcomes of media bricolage (see also Mateus and Sarkar 2024). Finally, more studies could be conducted in the context of tourism focusing on spatial bricolage, an area with scarce extant literature (Yachin and Ioannides 2020; Korsgaard et al. 2021).

Appendix 1

The Interview Protocol

The company's approach to marketing and communication[1]

- What kind of marketing philosophy or approach to marketing does the company have?
- What kind of things do you see as brand building (or marketing)?
- In which channels/how does your company do brand building (or marketing)?
- Share examples of your company's successful brand building (or marketing)? What made the campaign/case particularly successful?
- What are your brand building (or marketing) goals?
- What do you think is important in marketing/brand building?
- Do you see that the tourism context matters in terms of brand building (or marketing) (does it differ from other contexts)?

Company's brand

- What is the essence/core of your brand?
- How does your brand differ from other similar tourist destinations?
- How does a certain kind of language relate to your brand? Or does it?
- What kind of brand image are you aiming for? (What kind of associations do you wish to be associated with your brand?)
- Who does marketing and communication in your company? Is it the responsibility of a specific person? How is your brand communicated? (In what ways do you increase brand recognition?)
- Who are the company's most important partners in marketing?

Marketing resources

- What kind of resources does your company have for marketing?
- What kind of resources would you need more?
- If there were no resource constraints, how would you do brand building (marketing)?
- Do you feel that you have done brand building (or marketing) (sometimes) with almost no resources at all with "making something out of nothing" style? How? What role does improvisation play?
- Can you think of examples where, using your own smartness, you have used available resources in a new way (or combined resources) or in a way for which they were not originally intended, utilizing them in brand building (or marketing)? (for example, utilizing customers or persons other than marketing people in content production/marketing, utilizing a new type of channel in marketing, etc. Or used resources that another company has rejected)
- Do you feel that in brand building (or marketing) you have (sometimes) adopted an attitude in which you act without accepting possible limitations/lack of resources and act in spite of them?
- Do you have a company in mind with a well-built/marketed brand? What's good about that? (Have you been able to draw something from it for your company?)

Relationship with the place

- How do you feel about your relationship with the place where your company operates?
- How is the place and/or the relationship with the place visible in brand building?

[1] The researchers were aware that it might be challenging for the interviewees to discuss brand building, as many of the companies were relatively small and, with a few exceptions, the interviewees did not have a professional background in marketing. Therefore, the interviewees were also allowed to speak more broadly about marketing, and the researchers then interpreted which of the discussed topics related to brand building and which pertained more generally to marketing. The analysis of the data focused particularly on aspects linked to brand building.

Appendix 2

See Table 3.

Table 3 Coding sheet of abductive thematic analysis of this study

Examples of coding from raw material	1st level codes	2nd level codes	Domains of bricolage
"In everything we do, or like [we utilize the location]. For example, if we take a distillery tour, we tell the history of X [the municipality where the company locates], we tell the history of the dairy, and we also share a lot about the locals." (A3)	*What kind of free/inexpensive resources are available for branding?* Storytelling, history and heritage of the place, local people, history of the local people, local dialect, local humor, place brand, natural landscape, local animals, weather conditions, all senses, seasonality of tourism, company's own "words and language," choosing a unique brand name, using a clever email signature to strengthen the brand message, understanding everything that is being done as branding	Unique features of the place	Physical (material) input (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of material for branding
	What is the customers'' role in work related to branding? Customers are taking pictures, recording videos, writing blog posts online, and making recommendations of the company	Customers' work	
	What is the local community's role in work related to branding? The local community is providing support, is offering recommendations, and is giving practical help	Community's work	

Table 3 (continued)

Examples of coding from raw material	1st level codes	2nd level codes	Domains of bricolage
"I would say the gold moment that made a difference was when I was approached by this friend of mine, and he was looking to, he wanted to drive dogs, he lives in Helsinki, but he really likes mushing and dog driving and this kind of thing. But he didn't have a way to do it in Helsinki, so he was willing to exchange his skills, talent and know-how for the ability to come drive dogs in the north. And I was one of the first ones who said yes to that proposal. So, this was another one where, with very little resources, there's some financial compensation to it, but it's more exchange in goods, we managed to leverage what we do in a big way" (A10)	*What is the role of entrepreneurs, family members, and friends in work related to branding?* Entrepreneurs are doing branding themselves, entrepreneurs are proactive and innovative in branding, entrepreneurs' own personality is visible in branding, entrepreneur wants to keep branding small-scale and cozy, entrepreneur is a pioneer in their field, entrepreneur does favors for others and asks for positive WOM as a counter favor, entrepreneur wants to do things 'their own way' in branding, impacting on feelings of customers, family business is at the core of brand building, family members are helping with the branding, and friends are helping with the branding	Entrepreneurs, family, and friends' work	Labor input (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of time and human resources for branding
	What is the role of customers and influencers in work related to branding? B2C customers and influencers are engaging in word-of-mouth promotion, interacting with posts on social media through comments and likes; B2B customers are making recommendations, engaging in co-branding; entrepreneur reacts fast to secure an important B2B customer	Customers and influencers' work	
	What is the role of partners in work related to branding? Local visitor organizations are providing support and awareness; company's own suppliers are marketing on behalf of the company	Partners' work	
	What is the role of other entrepreneurs in work related to branding? Other entrepreneurs are making recommendations and raising awareness for the company in their brand communications; other entrepreneurs provide tips related to brand building	Other entrepreneurs' work	

Table 3 (continued)

Examples of coding from raw material	1st level codes	2nd level codes	Domains of bricolage
"Our oldest daughter's child said she can do the [web]sites. She's now in the last year of an upper secondary school." (interviewee 1/A6)	*What kind of (amateur) skills do entrepreneurs, family members, and friends have?* The entrepreneur learns how to create branding materials, improvises, and learns how to design websites, gaining knowledge through trial and error in branding. A friend, who is a marketing professional, offers help, while a family member contributes with self-taught skills	(Amateur) skills of entrepreneurs, family, and friends for branding	Skills input (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of personnel with marketing education
	What kind of amateur skills do employees have for branding? Employees act in marketing videos, create content for social media, serve as storytellers, and all employees function as 'part-time marketers'	(Amateur) skills of employees for branding	
	Entrepreneurs participate in development projects	Skills acquired through participation in development projects and contributions of project workers to the company	
	What can students do? Students are helping with branding, students are doing marketing surveys, and students are doing website for the company	Collaboration with educational institutions	
"We were supposed to produce drinks and sell them to bars and restaurants, but then the coronavirus pandemic began… so we started to invent all kinds of things." (A7)	*Why introduce new products/services?* No customers for current offerings due to the Covid-19 pandemic	New products to markets	Customers/markets (Baker and Nelson 2005) Lack of customers and problems in access to markets
"When we do our 20 min distillery round [for visitors], we say how X [a co-founder of the parent company] smuggled to a whiskey show in London the first droplets of whiskey that this company ever produced and went to obtain feedback from there." (A3)	*What kind of challenges with institutional environment?* Alcohol legislation, regulations of Building Control	Managing with laws	Institutional environment Laws and regulations (Baker and Nelson 2005) Regulatory challenges in branding

Table 3 (continued)

Examples of coding from raw material	1st level codes	2nd level codes	Domains of bricolage
	The entrepreneur participates in a TV reality show; the company takes part in a professional competition	Competitions	Media coverage (authors' own elaboration) Lack of paid brand communication
	The entrepreneur plans funny stunts, the company uses humor in its brand communication, and the company uses humor in its customer service	Media stunts, humor	
"We like to engage locally in all sorts of things, and nationally as well. Initially, it was easier, but nowadays it's extremely difficult to come up with something new. If some mishap happens in society, you need to create a story about it a second because things go viral so quickly. It's so fast that you can't keep up at all" (A2)	The company takes a part in topical discussions in society	Topical events and news	
	The company engages local and national newspapers to write articles about the company, the entrepreneur seeks unpaid media coverage, reacts quickly to secure media coverage, and the entrepreneur's young age attracts media attention	Unpaid media coverage in newspapers	
	Entrepreneurs receive media coverage on the radio	Radio	
	The resort serves as a filming location for an international TV series; a documentary is being made about the resort	TV documentaries and series	
	TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, TripAdvisor, LinkedIn	Earned social media coverage	

To avoid increasing the word count of the article too much, we present only one direct quote from each code group

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