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**MEASURING CUSTOMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY**

**THE CASE OF THE MICE DESTINATION**

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER I. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>14</b>
1.1 Overview of the study .....	14
1.2 Statement of the problem .....	23
1.3 Purpose of the research and research questions .....	26
1.4 Structure and research methodology .....	28
1.5 Contributions of the study within destination brand equity literature.....	30
<b>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>32</b>
2. 1 The main literature trends on brand equity .....	32
2.2. The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) .....	41
2.3 Measuring brand equity: components and indicators.....	42
2.3.1 Aaker's brand equity model .....	44
2.3.2 Keller's brand equity pyramid.....	50
2.4 Tourism destinations: building and measuring brand equity .....	51
2.5 Brand equity management and destination governance: the role of the DMOs.....	60
<b>CHAPTER III. BRAND EQUITY FOR MICE DESTINATIONS.....</b>	<b>63</b>
3. 1 An overview of the status of the MICE industry .....	63

3.2 The Convention Bureau and its role in developing a strong brand for a MICE destination .....	68
3.3 A CBBE model for a MICE destination .....	74
<b>CHAPTER IV. METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>85</b>
4. 1 Introduction to the case study .....	85
4.2 Methods for data collection and research methodology .....	91
4.3 Data analysis .....	94
4.3.1 Construct reliability and validity .....	97
4.3.2 First-order CFA .....	98
4.3.3. Second-order CFA.....	100
4.3.4. The SEM analysis: path relationship tests.....	101
4.3.5. The model fit .....	103
4.4. Discussion of the results and conclusions.....	106
4.5 Limits of the study and hints for future research .....	112
<b>Appendix A. Survey template .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Appendix B. Descriptive statistics .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>118</b>

# INTRODUCTION

The concept of brand equity has emerged in the academic literature since the 1980s and it has become one of the most important research issues in the marketing management field. The study of brand equity arises from a strategy-based requirement to improve marketing productivity. Consequently, marketers need a more exhaustive comprehension of consumers' behaviours as a premise for settling on better strategic decisions about the target market definition and the product positioning, with the improvement of the strategic choices about branding activities.

During the years, brand equity has been studied from a variety of perspectives and through different approaches (among others: Aaker, 1991; 1996; Keller, 1993; 2008; Farquhar, 1989; Yoo et al., 2000; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Boo et al., 2009, Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). Even if no common viewpoint exists on the theme, brand equity can be defined as the sum of the marketing impacts remarkably originating from the brand: this happens when the consumer is acquainted with the brand and holds some positive, solid and unique brand associations (Aaker, 1991).

A successful brand is an identifiable product or service, but it can also refer to a person or place, strengthened and enriched in such a way that the consumers perceive relevant and unique benefits, which match their needs (Keller, 2012).

Even if the majority of the scientific contributions covers the theme of product brand equity, the body of research regarding the service industry is of remarkable importance, as it takes into account different aspects to measure brand equity with respect to the products context. In investigating the differences and similarities

between product and service brands, de Chernatony and Dall'Omo Riley (1999) concluded that the concept of a brand is similar between products and services, although the emphasis given to the peculiar factors of branding strategies may differ. Therefore, the main services' characteristics should be investigated before applying branding principles to different types of brands.

In addition to these reflections, it is important to consider that nowadays the traditional difference between tangible and intangible products is fizzling out: in fact, while products tend to dematerialize, giving the predominance of the web and the online relationships, services are more inclined to assume tangible characteristics in order to transform into experiences.

In the tourism industry, the theme of destination brand equity is a relatively recent phenomenon and it is still developing, even if the topic of place branding has strongly emerged in the last years. In fact, the contemporary socioeconomic and technological trends, as well as the high competition that characterizes the worldwide tourism market, emphasize the importance to focus and invest on the perceived images of the tourist destinations. "As destination branding becomes a fairly active area of research, the question remains as to whether already accepted branding principles can be transferred to the tourism destination level" (Konecnik, 2007, p. 401). In this sense, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), whose jurisdictions may cover a country, a state, a province, a region or a specific city, are a critical component of the tourism industry since they have the role to develop attractive images among travellers to achieve a real competitive advantage in target markets.

These reflections are linked to the destination branding literature, which has been subject of investigation for more than 30 years (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979; Gartner,

1986, 1989, 1993; Echtner & Ritchie 1993; Baloglu & McCleary 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002). The brand of a destination is an essential factor responsible for its popularity and attractiveness, as it enhances positioning and exerts a considerable influence over visitors' choices and their satisfaction, while destination governance is instrumental in managing the fragmented and heterogeneous nature of destinations (Del Chiappa & Bregoli, 2012).

Even if the theme of destination branding has been widely studied, the theme of destination brand equity measurement is relatively new as it has been analysed for the first time in the 2000s (Konecnik, 2006; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Since then, various research studies have been made to measure brand equity for tourism destinations (among the most important: Bianchi et al., 2014; Boo et al., 2009; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Kladou & Kehagias, 2013; Pike, 2007, 2009, 2010; Pike et al., 2010; Pike & Bianchi, 2013). These authors recognized that destination brand equity reflects the perceptions/attitudes held by visitors, and it can be measured by analysing some selected brand dimensions from the perspective of the tourists.

While academic studies on brand equity measurement systems have been made for leisure destinations, other tourism contexts have been little explored. This dissertation deeply analyses the issues of the building, management and measurement of the brand equity for a MICE destination, with MICE standing for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions –with the last letter “E” in some cases standing for “events” and “C” for conventions”. While the academics did not focus on the MICE industry until the recent years, the development that this market has experienced since the 1980s has led to the realization of a terminology for practitioners in the Dictionary

of the Meeting Industry published by ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), which defines:

- Meeting: a general term indicating the coming together of a number of people in one place, to confer or carry out a particular activity. The frequency can be on an *ad hoc* basis or according to a set pattern, i.e. annual general meetings, committee meetings etc.;
- Incentive: a meeting event as part of a program, which is offered to its participants to reward a previous performance;
- Conference: a participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation. As compared with a congress, a conference is normally smaller in scale and more select in character. Though not inherently limited in time, conferences are usually of limited duration with specific objectives;
- Exhibition: events at which products and services are displayed.

The MICE market is becoming one of the most successful segments of the international tourism industry: in 2015, there have been organized more than 11,000 events around the world (ICCA Statistics Report, 2015). Among the countries that have hosted the majority of international events in the last years, at the 1<sup>st</sup> position, we can find the USA, followed by Germany, UK and Spain. Italy, in the last 3 years, remains stable at the 6<sup>th</sup> position (ICCA Statistics Report, 2015).

The rapid and vigorous growth of the international MICE market is leading many cities around the world to invest in this industry, creating or re-inventing their destination brands and providing themselves with proper infrastructures and professional congress

services able to attract the business target. Therefore, we are experiencing a significant growth of MICE destinations.

The Italian MICE market, in spite of some standstill and a general re-modulation around the contemporary needs of the demand, is following this trend and, in the last years, many Italian destinations demonstrate a concrete intention to invest in this market.

Keeping these premises in mind, the purpose of the present research is to focus on the brand building architecture process and the measurement of brand equity for a MICE destination. In order to proceed with the analysis, a review of the academic literature on the theme (see Chapter II) demonstrates that in tourism studies there is a variety of different approaches to brand equity monitoring and measurement and that there is no universally agreed set of metrics to measure brand equity for destinations. In fact, as a latent construct, destination brand cannot be measured directly, but through a set of observed variables

The present study aims at developing a valid brand equity measurement model for MICE destinations based on the concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) introduced by Aaker (1992) and Keller (1993) and already deepened in previous research with reference to leisure destinations (among others, Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). The study of brand equity for MICE destinations is at its infancy, while the few studies on the theme mainly concentrated on congressional destinations that are well settled in the market and well-developed in terms of services and promotion. Up to now, there is no scientific contribution on the theme of brand equity building with reference to an emerging MICE destination. The present study gives particular importance to the different influence that the brand



exerts in the selection process of a MICE destination with respect to a leisure destination. In the first case, the market is essentially B2B, hence the choice behaviours are driven by a greater rationality, while intangible assets are less influential (Del Chiappa, 2008).

Given these reflections, and in order to answer to these literature gaps, this dissertation tries to address the following research questions:

*1) How can a CBBE model be adapted for MICE destinations?*

*1a) What are the empirical dimensions and their relative indicators that have to be selected to measure brand equity for a MICE destination?*

From the analysis of the literature (see Chapter II), it came out that various authors selected four brand equity dimensions for leisure destinations: awareness, image, quality, and loyalty. The support of some key academic research has led the author of the present study to the incorporation of two of the above-mentioned dimensions – image and quality – into the destination experience (Boo et al., 2009). Moreover, as it is possible to see in Chapter III, there have been introduced the cultural assets indicators in the image dimension, as indicated by Kladou and Kehagias, 2014, and the relational assets in the quality dimension as suggested by Del Chiappa, 2008 in order to measure brand equity for a MICE destination. The literature review helped selecting and determining the more appropriate indicators for each dimension, in order to proceed with their measurement in the empirical analysis (see Chapter IV).

Given the importance of the governing and promoting actors in managing the complex nature of brand destinations, the present research deepens the strategic role of the

Convention Bureaus, which are the most important MICE destination marketing organizations in their respective area of interest, being it a city, a region or a country. They are directly responsible for marketing the destination brand in order to increase the number of business travellers.

Therefore, the second research question is:

*2) What is the impact of the Convention Bureau activities on the brand equity building and management of a MICE destination?*

Convention Bureaus, as destination mediators, have a crucial role both in the brand building and in the promotion process, since they support and guide the client's choice for a destination, enhancing its attractions, its quali-quantitative characteristics and its functional and intangible values.

This dissertation is articulated into four chapters: a first section is devoted to the identification of the literary background (Chapters I and II), while the second section (Chapters III and IV) deals with the current trends in the MICE industry and with the in-depth empirical analysis through the case study. In the second section, the attention is focused on the importance of the branding strategies for MICE destinations, on the built of brand equity by properly choosing brand elements, on the role of a Convention Bureau and on the implementation of a MICE destination brand equity measurement model.

Chapter I presents the research project, underlying the scientific motivation that leads to the outlying of the current dissertation. The meaning of the concepts “brand equity” and “destination brand equity” are discussed in this chapter to demonstrate the huge

complexity of this research issue. Chapter I explains the evolution of the studies on brand equity from the product to the service industry and finally to the tourism sector, underlining that the academic literature has often analysed destination branding from a demand-side rather than a supply-side point of view (Konecnik & Go, 2008; Cai, 2002). Keeping in mind both perspectives is essential in order to develop a coherent and efficient brand and to achieve cohesiveness in brand positioning. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the theoretical reflections that constitute a blueprint for the development of the current dissertation.

Chapter II proposes a theoretical analysis on the literature background, highlighting the main trends on the issue of brand equity and providing a wider understanding of the research theme with the investigation of both theoretical and empirical studies. The aim of this chapter is to verify how and whether the academic literature highlights the factors generating brand equity, both in the product and in the service industry: it identifies the sources and the outcomes of brand equity, dispensing insights and guidelines on how to build, measure, and manage brand equity.

More precisely, Chapter II deepens the consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) framework (Aaker, 1992; Keller, 1993), in order to point out what consumers know about brands and how marketers can develop an efficient and effective brand equity measurement system. This analysis helps identifying and quantifying the potential sources of brand equity in terms of the major benefits a firm gains as well as how to measure the overall value of a brand. Moreover, in this chapter it is clarified the importance of brand equity for destinations: it explores the link between brand equity management and destination governance, underlining the role performed by the DMOs.

With Chapter III, the attention shifts from the theoretical background to the analysis of the referring industry: in fact, it defines the contemporary status of the MICE industry, analysing it at a worldwide, European and Italian level. It then proceeds with a focus on the strategic and organizational features of the Convention Bureau in a MICE destination to after analyzing its role in destination brand equity. Finally, the proposed CBBE model for MICE destinations is introduced, with an explanation of the selected brand equity dimensions and their relative indicators.

Chapter IV is devoted to the empirical analysis: it introduces some background information on the selected case study to then deepen the methodology of the research entering into the empirical discussion. This chapter aims at verifying the proposed CBBE model for a MICE destination to the city of Napoli, Italy. Napoli represents an appropriate case of an emerging MICE destination: it is not among the most famous and most selected destinations for MICE events, but it is experiencing a growth in the business travellers' arrivals, given the recent host of international events that have given to the city a worldwide resonance. Moreover, the recent constitution of the Convention Bureau Napoli (CBN) in 2015 represents a remarkable opportunity for the Neapolitan MICE operators, since it embodies a substantial incentive in the process of the city brand (re)construction and promotion through the slogan "Meet in Naples". Its aim is to reorganize the MICE offer at a destination level in order to make Napoli more appealing to the business national and international targets. Hence, the city is experiencing a brand equity-building phase, which makes more interesting to apply the proposed CBBE model to an emerging MICE destination.

The chapter describes the methodology for the data collection process and data analysis. The empirical research tests the hypotheses in order to answer the above-mentioned questions.

Until now, the academic studies on MICE destination brand equity have deepened the demand-side perspective only from the meeting planners' point of view, while the ultimate consumers a MICE destination competes for are the event participants. Therefore, the empirical research has been carried out in occasion of two important events:

1. The ICOT (International Conference on Tourism) 2016, which took place in Napoli at the end of June 2016 and gathered in the city the world most important academic experts in the tourism field;
2. the XXV Anniversary of MPI<sup>1</sup> Italia Chapter, an international meeting organized in Napoli in July 2016 that hosted among the most important Italian meeting planners and suppliers.

In order to analyse the demand-side perspective, online surveys have been distributed after the meeting to the national and international participants to the events: the aim is to understand their perceptions of Napoli as a MICE destination and to test the selected brand equity dimensions. Then, the demand-side survey results have been discussed with the CBN managerial staff in order to understand both the positive and negative

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting Professionals International (MPI) is the largest meeting and event industry association worldwide. Founded in 1972, the organization provides innovative and relevant education, networking opportunities and business exchanges, and acts as a prominent voice for the promotion and growth of the industry. MPI has a global community of 60,000 meeting and event professionals including more than 17,000 engaged members and its Plan Your Meetings audience. It has more than 90 chapters and clubs in 24 countries ([www.mpiweb.org](http://www.mpiweb.org)). The Italia Chapter has been founded in 1991.

perceptions of the city to then better position the brand of Napoli as a MICE destination.

Finally, conclusions explain the findings of this study, highlight its limits and give some hints to the future research directions. Conceptualizing brand equity with reference to the MICE industry is helpful for supporting managerial decision-makers since it can recommend tactical guidance and strategies for destination brand marketing programs to create and improve loyalty.

# CHAPTER I

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Overview of the study

*"A product is something made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by the customer. A product can be copied by a competitor; a brand is unique. A product can be quickly outdated; a successful brand is timeless."*

Stephen King, Advertising Executive

WPP Group, London

In the academic literature, the concept of brand has been traditionally defined as “a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (Kotler, 1991, p. 442). Therefore, a brand is more than a product because it includes dimensions that differentiate it in some way from other products designed to satisfy the same need (Keller, 2012).

The contemporary trends in all market sectors demonstrate that if an organization conceives a brand just as a name, it overlooks the real essence of branding. In fact, nowadays, “one of the principal expertise of professional marketing managers is the capacity to create, support, secure, and constantly enhance brands” (Kotler 1994, pp. 444–445).

The American Marketing Association (AMA) gives an updated definition of brand and branding: “A brand is a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas. Brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use, and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary” (AMA, 2016). In our increasingly complex world, people have to face more choices in less time. Creating strong brands, maintaining and enhancing that strength over time, is a management imperative (Keller, 2012).

Brands develop through evolutionary stages: first, brands are still unknown to the marketplace. Then, thanks to the marketing activities, buyers can develop a degree of awareness that can be measured by brand recognition. Further, brands achieve a high level of acceptability and/or preference – buyers would select them over others. Finally, there are brands that impose a high degree of brand loyalty (de Chernatony, 1993; Kotler 1994).

Figure 1.1 provides an overview of the roles a brand plays for consumers and manufacturers. For what concerns consumers, brands identify the product source/maker, assigning responsibility to a particular manufacturer. More importantly, brands can encompass special meanings to consumers, such as simplification of their product decisions and risk reduction.

The best way for consumers to handle risks is obviously to buy well-known brands, especially those with which consumers have had favourable past experiences and perceive positive associations. Thus, brands can be a very important risk-handling device, especially in business-to-business settings where risks can sometimes have profound implications.



Therefore, from an economic perspective, brands allow consumers to lower the research costs, “both internally (in terms of how much they have to think) and externally (in terms of how much they have to look around)” (Keller, 2012).

If a brand is good in providing a good service over many years of regular use, it acquires familiarity and proven reliability. The benefits can come (de Chernatony & McDonald 1992; De Chernatony et al., 1998; Doyle & Wong, 1998):

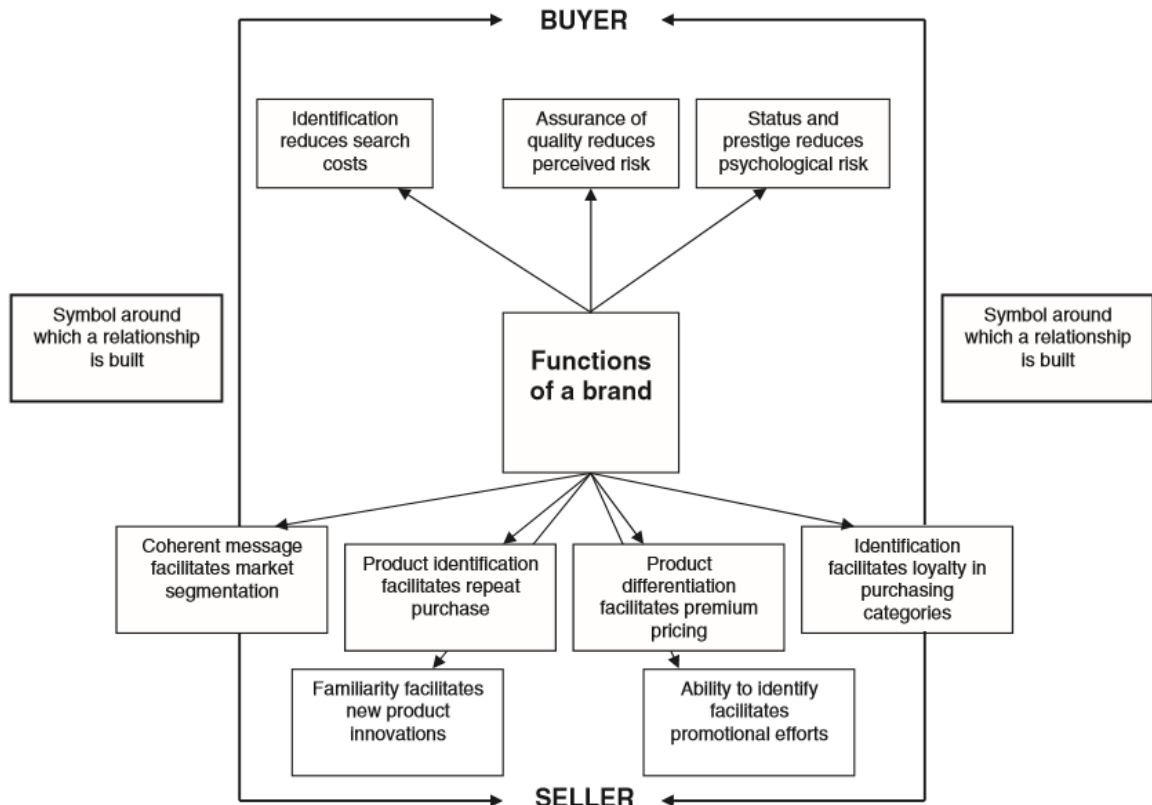
- a) from the experience of using the brand, which leads to familiarity and risk reduction;
- b) from the kind of people who use the brand, which leads to status and lifestyle;
- c) from the belief that the brand is effective, i.e. promises satisfaction and delivers quality;
- d) from the appearance of the brand, i.e. the packaging;
- e) from the manufacturer’s name and reputation.

Brands can also serve as symbolic devices, allowing consumers to project their self-image and confirm their status.

Finally, much interest has been generated in recent years in understanding the interplay between consumer culture and brands (Alden et al., 1999; Holt, 2002; Izberk-Bilgin, 2012).

To conclude, brands take on unique, personal meanings to consumers in facilitating their day-to-day activities and in enriching their lives. As consumers’ lives become more complicated and time starved, the ability of a brand to simplify decision-making and reduce risks is invaluable.

**Figure 1.1 – The importance of the brand for the buyer and the seller.**



Source: Berthon et al. (1999).

From the supplier's perspective, brands can represent a source of competitive advantage as they assist in differentiating the offering, being a mean of identification and protection. Brands play a strong role in deterring market entry for potential competitors. When well deployed, brands enable its owners to command higher prices and profit margins, leading to great financial returns (Kotler, 1991; Egan & Guilding 1994; Keller, 2012).

To conclude, brands represent enormously valuable pieces of legal property for firms, capable of influencing consumers' present and future behaviours, and of providing sustained future revenues.

One of the best ways to build a relationship between a brand and a consumer is to create an appealing brand personality through the association of human characteristics such as friendliness, responsibility and neighbourliness, to make it distinctive and more attractive to consumers (Kotler, 1991). In fact, brands are complex entities, but ultimately they reside in the mind of the consumers and of the potential buyers (Aaker 1996; Pearson 1996; Ind, 1997). Customers and other stakeholders “integrate all they see, hear and read about a product with all their experiences using or consuming it to form a single, but often complex, mental image about both the physical product and the company that makes it” (Keegan et al., 1995, p. 318). Therefore, brands exist and nourish mainly thanks to a continuous relationship process whereby the company clearly sets the values and expectations steeped in the brand, which is interpreted and redefined by the consumers (de Chernatony et al., 1998).

Brands are traditionally associated with physical goods: firms that sell industrial products or durable goods to other companies/final consumers are recognizing the benefits of developing strong brands. Even commodities have become highly differentiated as strong brands have emerged in some market sectors.

Nonetheless, in the recent years, the pervasiveness of service branding has accelerated in various market sectors. As generally agreed on both by academics and practitioners, one of the key challenges in marketing services is that they are less tangible than products, cannot be stored and are more likely to vary and differentiate in quality. For these reasons, branding can be particularly crucial for firms that operate in the service industry, as a way to address intangibility and variability problems. Brands symbols/logos can support in making the abstract nature of services more concrete: hence, customers are facilitated in the selection since services can be better identified

and provided of a clear meaning. Probably more than in the product industry, the involvement of referrals and testimonials can be powerful, since emotions play a key role in terms of sense of security and social approval.

Even if consumers give great importance to brands, the recent market developments generate important threats and challenges for brand managers (Keller, 2012). First, consumers have become wiser and more experienced with marketing and promotional activities, since they have at their disposal a greater access to information and consumer support. More importantly, the traditional media tools effectiveness is losing ground, while new communication and advertising options are pervading all aspects of the human life. The more sophisticated market competition and brands proliferation have made the product differentiation more difficult, while consumer loyalty decreases due to the economic downturns (Keller, 2012).

Given these observations, it can be stated that the evaluation of the brand success is becoming a more complex activity since it is a multidimensional construct, which value should be assessed over a long-term perspective and in relation to both the brands' stakeholders and competitors (Kotler, 1991).

The brand's success can be evaluated by two different criteria, which correspond to business-based measures or to consumer-based measures. They are interrelated and mutually dependent because business-based measures such as profit or market share are often linked to consumers' perceptions and responses to a brand (Kotler, 1991; de Chernatony et al., 1998). Various authors agreed that awareness, trust and reputation are the best guarantees of future earnings (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Aaker, 1996; Bedbury & Fenichell, 2002; Carpenter et al., 1994; Kania, 2001; Kapferer, 1997; Upshaw, 1995).

In order to understand the tangible and intangible values of brands, in the 1980s the concept of brand equity has emerged in the marketing literature and it has become a central issue in marketing management research. Its emergence contributed in confirming the importance of brands in marketing strategy and provided a key focus for both managerial and academic research activities. On the other side, the brand equity concept has been defined in different ways for a number of different purposes, generating confusion and no common viewpoint about how to conceptualize and measure it.

The original focus of the brand equity approaches was on brands as financial assets (Blackett 1991; de Chernatony & McWilliam 1990; Crimmins, 1992; Farquhar & Ijiri, 1993; Kamakura & Russell, 1993; Kerin & Sethuraman, 1998; Swait et al., 1993). Other authors have further focused on the short-term responses of consumers to brand extensions under experimental conditions. (Aaker, 1990; Aaker & Keller, 1990; 1993; Arnold, 1992; Boush & Loken 1991; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Park et al., 1991; Rangaswamy et al., 1993; Sullivan, 1992; Sunde & Brodie, 1993).

Despite the different perspectives, most researchers agree that brand equity consists of the marketing effects uniquely attributable to a brand. Brand equity explains why different outcomes result from the marketing of a branded product or service, as compared to the results that could be obtained if the same product or service did not have a brand identification. All authors who have debated on brand equity in the last decades generally agree with the basic notion that brand equity represents the "added value" or the incremental effect endowed to a product or a service as a result of past investments in the brand marketing.

Obviously, the brand equity measurement activities may change when regarding a product or a service, since different dimensions have to be taken into account: for example, durability and fit may be important factors for a product, while personality, friendliness and reliability may be of fundamental value when selling a service (Aaker, 1996).

Although the concept of branding has been extensively applied to both products and services, the recent years has also seen the evolution of geographical locations branding processes, thanks to the increased mobility of both people and business activities and the competition growth in the tourism industry, which have contributed to the rise of place marketing. All kinds of destinations, be them cities, states, regions or countries are now actively promoted through various online and offline advertising forms that mainly origin from Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) (Franch, 2010). These campaigns aim to create destination awareness and to stimulate the creation of a positive destination image that boost tourist flows and/or business investments. The role of a DMO is favouring the growth of collaborative processes among the stakeholders, involving them in the strategies development on the territory, promoting its attractive factors and co-planning its tourism products and experiences (Wang & Pizam, 2011; Franch, 2010). Destination branding is a fundamental aspect of the DMO practice, as travel locations are experiencing an increased substitutability due to the lack of differentiation among some destinations (Pike, 2005). The core of destination branding is to build a positive destination image that identifies and differentiates the destination by selecting a consistent brand elements mix (Cai, 2002; Morrison & Anderson, 2002).

Up to now, there is still no unanimously accepted definition of destination branding (Pike, 2013; Blain et al., 2005). According to Blain, Levy, and Ritchie (2005, p. 337) it is “the set of marketing activities that:

- 1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination;
- 2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination;
- 3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination;
- 4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk”.

The literature on destination brand equity started to spread out in the 2000s. There are different aspects to take into consideration in building destination brand equity. Among the most important:

- a) the destination recognition and awareness among potential travellers;
- b) the tourists’ involvement before, during and after the visit;
- c) the overall image the destination itself is able to build so that customers have specific, positive thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about it;
- d) the tourists’ satisfaction and loyalty and their intention to revisit the place or recommend it to others.

Some authors (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike, 2007; Garcia et al., 2012) have attempted to operationalize the concept of Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, introduced by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993), for destinations (see Chapter II).

The CBBE model has been created to give marketers and managers an alternative to the financial perspective that views brand equity as a balance sheet intangible asset. In fact, CBBE conceives the concept of equity as the value of the brand for the consumer: in CBBE perspective, “long-term brand success is related to the extent to which knowledge of the brand has been established by short-term marketing initiatives” (Keller, 1993). To examine CBBE for destinations may be of great support since it provides DMOs with a mean to understand better the effectiveness of brand initiatives. The management of brand equity can be seen as a continuous, planned and long-term strategy, which aims at increasing confidence in the brand: this aspect may be particularly difficult for destinations, given the incessant changes and evolutions that characterize the contemporary tourism market.

In particular, this research attempts to create a CBBE model for MICE destinations, which are greatly emerging and assessing their success during last years, since the congress & events sector is on the rise, especially in Europe. The model is developed thanks to the support of the literature on the theme (see Chapter II and III).

If, up to now, this work has introduced the core issues of the current dissertation, the following paragraphs will explore some theoretical points underpinning the problem of the research.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, unlike there are several scientific contributions covering the theme of product brand equity, the research regarding destination brand equity, especially the case of MICE destinations, is still developing, even if the theme of place branding has strongly emerged in last years (Cai 2002). In



fact, the contemporary socioeconomic and technological trends, as well as the high competition that characterizes the worldwide tourism market, emphasize the importance to focus and invest on the perceived images of tourist destinations. The brand of a destination is an essential factor responsible for its popularity and attractiveness, enhancing positioning and exerting a considerable influence over visitors' choices and their satisfaction, while destination governance is instrumental in managing the fragmented and complex nature of destinations.

The topic of destination branding has been partly investigated under the alternative label of destination image studies, which have been inspected for more than 40 years (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979; Phelps, 1986; Gartner, 1986; 1989; 1993; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; 2007; 2009; Balakrishnan et al., 2009; Hudson & Ritchie, 2009; Pike, 2004; 2009; 2011; Qu et al., 2011). Nonetheless, according to Cai (2002), a major disadvantage of the previous image studies is their inability to distinguish between the image and branding functions: "image formation is not branding, albeit the former constitutes the core of the latter. Image building is one step closer, but there still remains a critical missing link: the brand identity" (Cai, 2002, p. 722).

Despite the great amount of academic studies on the theme, which helped providing DMOs with brand development guidelines and insights, there is at least one field of analysis that still remains uncovered within the destination branding literature: the performance of destination brands over time with the definition of clear and efficient destination brand metrics. Given the great extent in terms of financial and human resources now being invested in destination brand initiatives globally, there is a need

for more research related to the assessment of destination brand strategies and their performance (Cai, 2002; Pike, 2007). This research gap has been attempted to be filled by academic studies on brand equity.

The question remains as to whether already accepted brand equity principles and methodologies related to products and services can be transferred to destinations and still remain effective. As already stated in the previous paragraphs, in comparing products and services, the concept of a brand is similar for both, although different dimensions of branding strategy may be emphasized. Therefore, destination characteristics should be investigated before applying branding principles. One measurement model worthy of investigation for the destination brand effectiveness measurement, which is going to be deepened in the present research, is the CBBE (customer-based brand equity) model, promoted by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003). The present study aims at developing a valid CBBE model for measuring brand equity for MICE destinations on the basis of the previous research (among others, Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

Due to the numerous benefits that MICE tourism can bring to destinations (among others, high direct and indirect revenues, greater foreign exchange, employment opportunities, positive impact on destination image and seasonality improvement), the number of worldwide destinations that are investing in this market to host events is constantly increasing. One of the key factors that would differentiate MICE destinations and may have a great influence on the decision-making site selection processes for both meeting planners and attendees is the destination brand. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to understand the effectiveness of destination brands in order to plan for successful long-term destination management.

As a latent construct, destination brand cannot be measured directly, but through a set of observed variables. A review of the academic literature on the theme (see Chapter II) demonstrates that there are different approaches to destination brand equity monitoring and measurement in tourism studies. Up to now, there is no universally agreed set of metrics and, most importantly, the academic research mainly concentrates on leisure destinations, while other tourism contexts have been little explored.

From the analysis of the literature, the most appropriate brand equity dimensions for a MICE destination have been identified, measured and tested in a case study (see Chapter IV).

The literature review helped selecting and determining some empirical variables for each dimension. The developed model aims at empirically testing the relationships among the proposed brand equity dimensions. These reflections constitute a precious point of departure for the development of the current work.

### **1.3 Purpose of the research and research questions**

The previous paragraphs have introduced the purpose of the present research, which consists in the development of a brand equity measurement model for a MICE destination. This kind of study has already been realized within the academic literature with reference to leisure destinations, mainly from a visitor's point of view. Instead, the present research aims at applying the brand equity model to a MICE destination, deepening the demand perspective, made by meeting planners and participants to MICE events. In addition, this research aims at focusing on the government and

promoting role of the Convention Bureau in reinforcing the brand of the MICE destination it represents.

Up to now, this theme has not been analysed in the academic literature. In order to answer to these literature gaps, the structure of the current dissertation is conceived according to the development of both theoretical and empirical sections in order to address the following research questions:

*1) How can a CBBE model be adapted for MICE destinations?*

*1a) What are the empirical dimensions and their relative indicators that have to be selected to measure brand equity for a MICE destination?*

*2) What is the impact of the Convention Bureau activities on the brand equity building and management of a MICE destination?*

In answering to the above-mentioned questions, the research attempts to shed light on the following issues:

a) the different influence that the brand exerts in the selection process of a MICE destination with respect to a tourist destination. In the first case, the market is essentially B2B, hence the choice behaviours are driven by a greater rationality, while intangible assets are less influential (Del Chiappa, 2008);

b) the nature and the role performed by the subjects involved in the brand architecture process of a MICE destination, giving a peculiar relevance to the Convention Bureau.

The weight of these destination mediators is crucial both in the brand building and in the brand equity achievement since they support and guide the client's choice for a destination, enhancing its attractions, its quali-quantitative characteristics, its functional and intangible values, giving shape to the destination brand identity.

## **1.4 Structure and research methodology**

In order to proceed with the analysis, the outlying of the research design process is necessary. The definition of the problem is the first step that shapes the basis of the research field, since it helps understanding what is the path of the study in terms of theoretical backgrounds, empirical setting and methodology.

Once the problem is defined, the objectives are identified according to previous gaps existing in the current literature on the topic, which could constitute new research issues, extending experience or adding strength to what is already known through previous research.

After the definition of the problem and the determination of the objectives, a literature review on the theme allows understanding the state of the art and determining the transition from the theoretical to the empirical part. Before proceeding with the empirical testing, the literature review highlights the theoretical foundation of this research according to the research objectives. This literature review allows assuming a holistic vision on these phenomena to after understanding what are the existing gaps and, hence, to reach a clear range of ideas to test.

In order to enhance the theoretical analysis with an empirical research and drive it towards interesting results, data are collected and analysed, to after interpret and verify the predicted results. The empirical section consists in a case study analysis in order to test the above-mentioned research questions. In fact, the case study is “a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989). It combines different data collection methods, such as archives, interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The evidence may be both qualitative, quantitative or both.

Chapters III and IV are conceived in order to develop and find the right indicators able to measure brand equity. The final step is theory verification.

The research design follows the positivist approach, which considers a precise research path that starts with the study of literature and proceeds with the empirical support through data collection and the measure of the issues of the research. Creswell (2009, p. 11) refers to selected strategies of inquiring into the meaning of the “types of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs or models that provide specific direction for procedures in a research design”.

To test the CBBE model adopted in this dissertation, it has been selected a destination in order to proceed with the case study analysis: Napoli (Italy), the chief town of the Campania region. In the recent years, and particularly during 2015 and 2016, Napoli is investing in attracting the national and international MICE target in order to promote itself as a destination where to hold any kind of events. This is why in 2015 the Convention Bureau Napoli has born, a network of private firms aiming at enhancing the network capabilities and the competitiveness of Napoli as a MICE destination.

The data have been collected through online interviews with the participants of two important events that occurred in Napoli during 2016: the XXV Anniversary of MPI Italia Chapter and the International Conference on Tourism (ICOT). The participants to the events were asked to rate the pre-selected brand equity variables (see Chapter III) with reference to Napoli as a MICE destination. The collected data allow testing the proposed brand equity measurement model and answering to the research questions. The empirical analysis is conducted through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

Then, the results have been discussed with the Convention Bureau Napoli managerial staff, in order to understand both the positive and negative perceptions of the city to then better position the brand of Napoli as a MICE destination.

## **1.5 Contributions of the study within destination brand equity**

### **literature**

This dissertation aims at providing new insights into theory and practice to the stream of destination brand equity management research. Even if the concept of brand equity has already been analysed in the academic literature, it has mainly been connected to leisure destinations. This research attempts to contribute to the still developing literature regarding the brand equity architecture process for MICE destinations, focusing on the case of a city that is recently trying to create/reinvent its brand associations and perceptions in order to attract the business target. This repositioning activity implies great efforts in terms of the recognition of the target needs and perceptions of the destination itself. In this sense, to identify the main brand equity dimensions and their related empirical variables has helped testing the demand perceptions and associations of the city as a MICE destination. In the same direction, the analysis of the Convention Bureau perspective supported in figuring out its branding programs and the actions that must be realized in order to measure their effectiveness with respect to the demand responses.

The theoretically developed and empirically tested model complements previous research findings on the destination brand perceptions by its end consumers, comparing it to the supply expectations and related activities. The dissertation aims at

contributing to the further conceptualization and operationalization of destination brand equity in the context of MICE industry.

The current research will provide a useful framework for destination managers who have to develop successful and coherent branding strategies, so that the relationship with the end consumer can be strengthened. The findings may be valuable to DMOs and/or Convention Bureaus that are responsible for developing and maintaining strong the brand equity of the destinations in which they operate.



## CHAPTER II

### *REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE*

#### **2. 1 The main literature trends on brand equity**

The concept of brand equity emerged in the 1980s: during the past few decades, it has become one of the major areas of interest for managers and marketing researchers due to its crucial role as a key intangible asset in the firm's pool of resources.

Before examining the contents of the research issues, this chapter proceeds with an in-depth analysis of the main literature trends on brand equity. The first step of the current literature review is the search of academic articles through different bibliographic electronic databases including Emerald, Business Source Premier (EBSCO) and Google Scholar. After a separate research in these databases, the results have been matched.

For the purpose of the present study, some different keywords are used for the selection of the papers. These are: “brand equity”, “costumer-based brand equity”, “brand equity measurement”, “brand equity + destination” and “brand equity + MICE destination”. There have been selected only the papers that include the mentioned keywords in their title or in their abstract.

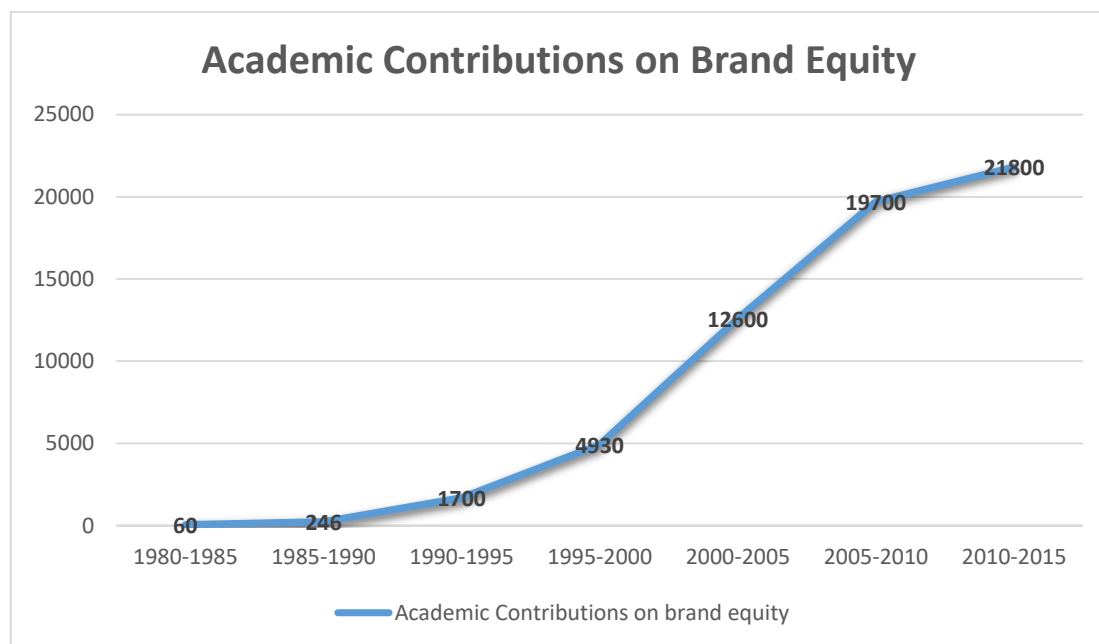
The chosen journals have the feature to belong to the research streams of strategic management, marketing and tourism management. They have been selected among the top rated journals by GEV (2016) and AIDEA (2016).

The selected contributions are both theoretical and empirical. As for the empirical analysis, the principal implemented tools are case studies and comparative studies through surveys.

Graph 2.1 – 2.4 shows on the X-axis the "Year" and on the Y-axis the number of papers published in the period 1980-2016 that include the above-mentioned keywords.

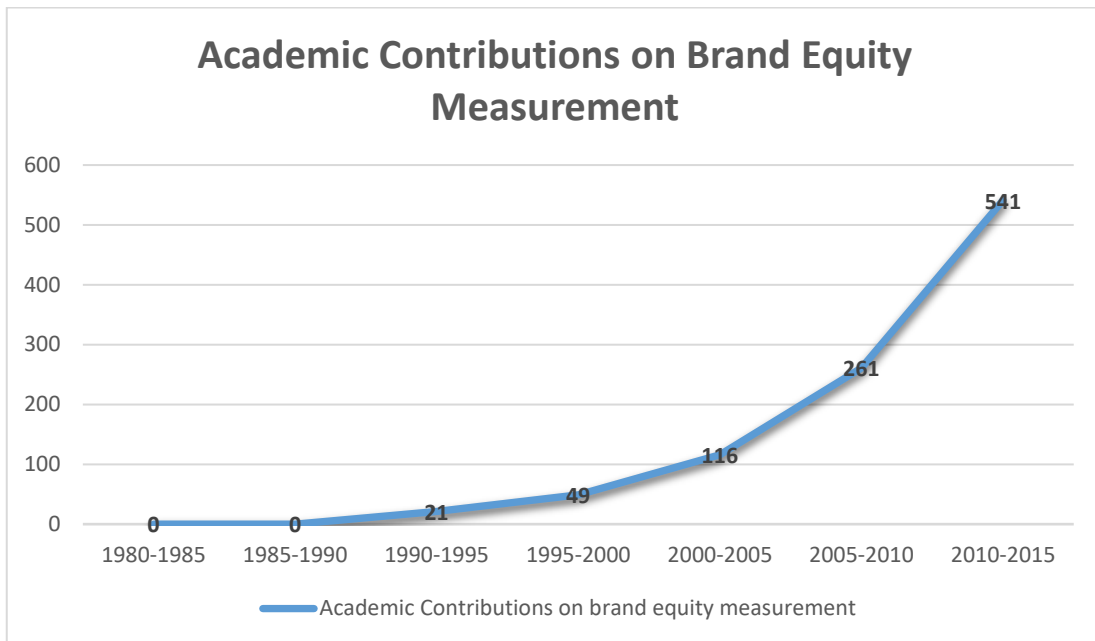
The charts demonstrate that the theme of brand equity has grown since the 1990s and has become a subject of great research interest since 2000s, while the contributions on brand equity measurement are less conspicuous since it is a more specific subject that started to be deepened only around 1995.

**Graph 2.1: Academic contributions on brand equity from 1980 to 2015**



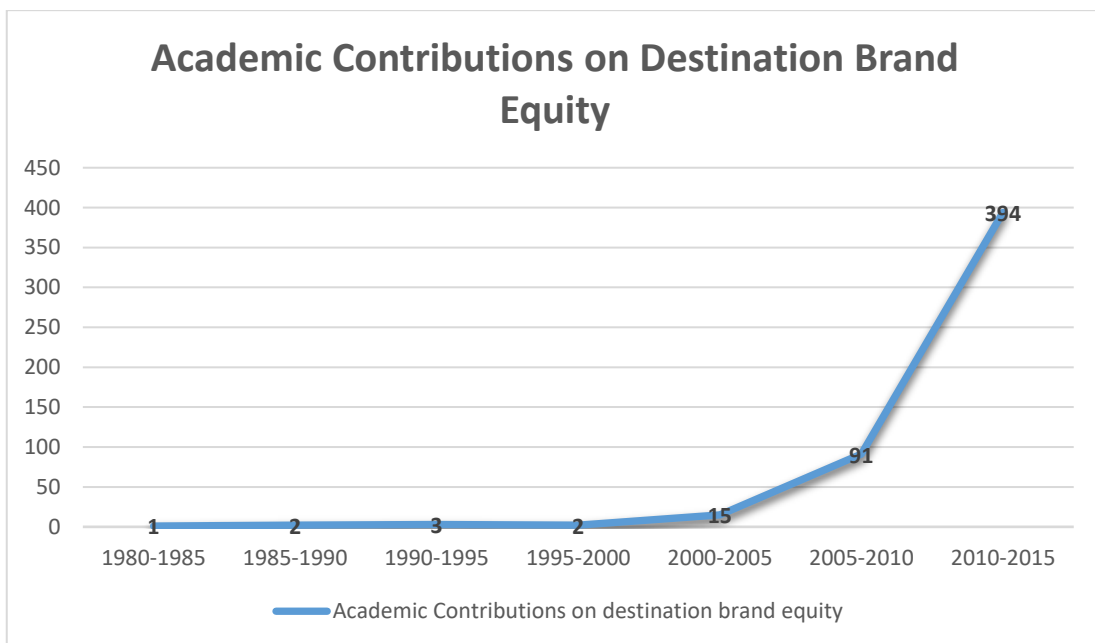
Source: Own elaboration.

**Graph 2.2 – Academic contributions on brand equity measurement 1980/2015**



Source: Own elaboration.

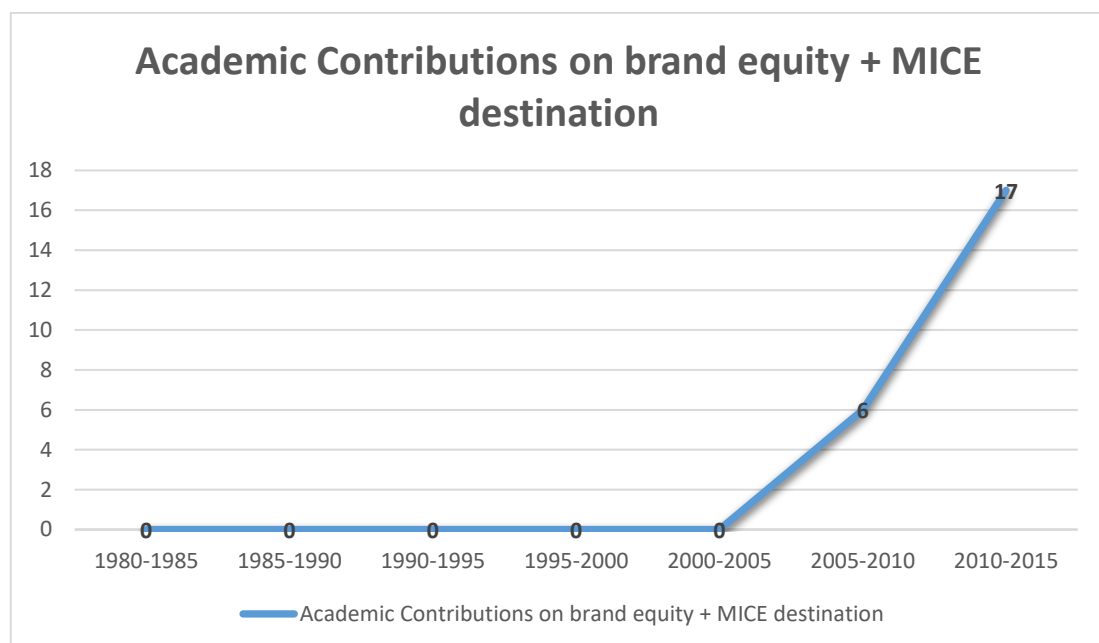
**Graph 2.3 – Academic contributions on destination brand equity 1980/2015**



Source: Own elaboration.

The theme of destination brand equity began to be analysed around 2005, but the amount of research is quite low if compared to the studies on brand equity related to industry products. As concerns the application of brand equity to MICE destinations, the theme has not been object of study until 2005, and an in-depth analysis is still at the beginning (see Chapter III). The present study attempts to fill this research gap.

**Graph 2.4 – Academic contributions on brand equity + MICE destination 1980/2015**



Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2.1 displays the main journals where the selected papers have been published: the biggest amount of research on brand equity is published on Journal of Marketing, Management Decision and European Journal of Marketing. As for the tourism journals, the principal one dealing with the theme of brand equity is Tourism Management.

**Table 2.1 – Main journals with published papers on brand equity**

<i>JOURNALS</i>	<i>PAPERS</i>
<i>Journal of Marketing</i>	3.660
<i>Management Decision</i>	2.060
<i>European Journal of Marketing</i>	1.660
<i>Journal of Business Strategy</i>	650
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	517
<i>Journal of Marketing Research</i>	219
<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i>	213
<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	193
<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing</i>	153
<i>Tourism Management</i>	153
<i>International Journal of Advertising</i>	135
<i>Journal of Services Marketing</i>	114
<i>International Marketing Review</i>	110
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	89

Source: Own elaboration.

Previous academic works on the theme (Yoo, 2000; Christodoulides & de Chernatony, 2010; Szocs, 2014) have collected the principal and most cited definitions of brand equity, which are grouped together in Table 2.2.

The literature reveals that academics, until now, have not agreed on a universally accepted brand equity concept and meaning (Vazquez et al., 2002, Keller, 2003) as well as on a standardized measurement system (Washburn & Plank, 2002). Rather, brand equity is intended as a multidimensional concept that “depends on which knowledge structures are present in the consumers’ minds and which actions a company can take to capitalise on the potential offered by these knowledge structures” (Farjam & Hongyi, 2016).

One of the most widely accepted interpretation of brand equity has been elaborated by Aaker (1991), who conceptualized it as:

*“a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers”.*

Keller (1993, p.2) described brand equity as “the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand”.

Farquhar (1989) stated brand equity is the added value endowed by the brand to the product. Vázquez et al. (2002) defined brand equity as the utility that the consumer associates to the use and consumption of the brand.

Clow and Baack (2005) considered brand equity as a set of characteristics that make a brand unique in the marketplace, allowing the firm to charge a higher price and retaining a greater market share than would be possible with an unbranded product.

In fact, quality branded products stimulate people to pay a premium price, particularly if the brand has an image with which they would like to be associated. The challenge is to find the level of premium price still acceptable in exchange for the confidence embedded in the brand (Keegan et al., 1995).

**Table 2.2 – Main definitions on brand equity**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Leuthesser (1988)</b>	The set of associations and behaviours on the part of the brand’s consumers, channel members, and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it would without the brand name and that gives the brand a strong, sustainable, and differentiated advantage over competitors.
<b>Farquhar (1989)</b>	Added value endowed by the brand to the product
<b>Aaker (1991)</b>	Set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers.
<b>Barwise (1993)</b>	A utility not explained by measured attributes – a differentiated, clear image that goes beyond simple product preference

<b>Keller (1993)</b>	The differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand
<b>Simon &amp; Sullivan (1993)</b>	Cash flow differences between a scenario where the brand name is added to a company product and another scenario where the same product does not have a brand name.
<b>Swait et al. (1993)</b>	The consumer's implicit valuation of the brand in a market with differentiated brands relative to a market with no brand differentiation. Brands act as a signal or cue regarding the nature of product and service quality and reliability and image/status.
<b>Rangaswamy et al. (1993)</b>	Favourable impressions, attitudinal dispositions, and behavioural predilections
<b>Lassar, Mittal &amp; Sharma (1995)</b>	The enhancement in the perceived utility and Desirability a brand name confers on a product
<b>Broniarczyk &amp; Alba (1994)</b>	The value a brand name adds to a product
<b>Park &amp; Srinivasan (1994)</b>	The difference between overall brand preference and multi-attributed preference based on objectively measured attribute levels The added value endowed by the brand to the product as perceived by a consumer
<b>Keegan, Moriarty &amp; Duncan (1995)</b>	The value attached to a brand because of the powerful relationship that has been developed between the brand and customers and other stakeholders over time The incremental price that a customer will pay for a brand versus the price for a comparable product or service without a brand name on it A long-term relationship with those people who loyally buy the brand over and over again
<b>Aaker (1996)</b>	Brand equity is: (1) Loyalty (brand's real or potential price premium), (2) loyalty (customer satisfaction based), (3) perceived comparative quality, (4) perceived brand leadership, (5) perceived brand value (brand's functional benefits), (6) brand personality, (7) consumers perception of organization (trusted, admired or credible), (8) perceived differentiation to competing brands, (9) brand awareness (recognition & recall), (10) market position (market share), prices and distribution coverage.
<b>Keller et al. (1998)</b>	The differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand
<b>Kerin &amp; Sethuraman (1998)</b>	Off-balance sheet intangible brand properties embedded in a company's brand
<b>Yoo et al., (2000)</b>	The difference in consumer choice between a branded and unbranded product, given the same level of features
<b>Vázquez et al. (2002)</b>	The utility that the consumer associates to the use and consumption of the brand.
<b>Ailawadi et al. (2003)</b>	Outcomes that accrue to a product with its brand name compared with those that would accrue if the same product did not have the brand name"
<b>Baldauf et al. (2003)</b>	Reflection of the premium price the firm charges for a strong brand combined with the sales it is able to attract compared to other average brands in the same product category
<b>Clow &amp; Baack (2005)</b>	Set of characteristics that make a brand unique in the marketplace

<b>Kotler &amp; Keller (2006)</b>	A bridge between the marketing investments in the company's products to create the brands and the customers' brand knowledge
<b>Mohd Yasin et al. (2007)</b>	Consumers' favouritism towards the focal brand in terms of their preference, purchase intention and choice among brands in a product category, that offers the same level of product benefits as perceived by the consumers.

**Source:** Own elaboration from Yoo, (2000), Christodoulides & de Chernatony, (2010), Szocs, (2014).

As it can be seen in Table 2.2, an important characteristic that almost all authors include in their definition of brand equity is:

***“the incremental effect created by the brand compared with what the customer response would be if same product or service were unbranded”.***

Various authors (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Buil et al., 2008; Christodoulides et al., 2015) have also demonstrated that the power of brand equity can be especially important in international marketing. In fact, global brands are characterized by international presence and visibility, hence acquiring equity makes it easier for them to expand. Besides, managers need to build equity by relying on their specific knowledge about the experience and behaviours of different market segments.

To manage brands profitably, managers must successfully design and implement a brand equity measurement system: it is a set of research procedures designed to provide timely and actionable information to implement the best possible tactical decisions in the short-term and the best strategic decisions in the long-term. A brand equity measurement system provides a comprehensive examination of a brand for assessing its health, reveals its main sources of advantage for both firms and consumers and suggest ways to improve and leverage that equity (Keller, 2013).



Once marketers have determined the brand positioning strategy, they are ready to implement a marketing program to create, strengthen or maintain brand associations. Brand tracking studies collect information from consumers on a routine basis over time, typically through quantitative measures of brand performance on a number of key dimensions, marketers can identify in the brand audit or by other means (Keller, 2013).

Effective brand management also requires a long-term management perspective in order to recognize any change in the brand marketing program on the basis of the consumers' behaviour, which affects the success of future marketing programs. A long-term view also supports the creation of proactive strategies designed to maintain and enhance customer-based brand equity over time and reactive strategies to revitalize a brand that encounters some market difficulties.

Until now, the academic research has attempted to measure brand equity with the use of a variety of financial techniques (Farquhar et al., 1991, Simon & Sullivan, 1993; Swait et al., 1993, Kapferer, 1997; Baalbaki, 2012). More recently, brand equity has increasingly been analysed and measured in customer-based contexts (Keller, 1993) to include effects on brand preferences, purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995, van Osselaer & Alba, 2000), and brand extensions (Rao & Ruekert, 1994).

As already mentioned in Chapter I, this research takes into consideration the Consumer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model: as it has already been confirmed by the academic literature (among others: Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993; Yoo & Donthu, 2001) the consumer perspective is the one that better fit the brand equity measurement for a destination.

## **2.2. The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE)**

The Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) approach is the dominant perspective adopted by the majority of academics and practitioners in marketing research: the reason relies on the assumption that if a brand has no meaning or value for the consumer, it is meaningless also to investors, manufacturers, or retailers (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995).

The core assumption of the CBBE concept is that the power of a brand resides in what customers have learned, felt, seen, and heard about the brand because of their experiences over time. Therefore, the greatest challenge for marketers in building a strong brand is ensuring that the customers link the right type of thoughts, feelings, images, perceptions, opinions to products/services, so that they link their desired experiences to the brand.

One of the first authors who provided a definition of CBBE was Keller (1993), who explained that brand equity occurs when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong and unique brand associations in its memory. CBBE can be defined as “the differential effect that the brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (Keller, 1993, p.1). A brand has a positive CBBE when consumers react more favourably to a marketed product than when it is not. Therefore, customers might be more inclined to new brand extensions and less sensitive to price increases, or more willing to seek the brand in new distribution channels (Keller, 2003; Cobb-Walgren et al, 1995; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). On the other hand, when a brand has a negative CBBE, consumers react less favourably to marketing activities for the brand compared with an unnamed or fictitiously named version of the same product (Aaker, 1991).

Szőcs (2014) mentioned that CBBE is a decision support tool that sets up a useful diagnosis for managers about the ideas consumers have about the brand: in this sense, CBBE can be best formulated as a construct caused by brand-related associations. In order to provide managers with recommendations on how to manage their brand equity or on how to study its constituent components, it is fundamental to develop a better understanding of the principal CBBE measurement models developed in the academic literature.

### 2.3 Measuring brand equity: components and indicators

Taleghani et al. (2011) selected the most cited brand equity studies from the recent literature: they provide valuable insights into the body of CBBE as well as the related variables chosen by the authors (Table 2.3).

**Table 2.3: Most cited studies on brand equity and the selected variables**

Author	Dimensions of Brand Equity	Related Findings
<b>Aaker (1991)</b>	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations	Four dimensions of brand equity represent customer perceptions of the brand and could be applied Across markets and products.
<b>Keller (1993)</b>	Brand awareness, brand image	When the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favourable, strong, and unique brand associations in the memory, then customer-based brand equity occurs.
<b>Park &amp; Srinivasan (1994)</b>	Brand associations (Attribute-based and non-attribute-based component of brand equity)	The non-attribute-based component of brand equity appears to play a more dominant role in determining a brand's equity.

<b>Lane &amp; Jacobson (1995)</b>	Brand attitude, brand name familiarity The stock market participants' responses to brand extension	Announcements depend on brand attitude and familiarity.
<b>Cobb-Walgren et al. (1995)</b>	Perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations, advertising awareness	The brand with greater advertising budget yielded substantially higher levels of brand equity. In turn, the brand with the higher equity generated significantly greater preference and purchase intentions.
<b>Aaker (1996)</b>	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness, brand associations	Four dimensions of brand equity represent customer perceptions of the brand and could be applied across markets and products.
<b>Yoo et al. (2000)</b>	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness/associations	Brand equity is positively related to perceived quality, brand loyalty, and brand associations. The relationship of perceived quality and brand associations to brand equity is much weaker than the relationship of brand loyalty to brand equity.
<b>Berry (2000)</b>	Brand awareness, brand meaning (customer's dominant perceptions)	Positive service brand equity emerges from the synergy of brand awareness and brand meaning.
<b>Yoo &amp; Donthu (2001)</b>	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand awareness/associations	A multidimensional brand equity scale is validated across Americans, Korean Americans and Koreans samples.
<b>Bravo Gil (2007)</b>	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand Awareness, brand associations	Brand loyalty is much closer to the concept of overall brand equity than brand Awareness-associations and perceived quality.
<b>Atilgan et al. (2009)</b>	Brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand Awareness, Brand associations, Brand Trust	Emergence of brand trust as a new dimension instead of brand awareness complies well with recent literature on global branding,
<b>Mishra &amp; Datta (2011)</b>	Brand Name, Brand Communication, Brand Association, Brand Personality, Brand Awareness, Brand Image, Perceived Brand quality, Brand Loyalty	Importance of the effect of the brand assets treated as antecedents like brand name, awareness, personality and consequences like brand preference and purchase

		intention on customer-based brand equity.
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**Source:** Taleghani et al. (2011).

A deep comprehension of the brand equity measurement variables is critical for brand managers and particularly important in assessing the brand value (Keller, 1993). Understanding the dimensions of brand equity to then invest in growing this intangible assets raise the competitive barriers and drives brand wealth (Yoo, Donthu & Lee 2000).

In the academic literature, some efforts in leading to an agreement on a brand equity measurement are recognized. In fact, the majority of the authors who realized academic studies on the theme (among the others, Motameni & Shahrokhi 1998; Yoo & Donthu 2001; Bendixen et al. 2004; Kim et al. 2003; Faircloth et al., 2001) agreed that Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) suggested two valid varieties of measures and methods to estimate brand equity.

In the following sub-paragraphs, there are discussed Aaker's brand equity model and Keller's CBBE pyramid. The present research follows the line of these authors who claim the CBBE is an asset of four dimensions that could be summarized as brand awareness, brand associations/brand image, perceived quality and brand loyalty.

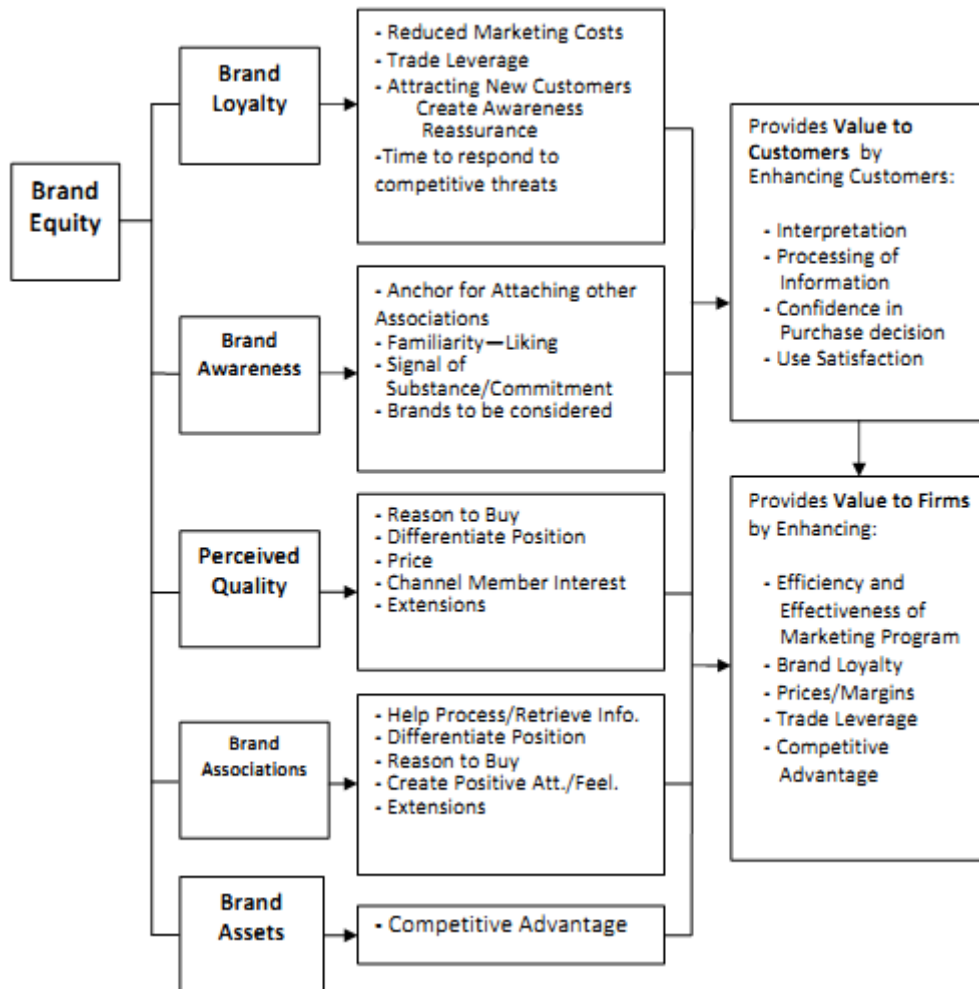
### **2.3.1 Aaker's brand equity model**

Aaker (1991) provided the most comprehensive brand equity measurement model (Figure 2.1), which consists of four different assets considered as the source of the brand value creation:

1. brand awareness;

2. brand associations/brand image;
3. perceived brand quality;
4. brand loyalty.

**Figure 2.1 – Aaker’s Customer-Based Brand Equity framework**



Source: Aaker, (1991; 1996).

#### *2.3.1.1 Brand awareness*

Awareness is a key determinant identified in almost all brand equity models (Aaker 1991; Kapferer 1991; Keller, 1992; Agarwal & Rao, 1996; Krishnan, 1996; Bong Na et al., 1999, Maio Mackay, 2001).

It refers to “the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category” (Aaker, 1991, p.61). At the recognition level, awareness provides the brand with a sense of the familiarity and commitment; at the recall level, it affects choice by influencing what brands are considered and selected. For many companies, brand awareness is pivotal since it generates a high level of purchase, mainly because consumers are likely to buy the brands they are familiar with enhancing the firm’s profitability and sales (Baldauf et al., 2003; Molinillo et al., 2017).

Creating high levels of brand awareness leads to three fundamental advantages (Aaker, 1991):

1. learning advantages: brand awareness influences the formation and the strength of the associations that make up the brand image. It helps establishing a brand node in memory that affects how easily the consumer learns and stores additional brand associations;
2. consideration advantages: the more consumers are aware of the brand, the more they consider it whenever they are making a purchase for which it could fulfill their need. Much research has shown that consumers are rarely loyal to only one brand, but have a set of brands they would consider buying and another set of brands they actually buy on a regular basis: making sure that the brand is in

the consideration set also makes other brands less likely to be considered or recalled;

3. choice advantages: in low-involvement decision settings, a minimum level of brand awareness may be sufficient for product choice, even in the absence of a well-formed attitude.

Brand awareness is the first step a customer has to develop to then acquire a set of brand associations (Washburn & Plank 2002).

#### *2.3.1.2 Brand associations/brand image*

Brand associations/brand image is perhaps the most accepted dimension of brand equity (Aaker, 1992), since it includes anything linked in customers' memory to a brand, such as product attributes, customer benefits, lifestyles, competitors and countries. Associations help customers retrieve information, are the basis for differentiation and extensions, provide a reason to buy and create positive feelings (Aaker, 1991, 1992). They represent "the basis for purchase decision and brand loyalty" (Aaker 1991, p. 109).

Some researchers (Farquhar & Herr 1993, Chen et al., 2016; Brown & Dacin 1997, Biel, 1992) identify two different types of associations.

First, product associations include functional attribute associations and non-functional associations. The first are the tangible features of a product (Keller, 1993; Hankinson & Cowking 1993; de Chernatony & McWilliam, 1989; Pitta & Katsanis 1995; Lassar et al., 1995). If a brand does not perform the functions it is designed for, the brand has a low level of brand equity.



Non-functional attributes include symbolic attributes (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, Farquhar & Herr, 1993, Park et al., 1986), which are the product intangible features that meet consumers' needs (Keller, 1993; Hankinson & Cowking 1993; de Chernatony & McWilliam, 1989; Pitta & Katsanis, 1995), such as:

- a) *social image*, which refers to the perception the consumer's social group holds about the brand (Lassar et al., 1995);
- b) *perceived value*, defined as the perceived balance between product utility and its costs (Feldwick, 1996, Martin & Brown, 1991; Lassar et al., 1995);
- c) *trustworthiness*, defined as the confidence consumers place in the firm and in the firm's communications (Lassar et al., 1995);
- d) *differentiation/distinctiveness*, which facilitates the processing and retrieval of information (Hoyer & Brown 1990), allows price premium and contributes to the success of a brand (Kapferer, 1991);
- e) *country of origin*, which is "the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its customers" (Thakor & Kohli, 1996, p.27). In fact, less concern is given to the place where firms effectively manufacture their products, and more to the place people perceive as the brand's country of origin.

Secondly, organizational associations are related to the company's expertise in producing and delivering its outputs and to corporate social responsibility (CSR) associations (Chen et al., 2016). CSR must be mentioned as another concept that is influencing the development of brands popularity nowadays, especially corporate brands (Blumenthal & Bergstrom, 2003; McAdam & Leonard, 2003).

#### *2.3.1.3 Brand perceived quality*

Perceived quality is viewed as a dimension of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Kapferer 1991; Kamakura & Russell 1993; Martin & Brown 1991; Feldwick 1996) rather than as a part of the brand associations (Keller, 1992; Gordon et al., 1994). It is the customer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority, which can differ from its objective quality (Zeithaml, 1988). Aaker (1992) explained it provides a reason to buy, differentiating the brand and justifying a higher price (Olson & Jacoby, 1972; Ophuis & Van Trijp, 1995; Acebrón & Dopico 2000). Zeithaml (1988) and Steenkamp and Dekimpe (1997) classify the concept of perceived quality in two groups of factors: intrinsic attributes and extrinsic attributes. The intrinsic attributes are related to the physical aspects of a product (e.g. colour, flavour, form and appearance); extrinsic attributes are related to brand name, price, store, packaging and production information.

#### *2.3.1.4 Brand loyalty*

Loyalty is a core dimension of brand equity. Aaker (1991) defines brand loyalty as the attachment that a customer has to a brand. It generates value by reducing marketing costs and leveraging trade: loyal customers expect the brand to be always available and tend to advise others to use it. Grembler and Brown (1996) describe different levels of loyalty: behavioural loyalty is linked to the consumer behaviour in the marketplace, i.e. the number of repeated purchases (Keller, 1998) or the commitment to rebuy the brand as a primary choice (Oliver, 1997, 1999). Cognitive loyalty means that a brand comes up first in consumers' mind when a purchase decision arises. The cognitive loyalty is closely linked to the highest level of awareness, i.e. top-of-mind

awareness (Keller 1998). Aaker (1996) identify price premium as the basic indicator of loyalty.

### **2.3.2 Keller's brand equity pyramid**

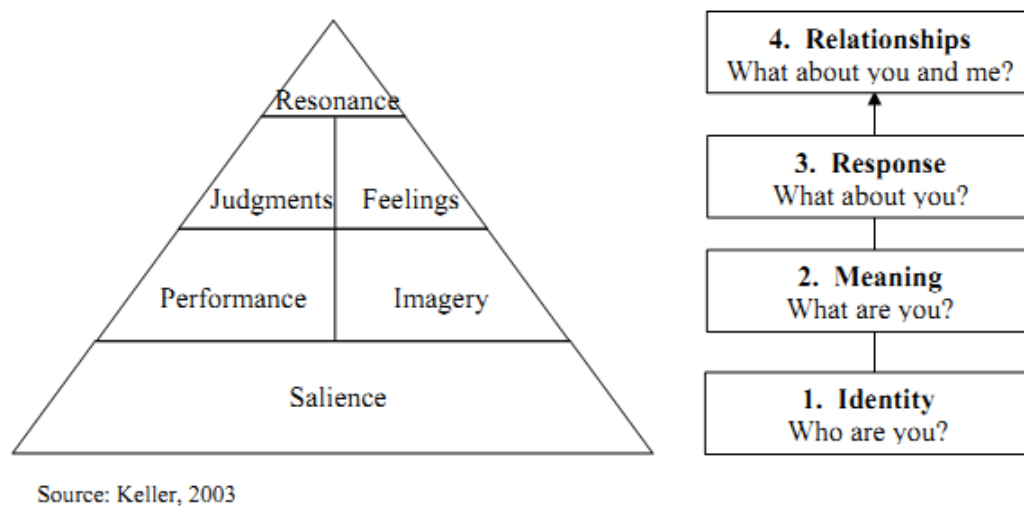
Keller (1993) conceptualized the brand as a network, where the associations are considered as nodes. The concept behind brand equity is to influence how customers think and feel about the product/service, relying on positive experiences. Keller identified six brand equity elements (Figure 2.2): brand salience, brand performances, brand imagery, brand feelings, brand judgments and brand relationships.

Brand salience is a measure of the awareness of the brand (Keller, 2008). Building brand awareness involves making sure that customers understand the product or service category in which the brand competes (Keller, 2001). Based on Keller's model, the first step in building a strong brand is to ensure a correct brand identity and to create coherent associations in the customers' minds with a specific product class or need. Brand salience represents the range of purchase and consumption situations in which the brand can come to mind.

The second step of Keller's model is establishing a brand meaning by linking to it tangible and intangible brand associations. Brand meaning is, therefore, characterised in either functional – brand performance – or abstract – imagery – associations.

The brand response is the third step in Keller's model and represents the sum of opinions and evaluations about the brand based on a combination of associations. The judgments include overall quality, credibility, consideration and superiority, while brand feelings are customers' emotional responses and reactions to the brand (i.e. warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect – Keller, 2003).

**Figure 2.2 – Keller’s Customer-based Brand Equity pyramid**



Source: Keller (2008).

Brand relationships constitute the final step in the pyramid: the brand response is converted to create an intense and loyal relationship between customers and the brand. The pinnacle of the pyramid is resonance, which refers to the nature of this relationship. It is described by four elements: behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement (Keller, 2001). Responses cannot occur unless the right meaning has been developed and transmitted; the relationship cannot be forged unless the proper responses have been elicited (Keller, 2001).

## **2.4 Tourism destinations: building and measuring brand equity**

Otto and Ritchie (1996, p.103) defined a “destination brand” as “a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination: it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with

the destination. It also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience”.

For tourism destinations, the process of branding needs to incorporate the concept of the visitor experience (Boo et al., 2009; Ryan, 2002; Berry, 2000; Pine & Gilmore 1999). Research has demonstrated that although visitors purchase individual tourism services, the entire visitor experience is what is effectively bought (Otto, Ritchie, 1996). This concept addresses Aaker’s (1990) core branding concepts – identification and differentiation – and is linked to experience marketing (Pine & Gilmore 1999; Simonson & Schmitt, 1997).

The promise of a brand is just as important, if not even more, for destinations than for other product/service organizations: it extends a degree of comfort to visitors, as they can more fully and accurately anticipate their upcoming vacation experience. As for other service organizations, if the promise cannot be delivered, the visitor is dissatisfied.

One of the principal conceptual frameworks that directly relates to destination branding has been enunciated by Hankinson (2004), whose general model is built around the concept of brand networks. In this view, place branding performs four main functions:

1. communicator, since brands “represent a mark of ownership, and a means of product differentiation manifested in legally protected names, logos, and trademarks” (Hankinson, 2004; p. 110);
2. perceptual entity, “which appeal to the consumer senses, reasons, and emotions” (*ibidem*);
3. value enhancer, directly linked to the concept of brand equity;

4. relationships, where “the brand is conceived as having a personality, which enables it to form a relationship with the consumer” (Hankinson, 2004; p. 111).

The CBBE methodology originally proposed for product brands, as well as for services and organizations, has been applied for the first time to destinations by Konecnik and Gartner in 2007. Since then, various research studies have been made to test the validity of CBBE to tourism destinations (among the others: Bianchi et al., 2014; Boo et al., 2009; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Kladou & Kehagias, 2013; Pike, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2013; Pike et al., 2010). These authors recognized that destination brand equity reflects the perceptions/attitudes held by visitors.

Table 2.4 summarizes the brand dimensions most used in CBBE models applied to tourism destinations by the principal academic research on the theme.

**Table 2.4: CBBE models tested on tourism destinations**

Aaker (1991)	Konecnik & Gartner (2007)	Pike (2007)	Lee & Back (2008)	Boo et al. (2009)	Kladou & Kehagias (2014)
<b>Brand awareness</b> -awareness measures	<b>Brand awareness</b> -name -characteristics	<b>Brand salience</b> -top of mind associations and decision set	<b>Brand awareness</b> -name -characteristics	<b>Brand awareness</b> -name and reputation -characteristics -specialization -popularity	<b>Brand awareness</b> -name and reputation -characteristics -specialization -strong link to specialization
<b>Brand quality/ leadership</b> -perceived quality -popularity	<b>Brand quality</b> - accommodation -infrastructure -cleanliness -personal safety -cuisine	<b>Brand resonance</b> -previous visitation -intent to visit	<b>Brand satisfaction</b> -overall satisfaction -overall happiness with the previous experience	<b>Brand quality (as part of brand experience)</b> -consistent quality offerings -quality experiences -expectation of superior performance -superiority towards similar destinations	<b>Brand quality</b> -reliance on a good atmosphere -quality of cultural experiences -level of organization of the city's cultural aspects -educational benefits

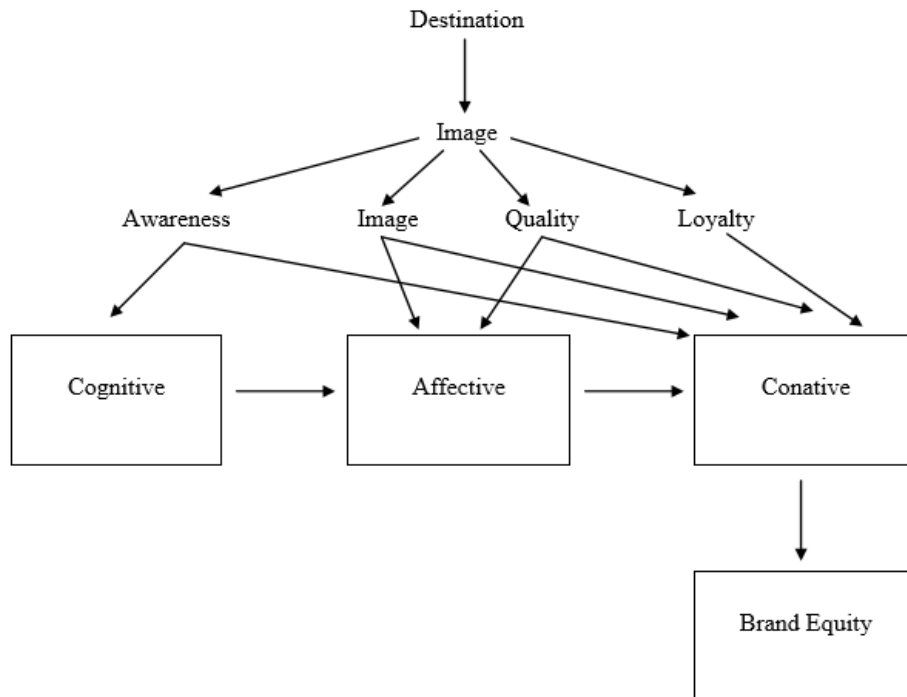
<b>Brand associations</b> -perceived value -brand personality -organizational associations	<b>Brand image/ associations</b> -destination attributes relevant for the given travel context	<b>Brand associations</b> -cognitive perception -affective perception	<b>Brand associations</b> -professional education -social networking -site selection -staff service -self-image congruence	<b>Brand image (as part of brand experience)</b> -personality fit -social approval -consistency with own self-image	<b>Brand associations</b> -culture -peers approval, self-image -self-congruence -exotic atmosphere -hospitable locals
<b>Brand loyalty</b> -price premium -satisfaction/loyalty	<b>Brand loyalty</b> -n. of previous visitations -time of last visitation -strong preference -perceived high number of benefits -intention to visit more -WOM	<b>Brand loyalty</b> -repeat visitation -word of mouth referral	<b>Attitudinal brand loyalty</b> -intention to revisit -commitment	<b>Brand loyalty</b> -enjoyment -commitment -WOM	<b>Brand loyalty</b> -enjoyment -strong preference -satisfaction -WOM
<b>Market behaviour</b> -market share -market price and distribution coverage	-	-	<b>Brand trust</b> -trust -reliance -integrity	<b>Brand value</b> -affordability -price/benefits	<b>Brand cultural assets</b> -entertainment/nightlife -cultural festivals -monuments/heritage sites -cuisine

Source: Own elaboration.

Among the principal studies on the theme, the CBBE evaluation for a tourist destination – CBBETD by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) adopted the Aaker's dimensions (Figure 2.3): awareness, image, quality and loyalty. Their research was also guided by three other components used extensively in the image research:

1. the cognitive component, at the base of awareness, represents what the visitor knows or thinks he knows about a destination;
1. the affective component, based on how the visitor feels about what he knows or think he knows about a destination;
2. the conative component, which is the action step, representing how the visitor acts with respect to the information he has acquired during the previous steps.

**Figure 2.3: Creation of brand equity for a destination brand**



Source: Konecnik, Gartner, (2007).

As shown in Figure 2.3, brand dimensions affect different components in the model. For example, awareness is most influential on the cognitive component, since without awareness there can be no brand equity. Image and quality appear to be more influential on the affective component, after awareness is assessed. Finally, loyalty comes into play in the conative component. The interrelationships among dimensions and their cumulative values are what gives rise to the creation of brand equity.

The model proposed by Boo et al. (2009, Figure 2.4) includes the following measurement assumptions:

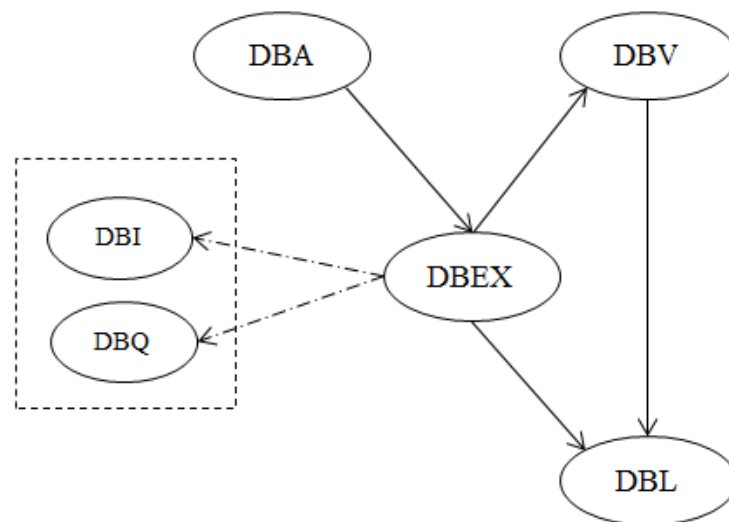
1. a destination brand could be measured by employing the concept of customer-based brand equity;



2. destination brands should be evaluated by comparison with other competitive destinations in the same destination brand category;
3. the destinations should be well-known among tourists;
4. tourists must have experienced the destination.

Destination brand experience can be considered an emerging concept of the destination brand equity measurement model, since it has a positive effect on destination brand value. Furthermore, destination brand awareness affects destination brand experience directly: in fact, top-of-mind awareness can be an important predictor of tourists' destination brand experiences. Boo et al. (2009) compared multiple destinations and offered enhanced insight into how tourists perceive a destination brand, indicating that a specification of the destination brand measurement model, free from the established relationships in the marketing literature, needs to be developed.

**Figure 2.4 - The CBBE model by Boo et al. (2009)**



Source: Boo et al. (2009). Note: *DBA* (Brand awareness), *DBI* (brand image), *DBQ* (brand quality), *DBEX* (brand experience), *DBV* (brand value), *DBL* (brand loyalty).

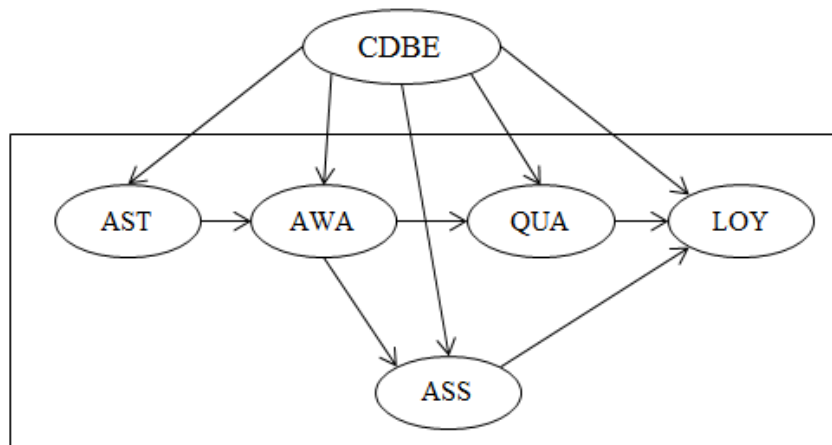
The recent and most cited studies on destination brand equity have been realized by Pike (2007, 2009, 2013), who applied the CBBE model to measure the performance of a tourism destination over time to see if any fluctuation in the brand perception occurred: he concluded that brand perceptions change at a very slow speed over time. The CBBE model was also applied to search structural relationships among destination brand equity dimensions and other latent constructs: for example, Ferns and Walls (2012) investigated the link among destination brand equity, travel involvement and visit intentions during pre-trip information search. Kim et al. (2009) searched on the relationships among destination brand equity, involvement, satisfaction and visit intentions.

There were also a few academic contributions attempting to adapt the CBBE model to specific research interests within tourism destination studies, i.e. Sartori et al. (2012) on regional destinations or Bianchi et al. (2014) on long-haul travellers.

Another important research made by Kladou and Kehagias (2014) proposed a CBBE model (Figure 2.5) measured for cultural destinations.

The authors added a fifth dimensions to the construct, represented by the cultural assets: they include heritage sites, monuments, traditions, cuisine, entertainment/nightlife, which help tourists to perceive the destination as unique and may influence familiarity. In Kladou and Kehagias' opinion, well-known and unique assets may have a strong influence on consumers' ability to recall and recognize the brand, generating an impact on awareness (Ferns & Walls, 2012; Dimanche, 2002; McKercher et al., 2006).

**Figure 2.5: The CDBE model by Kladou, Kehagias (2014)**



Source: Kladou & Kehagias (2014). *Note: CDBE: Cultural Destination Brand Equity, AST: assets, AWA: awareness, ASS: associations, QUA: quality, LOY: loyalty.*

The following sub-paragraphs analyse the principal brand equity dimensions identified in the literature with reference to destinations.

***Tourism destination awareness.*** This concept has mostly been investigated under the topic of the travel decision process (Goodall, 1993; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Howard & Jagdish, 1969). Awareness is a first and necessary step leading to trial and repeat purchase, but it is not sufficient: it may result just in product curiosity (Goodall, 1993; Fesenmaier et al., 1993). Nonetheless, only destinations about which the potential tourists are aware can be included in their perceived opportunity set. Awareness implies that an image of the destination exists in the minds of potential tourists (Gartner, 1993; Milman & Pizam, 1995).

***Tourism destination image.*** The research line on destination image started in the early 1970s (Gunn 1972; Hunt 1975) and remains a preferred area of study (Pike 2007). The topic has its roots in the marketing area (Gardner & Levy 1955), but it has also been

analysed within other disciplines such as anthropology, geography, sociology and semiotics (Gallarza et al., 2002). In spite of wide research interest on tourism destination image, there is no single and commonly accepted approach for what constitutes its conceptualization (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), its formation process (Gartner, 1993) and its operationalization (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993), but many steps have been taken within the last few years (Gallarza et al., 2002). Probably, the most universally acknowledged opinion is the acceptance of the important role played by the brand image in the destination evaluation and selection process (Echtner & Ritchie 1993; Gallarza et al., 2002; Hunt, 1975). It is considered as a significant factor in determining visitor choice (Lee et al., 2002), even if it is not always truly representative of what a place has to offer (Um & Crompton 1990). According to Echtner and Ritchie (1991, p.8), destination image is defined as “not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination”.

***Tourism destination quality.*** Only a few recent overviews of the brand image literature explicitly cover the topic of the perceived quality (Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Keane, 1997; Murphy et al., 2000; Weiermair & Fuchs, 1999). This is interesting since the tourist’s overall evaluation of a tourism destination is a combination of products, services and experiences, and quality is a vital element affecting consumer behaviour. Probably, the greatest issue when it comes to integrating quality into destination evaluation is how to operationalize the concept. The importance of price has been recognized by various authors (Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Crompton, 1979; Echtner & Ritchie 1993) as one of the most important extrinsic quality indicators,

while Baker and Crompton (2000) as well as Baloglu and McCleary (1999), identified in the ‘quality of experience’ one of the crucial factors in conceptualizing quality.

***Tourism destination loyalty.*** The concept of tourism destination loyalty has as its main indicators (Oppermann, 2000; Bigne et al., 2001; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991) repeat visitation (Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; Gitelson & Crompton, 1984) or intention to return (Ostrowski et al., 1993). Opperman (2000) suggested that destination loyalty should be investigated through a longitudinal perspective, looking at the lifelong visitation behaviour of tourists. In this way, behavioural loyalty can be considered as a reasonable predictor of future destination choice. Attitudinal tourism destination loyalty takes into account a person’s attitude with respect to the destination’s attributes: it can further influence the visitors’ intention to revisit or recommend a destination to others (Bigne et al., 2001). Word-of-mouth recommendations (Gartner, 1993; Gitelson & Crompton, 1983) appears to be an extremely important aspect of tourism destination loyalty.

## **2.5 Brand equity management and destination governance: the role of the DMOs**

“DMOs are the guardian of destination brands. They are responsible for the development, coordination and implementation of the destination network brand, working to induce images in the minds of consumers of destination experience” (Cox et al., 2014, p.85). In fact, the DMOs activities can be defined as:

*“the marketing activities that support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identify and differentiate a destination; that convey*

*the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; and that serve to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience, all with the intent purpose of creating an image that influences consumers' decisions to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an alternative one". (Blain et al., 2005, p.331).*

It is clear that "the ultimate goals of destination branding are identical to several important DMO objectives, firstly to attract visitors and expenditures to their respective destinations" (Blain et al., 2005, p. 337). In order to accomplish these objectives, DMOs need to develop a strong coordination with destination stakeholders in order to shape a common vision (Franch, 2010) and to develop a coherent brand: this will help delivering a consistent and high-quality destination experience to tourists.

Before the visit takes place and during the destination decision process, as consumers can choose among thousands of destinations to visit, brands can effectively stimulate awareness and communicate desired attributes to visitors, reducing search costs and influencing visitors' choice behaviours.

It is important to underline that, for DMOs, the promise to guarantee a positive tourism experience could be difficult to accomplish every time, given the variable nature of tourism products/services and the fact that not all the elements of the experience are under their control or influence. Therefore, measuring destination branding effectiveness is crucial in order to help DMOs to understand the visitors' perceptions about the destination identity and image before and after their visit, and to determine if the transmitted image matches with the experience and leads to satisfaction. In fact, if a DMO promotes an unrealistic or uncoherent image, visitors may be unsatisfied and

may negatively influence word-of-mouth; the repositioning of the brand is hard to accomplish (Blain et al., 2005). Another crucial role of DMOs in destination branding activities should also be focused on maintaining and enhancing visitor loyalty to ensure long-term destination success.

Some academic research demonstrates that many DMOs do not measure brand effectiveness and the results of their marketing strategies on a continual basis, if at all (Blain et al., 2005). The concept of CBBE proposed by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2003) and operationalized in the tourism industry by Konecnick and Gartner (2007), provides destination marketers a tool to measure how successfully the brand identity and the aspirational self-image planned and created by DMOs has been positioned in the market and in the consumers' minds (Pike et al., 2010) before and/or after the visit experience.

## CHAPTER III

### *BRAND EQUITY FOR MICE DESTINATIONS*

#### **3. 1 An overview of the status of the MICE industry**

During the last years, the MICE market has been listed among the most profitable segments of the international tourism industry. The World Travel Council (2013) demonstrates that it represents the 24% of the worldwide tourism business. Table 3.1 shows that in the last 10 years, with the only exception of 2011, the year of the economic downturn, the MICE industry has experienced a considerable growth, doubling the number of the association events organized all around the world (ICCA<sup>2</sup>, 2002 – 2015).

**Table 3.1 – The association events organized worldwide from 2002 to 2015**

<b>Year</b>	<b>#Events</b>
<b>2002</b>	6.155
<b>2003</b>	6.405
<b>2004</b>	7.642
<b>2005</b>	8.121
<b>2006</b>	8.745
<b>2007</b>	9.536
<b>2008</b>	10.149
<b>2009</b>	10.346
<b>2010</b>	10.406

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<sup>2</sup> ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association) is the global community and knowledge hub for the international association meetings industry, founded in 1963 at a time when the meetings industry was beginning to expand rapidly. ICCA's research department collects information on international association meetings and its statistics are considered official worldwide together with the UIA (Union of International Associations) rankings.



<b>2011</b>	10.070
<b>2012</b>	11.156
<b>2013</b>	11.685
<b>2014</b>	11.505
<b>2015</b>	12.078

Source: ICCA Worldwide rankings (2002 – 2015).

It is universally agreed among academics and practitioners that the growth and the development of the MICE industry has contributed in a significant way to some destinations' economic development. This is firstly because people who travel for business represent a more remunerative segment as they generate a 2/3 times higher spending per head compared to leisure tourists (ICCA, 2016), often on corporate or professional expenses. This means that business travellers stay, on average, in more expensive accommodation and select more costly restaurants and transportation options. At the same time, it has to be considered the host event organizers and the presence of exhibitors; all this spending is directly attributable to delegates participating to the event. Given its economic value, countries and destinations that aim at attracting the MICE target must encourage necessary developments to keep their offerings respecting global standards.

The MICE industry supports the destination's economic development because of the seasonal adjustments it implies within the overall travel and tourism industry: in fact, most of the MICE activity occurs during the off-peak seasons, which helps supporting the development and maintenance of the tourism infrastructures and facilities. The MICE activities grow the destination visitors' base by attracting people who are primarily attending events and who do not choose that destination exclusively for its own merits - people who might otherwise not have come at all.

The MICE industry also favours the local community with the enlargement of the leisure complementary activities (OICE, 2015), a better implementation of the hospitality firms, the occupation increase during the year and the employees' quality improvement. It has a direct positive effect on destination revenues and on its public services and infrastructures. Among the intangible advantages, it is important to underline the increase in destination popularity, the improvement of its brand/image, the professional growth of the local communities and the creation of networks and collaborative activities.

From a broader economic development perspective, meetings and conventions could attract business decision makers, and this can generate trade and investment potential for the destination. Besides, events in any discipline can attract to the destination among the best expertise in the world, which means local access to a high level of knowledge transfer and, vice versa, international exposure for local professionals. All these factors contribute in creating a strong and diverse return on investment in the business events industry.

The MICE sector reveals several complementarities with the other tourism typologies, stimulating operators to a strong territorial integration: the MICE product is, in fact, systemic and characterized by a high level of interdependencies. The territorial resource sharing and the uniform perception conference attendees have of the destination push the collaboration among the different operators of the MICE and tourist supply chain (Del Chiappa, 2008).

During 2015, there have been organized more than 12,000 events around the world (ICCA, 2015). Among the countries that hosted the majority of international events in the last years, at the 1<sup>st</sup> position we find the USA, followed by Germany, UK and Spain

(ICCA Worldwide Ranking, 2015). Italy, in the last 3-years period, remains stable at the 6<sup>th</sup> position (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 – ICCA Worldwide Ranking 2014-2015: number of meetings per country**

2014	Rank	Country	# Meetings	2015
	1	USA	831	
	2	Germany	659	
	3	Spain	578	
	4	UK	543	
	5	France	533	
	6	<b>Italy</b>	<b>452</b>	
	7	Japan	337	
	8	China – P.R.	332	
	9	Netherlands	307	
	10	Brasil	291	
	Rank	Country	# Meetings	
	1	USA	925	
	2	Germany	667	
	3	UK	582	
	4	Spain	572	
	5	France	522	
	6	<b>Italy</b>	<b>504</b>	
	7	Japan	355	
	8	China – P.R.	333	
	9	Netherlands	333	
	10	Canada	308	

Source: ICCA Worldwide Rankings 2014 – 2015.

**Table 3.3 - ICCA Europe Ranking 2014-2015: number of meetings per country**

2014	Rank 2014	Country	# Meetings	2015
	1	Germany	659	
	2	Spain	578	
	3	UK	543	
	4	France	533	
	5	<b>Italy</b>	<b>452</b>	
	6	Netherlands	307	
	7	Austria	287	
	8	Sweden	238	
	9	Portugal	229	
	10	Switzerland	226	
	Rank 2015	Country	# Meetings	
	1	Germany	667	
	2	UK	582	
	3	Spain	572	
	4	France	522	
	5	<b>Italy</b>	<b>504</b>	
	6	Netherlands	333	
	7	Portugal	278	
	8	Austria	258	
	9	Belgium	216	
	10	Turkey	211	

Source: ICCA Worldwide Rankings 2014 – 2015.

**Table 3.4 – ICCA Europe Ranking 2014-2015: number of meetings per city**

2014	Rank 2014	European Cities	#Meetings	2015
	1	Paris	214	
	2	Vienna	202	
	3	Madrid	200	
	4	Berlin	193	
	5	Barcelona	182	
	6	London	166	
	7	Singapore	142	
	8	Amsterdam	133	
	9	Istanbul	130	
	10	Prague	118	
	11	Brussels	112	
	12	Lisbon	109	
	13	Copenhagen	105	
	14	Beijing	104	
	15	Seoul	99	
	16	Hong Kong	98	
	17	Budapest	97	
	18	Rome	97	
	Rank 2015	European Cities	# Meetings	
	1	Berlin	195	
	2	Paris	186	
	3	Barcelona	180	
	4	Vienna	178	
	5	London	171	
	6	Madrid	171	
	7	Istanbul	148	
	8	Lisbon	145	
	9	Copenhagen	138	
	10	Prague	123	
	11	Amsterdam	120	
	12	Brussels	117	
	13	Rome	99	

Source: ICCA Worldwide Rankings 2014 – 2015.

As regards the European MICE industry, in 2015 the country that hosted the highest number of meetings has been Germany, while Italy is positioned 5<sup>th</sup> (Table 3.3).

For what concerns the number of meetings per European city, the first MICE destination in 2015 has been Berlin, followed by Paris, Barcelona and Vienna. The first Italian destination in Europe is Rome, located at the 13<sup>th</sup> position with 99 meetings (Table 3.4). The Italian MICE market, in spite of some standstill and a general re-modulation around the contemporary needs of the demand, is on the rise: many Italian Institutions and private actors demonstrate a concrete intention in investing in the MICE sector in their destination. During 2015, beyond Rome, the Italian cities that hosted the highest number of meetings have been Milan, Florence, Turin and Bologna.

Napoli is at the 6<sup>th</sup> position and in 2015 experienced a significant escalation among the European MICE destination, moving from the 110<sup>th</sup> position to the 73<sup>rd</sup> position (Figure 3.5).

**Table 3.5 - ICCA Italy Ranking 2014 – 2015: number of meetings per city**

Rank 2014	Rank in Europe	Italian Cities	# Meetings	Rank 2015	Rank in Europe	Italian Cities	# Meetings
1	14	Rome	97	1	13	Rome	99
2	23	Milan	58	2	16	Milan	93
3	36	Florence	34	3	34	Florence	43
4	50	Turin	27	4	64	Turin	22
5	57	Venice	24	5	70	Bologna	20
6	76	Bologna	17	<b>6</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>Naples</b>	<b>20</b>
7	105	Genova	13	7	79	Venice	19
<b>8</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>Naples</b>	<b>12</b>	8	91	Verona	17
9	126	Bolzano	9	9	115	Messina	12
10	136	Padova	8	10	120	Trento	11

2014

2015

Source: ICCA Worldwide Rankings 2014 – 2015.

### 3.2 The Convention Bureau and its role in developing a strong brand for a MICE destination

As already mentioned in the previous paragraph, several destinations worldwide have become aware of the economic and cultural value of the MICE industry. Therefore, the destination managers seek to attract MICE events, especially if large and international, by providing high-quality meeting facilities in their country/destination and by offering financial services and organizational support. The destination public bodies can generally provide two kinds of assistance to event organizers (Bensi et al., 2016):

1. the city Convention Bureau (CB), which offers a series of free-of-charge services in order to attract big events, to take care of the event organization and marketing, to plan post-events city tours and social activities, transport solutions, welcome receptions for delegates etc.;
2. the provision of financial support by the State or the regional/city authorities.

City Convention Bureaus are non-profit entities that, in most European destinations, are an integral part of the public bodies that are in charge of the strategic management of tourist activities.

The International Association of Convention & Visitor Bureaus (IACVB) states that about 60% of the 1500 CVBs in North America works as the official contact point in the destination for meeting planners, tour operators and potential visitors (Beldona et al., 2003). CVBs have existed in the U.S. since around 1896 (Morrison & Anderson, 2002): they were funded through locally collected room taxes. The role, sources of funding and budgets available to CVBs for the realization of their activities can vary from city to city. In Europe – according to a 2015 survey made by the International Association of Convention Centres – the main source of funding for DMOs and CVBs is government funding from specific tax receipts (76%) and membership dues (74%), followed by congress centre payments and contributions (39%), revenues from services (37%), sponsorship fees (24%) and hotel room night bed taxes (18%). In the most important meeting destinations in Europe, the CVB budget could exceed 1 million euros and, at times, even 2 million, as for the Vienna Convention Bureau in 2015.

CVBs' primary purpose is to “develop an image that will position their cities (or regions) in the marketplace as a viable destination for meetings and visitors” (Gartrell,

1994, p. 20). Hence, it can be confirmed that the responsibility for branding and promoting a city as a MICE destination as well as for coordinating the events organization and marketing is delegated to them (Rogers & Davidson, 2015).

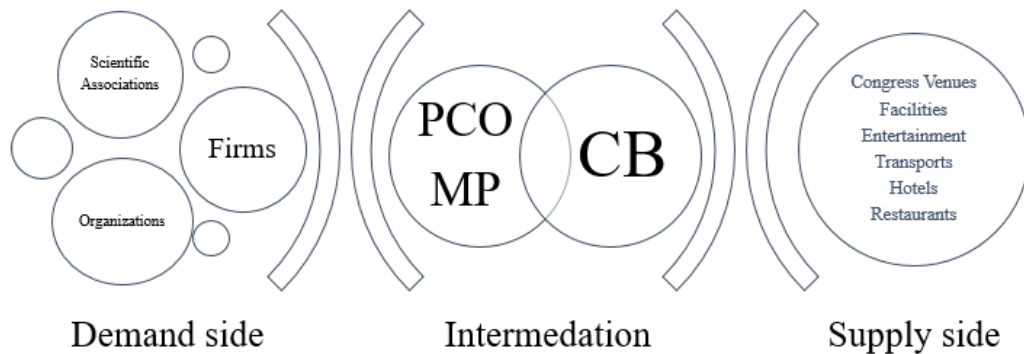
Since tourism represents a significant revenue earner for destinations of all sizes, CVBs have acquired greater importance over the years and play a significant role in the destination economic development.

A CVB must "sell the city" by performing the following six roles (Gartrell, 1998; Beldona et al., 2003):

1. developing an image to position the city in the marketplace as an attractive MICE destination;
2. providing information and responding to visitor inquiries;
3. working with meeting and group planners;
4. be representative for the industry;
5. coordinating the complementary elements of the industry and public sector;
6. representing the buyers (the demand side) and the sellers (the supply side) operating as an intermediary with professional congress organizers (PCO) and meeting planners (MP) and avoiding conflicts of interest (Figure 3.1).

From the demand side, professional and scientific associations, as well as firms and organizations represent the advertising recipients and the customers looking for a possible congress experience. From the supply side, the MICE destination offer is composed by accommodation facilities, transports companies, incoming services, tourism entertainment agencies, public entities and food and beverage agencies (Ficarelli et al., 2013).

**Figure 3.1 – The intermediation activity of the Convention Bureau (CB)**



Source: Own elaboration from Del Chiappa (2008).

Given the CVB's intimate knowledge of the destination, it is able to advise planners on site selection, transports, appropriate facilities and local services and to organize familiarization trips for meeting planners interested in the destination (Beldona et al., 2003).

Once the meeting specifications are available, the CVBs circulate the information to all the local operators that can satisfy the meeting requests. Once the event takes place, the promotional activities, the on-site assistance, staffing, delegates' registration and information are among the principal roles pertaining to the CVBs.

Given the collaborative structure of the tourism product, a destination can be viewed as a network of suppliers interacting with the CVB, which represents its focal point, while each partner add value to the destination offer.

CVBs also verify the respect of the standards of what is provided by the local suppliers and coordinates the various parties involved in the local meeting industry.



Involving local people and operators can be of support to increase the motivation in choosing a destination: this can encourage not only congress members to participate actively to the congress, but also the host community to welcome the event in a proper way.

It is clear that the primary goal of a Convention Bureau is to promote the image of a city to make it an attractive destination for business and leisure tourism. In recent years, the strategic plans for cities have placed great importance on developing a strong destination brand and distinctive positioning, since brand identity is a critical factor for success by adding value to how meeting planners perceive a destination (Baldona et al., 2003).

Over the years, various academic works have measured the influence a CVB support can have on the destination selection process for event planners.

Among others, Chacko and Fenich (2000) looked at 291 US meeting planners and found that the services offered by local CBs were the factor that best explained the attractiveness of the destination. Baloglu and Love (2001) made a survey of 20 meeting planners working for associations, demonstrating that the support from the CB was in the 5<sup>th</sup> position when ranking what was important in the decision-making process for selecting a meeting destination (after accessibility, quality of meeting spaces and hotel rooms and the city's image). Other academic studies have focused on Asia (Kim et al., 2003), finding that support from local CBs played a notably important role together with the city's cultural attractions, shopping options and accessibility via air. A research made by Chen (2006) with reference to Taiwan demonstrated that CVB local support is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important factor when selecting a meeting venue.

A more recent research made by Meetings Consultants (2014) in Italy demonstrated that an efficient CVB is the 6<sup>th</sup> most important factor in the selection process, coming ahead of the attractiveness of the destination and the presence of centres of excellence linked to the event's theme.

Given the above-mentioned observations, Convention Bureaus play a fundamental role in the attractiveness of a MICE destination and, therefore, they often play a crucial role in managing the financial funds allocated to event organisers. The efforts of the CVBs are often focused on obtaining and helping with largescale events that have a major economic impact on the destination (Getz & Fairley, 2004; ICCA, 2013).

The role of CVBs in destination branding varies with respect of cities characterized by affirmed destination brand or non-affirmed destinations which want to improve their brands.

In the first case, the city needs to adapt its brand to the evolution of the MICE demand, in order to be prepared to be as multifunctional as possible. Therefore, the destination has to work on communication activities, looking at new tendencies and the exploiting local resources to show the destination in different ways.

As for non-affirmed destinations aiming at hosting MICE events, they have to optimize territorial characteristics to create new demand and study new tendencies about business market. Among the principal pull factors to take into consideration in destination management and marketing, there can be numbered the improvement in geographic accessibility, the socio-political safety promotion and the economical affordability (Beldona et al., 2003).

### **3.3 A CBBE model for a MICE destination**

As already stated in the previous chapters, the academic studies on destination brand equity have been mainly conducted from the perspective of leisure tourists, while the research is still at the beginning for what concerns business tourism. Some works, even if dated, have been carried out from the perspective of meeting planners (Oppermann, 1996), but almost never from the point of view of the conference participants, who are the ultimate costumers for whom MICE destinations strive to compete.

Various international organizations and CVBs associations, meeting professionals as well as multinational firms (i.e. American Express, ICCA and MPI International) have focused on identifying what are the most influential factors, as well as the relative inhibitors, for the site selection process of a MICE destination.

As a result, the following categories were recognized as most important:

1. accessibility – type of transportation, cost, time, frequency, convenience;
2. local support, represented by CVBs, DMOs and subsidiaries;
3. extra conference opportunity, i.e. entertainment, culture, shopping, sightseeing, recreation and professional opportunities;
4. accommodation facilities and their relative capacity, cost, service, availability;
5. meeting facilities, i.e. capacity, layout, cost, ambiance, availability;
6. site environment, i.e. climate and infrastructure facilities.

In particular, an interesting study made by American Express (2015) recognizes what are the top influencing meeting location concerns with respect to USA, Europe, Central and South America and the APAC countries (Table 3.6). It is clear that the accessibility of the destination, as well as the budget issues, are among the first factors influencing

the site-selection process, while the previous experience in the destination does not represent a principal concern.

**Table 3.6 – The top meeting location concerns in the four continents**

<b>Top influencing meeting concerns</b>	<b>North America</b>	<b>Europe</b>	<b>Central/South America</b>	<b>APAC</b>
<b>Economic/political instability concerns</b>	2%	4%	8%	16%
<b>Currency/exchange rate</b>	1%	1%	10%	4%
<b>Online reviews</b>	1%	0%	4%	1%
<b>Safety concerns</b>	2%	3%	4%	14%
<b>Perceptions around “resort” destination for meetings</b>	5%	4%	8%	4%
<b>Participation in company’s or organization’s preferred supplier program</b>	5%	8%	0%	9%
<b>Past experience of colleagues</b>	1%	2%	0%	5%
<b>Own past experience</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Ease of air lift/ transportation to location for attendees</b>	18%	14%	20%	7%
<b>Budget</b>	28%	24%	32%	23%
<b>Client directive based on past experience</b>	10%	10%	6%	7%
<b>Repeat destination for meeting</b>	7%	8%	4%	1%
<b>Specific location type needed – airport, training facility etc.</b>	19%	22%	4%	9%

Source: American Express (2015). Global Meetings and Events Forecast 2016.

Several academic studies (Um & Crompton, 1992; Oppermann, 1995; Go & Govers, 1999; Hu & Hiemstra, 1996; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Weber & Chon, 2002; Crouch

& Louviere, 2004; Baloglu & Love, 2001; Kim et al., 2003; Rogers & Davidson, 2015) concentrated upon the same issue, but until now, there is no general accepted list for MICE destination selection attributes. Various studies focused on the importance of some factors above others: for example, Rogers and Davidson (2015) defined the venue location as the most important factor of choice, while other attributes as price, quality of services, accessibility to attractions and type of venue seem to be less relevant. Swarbrooke and Horner (2001) underlined that a MICE destination, to be successful, should primary possess sufficient accommodations, a good transport system, attractions and an appropriate venue.

Some authors (Weber & Chon, 2002) considered destination image as the most relevant attribute: since many destinations have good and similar services and facilities, having and appealing image can be the point of difference and favour competitiveness.

For what concerns the MICE destination brands, its relevance became obvious in the 2000s, since many meeting planners and organizers started to recognize that destination branding and marketing is of prime necessity to attract business tourism (Rogers & Davidson, 2015; Lee & Back, 2010).

Until now, there have been only limited attempts to measure the brand equity for MICE destinations (see Chapter II). Among others, Lee and Back (2008) measured the perceived quality of a branded conference, analysing the staff service, the site selection, the professional education and the social networking.

Jin and Weber (2013) made an exploratory study from the perspective of the exhibition organizers and concluded that the destination choice is the most important factor in attracting exhibitions, more than the venue choice. Yet, these studies did not stress the

importance of the MICE destination brand and its promotion, which do have a strong influence on the site selection.

This research gap requires immediate attention since MICE destinations must highlight their added value in order to position themselves in the market. The present study aims at filling this gap on the basis of the academic theories and frameworks that analysed the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) concept in the product industry (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1992) and in the tourism market (Boo et al., 2009; Ferns & Walls, 2012; Pike, 2007; 2009; Pike et al., 2010; Lee & Back, 2008, 2010; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

In order to construct a valid and reliable model to measure brand equity for MICE destinations and identify the most appropriate dimensions, an exhaustive literature review on the theme has been undertaken (see Chapter II). The CBBE studies regarding the tourism destinations context concentrated on four main variables (see Chapter II): awareness, image, quality and loyalty, among which it exists a statistically relevant relationship (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

As underlined by Boo et al. (2009), the presence of a previous destination experience is fundamental in order to measure the above-mentioned variables: only people who have effectively experienced the place can evaluate it in a proper way. This idea has been already confirmed by Berry (2000) as well as by other authors (Ambler, 1997; Bhat, Reddy, 1998; Long & Shiffman, 2000) who considered experience as the primary driver of brand equity: in fact, the concept of brand underlines the emotional benefits to consumers who purchase experiences, which is even truer with reference to tourism destinations. In Boo et al., (2009) the image and quality dimensions are

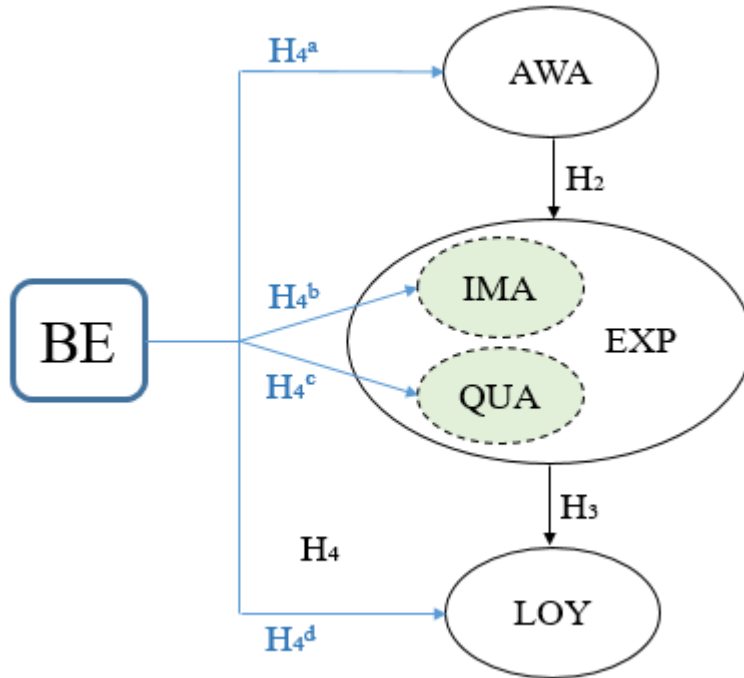
comprised into the destination experience. Brand awareness is the antecedent of brand experience, and this last has a direct effect on brand value and loyalty.

Following the model by Kladou and Kehagias (2014, see Chapter II) and given the purpose of the present research, since cultural assets may support an improvement in the perception of a MICE destination, they have been included in the “image” dimension (Pike, 2010).

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, a MICE destination with a well-organized system of offer can count on the meta-management role of a Convention Bureau. It represents the buyers (the demand side) to the sellers (the supply side) and vice versa, operating as an intermediary with professional congress organizers and meeting planners (Del Chiappa, 2008), hence enhancing the quality of the destination. The CB (intermediary of the supply side) and the PCO (intermediary of the demand side) develops a sort of relationship in co-creating and co-planning the event on the basis of the client’s requests. This *ex-ante* partnership has a direct influence on the quality perceptions of the destination as a place for MICE events and on the related destination loyalty, since the event results from a previous strong coordination. Therefore, the quality dimension includes the presence of the Convention Bureau relational assets and support for the event organization.

On the basis of the academic studies on destination brand equity and of the analyses made by both academics and international associations on the MICE site-selection process, the present research proposes a brand equity measurement model (Figure 3.2) for a MICE destination (MDBE model).

**Figure 3.2: The proposed brand equity measurement model for a MICE destination - MDBE**



Source: Own elaboration.

The model empirically supports the existence of four first-order dimensions, namely:

- 1) MICE destination awareness (AWA);
- 2) MICE destination image (IMA);
- 3) MICE destination quality (QUA);
- 4) MICE destination loyalty (LOY).

MICE destination image and quality converge into the MICE destination experience (EXP).

In order to answer to the research questions developed in Chapter I (“How can a CBBE model be adapted for MICE destinations?”; “What are the empirical dimensions and their relative indicators that have to be selected to measure brand equity for a MICE



destination?"; "What is the impact of the Convention Bureau activities on the brand equity building and management of a MICE destination?") and following the review of the literature, the present research proposes the following hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive and subsequent relationship among the proposed first-order dimensions: AWA, IMA, QUA and LOY (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Boo et al., 2009; Pike, 2010; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014);
- H<sub>2</sub>: AWA has a significant effect on EXP (Boo et al., 2009);
- H<sub>3</sub>: EXP has a significant effect on LOY (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014; Pike, 2010; Boo et al., 2009);
- H<sub>4</sub>: the relationships among the proposed dimensions demonstrate the presence of a second-order general dimension, the MICE destination brand equity (BE), which has a significant effect on the proposed brand dimensions (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

As a result, the more appropriate indicators have been identified to measure each of the selected brand equity dimension for a MICE destination (Table 3.7). The variables have been selected from a review of the main academic and practitioner studies on destination brand equity, which support their inclusion into the present research. The final scale consists of 4 variables for AWA, 7 variables for IMA, 7 variables for QUA, and 4 variables for LOY, with 22 variables in total.

The variables have been measured through a 5-point Likert Scale where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. The neutral attitude has been guaranteed in all scales. The proposed model has been tested on one destination: Napoli, Italy, as it can be seen in Chapter IV. Taking into consideration the study made by Boo et al. (2009), the sample selection included only people who have previously experienced the

destination as participants to meetings and/or meeting planners who organized events in the destination. The interviewees who have not attend a MICE event in the selected case study and neither have ever organized an event in the above-mentioned destination, were asked to provide the reasons for not doing so among a set of options, allowing multiple answering and an open answer (Table 3.8).

**Table 3.7: The selected dimensions and variables for the proposed MDBE model**

	<b>LABEL</b>	<b>VARIABLES</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>
<b>MICE DESTINATION AWARENESS</b>	A1	I have heard about MICE events organized in the destination	Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Pike, (2009, 2010); Aaker (1991), Berry (2000), Keller (1993)
	A2	The destination has a good name and reputation as venue for MICE events	Baloglu, Love (2005); Boo et al. (2009), Pike et al. (2010)
	A3	The characteristics of this destination come quickly to my mind	Boo et al. (2009), Pike et al. (2010); Arnett et al. (2003); Pappu & Quester (2006); Yoo & Dunthu (2001)
	A4	This destination comes primary to my mind when I think about organizing meetings, incentives, conferences or exhibitions	Boo et al. (2009), Pike et al. (2010)
<b>MICE Destination Brand Image</b>			
<b>MICE DESTINATION EXPERIENCE</b>	I1	In this destination I feel secure and safe	Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Oppermann (1996); Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991); San Martín & Del Bosque (2008); Fortin et al. (1976); Pike (2007, 2009, 2010); Baloglu & Love (2005); American Express (2015)
	I2	This destination is characterized by a pleasant weather	Edelstein & Benini (1994); Oppermann (1996); ASAE (1992); Pike (2007, 2009, 2010);

			Aaker (1996), Berry (2000), Berry & Seltman (2007), Baloglu & Love (2005); Konecnik & Gartner (2007)
	I3	This destination is in a good geographic location	Oppermann, (1996); Fortin et al., (1976); Baloglu & McCleary (1999); Beerli & Martín (2004); Echtner & Ritchie (1991); San Martín & Del Bosque (2008)
	I4	This destination offers good opportunities for professional education and networking	Lee & Back (2008), Lim et al. (2012); Kladou & Kehagias (2014)
	I5	The price for accommodation, food and services is good if compared to other MICE destinations	Konecnik & Gartner, (2007); Oppermann, (1996); Fortin et al., (1976); ASAE, (1992); Edelstein & Benini, (1994); Pike (2007, 2009, 2010); Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991), San Martín & Del Bosque (2008); Baloglu & Love (2005); American Express (2015)
	I6	This destination is rich in interesting cultural/historical attractions/sightseeing opportunities	Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Fortin et al. (1976); Prentice (2001); Edelstein & Benini (1994); Pike (2007, 2009, 2010); Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991), San Martín & Del Bosque (2008); Baloglu & Love (2005)
	I7	This destination has good extra conference opportunities: nightlife/dining/entertainment/recreational facilities	Oppermann (1996); ASAE (1992); Edelstein & Benini (1994); Pike (2007, 2009, 2010); Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991), San Martín & Del Bosque

			(2008); Baloglu & Love (2005)
	<b>MICE Destination Brand Quality</b>		
	Q1	This destination is characterized by a good quality of accommodation	Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Oppermann (1996); Fortin et al., (1976); ASAE (1992); Pike (2007, 2009, 2010); Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991), San Martín & Del Bosque (2008); Baloglu & Love (2005)
	Q2	This destination has good convention centres and high quality of meeting facilities	Oppermann (1996); Fortin et al. (1976); ASAE (1992); Baloglu & Love (2005)
	Q3	This destination has a good local transportation system	Konecnik & Gartner, (2007); Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991), San Martín & Del Bosque (2008); Baloglu & Love (2005); Pike (2007); American Express (2015)
	Q4	This destination is characterized by a high level of cleanliness and unpolluted environment	Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Oppermann (1996); Pike (2009, 2010); Baloglu & McCleary (1999), Beerli & Martín (2004), Echtner & Ritchie (1991), San Martín & Del Bosque (2008)
	Q5	This destination is easy to access in terms of air and train connections	Oppermann (1996); Fortin et al. (1976); ASAE (1992); Edelstein & Benini, (1994); Baloglu & Love (2005); Pike (2007); American Express (2015)
	Q6	This destination is characterized by appealing local cuisine and restaurants	Oppermann (1996); Pike (2007, 2009); Baloglu & Love (2005); Kladou & Kehagias (2014); Konecnik & Gartner, (2007); Slater (2004)

	Q7	This destination is characterized by a good Convention Bureau event support and mediation service	Baloglu & Love (2005); Del Chiappa (2008)
MICE DESTINATION BRAND LOYALTY	L1	This city is one of my preferred destination where to organize events	Konecnik & Gartner, (2007); Boo et al. (2009)
	L2	This destination provides more benefits than other MICE destinations	Konecnik & Gartner (2007)
	L3	I intend to organize events in this destination in the future	Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Pike (2009, 2010); Baloglu & Love (2005); Boo et al. (2009)
	L4	I intend to recommend this city to colleagues as a business destination	Konecnik & Gartner (2007); Pike (2009, 2010); Boo et al. (2009); Arnett et al. (2003)

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 3.8 - Answers explaining no previous experience in the destination and the relative relationship with the MDBE dimensions**

Answer	Relation to the MDBE dimensions
There are no MICE events that would be of interest for me	AWA
This destination does not have a positive reputation	IMA
This destination provides a low quality of services	QUA
This destination has low accessibility	QUA
Other	Answers analysed case-to-case

Source: Own elaboration.

## CHAPTER IV

### *METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION*

#### **4. 1 Introduction to the case study**

The empirical part of the present dissertation is conducted through a case study analysis: in fact, examining situational complexity is fundamental in order to proceed with social and behavioural science research (Stake, 2013). The selected case study is the city of Napoli, which is analysed as an emerging MICE destination: the city, up to now, is not counted among the most popular destinations worldwide for meetings and events. Nonetheless, since the purpose of this study is to focus on the destination brand equity building and measurement, Napoli particularly fits this objective as a case study because it is experiencing a strong commitment from both the public and the private sectors to invest in the MICE industry and to re-brand the city. The recent constitution of the Convention Bureau Napoli is a clear signal in this sense. This is why Napoli is now working on repositioning itself as a destination to host meetings and events and not only as a typically leisure destination: the city is therefore working on its brand in order to attract the MICE industry in town. Table 4.1 shows a profile of Napoli as a tourism and MICE destination.

**Table 4.1 – Profile of Napoli as a tourism and MICE destination**

<b>Location</b>	South of Italy on the Tirrenian Sea
<b>Status within the country</b>	Chief town of Campania Region
<b>City area</b>	117.3 km <sup>2</sup>

<b>Population</b>	3.109.160
<b>Climate</b>	Mediterranean
<b>Ranking in the country (by population)</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
<b>Accessibility by air</b>	Naples international Airport, 7km from city centre 91 destinations with direct flights
<b>Tourists coming by plane</b>	6 millions – 61% international, 39% national (2015)
<b>Accessibility by high-speed train</b>	Italo and Trenitalia connects Naples with the principal Italian destinations in max. 4 hours.
<b>Accessibility by water</b>	Sea port
<b>N. of cultural venues</b>	50 archaeological sites 52 museums 17 theatres 448 churches 7 castles 18 libraries
<b>Convention Bureau</b>	Convention Bureau Napoli
<b>Main congress venues (more than 600 seats in one room)</b>	3 convention centers (Mostra d'Oltremare, Centro Congressi Stazione Marittima, Città della Scienza)
<b>Maximum meeting capacity in congress venues (seats in one room)</b>	1.155
<b>N. of hotels (total)</b>	150
- 5 stars	3
- 4 stars	49
- 3 stars	66
- 2 stars	14
<b>Maximum meeting capacity in hotel venues (seats in one room)</b>	530 seats
<b>N. of beds (total)</b>	12.609
- 5 stars	688
- 4 stars	7.120
- 3 stars	3.817
- 2 stars	485
<b>N. of tourists arrivals</b>	1.137.903 (2015)
<b>N. of total overnights in hotels</b>	2.908.633 (2015)

Source: Own elaboration<sup>3</sup>

Napoli is located in the Southern part of Italy and is the chief town of the Campania Region. It is the 3<sup>rd</sup> city in Italy after Rome and Milan in terms of number of inhabitants

<sup>3</sup> Data have been collected from various sources: Napoli Municipality, the International Airport of Napoli, the EPT Napoli, Federalberghi Napoli, ISTAT.

(3.109.160 citizens) and it is among the oldest Italian cities, since it has been founded by Greeks in the VIII century B.C: its contemporary urban fabric preserves the elements of its long and eventful history.

The city's enviable geographical location, in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius and in close proximity to the islands of Capri and Ischia, halfway down the Italian coasts, makes it easy to reach from anywhere in the world.

The historic centre is the largest of all Europe and earned its spot on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995. The incredible amount of old monuments and the preservation of customs and traditions – folklore, gastronomy and craftsmanship –, as well as of international events and shows, make the city an ideal place for any kind of tourist activity.

Napoli is a perfect destination for the MICE target since it encompasses one of the worldwide most valuable cultural and artistic heritage, breath-taking landscapes, and several centres of excellence in education, research, art, science and design. The weather particularly pleasant all year, the lifestyle, the gastronomy and the qualified hospitality industry are distinctive points of the destination.

The International Airport is located just 5 kilometres away from the city centre and connects Napoli with 91 national and international destinations. The main European cities can be reached in less than 3 hours. The high-speed train network guarantees rapid connections with the Italian principal cities and allows reaching easily Napoli from all over the world.

The attractiveness of Napoli, as a tourist destination, is growing worldwide: as shown in Table 4.2, the number of tourist presences has increased in the last 5 years, reaching



2.891.104 in 2015. The average length of tourists stays in the city has grown from 2 days in 2011 to 4 days in 2015.

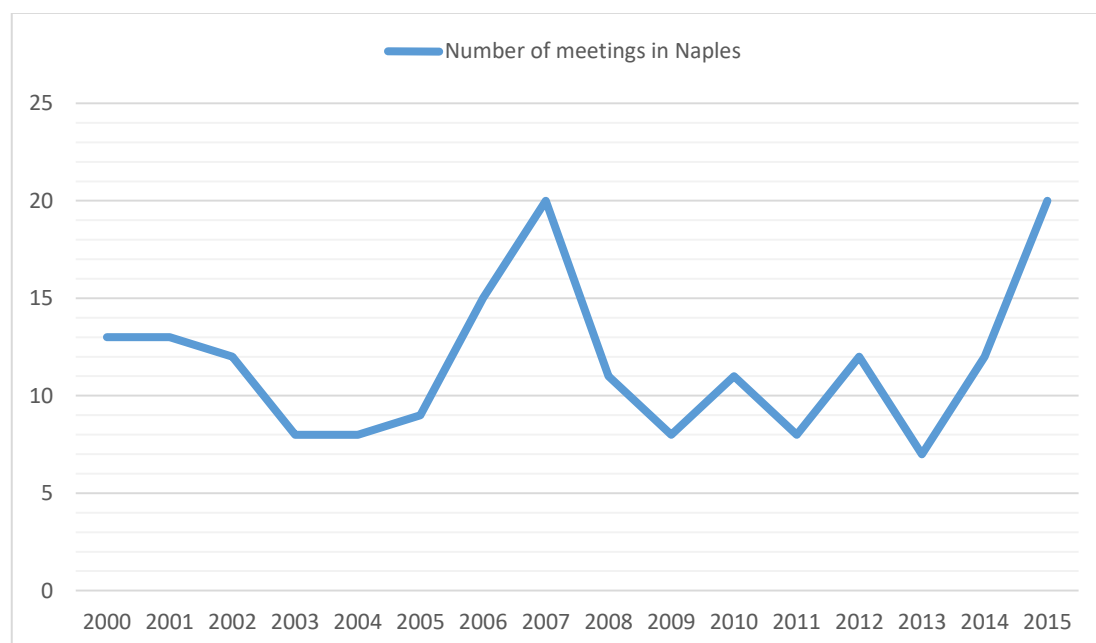
**Figure 4.2 - number of tourists presences in Napoli from 2011 to 2015**

Year	Tourists presences
2011	2.166.518
2012	2.292.213
2013	2.991.317
2014	2.891.104
2015	2.908.633

Source: EPT Napoli (2015).

As concerns business tourism, Figure 4.1 shows the ranking of Napoli as a MICE destination from 2000 to 2015 according to the “Country and City Rankings” published by ICCA.

**Figure 4.1: Number of meetings per year in Napoli from 2000 to 2015**



Source: ICCA Country and City Rankings (2000-2016).

As it can be seen in the graphic, the number of meetings in Napoli, after a peak reached in 2007, has fallen down during the economic downturn period, but since 2013, the MICE industry is experiencing a new growth and is expected to continue increasing. In fact, Napoli in the last years has hosted important international events such as the America's Cup in 2012, the Giro d'Italia start in 2013, the Davis Cup in 2014 and the Dolce & Gabbana's Alta Moda Show in 2016. The events promotion and the worldwide arrivals to Napoli have guaranteed international resonance to the city and an increase in consideration for meeting site selection. In addition, thanks to the constitution of the Convention Bureau Napoli in November 2015, the city is experiencing a re-branding process and a MICE-specific promotion on the national and international channels.

Convention Bureau Napoli (CBN) is a network of private actors operating in the Neapolitan MICE and tourism industry. By now, it is constituted by 21 members among hotels, tour operators, event organizers/meeting planners, catering and transfer agencies, together with the International Airport, in order to support every stage of the event organization in the city. It also counts among its partners the biggest congress centres in Napoli and some of the most impressive unconventional venues: it is actually working on new memberships in order to represent the city in the most comprehensive way. CBN supports event and meeting planners who are interested in organizing an event in the city with site inspections, promotional materials, contacts with local authorities, suppliers and Institutions.

During its first year of activity, CBN has invested in various communication and promotional tools to build a coordinated and coherent brand for Napoli as a MICE

destination: on this wake, the slogan “Meet in Naples” has been created and transmitted both on online and offline channels. CBN dedicates particular attention to the typical B2B tools such as national and international fairs, educational and fam-trips for both PCOs and corporates, direct marketing, social media and specialized magazines. The CBN has also applied for various bidding opportunities to attract international business events to the city and is already collecting some success stories. Besides, since November 2016, the city Department on Tourism and Culture has undertaken an in-depth analysis on Napoli in order to understand its strengths and weaknesses and to build a strategy for tourism until 2020. Within this strategy, great attention has been dedicated to MICE and business tourism, because of its huge potential in working on seasonality and in delivering considerable economic returns. Hence, the Convention Bureau Napoli, which is characterized by a private governance, will receive a strong support by the public authorities in order to continue its promotional activities through fairs, press tours and fam trips, and to strengthen its bidding initiatives to candidate Napoli for international events.

The Convention Bureau Napoli in 2016 has become member of the Convention Bureau Italia, which is a network of Italian tourism and congress companies: in just one year of membership, Napoli reached the 6<sup>th</sup> position among the most requested Italian destinations for MICE events (Convention Bureau Italia, 2017).

Within the development of the Napoli 2020 strategy, a survey conducted on the hotels belonging to the CB Napoli during October 2016 demonstrates that the city is characterized by a strong seasonality of the MICE activities, which concentrate in autumn and spring seasons. Hence, the CBN members feel the necessity to promote Napoli as a MICE destination for the winter months (December – March), when the

tourism flows decrease and the hotels can better manage the presence of business tourists and the host of bigger events. By now, the nationality of the business arrivals in the city is mainly Italian, while a 15% - 20% is European (mainly from France, Spain and UK), and a 5% American and Asian. The average meeting dimension in the hotel venues is around 80 to 200 participants. Of more than 6.000 requests for the host of meetings received by the Neapolitan operators in the last 3 years, a 60% has had a positive outcome, but mainly within the Italian market.

As concerns the congress venues, the events nationality is mainly Italian (70%) and European (30%). The average meeting dimension is around 80 to 1.200 participants: the biggest event organized in the last three years was of 3.000 people hosted in the same venue.

## **4.2 Methods for data collection and research methodology**

The empirical analysis aims at testing the brand equity theoretical model proposed in Chapter III (see Figure 3.2) on a MICE destination. The study implemented a survey design through a self-administrated questionnaire (see Appendix A): this last has been elaborated on the basis of the four dimensions and their related variables that have been selected from the literature review (see Table 3.7).

As anticipated in the introduction, the case study analysis tries to deepen the demand-perspective, represented not only by meeting planners but also by the ultimate MICE destination target, the meeting participants. Therefore, the empirical research has been carried out in occasion of two important events:

3. ICOT (International Conference on Tourism) 2016, which took place in Napoli at the end of June 2016 and gathered in the city the world most important academic expert in the tourism field;
4. the XXV Anniversary of MPI Italia Chapter, the Italian meeting planners' convention organized in Napoli in July 2016.

In order to analyse the demand-side perspective, online surveys have been distributed after the meeting to the national and international events participants: as concerns the ICOT conference, they were not only participants but also experts in tourism. As for the MPI Italia Chapter Anniversary, the members are among the most important meeting planners in the country. The aim is to understand their perceptions of Napoli as a MICE destination and to test the selected brand equity dimensions.

The distribution of the survey has been limited to three months (November 2016 to January 2017). From a sample of 350 (181 MPI Italia members and XXV Anniversary participants plus 169 ICOT 2016 academics), the final number of collected responses amounts to 226. It is considered a sufficient number (Kline, 1998; 2011, Wolf et al., 2013; Muthén, 2002) to derive parameter estimates with small standard errors and to provide a converged and proper model solution. The collected responses include 142 answers from meeting planners who participated to MPI Italia Anniversary and 84 answers from ICOT academics and experts in the tourism field.

Data have been elaborated through a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which is a multivariate statistical procedure used to test how well the measured variables represent the number of constructs. With CFA, it is possible to specify the number of factors required in the data and which measured variable is related to which latent variable in order to confirm or reject a measurement theory.

It has also been implemented a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which can be defined as a class of methodologies that seeks to represent hypotheses about the means, variances and co-variances of observed data in terms of a smaller number of ‘structural’ parameters defined by a hypothesized underlying model (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003). SEM is a very powerful multivariate technique that can be implemented to determine and validate a proposed causal process and/or model through a “system of linked regression-style equations to capture complex and dynamic relationships within a web of observed and unobserved variables” (Gunzler et al., 2013, p. 390). SEM-based procedures present significant advantages over first-generation techniques because of the greater flexibility that a researcher acquires for the interplay between theory and data (Chin, 1998; Jeon, 2015):

1. the use of latent variables, which refer to not observable constructs. To capture the essence of such variables, multiple indicators are necessary, implying the presence of measurement errors. Identifying measurement errors makes the causal equation model between latent variables clearer if compared to path analysis or regression;
2. the exogenous and endogenous variables are estimated simultaneously; therefore, a researcher can show the direct, indirect and the total effects;
3. SEM is composed of measurement equations (by CFA) and structural equations (by path analysis), that can be conducted at one time in a model;
4. SEM can show reciprocal causal relationship between latent variables.

For the CFA and SEM analyses, the RStudio software (Version 5.0) has been chosen.

### 4.3 Data analysis

From the original sample of 226, 195 responses are considered valid, since there were no missing data in the answers. Besides, only the answers of the respondents who have attended at least one MICE event in Napoli have been taken into account to test the proposed MDBE model, since they have actually experienced the destination (Boo et al., 2009) and had access to the extended version of the survey.

Only 24 respondents have never attended a MICE event in Napoli: their reasons are mainly related to the absence of MICE events that match their interest (44%), followed by the perception of low-qualified services (31%) and the negative reputation of the city (17%).

The respondents' frequency of event attendance respects the following distribution:

- 13% of respondents attend a MICE event once a year;
- 24% of respondents attend a MICE event twice a year;
- 36% of respondents attend a MICE event from three to five times a year;
- 27% of respondents attend a MICE event more than six times a year.

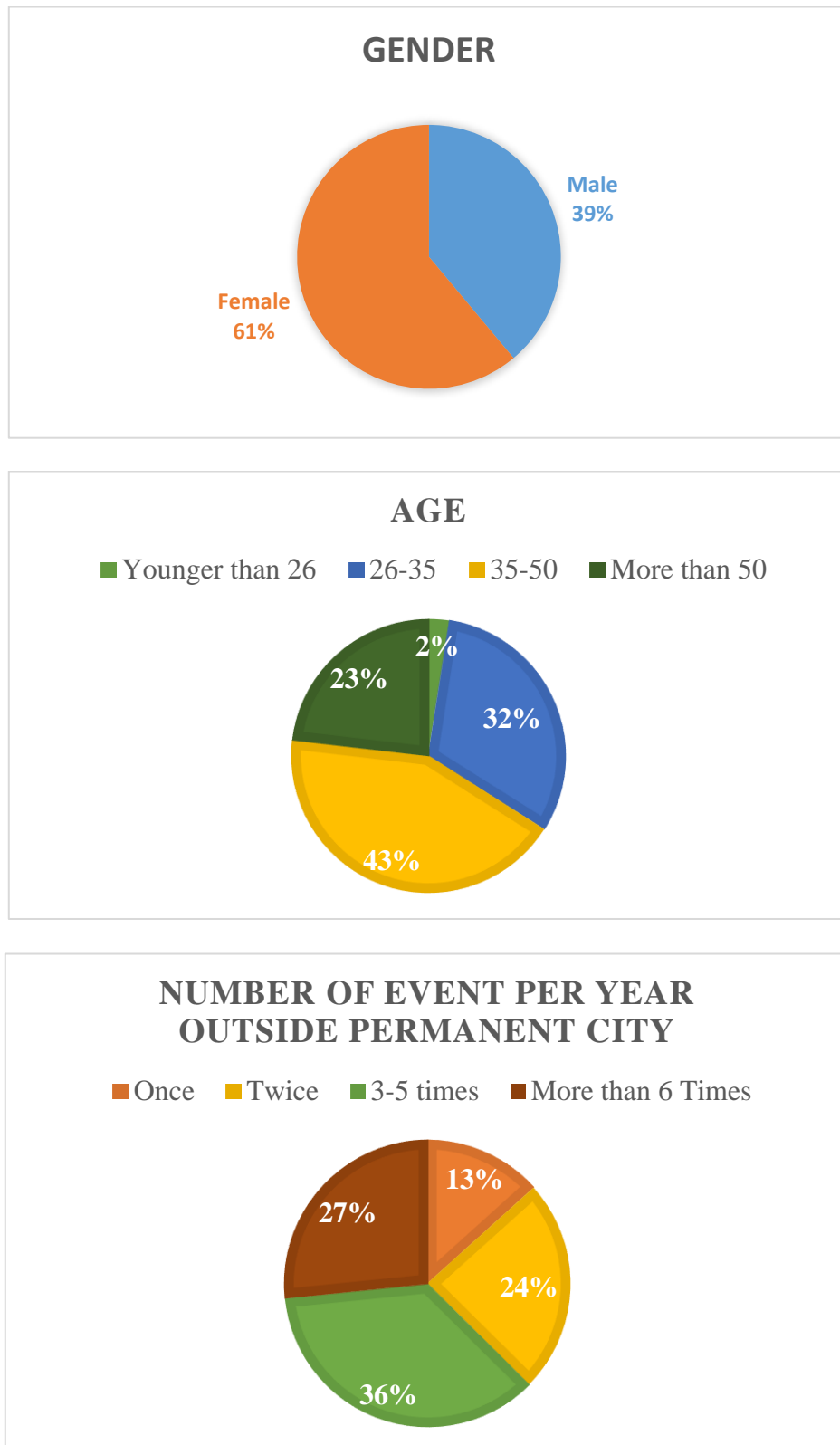
Representatives of 17 countries have filled out the survey, providing a very diverse insight into the perception of Napoli brand equity as a MICE destination.

The majority of the respondents were professional congress organizers/meeting planners (25%), while only 3% were students.

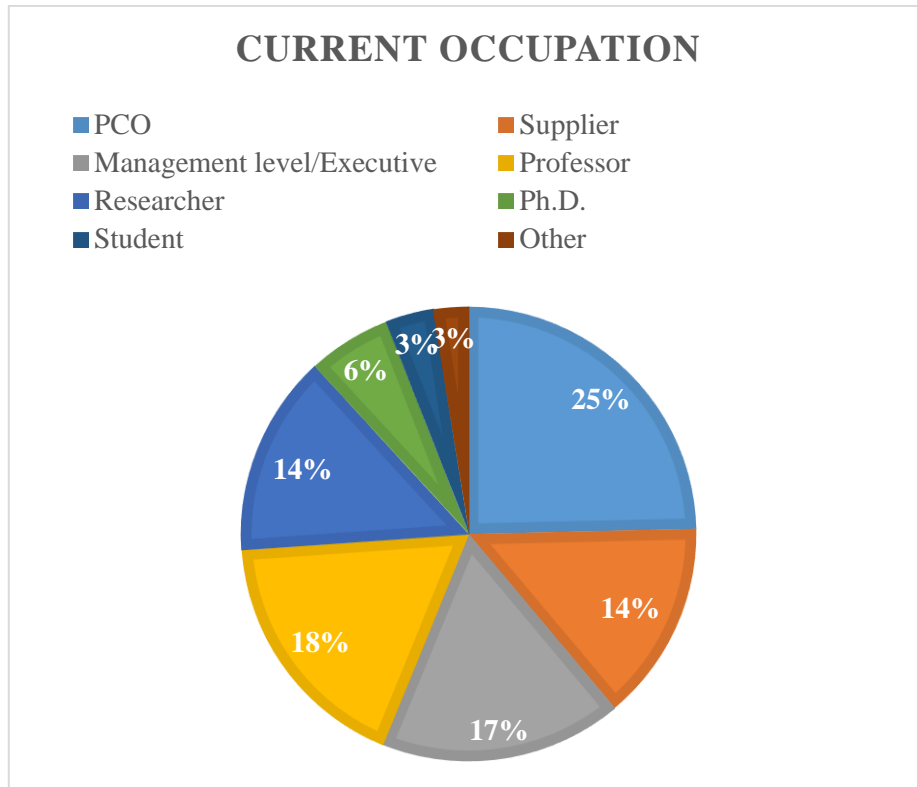
The 61% of the respondents were women: this data is particularly interesting since it demonstrates a reversal trend of the general idea that men travel more for business.

Figure 4.2 provides an overview of the respondents' demographic profiles in terms of age, gender and occupation.

**Figure 4.2 - The survey respondents demographics**







Source: Own elaboration.

Data were loaded into the R software and screening procedures have been implemented.

In order to test the MDBE model, a five-item Likert scale is used (5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree). In the empirical analysis, to carry out the CFA and the SEM, the categorical Likert scale variables have been estimated as continuous data (Muthén, 1984; Finney & Di Stefano, 2006; Allen & Seaman, 2007). Descriptive statistics are presented in Appendix B. They showed that the variables belonging to the IMA dimension have been rated the highest, demonstrating that the image perceptions are particularly important for the evaluation of a MICE destination (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

#### 4.3.1 Construct reliability and validity

In order to estimate the reliability of the multi-items scales for each construct, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability have been implemented (Table 4.3). These indexes support the author in understanding the degree to which the collected responses are consistent across the four dimensions.

The academic literature recommends Cronbach's Alpha values of .80 or higher or at least .70 and higher to consider the internal consistency acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003; Kline, 2000; De Vellis, 2012). The alpha coefficient and the composite reliability for all dimensions are around .80 or higher, indicating a good level of internal consistency. The overall Cronbach's Alpha of the multidimensional scale is 0.82. Therefore, the construct reliability is assessed as adequate.

**Table 4.3 - Construct reliability**

Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	N. items	Composite reliability
AWA	0.802	0.805	4	0.80
IMA	0.817	0.821	7	0.811
QUA	0.807	0.804	7	0.792
LOY	0.897	0.892	4	0.895

Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 4.4 - Construct validity**

Dimensions	Composite reliability	AVE
AWA	0.80	0.680
IMA	0.811	0.709
QUA	0.792	0.651
LOY	0.895	0.860

Source: Own elaboration.

In order to check the validity of each dimension's multi-item scale, a construct validity test has been carried out: it checks if the constructs that should be interrelated are, in effect, interdependent. Construct validity is assessed to be adequate when the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) equals or exceeds 0.50 and composite reliability is higher than AVE (Cheung & Lee, 2010). As shown in Table 4.4, construct validity appears to be satisfactory for all constructs since the values respect the literature suggestions. In conclusion, the proposed multi-items scale of MICE destination brand equity is considered valid.

#### **4.3.2 First-order CFA**

The proposed MDBE model testing starts with the analysis of the four dimensions' structure consisting in the 22 items to which the survey participants responded. The first-order CFA is conducted in RStudio to test relationships between the indicators and their relative latent variables, and among the four latent variables themselves.

The model output is presented in Figure 4.3. The general rules for standardized regression consider weights above 0.70 as excellent, 0.63 very good, 0.55 good, 0.45 fair and 0.32 poor (Johnson, 2000; Hoyle, 1995; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2007). As shown in the Figure, the indicators reveal excellent weights (ranging from 0.75 to 0.94), and the four dimensions demonstrate positive correlations (ranging from 0.90 to 0.94). These results proves the H<sub>1</sub> proposed in Chapter III: the correlations among CBBE dimensions were all significant, demonstrating convergence, but not redundancy of the dimensions. The highest correlations were recognized between the quality and loyalty dimensions (0.955).

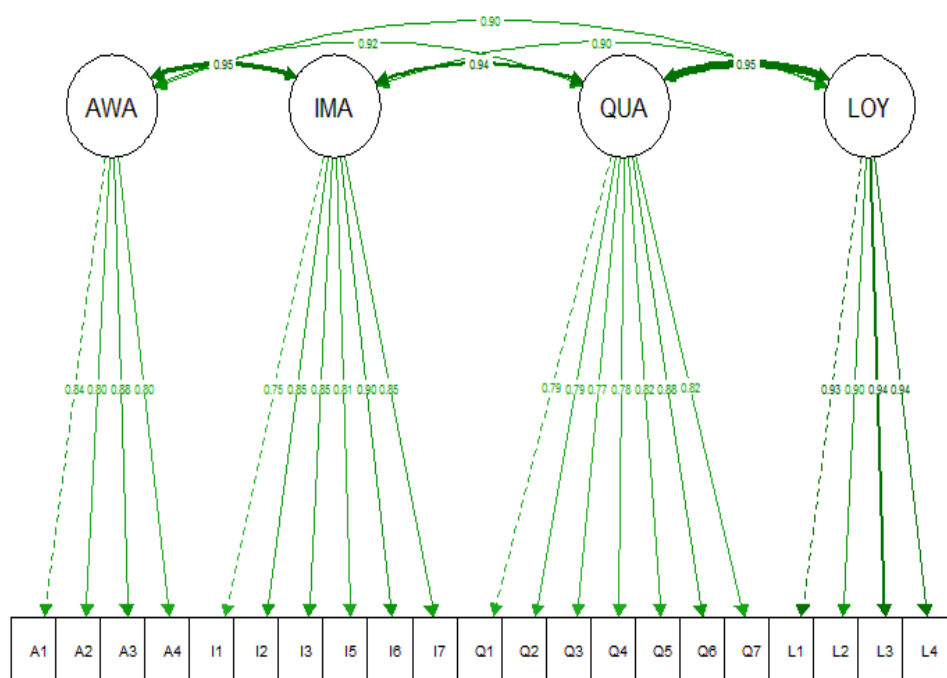
Table 4.5 shows the correlations among the four brand equity dimensions, which indexes are very good. High correlations among the dimensions prove the existence of a second-order dimension, the Brand Equity, in line with previous academic research on the theme (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

**Table 4.5 - Correlations among brand equity dimensions**

	AWA	IMA	QUA	LOY
AWA	1			
IMA	0.948	1		
QUA	0.92	0.942	1	
LOY	0.90	0.901	0.955	1

Source: Own elaboration.

**Figure 4.3 - The baseline model tested for dimensions relation.**



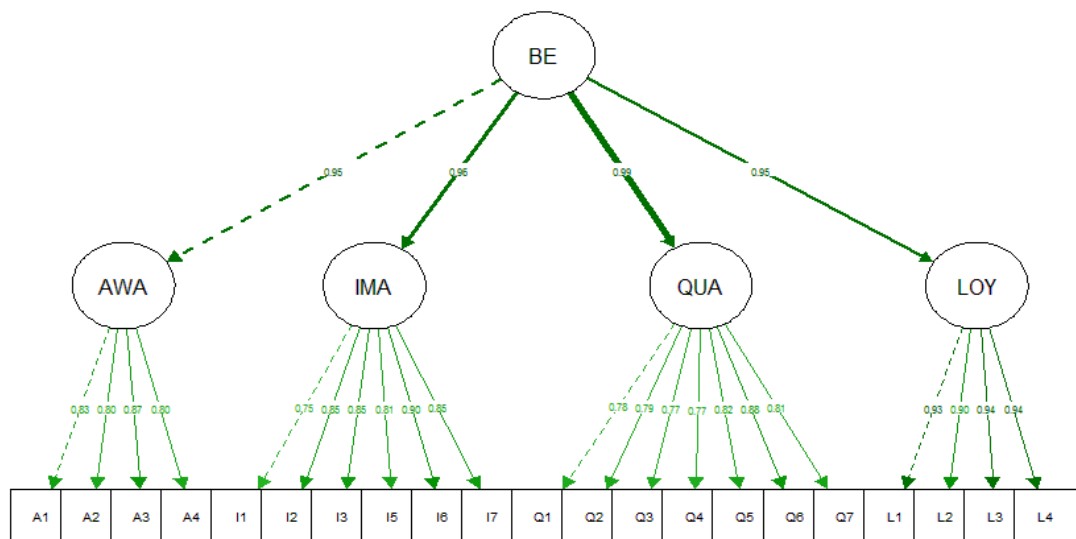
Source: Own elaboration.

### 4.3.3. Second-order CFA

As the academic literature suggests (Chin, 1998; Garver & Mentzer, 1999), second-order models can be applied when the lower order factors are substantially correlated with each other, proving that there is a higher order factor that is supposed to justify the relations among the lower order factors.

Since both conditions are met, a second-order CFA model can be designed and tested in order to prove the existence of connections between the Brand Equity (BE) its dimensions. In fact, brand equity is presumed to have an impact on its first-order factors, which are explained by indicators. The second-order model design is presented in Figure 4.4.

**Figure 4.4 – Second-order CBBE model design**



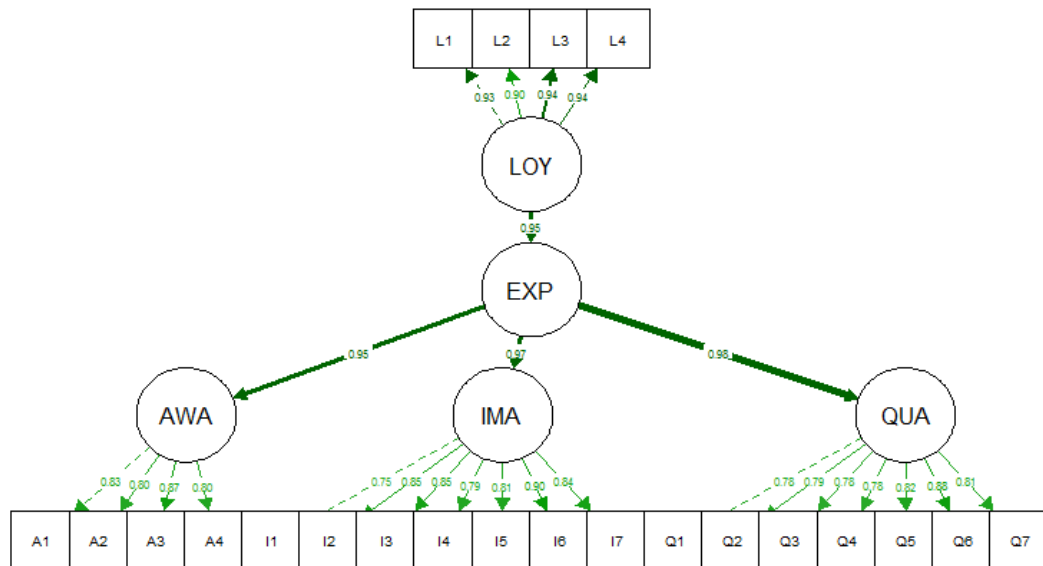
Source: Own elaboration.

The analysis reveals high regression weights from the BE to its first-order factors: therefore, the brand equity has significant statistical effects on its dimensions, proving H<sub>4</sub>. This result is in line with previous academic research on the theme (Boo et al., 2009; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014).

#### 4.3.4. The SEM analysis: path relationship tests

In order to test the subsequent impacts hypothesized in H<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>3</sub> among the brand equity dimensions, a SEM approach has been adopted. The model is designed in Figure 4.5 and tests the impact of AWA on EXP (that consists of IMA and QUA), and of EXP on LOY. Table 4.6 includes the regression weights and the test results.

**Figure 4.5 - Path relationship model design – impacts among BE dimensions**



Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 4.6 - Regression weights and test results**

Impact	Standardized Regression Weights	Hypothesis	Test Results
AWA → EXP	0,955	H <sub>2</sub>	Accepted
EXP → LOY	0,953	H <sub>3</sub>	Accepted.

Source: Own elaboration.

The EXP dimension results in having a significant effect over IMA (0,967) and QUA (0,983), in line with Boo et al. (2009) research, testing that the merging of IMA and QUA into EXP provides a better model fit.

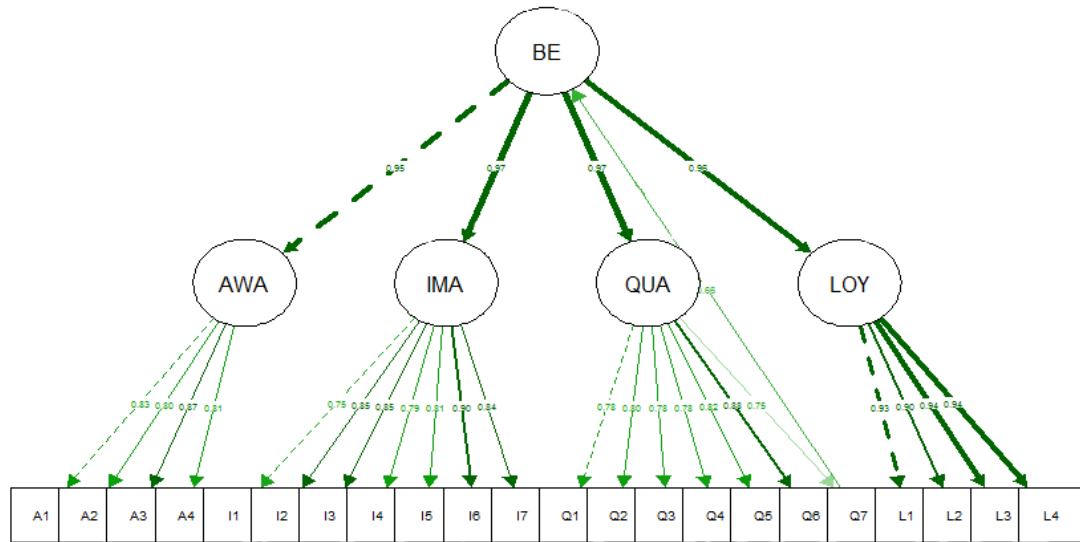
The standardized regression from AWA to EXP is considered excellent (0.955), in line with Kladou and Kehagias (2014), as well as the regression from EXP to LOY (0.953), in line with Chen and Tsai (2007) and Hutchinson et al. (2009).

As concerns the role of the Convention Bureau Napoli and its impact on brand equity (RQ2), a final model has been designed and tested through a SEM analysis. The evaluation of the CB Napoli support in the organization of an event has been inserted in the survey into the QUA dimension (Q7 indicator).

Figure 4.6 shows that there is a good correlation (0.66) between the indicator Q7 and the second-order factor BE (Brand Equity), demonstrating that the role and activities performed by the Convention Bureau Napoli have an impact on the MICE destination brand equity.

In conclusion, Table 4.7 shows the correlation indexes among the first-order dimensions and the indicator Q7. This last demonstrates a very good correlation with the AWA factor, and a lighter but still good correlation with IMA, QUA and LOY.

**Figure 4.6 - Path relationship model design: the impact of the CB on brand equity**



Source: Own elaboration.

**Table 4.7 - The correlation indexes between the CB Napoli support (indicator Q7) and the first-order dimensions**

	Q7
AWA	0.748
IMA	0.556
QUA	0.553
LOY	0.534

Source: Own elaboration.

#### 4.3.5. The model fit

The model fit has been checked through various indexes, as suggested by Kline (2015) and Brown (2014) when dealing with first-order CFA, second-order CFA and path test simultaneously. The following indexes (Hooper et al., 2008; Kline, 2011) have been analysed through RStudio:



1. Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) – absolute fit index: it measures the deviation from the expected results to test if the actual results are within an acceptable margin of error, and if this last could be due to chance alone;
2. R-square ( $R^2$ ) – global fit index: it indicates the variance proportion in the dependent variable that can be predicted from the independent variable;
3. P-value: it is defined as the probability, under the assumption of some hypothesis, of obtaining a result equal to or more extreme than what was actually observed;
4. Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Bentler Comparative Fit Index (CFI) – incremental fit indexes;
5. Steiger-Lind root mean square error for approximation (RMSEA) – parsimonious fit index;
6. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): it provides a mechanism for adjusting sample sizes where chi-square statistics are used.

**Table 4.8 – Model Fit Summary**

Index	Guidelines (Kline, 2015)	First- order CFA	Second- order CFA	Path relationship test	Path relationship test – impact of CB on BE
$\chi^2$	Any number between 0 and +∞	446.69 df=183	461.7 df=185	491.61 df=205	489.41 df=204
$R^2$	$\geq 0.5$	0.71	0.71	0.705	0.707
<b>P-value</b>	$< .0001$	$< .0001$	$< .0001$	$< .0001$	$< .0001$
<b>TLI</b>	$\geq 0.5$	0.931	0.928	0.929	0.929
<b>CFI</b>	$\geq 0.5$	0.940	0.937	0.937	0.937
<b>RMSEA</b>	$\leq 0.06$	0.086	0.088	0.085	0.085
<b>SRMR</b>	$\leq 0.06$	0.035	0.037	0.036	0.036

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4.8 provides the fit summary showing the level of acceptable fit and the observed indexes for each model.

From the analysis of the fit results, it can be stated that all the tested models have satisfactory indexes, since almost all of them (except from the RMSEA) respect the guidelines suggested by the academic literature:

1. the chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) demonstrates a good fit with the degrees of freedom in all models;
2. the  $R^2$  is higher than 0.5 in all models, reaching the 0.7 weight;
3. the P-value is less than 0.0001 in all models ;
4. the TLI and the CFI demonstrate particularly good results, being higher than 0.90 in all models;
5. the RMSEA does not demonstrate a good result, since it should be less than 0.6 but all models reach the 0.8 weight;
6. the SRMR has a good fit, since it is less than 0.3 in all models.

The empirical analysis supports the author in answering to the research questions formulated in Chapter I:

1. in this study, it has been proposed a CBBE model for an emerging MICE destination, implementing the baseline given by the academic studies made on tourism destinations and adapting them to the MICE context (RQ 1).
2. the author selected the most appropriate empirical variables to measure brand equity for MICE destinations. The model has been tested on a case study analysis, the city of Napoli, with good results (RQ 1a).
3. as concerns the role of the Convention Bureau in the brand equity building process, it has been measured the impact of the CB Napoli support on brand

equity second-order factor, with a satisfactory and positive result (RQ 2), and especially on the brand awareness dimension.

#### **4.4. Discussion of the results and conclusions**

MICE tourism industry has excellently grown in last years, and this expansion involves many countries and major cities that have created their own Convention Bureaus (Hankinson, 2015). All CB have the role of promoting their area of reference as a place for meeting, incentives, conferences and exhibition. It is interesting to note that not all countries or cities are able to attract the MICE target (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Hankinson, 2009). Hankinson (2015) argued that the implementation of an efficient branding strategy represents a crucial tool for the MICE destination success. Yet, many CBs do not measure brand effectiveness and the results of their marketing strategies on a continual basis, if at all (Blain et al., 2005). The concept of CBBE provides destination managers and marketers a tool to measure how successfully the brand identity and the self-image planned by the CBs are positioned in the market and in the minds of the MICE target before and/or after the visit experience. Moreover, conceptualizing brand equity with reference to the MICE industry can support managerial decision-makers since it can recommend tactical guidance and strategies for destination brand marketing programs to create and improve loyalty.

This dissertation starts from the recognition of some research gaps in the academic literature about the evaluation of MICE destination brand equity. In fact, even if the destination phenomenon has attracted great interest among researchers and practitioners, most studies limited on investigating only the tourism destination image concept (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Since tourism destinations can be considered as

brands, starting from the mid-2000s some academic studies tried to understand whether techniques for Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) could be transferred to the destination context. Therefore, a review of the studies on the theme led the author to important assumptions for MICE destination brand measurement, which included:

1. a MICE destination brand could be measured by employing the concept of customer-based brand equity (CBBE) (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993);
2. A CBBE model consisting of four dimensions – awareness, image, quality and loyalty – could be adapted to a MICE destination; the theoretical representation of each proposed dimension comes from a synthesized review of previous academic theoretical findings (Aaker, 1991; Boo et al., 2009; Kladou, Kehagias, 2014; Pike, 2010) as well as from the author adaptation to the MICE context;
3. the empirical analysis must be conducted among persons who have experienced the destinations at least once (Boo et al., 2009).

Following these assumptions, a CBBE model has been proposed on the basis of the previous academic literature on the theme; it was tested with reference to a MICE destination context, the city of Napoli, and examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Model (SEM). These techniques enabled the author to combine the proposed CBBE dimensions into a model and to analyse their relationships and relative impacts.

During the investigation, all proposed hypotheses have been confirmed. The results imply that a subsequent relationship between all four proposed dimensions exists: in fact, the findings showed that destination brand awareness (AWA) has a positive effect on destination brand experience (EXP), which is composed by image (IMA) and

quality (QUA) as already stated by Boo et al. (2009). Moreover, destination brand experience (EXP) has a positive influence on destination brand loyalty (LOY). Hence, a positive destination brand experience can improve the perception of destination brand loyalty: the acknowledgment of this relationship could be of support for managers to favour revisit behaviours by working on destination experience.

This empirical study also offers enhanced insight into the important role of destination image in the brand equity model. It can be stated that all dimensions are important in destination evaluation and can be expressed through the concept of CBBE, but image has been the highest rated dimension in the survey, in line with Konecnik and Gartner (2007), which consider image as pivotal in destination's choice. Therefore, the image congruence with a MICE destination is a primary influential factor in brand equity. As already stated by Sirgy and Su (2000), creating and managing an appropriate image has become crucial for effective destination positioning.

This study suggests that destination marketers, along with the MICE offer, should collaborate in developing promotional strategies that emphasize the distinctive peculiarities and attractive factors of the destinations in which they operate. It is of paramount importance for destination managers to analyse the different dimensions that make up destination brand equity, in order to improve their prominence for the MICE target and to improve the uniqueness of the destination brand.

The concept of the CBBE proposed in this dissertation suggests that Convention Bureaus' strategic marketing campaigns should be planned in order to increase destination awareness, its image and quality perceptions, and consequently the loyalty dimension. As concerns awareness, it should be carefully considered, especially when dealing with emerging destination brands, as it could be the case of the investigated in

this study. In fact, Napoli, as a newly established MICE destination, has had little time to build its brand equity. Destination awareness about a destination and its positive impact on image and quality can consequently lead to re-visit a destination or to recommend it.

Since the survey conducted within this research supports an in-depth understanding on what are the demand perceptions about the destination, its results have been shown to the Convention Bureau Napoli management team in order to get opinions and commentaries about the aspects of the city that have been best evaluated, together with the ones that obtained the worst results. Various indicators listed below are not under the power of the CB Napoli but greatly support and/or influence the city promotion and attractiveness.

As it can be seen in Appendix B, the dimensions' indicators that obtained the higher evaluations are mainly related to the IMA dimension. They are listed following:

- Q6 – “this destination is easy to access in terms of air and train connections”: Napoli, in the last years, has experienced a great development of the train and air connections, thanks to the implementation of the high-speed trains and the great reinforcement of the airport national and international connections. These advancements have made the city more accessible both to the international and the intercontinental targets, and the ease of the connections is among the principal reasons (24% of the top influencing meeting concerns in Europe) in selecting a MICE destination (see Chapter III);
- I6 – “this destination is rich in interesting cultural/historical attractions/sightseeing opportunities”: the artistic treasures to visit in Napoli are several: the historic centre is the largest of all Europe, characterized by

stratifications related to the city's twenty centuries of history. The design of the streets, piazzas, churches, monuments and public buildings and castles constitute a jewel box of artistic and historical treasures of exceptional importance, so much so that they earned their spot on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995;

- I2 – “this destination is characterized by a pleasant weather”: Napoli is characterized by a favourable climate all year round, which allows enjoying the city in any month and helps overcoming the seasonality issue;
- I3 – “this destination is in a good geographic location”: the city's geographical position halfway down the Italian coast makes it easy to reach from anywhere in the world. Besides, Napoli is located near Pompeii, the worldwide famous Roman town buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 D.C, which the biggest archaeological site in the world. In addition, from Napoli is easy to reach the Amalfi Coast, protected by UNESCO and known all around the world for its natural beauty, beaches, hotels and restaurants;
- I5 – “the price for accommodation, food and services is good if compared to other MICE destinations”: Napoli, if compared to the principal MICE destinations in Italy, like Rome, Venice, Florence or Milan, is particularly cheaper both as concerns meeting infrastructures, both in terms of the cost-of living.

It would be therefore useful for the CB Napoli to implement these factors in the city's MICE branding strategy in order to focus on what are perceived as the greater strengths of the destination.

On the other hand, the indicators that obtained the worst evaluations are mainly related to the QUA dimension:

- Q4 – “this destination is characterized by a high level of cleanliness and unpolluted environment”: unfortunately, Napoli is still perceived as characterized by air and environment pollution, given the illegal waste scandals of the last years and the great traffic congestions;
- Q3 – “this destination has a good local transportation system”: even if the metro system has been greatly improved both functionally and aesthetically, the city internal connections are still not considered as satisfactory, also given its hilly nature and the scarcity of public means of carrying. Also, the quality of taxis is quite low i.e. ill-kept cars, absence of Wi-Fi or credit card payment facilities;
- Q2 – “this destination has good convention centres and high quality of meeting facilities”: some of the city most important congress centres are timeworn and not provided with the most updated technologies, which could make it difficult to compete with the most important international MICE destinations;
- Q1 – “this destination is characterized by a good quality of accommodation”: some of the congress hotels in Napoli are not characterized by vast rooms in order to host big meetings and are not equipped with the latest technologies. The relative small dimensions of the Neapolitan hotels have been surpassed by the CB Napoli, which coordinates and keeps together its hotel members in order to guarantee the host and the success of big events. Moreover, many Neapolitan hotels are undertaking renovations of the infrastructures, including the meeting



rooms, and the CBN consultancy supports them in order to follow the international standards in the makeover works.

Many of the indicators that have been negatively evaluated by the respondents have been already inserted in the CB Napoli Plan (i.e. improvement of the convention centres and of the hotel quality) and in the Tourism Strategy 2020 objectives scheduled by the city Department on Tourism and Culture (urban cleanliness, improvement of the local transport system). Besides, CB Napoli and the city Municipality are starting a collaboration in order to attract the MICE target, which includes the organization of fam trips addressed to the international audience and the increase of the communication and promotion tools to spread the brand of Napoli as a professional and well-equipped MICE destination.

Since Napoli is now starting to position itself as a MICE destination, it has the advantage to build its brand from the beginning, particularly with reference to the foreign target.

As for the Italian market, some stereotypes and weaknesses must be overtaken in order to promote the city as a professional, efficient and organized destination. This is why the CB Napoli is actively working on the MICE offer creation and renewal, to then market it to the national and international demand.

#### **4.5 Limits of the study and hints for future research**

This research project has implemented a CBBE model on the basis of a literature analysis on brand equity, and adapting the research made on the theme to the context of the MICE destination, from which there have been derived some measurement assumptions. Given the CBBE proposed model, it has been possible to examine the

presence of structural relations among the brand dimensions, to test the hypothesis and the research questions. Yet, some limitations do not allow considering the conclusions of this research project as universally valid or recognizable. Among the principal research constraints, further model validation should be required with a larger sample: in fact, Kline (2015) stated that a general rule concerning the relationship between the sample size and the model complexity is 20:1. Therefore, it is recommended to limit the number of variables and submit the survey to a broader audience. In addition, the model fit indexes are not high enough to consider the proposed model as effectively valid. Moreover, in SEM analyses a finding of good fit does not imply that the model is correct or not, but only plausible. Besides, a good model fit does not mean that the effects hypothesized in the model are strong (Jeon, 2015).

The case study has been conducted on the city of Napoli: as stated previously, the city is clearly proposing itself to the MICE target only from 2015, when the CB Napoli has born. This choice of this case study has been undertaken since the author aimed at analysing the brand equity building and management process. Nonetheless, it would be of great support to replicate the study in the future years, in order to provide the research with a longitudinal approach.

Secondly, the study focuses on a single case study: since destination brands should be better evaluated by comparison (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007), it could be useful to repeat the research through a multiple case study analysis, in order to test the proposed models on different contexts, possibly with a cross-country approach. Future replications may investigate more popular and recognized destinations, therefore it may be of help to incorporate in the brand equity model additional awareness measures, such as top-of-mind recalls.

Finally, even if the demand-side perceptions have been discussed with the CB Napoli management team, the research project lacks of an in-depth analysis of the supply-side. It may be examined on the basis of the results obtained in the survey through focus groups with the main MICE stakeholders of the city: the CBN members, the principal congress venues and the city Department of Tourism and Culture.

The supply side has almost never been considered in the equity measurement of a destination brand, which “comprises the supply-side desired identity and the demand-side image of the destination held by the consumer” (Pike, 2010, p.135). Therefore, a crucial hint for the future research may be to deepen both sides simultaneously. Keeping in mind both perspectives is essential in order to develop a coherent and efficient brand and to achieve cohesiveness in brand positioning.

## Appendix A. Survey template

*Dear respondent,*

*you are invited to participate to this survey that aims at investigating Napoli as a MICE destination. The survey is conducted within a Ph.D. dissertation project in Management at the University Federico II of Naples.*

*The questionnaire will take 5-10 minutes, it is completely anonymous and all data will be confidential. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, feel free to contact me at [chiara.dandrea@unina.it](mailto:chiara.dandrea@unina.it).*

*Thank you very much in advance for your time and support, every answer is a significant contribution to the study.*

### **Your MICE activities**

How often do you attend business meetings, incentives, conferences and/or exhibitions held outside your permanent city (times per year)?

- ☐ Once
- ☐ Twice
- ☐ 3-5 times
- ☐ More than 5 times

Have you ever attended an event in Napoli?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If not, why?

- ☐ There are no MICE events that would be of interest for me
- ☐ This destination does not have a positive reputation
- ☐ This destination provides a low quality of services
- ☐ This destination has low accessibility
- ☐ Other: ...

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about Napoli as a MICE destination (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree)**

I have heard about MICE events organized in the destination
The destination has a good name and reputation as venue for MICE events
The characteristics of this destination come quickly to my mind
This destination come primary to my mind when I think about organizing meetings, incentives, conferences or exhibitions.
In this destination I feel secure and safe

This destination is characterized by a pleasant weather
This destination is in a good geographic location
This destination offers good opportunities for professional education and networking
The price for accommodation, food and services is good if compared to other MICE destinations
This destination is rich in interesting cultural/historical attractions/sightseeing opportunities
This destination has good extra conference opportunities: Nightlife/dining/entertainment/recreational facilities
This destination is characterized by a good quality of accommodation
This destination has good convention centres and high quality of meeting facilities
This destination has a good local transportation system
This destination is characterized by a high level of cleanliness and unpolluted environment
This destination is characterized by appealing local cuisine and restaurants
This destination is easy to access in terms of air and train connections
This destination is characterized by a good Convention Bureau event support and mediation service
This city is one of my preferred destination where to organize events
This destination provides more benefits than other MICE destinations
I intend to organize events in this destination in the future
I intend to recommend this city to colleagues as a business destination

### General personal information

How old are you?

- ☐ 25 and younger
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 35-50
- ☐ More than 50

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your current occupation? (for MPI)	What is your current occupation? (for ICOT)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Student</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Professional Congress Organizer/Meeting Planner</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Services supplier</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Management level/executive</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other: ....</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> Student</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Professor</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Researcher</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Ph.D.</li> <li><input type="radio"/> Other: ....</li> </ul>

## Appendix B. Descriptive statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Variances	Std. deviation
A1	2.000	5.000	3.923	0.167	0.743
A2	1.000	5.000	3.713	0.216	0.771
A3	2.000	5.000	3.892	0.147	0.793
A4	1.000	5.000	3.621	0.31	0.922
I1	2.000	5.000	3.585	0.261	0.775
I2	2.000	5.000	4.092	0.176	0.785
I3	2.000	5.000	4.031	0.167	0.777
I4	1.000	5.000	3.774	0.193	0.784
I5	2.000	5.000	3.974	0.161	0.747
I6	2.000	5.000	4.154	0.213	0.942
I7	2.000	5.000	4.021	0.274	0.865
Q1	1.000	5.000	3.621	0.291	0.847
Q2	1.000	5.000	3.477	0.329	0.878
Q3	1.000	5.000	3.476	0.336	0.901
Q4	1.000	5.000	3.472	0.262	0.918
Q5	1.000	5.000	3.851	0.216	0.884
Q6	1.000	5.000	4.169	0.247	0.964
Q7	2.000	5.000	3.779	0.121	0.863
L1	1.000	5.000	3.590	0.152	0.953
L2	1.000	5.000	3.574	0.1	0.904
L3	1.000	5.000	3.785	0.109	0.925
L4	1.000	5.000	3.779	0.167	0.932

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