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Brand solutions creating a position in the electronic books market

Rozwiązania brandowe budujące pozycję na rynku książek elektronicznych

Abstract

Competition in the market is constantly intensifying. Thus, companies are looking for new ways to attract consumers and increase their competitive advantage. Brands are becoming "a crucial tool and the value they create for the consumer. It fosters consumer favor and confidence and encourages them to choose brands instead of competitors' offers. Brand solutions could be essential for the customer incentives while forming sales market share and brand value. Thus, this article aims to determine possible brand solutions creating a position in the electronic books market. The literature review method was applied to discuss the brand value and image formation tendencies in the electronic books market. It confirmed that the brand image is formed by emphasizing the distinctive aspects of the brand identity in marketing communication (positioning). On their basis, specific associations are included in the minds of consumers, which become the image of the brand. Accordingly, a theoretical research model was constructed. With the help of a quantitative research survey method, the data of 307 respondents were analyzed. Research data were analyzed using the SPSS program. The questionnaire data was validated using Crombach Alpha (0.829). The research results showed the need for correct consumer leading by creating the positioning strategy with orientation to differentiation in the marketing communication. The authors suggest how analyses of consumers' attitudes in the electronic books market could lead to brand image formation. Some more profound scientific value could be completed in the future while applying surveys to a broader range of organizations and their brands.

Keywords
brand, image, positioning, electronic market, books branding

Streszczenie

Konkurencja na rynku stale się nasila, dlatego firmy poszukują nowych sposobów na przyciągnięcie konsumentów i zwiększenie swojej przewagi konkurencyjnej. Marki stają się kluczowym narzędziem i źródłem wartości, jaką tworzą dla konsumenta. Wzmacniają przychylność i zaufanie konsumentów oraz zachęcają ich do wybierania konkretnych marek zamiast oferty konkurencji. Rozwiązania brandowe mogą być kluczowe dla motywacji klientów przy budowaniu udziału w rynku i wartości marki. Celem artykułu jest zatem określenie możliwych rozwiązań marki budujących pozycję na rynku książek elektronicznych. Do omówienia wartości marki i tendencji wizerunkowych na rynku książki elektronicznej zastosowano metodę przeglądu literatury. Potwierdziła ona, że wizerunek marki jest kształtowany przez podkreślanie w komunikacji marketingowej (pozycjonowanie) wyróżniających się aspektów tożsamości marki. Na ich podstawie w świadomości konsumentów powstają określone skojarzenia, które kształtują wizerunek marki. W związku z tym skonstruowano teoretyczny model badawczy. Za pomocą ilościowej metody ankietowej przeanalizowano dane 307 respondentów. Użyto do tego programu SPSS. Dane z kwestionariusza zostały zweryfikowane za pomocą współczynnika alfa Crombacha (0,829). Wyniki badań wykazały potrzebę prawidłowego prowadzenia konsumenta przez stworzenie strategii pozycjonowania zorientowanej na zróżnicowanie w komunikacji marketingowej. Autorzy sugerują, w jaki sposób analizy postaw konsumentów na rynku książek elektronicznych mogą prowadzić do kształtowania wizerunku marki. Głębszą wartość naukową można osiągnąć w przyszłości, stosując ankiety do zbadania szerszego zakresu organizacji i ich marek.

Słowa kluczowe
marka, wizerunek, pozycjonowanie, rynek elektroniczny, branding książek

Introduction

As the competition in the marketplace is constantly growing, companies are looking for new ways to attract customers and increase their competitive advantage. Brands and the value they create for consumers have become a crucial tool, as they promote customer loyalty and trust, and encourage them to choose a particular brand over the brands offered by the competitors (Juščius et al., 2018). Brand image has a strong impact on customer behaviour and can be one of the stimuli for purchase decisions, which in turn helps to increase the volume of sales, market share and brand equity (Prema & Gnanamoni, 2018; Jung et al., 2020). As the brand image is built in the minds of consumers, the marketers, by observing consumers' behaviour and attitudes, are able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the brand and use them for developing their competitive advantage, because a strong brand image becomes a factor for consumer trust (Jain, 2017). Image is an element, the development of which in a brand management strategy, can bring significant benefits to the company, as well as help to attract customers and gain competitive advantage.

A brand involves not only visual or linguistic aspects but also an emotional relationship between the product and the customer, which is built on shared values (Bogdan, 2002, quoted in Nistorescu et al., 2013). The customer's emotional attitude is considered the key factor leading to customer trust in the brand, increased satisfaction, customer preference for the product or service over other products or services offered by the competitors, as well as customer loyalty (Song et al., 2019). Due to the wide variety of choices and the amount of information available, customers are more likely to choose a product according to the brand image rather than the product itself (Zhang, 2015; Prema & Gnanamoni, 2018). For this reason, the brand image that emerges in the minds of customers can be a crucial aspect for attracting them.

Researchers have studied brand image and its formation in the minds of consumers, its dependence on consumers' attitudes, social interactions, personality, and preferences (Gardner & Levy, 1955, quoted in Jung et al., 2020; Patterson, 1999; Batey, 2008; Wijaya, 2013; Išoraitė, 2018; Mao et al., 2020), as well as marketing communication efforts of the brand itself (Wijaya, 2013; Išoraitė, 2018). However, there is a lack of individual studies in specific areas of activity. According to researchers, sustainable book reading is becoming increasingly important in society (Kang et al., 2021). The concept of sustainable book reading, with the aim of repeated reading of paper books and reducing the negative impact on the environment, is a new one. The aim is therefore to develop book-sharing platforms that are beneficial to users and the environment. However, it remains unclear how companies can build their brand image to properly position sustainable book use in society. Therefore, the research problem addressed in this article is that brands are becoming a crucial tool and the value they create for the consumer. It fosters consumer favor and confidence and encourages them to choose brands instead of competitors' offers.

The article analyses brand equity and image, its links to identity and positioning. The research has been conducted in order to understand the subtleties of book brand positioning in the market.

Value created by the brand

Jung et al. (2020), analysing the definitions of a brand from the customer's perspective define a brand as a set of associations, expectations, memories, or connections created in the customer's mind that create perceived value for a product or service and contribute to the customer's decision to choose one product over another. It is emphasised that the brand represents the ever-changing relationships between the customer and the brand, which depend on the customer's perception of the brand, his/her experience of the brand, and the relationship that has been established between them (Aaker, 2014). The concept of the brand is defined in terms of the emotional aspects that are not tangible, but which add to the distinctiveness and competitiveness of a product and create a relationship between the brand and the customer. It is agreed that the brand helps to create a certain relationship between the product and the customer, and that this relationship creates added value.

Brand equity can be: functional, related to the direct use of the product by the customer; self-expressive, which arises when the customer buys the brand because of its attractiveness and the desire to show off; emotional, when the brand evokes certain feelings and cognitive experiences for the customer (Hart & Murphy, 1998, quoted in Vanagienė & Ramanauskienė, 2008). According to Aaker (2014), the brand is a company's promise to deliver the stated values to customers. Brand equity is a complex concept including awareness, associations, perceived quality, loyalty, image and identity (Juščius et al., 2018; Arumugam, 2019). It can be argued that brand equity for the customer arises when the brand is beneficial to him/her, when it evokes emotions, resulting in certain associations and images in his/her mind when the

customer is familiar with and recognises the brand, and as a result, makes repeated purchases. This also facilitates the customer's purchase decision, as he/she prefers the brand with a well-known, reputable image, which is associated with a positive experience.

Brand equity can be measured in terms of a higher price that customers are willing to pay for that brand compared to a typical product (Arumugam, 2019). According to Kenarova-Pencheva (2019), brand equity helps to increase revenue, profitability and market share because it represents benefits for which consumers are willing to pay more. This value is the advantage of the brand over its competitors or conventional goods, as the brand image in the minds of consumers is more favourable than that of its competitors, allowing it to offer a higher price for its product or service, which loyal customers will be willing to pay, thus generating a higher profit. It is argued that brand equity is the result of the relationships with the customer. This value is created on the basis of associations and images driven by emotions.

Brand image

The first definition of the brand image was provided by Gardner and Levy (1955), who emphasised that brand image is formed in the minds of consumers and consists of certain feelings, ideas or attitudes about the brand, which determines the consumer's choice to buy the product of that brand (quoted in Jung et al., 2020). Brand image is formed in the consumer's subconsciousness through brand attributes and associations, by means of communication tools and is strongly influenced by the consumer's personality, his/her attitudes and various social aspects (Išoraitė, 2018; Wijaya, 2013). Some attributes or evoked feelings may encourage one customer to buy that particular brand, while another consumer may not find the same attributes so attractive because of his/her personality traits, psychological aspects or social status, and she/he may choose to buy a product of another brand. According to Mao et al. (2020), customers themselves create a brand image by associating certain feelings and meanings with the brand, but these associations also provide them with information about the quality and value of the brand. If the brand image is strong, the service or product offered by the brand is perceived as being of high quality and having value.

It is argued that brand image is an image in the mind of the customer, created by the means of communication and correlating with the customer's environment (Gardner & Levy, 1955, quoted in Jung et al., 2020; Patterson, 1999; Batey, 2008; Wijaya, 2013; Išoraitė, 2018; Mao et al., 2020). The authors agree that brand image is composed of brand attributes and the feelings, ideas and associations that arise from them. Brand associations are all aspects that customers associate with the brand and relate to its traces left in their memory, which are reflected by the customer's ability to identify the brand under different conditions (Stonyte & Kinderis, 2020). Brand associations are a reflection of the emotional impact on the customer and are a key element of brand image (Susanti et al., 2019). Brand image associations are the aspects that customers associate most with a particular brand and that differentiate some brands from others in their minds.

The following types of associations are distinguished: brand personality, perceived quality and associations related to the organisation itself (Stonyte & Kinderis, 2020; Oppong & Phiri, 2018).

Brand personality is a set of human characteristics that reflect the emotions and feelings that the brand evokes in its consumers (Oppong & Phiri, 2018). As suggested by Stonyte and Kinderis (2020), brand personality can provide some brands with self-expressive and symbolic benefits, which are the source of differentiation and the relationships between the customer and brand. This implies that by providing human aspects to the brand, it becomes even more distinct from its competitors, and consumers can identify themselves with the brand by discovering similarities, thus creating shared values and making the consumer more willing to buy the product or service of that particular brand.

The perceived quality of the brand relates to the functional benefits that the brand provides to consumers and is an overall evaluation of the performance of the product (Stonyte & Kinderis, 2020). Asshidin et al. (2016) describe perceived quality as the evaluation of the overall excellence of the brand from the consumer's perspective, based on the necessary functional (product performance and durability) and complementary (brand name) attributes, which may depend on various factors such as the moment of purchase itself, the moment of consumption of the product or service as well as the place of purchase or use. The concept itself suggests that this aspect may be perceived differently by each consumer, depending on the circumstances and psychological aspects. Perceived quality also helps consumers decide which products or services to buy, and helps to differentiate them from those of competitors.

Associations arising from the organisation or company relate to elements such as people, programmes and values that are linked to the brand and which can provide meaningful differentiation in the market (Oppong & Phiri, 2018). Therefore, the employees of the company and the quality of service they provide, as well as the company's stated values, can also help to differentiate it from other brands, while consumers may in turn associate these aspects with the brand.

Brand associations can relate to both tangible and intangible aspects. Consumers rely on brand associations to process, organise and retrieve messages from their memory in order to ease their purchase decisions (Oppong & Phiri, 2018). Stonyte and Kinder (2020) also argue that brand associations may not only serve as a basis for consumer purchase, but also as a basis for differentiation and positioning for the company.

Brand image is a key driver for building consumer loyalty and encouraging repeat purchases (Zhang, 2015; Prema & Gnanamoni, 2018). This means that when a positive image of the brand is created in the consumer's mind through associations, he or she tends to buy the product or service repeatedly and becomes a regular customer. Consumers tend to have a more positive attitude towards a brand whose image is based on emotions and on creating a relationship between the brand and the consumer (Zhang, 2015; C. T. Chen, 2019). In order to satisfy their needs for personal development and self-esteem, consumers tend to associate themselves with brands that have strong images, and then they experience a psychological satisfaction that directly influences their purchasing behaviour (C. T. Chen, 2019; Prema & Gnanamoni, 2018).

Brand identity is also relevant to brand image and positioning. According to De Paula and Chaves (2017), brand identity is how brand marketers want to represent the brand. This process is carried out through communication tools within the company.

Brand identity

According to Jain (2017), brand identity is the external expression of the brand, including its name, logo, tone, symbols, and visual appearance, which form the basis of consumer brand recognition and brand differentiation. Ianenko et al. (2020) identify brand identity as an idea of what the brand should be and aims to be. Brand identity shows how the company would like the brand to be perceived from the consumer's perspective (Jain, 2017; Barbu, 2016). From these definitions, it can be argued that brand identity encompasses all the aspects that differentiate the brand from its competitors and helps to shape consumers' perception of the brand.

Jain (2017) places great emphasis on the visual identity of the brand, as it is often the first aspect that catches the customer's attention and shapes his/her perception before he/she learns more about it. For this reason, it is crucial to exploit visual aspects when differentiating the brand in order to make it stand out from competitors and gain customer trust. The following key elements of brand identity are also emphasised: meaning, which must reflect a unique mission, culture, personality and values; differentiation, distinctiveness and its emphasis in communication; durability and flexibility, which means that the main idea of the brand must be able to cope with change, and that an effective positioning helps to adapt and grow in the future (Jain, 2017). A brand identity should encompass all the aspects that make a brand distinctive, meaningful, resilient and provide the basis for building customer trust and positive associations.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) proposed a brand identity structure (see Figure 1). The presented brand identity structure is used by Atmaja and Budi (2016) for their study, suggesting that this model is still relevant and used.

Brand identity consists of twelve main parameters, and brand identity consists of brand essence, core and extended identity. The brand essence reflects the core value and idea offered by the brand. The core identity indicates the most important aspects of the brand for both employees and consumers. The extended identity combines all elements of the identity that are not part of the core identity.

Brand image and identity are closely related. Figure 2 shows the links between brand image and identity.

As it is seen from Figure 2, the company (the sender) formulates its message, advertisements through various symbols according to the brand identity (distinctive characteristics), and develops its communication with consumers. Brand image is formed when consumers decode the message they receive through communication and form associations. Brand identity is what the company thinks of itself, while brand image is what consumers think of the brand (Barbu, 2016; Ianenko et al., 2020). It should be noted that brand identity is how the company wants the brand to be perceived by consumers, and brand image is the end result of this effort.

Figure 1. Brand identity structure
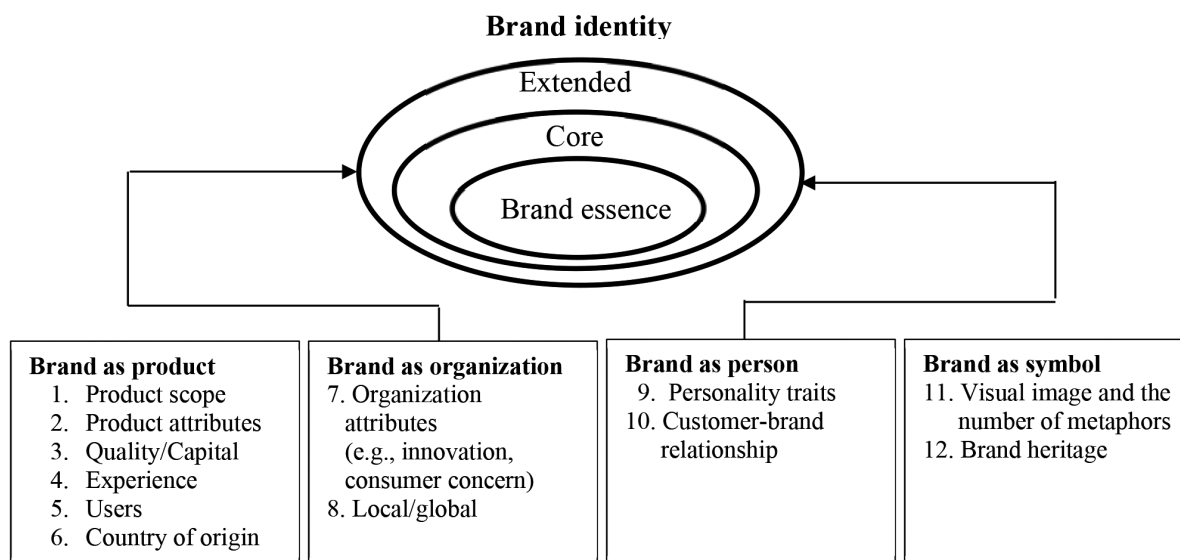
Source: own study based on Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000.

**Figure 2. The links between brand identity and image**
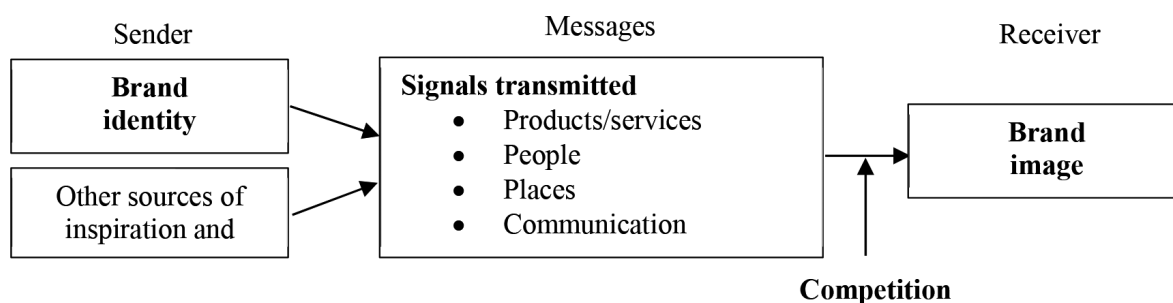
Source: own study based on Kapferer, 2012.

Brand positioning and marketing communication

As mentioned above, brand identity is how the company seeks consumer acceptance of the brand, positioning is the process leading to the formation of the brand image, and brand image is how consumers accept the brand. The model of the links between these concepts is presented in Figure 3, which is an adaptation of the models of the links between brand identity, positioning and image proposed by Janonis et al. (2007) and de Paula and Chaves (2017).

According to Janonis et al. (2007), a positive brand image is achieved by properly presenting the brand identity to consumers and by using an effective positioning strategy based on the brand identity. As De Paula and Chaves (2017) argue, brand identity is how brand marketers want to present the brand and this process is carried out through communication tools within the company. Meanwhile, brand image is built externally and reflects the customer's perception of the brand and the vision of the brand in the customer's mind, which contributes to the development of competitive advantage.

Figure 3. The link between brand identity, positioning and image
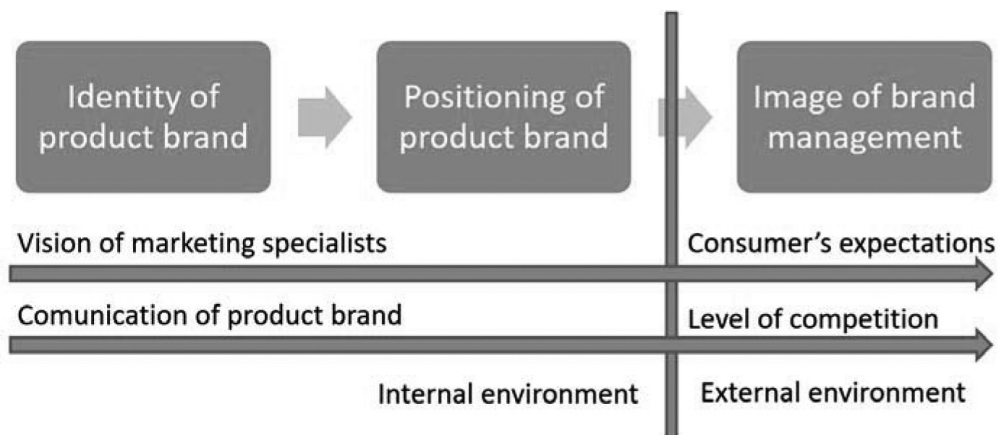
Source: adapted from Janonis et al., 2007; de Paula & Chaves, 2017.

Positioning is the particular position the brand aims to gain in the mind of the consumer (Ke et al., 2020; Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Fayvishenko (2018) describes brand positioning as a process aimed at highlighting distinctive features and creating positive associations in the minds of customers in order to gain customer loyalty and build brand image. Brand positioning is the process of positioning a brand in the mind of the customer and creating a strong brand image by highlighting the unique qualities and strengths of the brand. Positioning is a key element of brand communication to increase customer trust, encourage information retrieval and favourable purchasing decisions (Fayvishenko, 2018; Ke et al., 2020).

The unique idea of differentiation is the basis for effective positioning (Fayvishenko, 2018). According to Heding et al. (2020), consumers have limited mind space for commercial messages, so in order to be successful, brands need to position themselves in a way that conveys the most accurate and relevant message to them.

Kapferer (2012) provides the following formula for positioning: "... (to — description of the target market), the brand X is ... (a distinctive statement about the product or brand), out of all ... (differentiation from competitors), because ... (reason, promise, consumer benefit, supporting arguments)."

A similar but a bit more extended positioning statement is provided by Woods (2020). It is suggested to formulate this statement by placing the main aspects of the brand in different columns and selecting the most important ones to form the essence of the brand (see Figure 4).

Woods (2020), contrary to Kapferer (2012), adds one more part to the positioning statement — the pay-off to the consumer, which is supposed to show what the consumer emotionally gets from the brand. All the elements of the positioning statement are finally brought together in a brand essence, which should be unique and preferably no longer than 2–4 words. Keller and Swaminathan (2020) refer to this brand essence as the "brand mantra" and also emphasise that it should be short, clear and as precise as possible in defining the essence of the brand to the consumer. When the positioning statement is short, compelling and clear, it is the most memorable for the customer.

The following main positioning strategies can be distinguished: based on attribute or benefit positioning; based on price/quality; based on competitors, by using aggressive tactics; based on the mode of use; based on consumer; based on product category (Blankson, 2016; Nadube & Didia, 2018).

There is also one more very important positioning strategy used to reinforce the brand image and to adapt to modern trends: the *green brand image*. Keller and Swaminathan (2020) state that environmental protection is among the top five issues that young people are concerned about, and two-thirds of brand managers consider sustainability initiatives to be one of the most important aspects of staying competitive these days. Sustainable consumption is a growing trend, with many consumers turning to environmentally friendly products and companies contributing to green initiatives to demonstrate social responsibility. Green (or environmentally friendly) products can be defined as those that do not cause

Figure 4. Positioning statement template

Criteria which must be met by the positioning statement 1. Important, 2. Unique, 3. Convincing, 4. Encouraging to act, 5. Sustainable	
Audience The target audience, its most important needs in relation to the brand category	To:
Description The basic description of the product/service, or a broader, more strategic frame of reference	—— is:
Benefit The unique or primary benefit or distinctiveness of a product/service	That:
Proof Factual and provable arguments or reasons to believe the primary benefit or point of difference	That is because
Pay-off What is the emotional pay-off for the consumer? Does it answer the consumer's needs?	So that:
Brand essence The main idea, concept of the brand (unique, succinct, ideally 2–4 words)	

Source: compiled by the authors, based on Woods, 2020.

harm to the environment and are sustainable, the main objectives of which are to reduce waste and increase resource efficiency (Y. S. Chen et al., 2020).

It is argued that the brand, which provides services and emphasises the emotional and functional benefits of the service in terms of environmental protection in its positioning, over time builds the image of a professional, successful, reliable company in the minds of consumers, which in turn contributes to the development of consumer trust, loyalty and a sustainable brand image (Bashir et al., 2020). It also argued that brands with a green brand image are one step ahead in gaining a competitive advantage (Alamsyah et al., 2020; Chin et al., 2019). The brand can be considered "green" when it evokes positive feelings, attitudes and associations with environmental protection, which are highly favourable for building customer trust, satisfaction and added value for the brand (Ha, 2020; Y. S. Chen et al., 2020). This means that by positioning itself as environmentally friendly, over time the brand builds both a positive green brand image, which contributes to customer trust, adds value and helps to increase competitiveness.

Bashir et al. (2020) identify the following green brand positioning strategies, such as positioning through energy (or resource) efficiency, eco--friendliness or environmental friendliness. Chin et al. (2019) also note that effective positioning can be achieved if the product can be recycled or if its packaging is sustainable. Other authors argue that promoting sustainable consumption can help build

positive green brand associations and attitudes (Y. S. Chen et al., 2020). When developing a marketing strategy, it is important to decide which attributes should be emphasised in the positioning in order to ensure that the brand can deliver its given promise to the customers.

Brand positioning is one of the most important concepts in marketing and brand management, as a well-developed positioning strategy can improve a brand's competitiveness, increase demand (Ke et al., 2020), and provide direction for new product development, market expansion, pricing, choice of distribution channels, communication (Fayvishenko, 2018). Therefore, a well-developed positioning strategy is essential for building a strong brand image.

According to Percy (2018), although marketing communication is not the only form of communication that affects brand identity, reputation, image and positioning, consistent and targeted marketing communication has a significant impact on these aspects.

Online marketing is characterised by interactivity, building personal relationships with customers but reaching larger audiences, the ability for customer to choose the duration of contact and show initiative, unlimited audiences, the ability to build a relationship between customers and the brand, less time spent updating information, the ability to adjust the information according to the feedback and personal characteristics of the consumers (Todor, 2016). Online marketing is an opportunity to sell and promote goods or services without

a physical store, to create advertising based on consumers' past purchase behaviour and needs, to reach all customers with an internet connection, to build relationships, to develop two-way communication on social media, to make product or service reviews more convenient, to ensure transparency, to save time for both yourself and consumers (Santos, 2020).

However, consumers are no longer just recipients of information, they have also started to actively express their opinions on goods, services and brands (Chiang et al., 2019). The brand social media channels created by a company have a positive effect on consumer perception of the brand and brand image (Ali et al., 2019). A study by Alam and Khan (2019) confirmed that the content created by a company on social media has a significant impact on brand image, and the response generated by consumers has a positive effect on brand perception and image.

The research conducted by Martinus and Chaniago (2017) showed that Instagram can be well used to improve the branding strategy of start-ups through informative, entertaining, vivid and attention-grabbing visual content, encouraging engagement in discussions and storytelling. The latter is recognised as a particularly important element in communicating the brand and its value.

Marketers use Facebook advertising to reach their target customers and learn about their needs, as well as to have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing behaviour, brand perception and brand image (Erkan et al., 2019). As paid Facebook advertisements are shown to users whose characteristics are specified when they buy them, this means that the advertisement will attract users who are likely to find the offered content interesting and relevant, and who are more likely to engage with and be interested in the brand.

Voorveld et al. (2018) revealed that Facebook is mainly used to find out missing information, to search for topics or up-to-date information, and to find content that is satisfying and relaxing, especially for social interactions and communication. The internet and social media have fundamentally changed the way consumers search for information. Nowadays, their choices are increasingly influenced by online reviews or discussions with other consumers, which is also known as word-of-mouth communication. Consumers are more likely to trust the opinions of other consumers than the advertisements of the brand itself (Nuseir, 2019; Sidharta et al., 2021), so this can be used as one of the tools to increase consumer trust in the brand.

The research carried out by Mihardjo et al. (2019) confirms that electronic word-of-mouth communication has a positive effect on brand image, especially when the brand is involved in online sales. Electronic word-of-mouth not only has a positive effect on brand image but also on consumers' intention to buy online (Nuseir, 2018; Sidharta et al., 2021). On the other hand, companies should monitor and react to consumer discussions, which can have both positive and negative effects on brand image (Alam & Khan, 2019).

In recent years, the benefits of brand communities for mobilising consumers, creating and maintaining a social networking environment favourable to communication, discussion, comments, sharing of experiences and recommendations have been extensively analysed.

Brand communities are based on people's desire to belong to a particular group and are designed to bring together like-minded people, to foster communication and discussion about the brand's features, products or services, to share experiences and to create a relationship between the consumers, as well as between the consumers and the brand, to fulfil the need to connect with others, to reduce loneliness (Snyder & Newman, 2019).

Communication strategies in the community can focus on stimulating new experiences and self--esteem (Kumar & Kumar, 2020). Kaur et al. (2020) suggest that virtual brand communities should be a place where members can share brand-related experiences and provide support to each other. Tactics such as interactive quizzes, competitions, games or puzzles are suggested to encourage involvement and participation, and brands should offer content that is informative, entertaining and promotes networking.

According to Spiller (2020), blogs created by companies and the way they use keywords, as well as the links to and from the website of the brand or social media, can also improve the on-page SEO (search engine optimisation) rankings of the brand, making it easier for consumers to find information about the brand. The blog can be aimed at both local and international markets, depending on the country where it was created, which allows expanding the scope of the target audience and building the image of the brand in a broader market. The authors point out that the blog created by the brand itself can be more effective than the one created by third parties (Dann & Dann, 2011). This means that the content created by the brand itself is likely to appear more credible and sincere to consumers, which contributes to the formation of positive associations and attitudes.

Research methodology

Research method. Causal research was chosen to achieve the aim of the research, as it delves into the underlying causes of the phenomena in order to

identify a comprehensive solution to the problem (Pranulis & Dikčius, 2012). This research aims to get insight into consumers' opinion on brand image and its improvement in order to anticipate solutions. For the exploratory aspect of this case study, it was decided to choose a quantitative research method and to carry out an online questionnaire survey. This method was chosen because the quantitative research method helps to reveal real trends and statistical evidence, it seeks to look for external attributes, patterns and values that can then be expressed numerically by means of statistical analysis, and it can be used to survey the target group, which represents the opinion of the population, to obtain objective answers and to provide summarised results (Kardelis, 2016).

Respondents of the research. Before conducting the research, the population of interest, or a part of it, must first be defined, consisting of people with certain characteristics, attitudes or other features that would provide the necessary information for the selection of the research sample (Pranulis & Dikčius, 2012). The sample is composed of men and women aged 25–50 living in Lithuanian cities. Education and employment are also very important aspects of the current research, and, as it was revealed, the majority of the respondents have a higher level of education and are employed.

Sampling method. Non-probability sampling, using the convenience sampling method, which is based on interviewing the closest and most accessible elements of the population (Pranulis & Dikčius, 2012). This method was chosen to ensure smooth data collection.

Method of data collection. Survey using a closed-ended questionnaire. The survey was carried out online, using the online survey website apklausa.lt, by creating a questionnaire based on the survey instrument. The survey was carried out between 3 May 2021 and 7 May 2021. The questionnaire was distributed in closed Facebook groups dedicated to book lovers and readers and on the online forum vinted.lt, which also sells books. 307 responses were collected, with a standard research error of 92% (Raosoft, 2022).

Method of data analysis. Data processing and analysis were performed using MS Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics software package for statistical analysis. The methods used for data analysis were arithmetic mean, frequencies and cross-tabulations.

Research instrument and its rationale. The content of the questions in the questionnaire is based on the performed theoretical analysis and the following sources of scientific literature:
- Purchasing habits (Erkan et al., 2019; Fayvishenko, 2018; Ke et al., 2020);
- Book brand awareness, attributes, associations and factors that can improve image (Nuseir,

2019; Sidharta et al., 2021; Mihardjo et al., 2019; Keller & Swaminathan, 2020);
- Demographic issues.

Research ethics. the following basic principles of research ethics were followed during the research (Žydžiūnaitė, 2007): the right to be free from harm; the right not to be exploited; the usefulness of the research — explaining to the respondent the benefits of the research; the risk--benefit balance — ensuring that the benefits of the research are greater than the risks; respect for the dignity of the person; privacy, anonymity — respondents will not be asked very personal questions; confidentiality — it will not be possible to identify the subjects from the information provided.

Analysis of the results of the consumer opinion survey

In order to identify the areas for improvement, the analysis of the results of the consumer opinion survey will be carried out. Firstly, the reliability of the research has been verified. When all 58 questions were selected, it was found that the *Cronbach Alpha* is 0.829. The closer the *Cronbach Alpha* is to 1, the more reliable the data are. This obtained value indicates that the research questions were significantly interrelated and purposefully integrated.
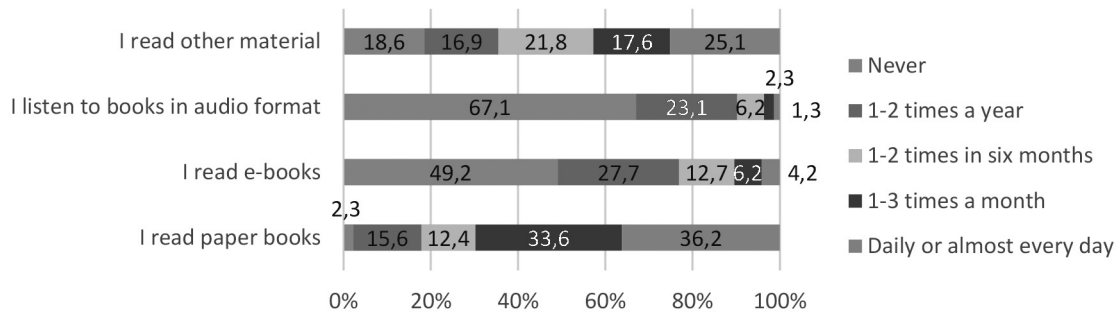
Figure 5 shows that the respondents are least likely to listen to books in audio format (67.1% of respondents answered that they never do that). Almost half of the respondents (49.2%) never read e-books and a very small proportion read them 1–3 times a month or daily (6.2% and 4.2% respectively). Respondents' answers were quite evenly distributed in terms of how often they read other material. Meanwhile, only 2.3% of respondents said that they never read paper books. 33.6% read books in this format 1–3 times a month and even 36.2% read paper books daily or almost every day.

Figure 6 shows where the respondents, who most often read paper books, live.

As it is seen from the data in Figure 6, the respondents living in cities are most likely to read paper books. A particularly large number (92 respondents) of the respondents living in cities read books almost every day or daily, and 72 respondents from large cities read paper books 1–3 times a month. This suggests that the marketing communication tools aimed at attracting customers should be focused on the population of large cities.
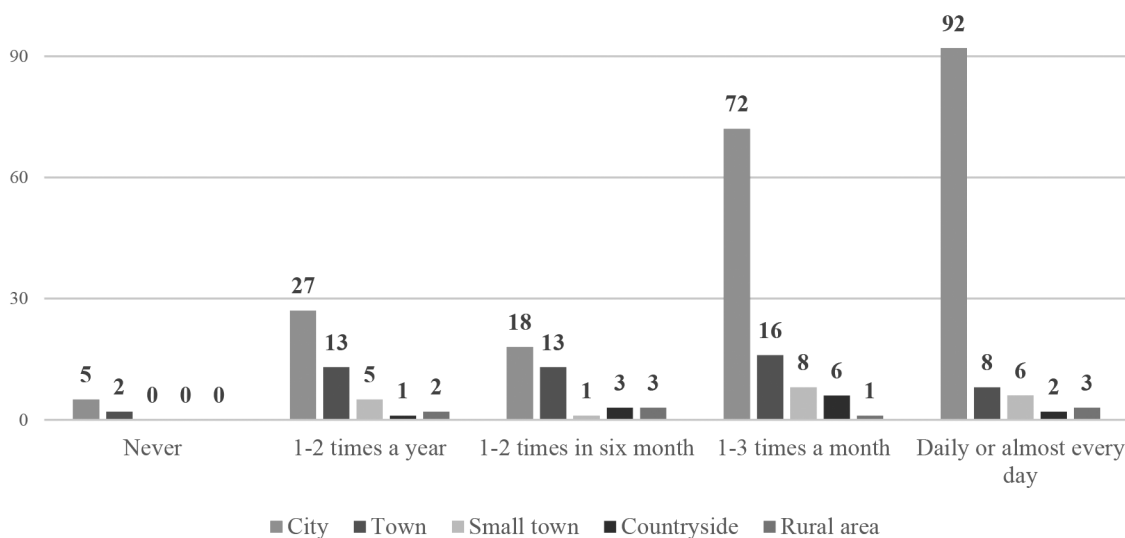
The distribution of the respondents' answers according to the source of information about books and their availability is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 5. Distribution of the respondents' answers by type and frequency of reading (%)

Source: own study.

Figure 6. Distribution of the respondents by the frequency of reading paper books and their place of residence

Source: own study.

Figure 7 shows that the most frequent sources of such information are social media advertisements (16%) and online reviews (14.7%). A similar proportion of the respondents get information from reading groups on social networks (e.g., Facebook) and from family and friends. 11.9% of the respondents receive information from the influencers' advertisements. It appears that the least popular sources of information are traditional media (TV, radio) (2.7%) and the press (magazines, newspapers) (2.4%). The data show that the Internet is becoming an increasingly popular source of information, while traditional sources are losing their popularity.

Figure 8 depicts the distribution of the respondents' answers according to where and how often they buy books.

As many as 79.5% of respondents never rent books and 69.7% never buy books from e-book sites.

A larger proportion of the respondents prefer to buy books 1–3 times a month in online reading communities (e.g., Facebook groups) from individuals (22.1% of the respondents), from second-hand book selling platforms (e.g., Vinted, sena.lt) 24.1%, from online sites of the bookshops 25.4%. The respondents are slightly less likely to buy second-hand books from bookshops or physical bookshops, and 39.7% of the respondents borrow from the library 1–2 times a year. These data suggest that a higher proportion of the respondents are more likely to buy books online.

Figure 9 provides the arithmetic mean of the distribution of respondents' answers on the most common problems they encounter when buying paper books.
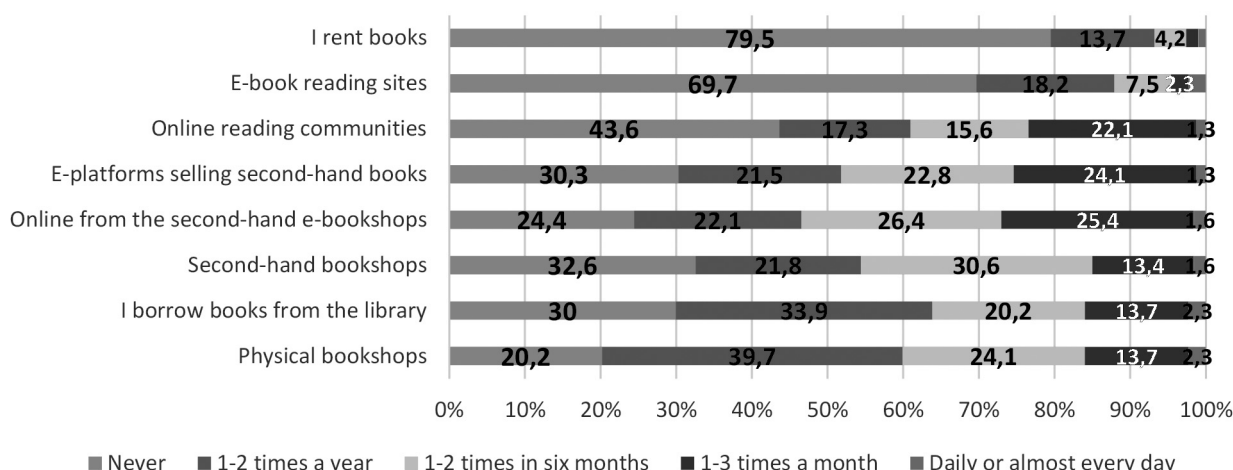
The respondents were asked to rate the statements on a scale where strongly disagree=1, totally agree=5. The arithmetic means are

Figure 7. Sources from which the respondents get information about books and their availability (%)
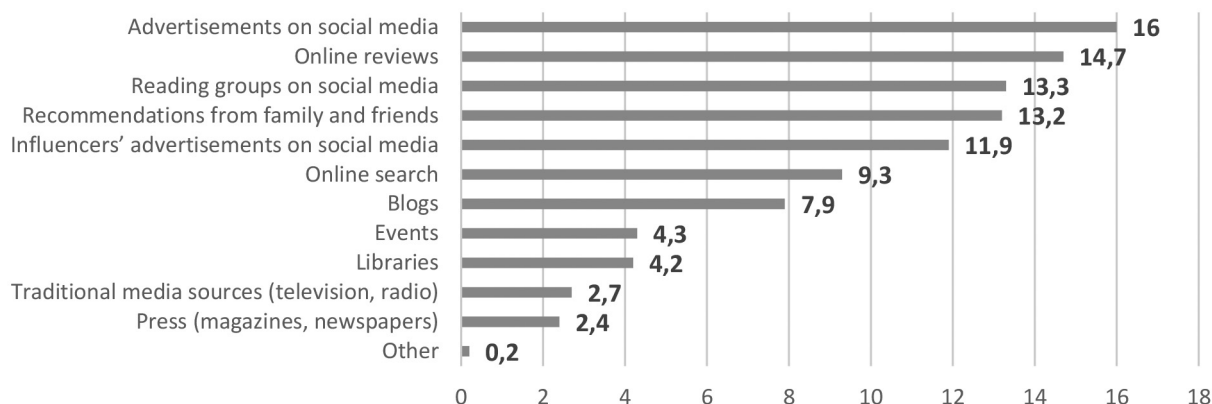
Source: own study.

Figure 8. Distribution of the respondents' answers by the place and frequency of purchasing books (%)
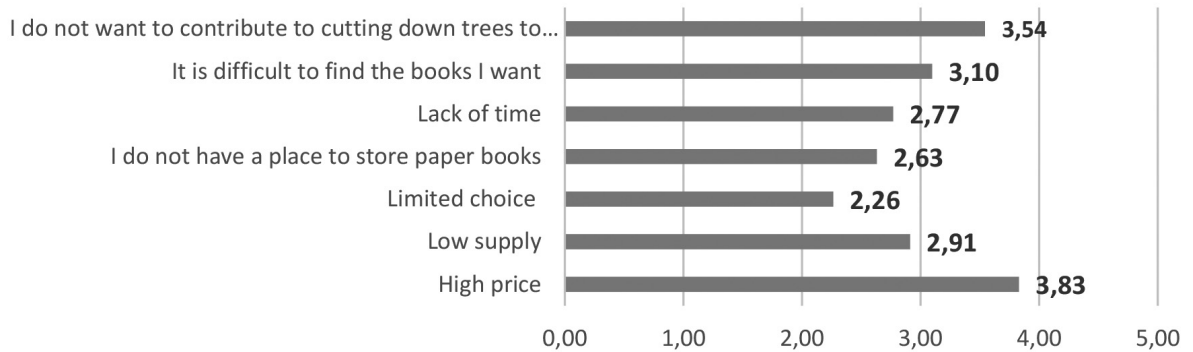

Source: own study.

interpreted as follows: the closer the value is to 1, the bigger the number of respondents who totally disagreed with the statement; the closer the value is to 5, the bigger the number of respondents who totally agreed with the statement. The data in Figure 9 shows that the main problem faced by the majority of the respondents is the high price of paper books. Also, a larger proportion of respondents were more likely to agree that they do not want to contribute to cutting down of trees for book production. Respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that it is difficult for them to find the books they want. The smallest proportion of the respondents said that access to get books was the biggest problem. This may be due to the fact that a very high percentage of respondents live in cities. It was revealed that 79.5% of respondents never choose to rent books.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of the respondents' opinion on marketing communication tools that can improve the brand image of books.

Figure 10 suggests that the most important aspect for the respondents was the ability to find reviews on other users' experience (32.9% agreed, even 55.4% totally agreed). This solution could possibly help to create a credible brand image. The second most popular option is a brand-managed Facebook group with quizzes, competitions, discussions (26.1% agreed, 48.9% totally agreed). Even 44% of the respondents totally agreed that the blog in the Lithuanian language would improve the image. A third of the respondents agreed or totally agreed that the blog in the English language would also improve the brand image. 37.8% of the respondents totally agreed and the same percentage agreed that advertising on social media would

Figure 9. Arithmetic means of the distribution of the respondents' answers on the difficulties of buying paper books

I do not want to contribute to cutting down trees to…	3,54
It is difficult to find the books I want	3,10
Lack of time	2,77
I do not have a place to store paper books	2,63
Limited choice	2,26
Low supply	2,91
High price	3,83

Source: own study.

Figure 10. Distribution of the respondents' answers on tools to strengthen the brand image of books (%)

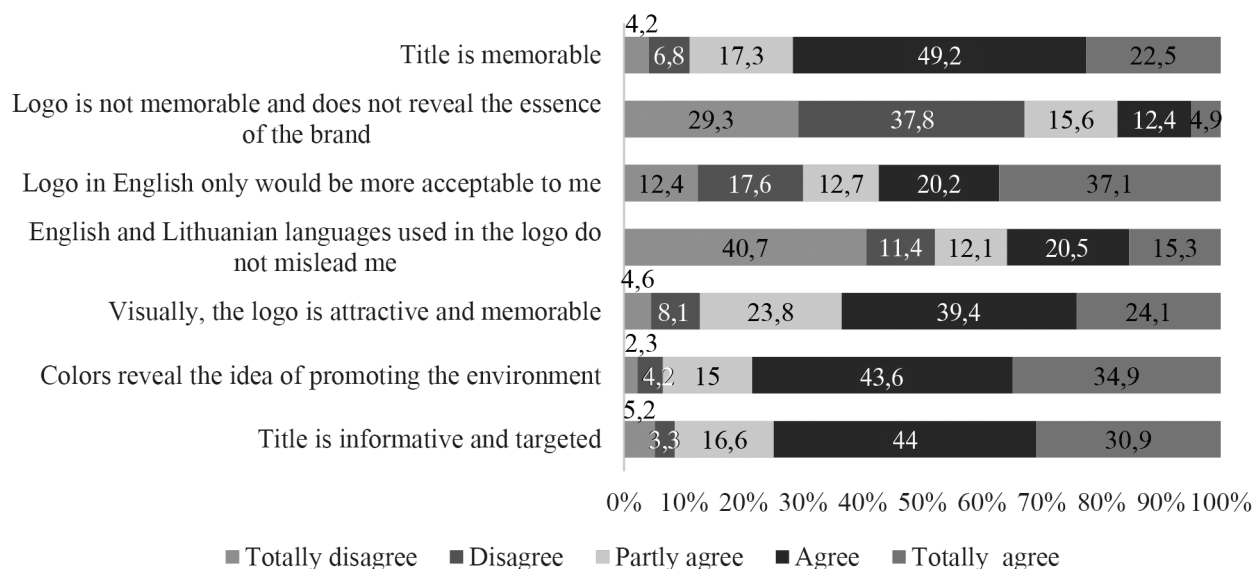|	Totally disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Totally agree
Loyalty gifts	33,6	12,1	14,3	24,4	15,6
Communication on social media in Lithuanian/English	8,8	3,6	16,3	38,1	33,2
Newsletter	39,1	13,4	20,5	18,9	8,1
Social media advertising	8,8	3,3	12,4	37,8	37,8
Brand-managed Facebook group	10,1	2,6	12,4	26,1	48,9
Brand participation in public events	26,7	14,3	13	29	16,9
Blog in English	6,8	10,4	17,6	31,9	33,2
Blog in Lithuanian	7,5	8,8	19,5	20,2	44
Advertising on traditional media	36,5	16,3	19,5	21,2	6,5
Reviews on other users' experience	2,9	1,3	7,5	32,9	55,4

Source: own study.

Figure 11. Arithmetic means of the distribution of the respondents' answers on tools to strengthen the brand image of books

Loyalty gifts	2,77
Communication on social media in Lithuanian/English	3,83
Newsletter	2,44
Social media advertising	3,93
Brand-managed Facebook group	4,01
Brand participation in public events	2,95
Blog in English	3,74
Blog in Lithuanian	3,84
Advertising on traditional media	2,45
Reviews on other users' experience	4,36

Source: own study.

Figure 12. Respondents' opinion on book brand logos

Source: own study.

improve the image. In order to give a clearer picture of the respondents' opinion on the tools identified, Figure 11 shows the arithmetic means of respondents' answers to the same question.

Figure 11 reveals that the least effective tools were advertising on traditional media (TV, radio), newsletter, loyalty gifts and participation in public events. This data also confirms that the most effective tool identified by the largest proportion of the respondents was the ability to find reviews from other users (which is currently not available). The second place is taken by the Facebook group (community), which is followed by social media advertising, a blog in the Lithuanian language, social media communication in English and Lithuanian, and a blog in the English language.

Figure 12 reflects the breakdown of the respondents' opinions on book brand logos. According to the respondents, two languages used in the logo are confusing (40.7%) and an English-only logo would be more acceptable and attractive (57.3% agree and totally agree).

Table 1 shows the crosstab of the questions "A well-known book brand" and "What marketing communication tools could improve the book brand image". The solutions selected for cross-tabbing are those that have previously been identified as the most attractive.

The data in Table 1 show that the possibility to find reviews is slightly more important for the respondents who are not familiar with the brand. This may be due to the fact that reviews help to create an image of credibility. A brand group on Facebook to build a community is fairly equally important for those who are familiar with the

brand and those who are not. Advertising on social media was identified as slightly more attractive by the respondents who were not familiar with the brand compared to those who were. The blogs in Lithuanian and English would be more attractive to those who are familiar with the book brand. Communication on social media in Lithuanian and foreign languages is equally attractive to those who are familiar with the brand and those who are not. This suggests that these tools could potentially help to attract those who are not aware of the brand and improve its image in the minds of both aware and unaware consumers.

Discussion and conclusions

To summarise the results of the survey, the majority of the respondents, especially those living in cities, read paper books 1–3 times a month or even daily. The most popular places to get information about books and their purchase or availability are social media advertising, reviews and reading groups. A larger proportion of readers are more likely to buy books online. The most common problems with buying paper books encountered by the respondents are the high price and the reluctance to contribute to the cutting of trees. Most associations are related to books themselves and slightly fewer to environmental aspects. The most important factors that would encourage the respondents to subscribe to second-hand books would be a low price, the possibility to order online and the possibility to contribute to an

Table 1. Correlation of the respondents' answers on tool to strengthen the brand image of books with brand awareness

What measures would improve the book brand image?	Well-known book brand	Yes	No	What measures would improve the book brand image?	Well-known book brand	Yes	No
Possibility to find reviews on other users' experiences	Totally disagree	3	5	Brand group on social network Facebook (with quizzes, competitions, discussions)	Totally disagree	19	7
	Disagree	1	2		Disagree	4	4
	Partly agree	5	16		Partly agree	10	23
	Agree	32	61		Agree	23	51
	Totally agree	96	68		Totally agree	81	67
Blog in the Lithuanian language	Totally disagree	10	11	Social media advertising	Totally disagree	17	7
	Disagree	8	15		Disagree	7	2
	Partly agree	20	35		Partly agree	10	22
	Agree	16	42		Agree	44	66
	Totally agree	83	49		Totally agree	59	55
Blog in the English language	Totally disagree	9	12	Communication on social media in Lithuanian/English	Totally disagree	19	4
	Disagree	5	23		Disagree	4	7
	Partly agree	12	40		Partly agree	9	39
	Agree	37	50		Agree	40	70
	Totally agree	74	27		Totally agree	65	32

Source: own study.

environmental initiative. The tools that would improve the brand image of the books were reviews from other users, a Facebook community, a blog in English and Lithuanian, advertising on social networks and communication in English and Lithuanian.

The results of the research showed that the possibility to find reviews from other consumers was the most important tool for improving brand image. The research confirms that active blogs (in both Lithuanian and English) encourage consumer participation in content creation and increase website traffic.

The theoretical analysis has shown that brand communities can be an excellent tool for brand image building. This was also agreed (26.1%) or totally agreed (48.9%) by the survey respondents who would like to find discussions, interesting quizzes and competitions in a brand community. The respondents agreed that paid advertising on social networks is the main source of information about books and their acquisition. The theoretical analysis shows that paid advertising on social networks is a crucial tool to reach your target audience. The research participants suggest that communication in both English and Lithuanian would help to improve the image of the brand to both those who are familiar with it and those who are not.

The research respondents believe that the use of two languages in the logo is misleading and that an English-only logo would be more appealing. The main associations of the respondents are with books and reading, but not with the "green" brand. This suggests that environmental friendliness should be emphasised in communication, as the theoretical analysis has shown that these days the green brand creates a very important differentiation and competitive advantage. In order to build green brand associations, marketing communication should provide information on the specific attributes that make a product or service environmentally friendly, in order to inform consumers about the value that is being created by contributing to environmental protection (Y. S. Chen et al., 2020; Alamsyah et al., 2020; Chin et al., 2019). In order to demonstrate sincerity and credibility, it is crucial to educate consumers about environmental issues and provide evidence of how the brand contributes to their solution (Ha, 2020). This suggests that providing consumers with the most detailed and well-reasoned information about how and what environmental problem they are trying to solve and being able to fulfil their promise is essential in the development of the brand positioning strategy in order to build trust and a strong green brand image.

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Obroniła doktorat z zakresu zarządzania i rozwoju turystyki. Jej badania i publikacje koncentrują się na następujących obszarach: zarządzanie marketingowe, jakość usług, zachowania konsumentów, zrównoważony rozwój w biznesie.