More than Classrooms: How School Culture Creates a School Brand?

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	School culture is important for creating a school identity and, consequently, school branding. Using the method of critical and content analysis and theoretical reflection, the study explores the correlation between school culture, marketing, and educational sciences. The research problem arises from the insufficiently clear connection between the school brand, school culture, and the role of principals. The aim of the study is to determine how school culture contributes to the formation of a school brand. The theoretical assumptions of Keller's CBBE model and Balmer's AC4ID model of corporate identity were used. This study is interdisciplinary because it connects the fields of management, marketing, and pedagogy with the aim of bridging the gap between the educational sciences of school leadership and management. The main results indicate the strong influence of school culture on the emotional connection of all stakeholders, as well as their loyalty to the school. This study also provides a deep understanding of the concept of school culture and branding, offering valuable insights for educational institutions.

1. Introduction

Education is not only the result of social circumstances, but also a system shaped through legal and managerial decisions [1]. In this sense, the professionalization of principals, as well as the curriculum, strongly depend on legislation. Therefore, principals who manage and lead schools are responsible for school culture (SC) and the effectiveness of their work. However, the issue of SC is not only a question of the school ethos but also a question of the school leadership style, the school vision and school management (SM). In the simplest terms, SC is perceived as positive or negative. If we look at school culture from the aspect of organizational behaviour, it occupies a main place in school management. By understanding school culture, we understand how schoolwork functions [2], how teachers work [3] and what internal relationships are like [4]. In fact, studying SC is necessary in the context of educational sciences and the economics of education [5]. However, SC can also be viewed from the aspect of school marketing where the influence of building, encouraging, and maintaining positive relationships is precisely a key aspect of developing a school's image.

The school's cultural values play a key role in employee motivation. Values such as respect, collaboration, innovation and excellence can create a positive work environment that encourages teachers to engage and grow professionally. When teachers feel valued, their motivation increases, which positively affects the quality of teaching and the success of students [6]. In this sense, the principal's leadership style can direct the SC in a positive or negative direction. This means that the principal, with the help of his pedagogical competences and managerial skills, co-creates SC, i.e. creates collegial relationships between employees, encourages extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for improvements and proactivity. In this way, cooperation between principals, employees, stakeholders, and students is created.

Despite numerous studies on SC, there is still an insufficiently developed model that would connect school leadership, school management, corporate marketing, organizational behaviour, and school branding. Specifically, Staničić [7] talks about the professionalization of school principals as well as the importance of distributive school leadership, but school leadership and SM are still not viewed in cooperation. This is, among other things, due to the very interdisciplinary nature of different paradigms in which pedagogy and educational sciences view school leadership differently with a strong emphasis on curriculum, teaching, students, and school climate, while neglecting modern management methods. Similarly, the economics of education emphasizes management, administration, finances, while forgetting the educational component of the school, its essential role in education.

Further research is needed on how strategic management of SC can influence school perceptions in the long term. This study seeks to fill this gap in theoretical terms by offering an analysis of key elements of SM, SC, and branding in the context of corporate marketing. The significance of this study stems from a deeper understanding of SC and the connection between the influence of principals, employees, and the school in a recognizable educational institution. In other words, the goal is to identify key leadership and SM factors that influence the creation of a school brand and to offer guidelines for strategic management. The paper analyses relevant literature from the field of management, marketing, and educational sciences, and interprets and presents research results that identify different roles and their connections to school identity, teachers, and branding.

2. Methodology

The study starts from the analysis of relevant literature related to SC and brand theory. Using Keller's CBBE model [8], we analyse how various aspects of school culture can shape brand perception. Also, using Balmer's AC^{4}ID Test [9], we research different identities of the school and how they manifest through SC. Finally, using Grönroos's brand relationship context [10], we research how school culture can affect the relationship between students and the school as a brand. The analysis focused on patterns and themes in the works of J. M. T. Balmer, K. L. Keller, and C. Grönroos. The theories of Balmer, Keller, and Grönroos were evaluated in terms of logical consistency, validity, and reliability. More precisely, the concept of corporate identity and brand is analysed according to Balmer's AC^{4}ID Test model. In other words, the identity of the school is investigated from the aspect of SC by applying the theories of corporate marketing [11,12]. Also, Keller's brand equity model is analysed, according to which the brand is presented in the context of the impressions of the school's stakeholders. This means that Keller's brand pyramid served as a bridge to show more clearly the connection between school identity and school image. Finally, we look at Grönroos' brand relationship model in the context of SC and the school climate, but also as a model of service provided

by teachers to students. In this sense, we understand teachers as key factors in the construction of SC and service providers who together form a brand relationship.

Three research questions were posed: How does school culture affect marketing effectiveness? How do brand relationships mediate between school culture and marketing effectiveness? What constitutes school identity? The contribution of this study is reflected in providing new insights and understanding of how SC can be used as an effective marketing tool. Also, this study builds on previous studies of SC in the context of SM [13-16]. This research employs a combination of qualitative content analysis [17], document analysis [18], critical analysis [19], and theoretical reflection to investigate SC. The topic of this study is SC in the context of marketing, especially from the aspect of school identity and brand identity. The goal is to achieve a deeper understanding of the SC concept in the context of marketing and management and to offer new insights into the school's identity. The limitations of this paper stem from its qualitative analysis. In further research, the elements of the school's identity can be empirically researched according to the model we present. In this sense, a linear model can be used to obtain the overall identity of the school for each identity dimension.

3. Theoretical determination of School Culture

School culture is a complex and multidimensional concept that includes values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape the daily life of the school. We observe SC through four aspects [20]: frameworks, products, expressions, and activities. In addition to influencing employee motivation [4], the school's cultural values can also function as a catalyst for marketing effectiveness. A school that nurtures positive values and has a strong culture [9] can attract and retain talented teachers, students, and parents. Transparent communication, recognition and promotion of a school's achievements can improve its reputation [17] and attract more enrolments, thereby increasing marketing effectiveness.

SC represents a set of values, norms, beliefs, and practices that shape the daily life of the school and influence the behaviour of all members of the school community [9], including students, teachers, administrative staff, and parents. School culture (SC) is a complex concept that includes the basic assumptions and beliefs of school members, which operate unconsciously and define the way the school sees itself and its environment. In fact, the SC model itself is identical to the organizational culture model, only that it is observed in the context of education. Schein's model of organizational culture [5] is one of the most well-known and widely used models for understanding how culture functions within organizations.

3.1. Literature review

According to Schönig [21], SC is a key concept for school development. It encompasses the values, norms and practices that are promoted within the school and shape its development and success. SC is the basis for all changes and innovations within an educational institution, and a positive school culture can improve the motivation of students and teachers. Rosenbusch and Huber [22] emphasize that SC influences educational goals and processes. SC can support the achievement of educational goals, and the creation of an organizational culture that supports educational goals and promotes cooperation between teachers and students is essential. Heenan *et al*., [23] investigate the impact of transformational school leadership on staff and school culture. They conclude that transformational leadership has a positive effect on staff motivation and improves school culture.

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their teams, which leads to improvements in performance and achievement of educational goals. The above is consistent with the assumptions presented by S. Staničić [7].

Mincu [24] analyses the key role of SM in the transformation of education, emphasizing the importance of organizational culture and school structure for achieving quality education. Effective school management requires understanding and adapting the organizational culture to achieve the desired educational outcomes. In schools with a positive culture, a collaborative relationship among employees prevails. A school that embraces change is one that has strong support from the principal [2, 21]. According to McChesney and Cross [25], positive school accountability supports innovation and improvement in teaching. Teachers play a key role in shaping and maintaining school culture, and their collaboration and professional development are essential for school success. This means that we view SC as an expression of the shared beliefs of all participants in the educational process. Veletić *et al.*, [26] investigate teachers' and principals' perceptions of the school climate, with special emphasis on the principal's leadership style and its impact on the quality of the organization. They conclude that the principal's leadership style significantly affects the perception of the school climate and teacher satisfaction.

Torres [27] provides an overview of theoretical approaches to organizational culture in schools and their connection with leadership and management processes. The school's identity is formed through its culture, which affects the perception of the school in the community and its image. Positive school culture can improve the school's image and attract more students and community support. Jukić [14, 28, 29] analyses the corporate brand in school management, emphasizing the role of employees, corporate identity, and reputation. In this sense, it builds on Balmer's theory [7, 30, 31] of corporate identity. These studies provide examples of how theoretical models such as corporate identity [11,31] can be applied in the context of SM and SC. In this sense, the core of SC is the values and beliefs of teachers.

This is connected to the context of pedagogical culture that emphasizes the importance of education and the function of teachers, which is not only the transmission of knowledge but also the transmission of ethical virtues [6, 21, 25]. Živković researches and analyses the teacher identity model. This research builds on the correlations in teaching [32, 33] that start from Beijaard teachers' professional identity [34-36]. Teacher professional identity can be most simply presented as the teacher's sense of self-worth and reflection on those values. According to Jukić [16, 29] there is a common correlation between employee behaviour and SC. Therefore, the SC concept represents a way of unconscious thinking [20] of all school stakeholders, and it is precisely such a system of traditions, norms and beliefs of an educational organization that starts from constant interaction.

3.2. School Culture – phenomenological approach

Culture can be defined as a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations of a particular community. In the context of SM, school culture reveals how participants in school life approach decision-making problems and the implementation of strategic decisions. According to Owens [37] the culture of an organization (school) brings stability and security to the community, strengthens order, and empowers it. SC is in this sense a "system of norms and values" that emerge over time in every educational institution. According to Staničić [7], it is a system of expectations and assumptions that influence the behaviour of teachers and students. This means that SC is not static. Rituals and procedures in school are an important segment that defines SC because they help create structure, a sense of community, and expectations for students and teachers. Research shows that consistent

implementation of routine procedures, such as the way of registering for classes and interaction between students, contributes to the socio-emotional development of students [38].

Schein's organization culture model [5] includes three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. Schein's model can be applied to SC to better understand the various elements that shape the daily life of the school (see Table 1). Artifacts are the visible elements of a culture, such as the physical environment, language, technology, dress styles, rituals, and ceremonies [5]. Artifacts are easy to see, but often difficult to understand without a deeper insight into the organization. In a school context, artifacts can include school uniforms, classroom layouts, school slogans, symbols, and ceremonies such as graduations. Espoused values are declared values and norms shared by members of the organization [5]. They include the organization's mission, vision, strategies, and goals. Expressed values shape the behaviour of the organization's members. Expressed values in a school may include an emphasis on academic excellence, inclusion, collaboration, innovation, and respect. Underlying assumptions are deeply rooted beliefs and assumptions that unconsciously shape the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of organizational members [5]. Basic assumptions are the most difficult to change because they are implicit and often unspoken. Basic assumptions in school may include beliefs about the nature of learning, the roles of teachers and students, and the purposes of education.

Table 1
School Culture in Schein's context

Artifacts	The physical appearance of the school, school ceremonies, school symbols
Espoused values	Mission and vision of the school, educational strategies, rules of conduct
Underlying assumptions	Deeply held beliefs about education, learning and teaching

J. Wagner explores how school spaces use symbols such as flags, crosses, and language regimes to shape students' identities and feelings of belonging [39]. The research conducted by Sousa and Ferreira [40] indicates the limited real power of students in SM, emphasizing that their participation is often symbolic. SC often supports the idea of participation, but in practice students have limited influence. Formal mechanisms such as student councils exist, but their actual decision-making power remains minimal. Also, Graß [41] emphasizes that principals do not act only as executors of reform policies, but also reinterpret and adapt them, which has a long-term impact on SC. Competition between schools becomes the dominant frame of mind, with the success of a school being measured by its ability to attract students. In other words, SC is perceived in the context of the *educational market*, and then the way in which culture is experienced changes. Of course, such a way of observing SC is not in line with the current understanding of the education system in Southeastern Europe.

This process changes the school culture because decentralization creates pressure on principals and teachers to achieve better results with limited resources, often according to market principles. Böttcher [42] warns similarly when analysing the concept of school decentralization. Although SC can be described as the actions of collective and individual actors in the micropolitical sphere [42], it is still a set of interactions between all school stakeholders. According to Helsper [43], SC is not a static concept, but a dynamic process that arises through interactions of different dimensions such as pedagogical practice, organizational structure, and social relations. In this sense, SC is formed through continuous reshaping, because schools are not only places of imparting knowledge, but spaces where values, identities and social norms are built.

Structural elements such as classroom organization and administrative procedures can support or hinder certain cultural values [44,45]. For example, flexible schedules can encourage collaboration and innovation among teachers. SC is shaped by its history, context, and people in it [45,46]. For

example, the age of the school can influence cultural changes [47,48], and the external context, such as the community and local education authorities, also plays a significant role. If a school has a culture that values autonomy and creativity, structural elements are likely to be adapted to support these values (see Table 2).

Table 2
Structure of School Culture

Interconnection	The Principal influences on SC, and the SC shapes the principal
Impact	Structural elements encourage teacher cooperation
Influence	Structural elements support the teacher's values

There is no single SC, as they are shaped by their own educational emphases and ways of self-perception. The diversity of cultural practices in schools contributes to the creation of a living school culture, which is constantly evolving through the interactions of teachers, students, and the school community. This also means that cultural schools (*Kulturschulen*) have unique approaches to education as stated by A. Sliwka, Klopsch and Maksimović [49], but their SCs can differ even when they share the same focus on culture. This raises additional questions. Among other things, if we assume that SCs are a set of shared beliefs and attitudes of a particular school, they do not necessarily have to achieve the same identity. Within a single school, there can be diverse cultural practices, which contributes to a dynamic and school culture [50]. Then SC in cultural schools is not unique, but a dynamic process that adapts to different social dimensions specific to each school. The way in which SC is analysed influences its definition.

If cultural schools are viewed as a separate category, they can be separated from *non-cultural schools*, but their internal diversity remains present. Jukić [13,16,29] analyses very similarly in the context of SC and extends it to school branding. Staničić [7,51] distinguishes effective schools from ineffective schools. In this sense, effective schools represent a positive SC and are characterized by employee participation in decision-making, shared responsibility, and collegial relations. Conversely, ineffective schools represent a negative (toxic) culture that is recognized by non-acceptance of innovations, criticism, and failure to solve problems. According to Peterson and Cosner [20], the components of SC are viewed as frameworks (norms, values, and beliefs), products (symbols and artifacts), expressions (stories and myths), and acts (rituals and ceremonies). In this sense, we understand frameworks as unwritten rules that influence the interaction and behaviour of employees and students and school values such as teacher training [25, 32]. Products represent the objectification of the SC, i.e. certain artifacts of the school such as trophies won and symbols that represent the value of the school. Also, school expressions represent specific stories and myths of the school that are based on previous successes with the help of which they serve as a form of motivation and identification of teachers. Finally, the fourth component of the SC starts from the category of rituals and ceremonies that represent a specific way of "life" of the school in the form of ceremonies, events, and celebrations.

The concept of cultural schools does not exclude SC components. According to Sliwka *et al.,* [49] the concept of cultural school emphasizes the cultural dimension of school culture, but at the same time they recognize that SC is not homogeneous and that it can vary between schools. Artistic and creative elements are added as key factors in shaping the school community. Culturally aware schools strive to develop SC components and achieve positive cultural determinants. Such schools develop a unique sense of purpose and values, high standards, shared and collaborative learning [3], and a sense of collective merit. SC is a system of standards, beliefs, and rules [52]. Also, emotional support, empathy and positive interpersonal relationships play a key role in creating a supportive and effective

educational environment. Cultura of care not only improves the student experience but also contributes to the professional satisfaction and identity of teachers [53]. Teacher identity is a key component of SC. The teacher's professional identity model is based on three key dimensions [35, 36]: the teacher as an expert in the subject, as a pedagogical expert and as a didactic expert (see Table 3).

Table 3
The Hidden Foundations of School Culture

Schein's model	Techer's identity	School Culture
Artifacts	The teacher as a role model	Appearance of the school, symbols, uniforms, ceremonies
Espoused values	The teacher as an educator	Rules, behaviours, school vision, strategy
Underlying assumptions	Teacher as a professional	The role of the teacher, the purpose of education

As can be seen from Table 3, teachers use artifacts to create a positive environment and model professional behaviour. Also, Schein's first level of culture [5], i.e. artifacts are a visible part of SC, such as the physical appearance of the school, school uniforms, symbols and slogans, and ceremonies and rituals. From the aspect of espoused values, expressed values include the mission and vision of the school, educational strategies, rules of conduct and expectations from students and teachers. According to Bruner [54], SC is the teacher's work that shapes it and enables its functioning, i.e. it depends on the influence of individuals. This is in line with Çoban *et al.,* [55] who emphasize the importance of building trust with teachers and prioritizing teaching to encourage collaboration and increase school self-efficacy.

The concept of cultural school can be connected to SC through all four dimensions (see Table 4). The term cultural school refers to a school that emphasizes cultural values, artistic expression, and creativity as the foundation of education. Such schools often integrate art, history, tradition, and social norms, creating an environment that encourages stakeholders to explore identity. It can also refer to SC, which encompasses the norms, values, beliefs, and customs that shape the school atmosphere. This is also connected to the understanding of SC according to Peterson and Costner [20] as well as Stoll [46], but also according to Göhlich [48]. Cultural schools shape specific pedagogical and artistic values that guide teaching and school identity. For example, schools that promote an interdisciplinary approach to art and education create unique educational norms that differ from traditional schools. Schools with a cultural focus often have a unique aesthetic, including student artwork, school publications, architecture suited to creative spaces, as well as specific symbols that reflect their cultural focus.

Cultural schools develop their school narratives through stories about significant cultural projects [56], successful artists who were students at the school, as well as through mythologizing school initiatives that reflect the artistic identity of the community. Cultural schools hold festivals, artistic performances, exhibitions, and public presentations, which become part of the school tradition. These events contribute to the creation of a dynamic school culture where creativity is celebrated as a key value. The uniqueness of SC stems from the relationship between teachers and students, the culture changes as its stakeholders change. Therefore, the role of the principal in creating SC is extremely important [57, 58].

Table 4

School as a cultural space

Dimensions	Example	Cultural school
Frameworks (norms, values, and beliefs)	Educational norms, pedagogical values, stakeholder beliefs	Focus on artistic expression, creativity as the foundation of education
Products (symbols and artifacts)	Visual identity of the school, material symbols, achievements	Student artwork, school exhibitions, creative spaces
Expressions (stories and myths)	Significant events, school history, occurrences, and anecdotes	Stories of successful artists, projects, and cultural collaborations
Acts (rituals and ceremonies)	School celebrations, rituals, ceremonies, festivities	Art festivals, performances, theatre productions

If changes are attempted in a school, key components of the school community that are perceived as positive or negative are quickly revealed. This is both an indicator of how willing teachers are to accept change, and how "strong" the SC is. In this sense, any change that goes against the already adopted culture and encounters resistance from teachers and students exposes weaknesses in the SC. In other words, changes that will be accepted in a school with democratic leadership [2], and where teachers participate in decision-making represent a positive SC [13, 15]. However, from the aspect of the role of principals in the development of school culture, principals represent an important segment.

Staničić [7, 51], observes SC through five dimensions: pedagogical culture, didactic culture, relationship culture, special school culture, and school culture in a broader sense. Pedagogical culture represents a shift away from the dominant educational function of schools in favour of upbringing. Through its actions, it highlights ethical values and promotes positive virtues. In this sense, a school's pedagogical culture stems from the influence of the principal and all employees. Didactic culture is related to teaching and is recognized through the curriculum, educational goals, reading literacy, and expression. Its aim is to achieve educational tasks. Didactic culture implies innovations in the teaching process. Relationship culture represents the quality of coexistence among teachers, principals, pedagogues, students, and parents. It is recognized through elements of communication, namely mutual respect, and the ability to resolve conflicts. Special SC represents a metaphor for realized school culture, meaning the development of the school's strength and identity. This refers to the concept of the school as a living space where academic achievements are nurtured, the school logo is created, an anthem is composed, and its identity is developed. This is like the concept of cultural schools [49]. Finally, school culture in a broader sense includes external conditions, such as leadership style and governance models. Here, it is particularly important to highlight the influence of the school board, advisory bodies, and local and national administration.

3.2. Balmer's concept of corporate identity

Balmer [31, 59] emphasizes the importance of corporate identity as a key element in corporate marketing strategy. In the simplest terms, the corporate identity of a school includes visual identity, organizational identification, and the overall perception of the school. Corporate identity is a prerequisite for school branding. The ACID Test (Analysis of Corporate Identity Dimensions) is a method developed by Balmer and Soenen [59] to assess and manage corporate identity. This method helps organizations identify weaknesses in their identity strategy and prioritize changes. AC^2ID Test (Actual, Communicated, Conceived, Ideal, Desired Identity) extends the ACID Test by adding additional identity dimensions [30]. This method enables a deeper understanding of various aspects of corporate identity and how they are interconnected.

AC[4]ID Test (Actual, Communicated, Conceived, Covenanted, Cultural, Ideal, Desired Identity) is the latest iteration of Balmer's corporate identity model [9]. AC[4]ID Test is a comprehensive framework for the analysis and management of corporate identity, which includes seven dimensions of identity: actual, communicated, conceived, covenanted, cultural, ideal, and desired identity. Applying Balmer's identity analysis methodology [9] in the context of SM, we can interpret and explore SC in detail (see Table 5).

Table 5
AC[4]ID Test in School

Identity type	School
Actual	Teacher's relationship
Communicated	School communications
Conceived	Perception about school
Covenanted	The school's mission
Cultural	School culture
Ideal	School goals
Desired	School personality

Actual identity refers to what the school really is, including its values, culture, structure, and behaviour. This includes everything the school does and how it treats students, parents, and employees. A school that has a strong academic reputation, offers a variety of extracurricular activities, and has an inclusive culture. Communicated identity refers to the way the school communicates its identity to external and internal stakeholders. This includes all forms of communication, from official websites and brochures to social media and public appearances. Conceived Identity refers to the perception that external stakeholders (such as parents, community, and potential students) have of the school. This may include the school's reputation in the community and the opinions people have about its quality. In the context of the school, we understand it as a school that is known for its high success rate in state exams and positive feedback from parents.

Covenanted Identity refers to the formal and informal contracts and promises that the school makes to its stakeholders. This includes the mission, vision, and values that the school expresses publicly. As an example, we can take a school that in its mission emphasizes dedication to academic excellence and holistic development of students. Cultural Identity refers to shared values, norms, and practices within the school. This includes all aspects of school culture; from the way students and teachers relate to each other to the traditions and customs of the school. This is remarkably like Grönroos' understanding of the concept of brand relationship. The brand as a brand image is the consequence of how a given customer perceives his relationship with a brand over time. Ideal Identity refers to what the school aspires to become in the future. This includes long-term goals and aspirations that the school has for its development and progress. As an example, let us take a school that aspires to become a leading educational institution in the region with an emphasis on STEM education and international programs. Desired Identity refers to the identity that key stakeholders (such as management and teaching staff) want the school to have. This may include specific characteristics and values they want to see in the school. An example can be a school board that wants the school to be recognized for its innovation and adaptability in education.

If we compare the common and opposite aspects of AC[4]ID school identity according to Balmer [9, 11, 30, 59] and elements of school culture according to Peterson and Costner [20], we can deeply analyse the SC context. From a holistic point of view, Balmer's model analyses the organization's identity through multiple dimensions and is therefore better. Both approaches emphasize the importance of communication in the formation and maintenance of identity or SC. Specifically,

according to Balmer [9, 59] it is the concept of communication that is part of the AC^{4}ID test, and according to Peterson and Costner [20] it is expressions that include communication patterns, symbols and rituals that help shape the school's identity.

Also, both approaches recognize the importance of cultural elements in shaping the school's identity or culture. It is remarkably similar according to Schönig [21], but also according to Schein's organization culture model [5]. If we were to observe the opposite aspects of the two models, then Balmer's AC^{4}ID Test deals more with the perception and communication of identity, while Peterson and Costner analyse the concrete elements that make up SC. In this sense, AC^{4}ID has a wider spectrum of dimensions that include both external perception and internal values, while Peterson & Costner focus on concrete elements within the school. The concepts of SC and school identity are intertwined. School identity represents the collective self-awareness of a school, i.e. the way in which a school is perceived. This means that a school's identity is based on its unique characteristics, vision, and mission, as well as the way it connects with the local community. Conversely, SC characterizes the way in which the school community perceives itself. These two concepts are intertwined and are related to school branding [16, 28, 29, 60, 61].

The principal is the most important mediator of SC in the school. His leadership determines the school climate, the level of motivation, the level of SC and the satisfaction of teachers with their work [62, 63]. The principal is the pedagogical leader of the school [64] and the administrative manager. Accordingly, his role is multiple because he is the organizer and professional leader, manager, creator of SC and promoter of the school [6, 49, 65]. In this sense, the most key role of the principal is to create and encourage the working atmosphere [66]. In fact, we can say that the principal's role is dual: leader and manager. This also means that the way we view the economics of education determines the purpose and goal of the choice of research method as well as paradigm [66]. In other words, if we look at school leadership, we are talking about educational sciences.

If we look at the leadership styles of school principals in the context of Southeastern Europe, then the political dominance of principals is still noticeable. According to research by Teodorović *et al.,* [67], principals continuously encounter obstacles from local government, inefficient educational policies, imprecise legislation, problems in communication with parents and the need to improve principal competencies. However, this is related to the professionalization of principals that S. Staničić [7], refers to. What would contribute to the competence of school principals is the quality selection, prior verification of competencies and motivation of future principals for school development [68]. In this way, the influence of local politics in controlling principals and thus the way of school management would be reduced. We find a similar finding in research on the effect of transformational leadership on teacher self-efficacy [69]. However, the political dominance of school principals is also reflected in the school board, which is a dominant political body in which teachers are in the minority. According to a study of 31 school laws in the last 150 years, it was observed that the selection of school principals has consistently moved within the framework of expertise and political suitability [70]. Therefore, the current way of developing principals is not sufficient for their quality work [55, 67, 71].

4. Brand contacts and school culture

In the context of SC, brand contacts are all experienced moments between the message to which users are exposed. Specifically, these are the teaching, pedagogical approach, teachers, school ceremonies, school atmosphere and school reputation. The brand concept is extremely important in marketing. According to Grönroos [10] branding is the central concept of marketing. Veljković [72]

warns of the essential importance of the brand in its associations, confirming Kapferer's [60] and Keller's [8, 73] theories of the brand as a perceptual creation. A significant responsibility for the successful positioning of the brand lies precisely in the communication with consumers [74, 75], which we observe through image determination. Starčević [76] states very, similarly, emphasizing the role of advertising and marketing communication in branding. Linking SC to Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model can provide a deeper understanding of how school culture can serve as a foundation for school branding. Keller's CBBE model [8] focuses on building a strong brand through four key stages: brand identity, brand meaning, brand responses, and brand resonance. According to Kapferer [60], brand strength comes from representations and relationships. Representations are a system of mental associations, while relationships are emotional connections.

The CBBE model presented by Keller points to a deeper understanding of perceptions, feelings, and relationships from the consumer's point of view, but also as a strategic model for building a strong brand. Kapferer's model emphasizes the importance of aligning brand identity with brand image to ensure consistency and authenticity in consumer perception. Keller [8, 73] understands brand image as a key element in building market value. According to his CBBE model, brand image is defined as a set of associations that consumers have about the brand. Keller emphasizes that brand image includes all the associations that consumers associate with the brand. These associations can be functional (e.g. product quality) or emotional (e.g. feelings the brand evokes). In the context of SM and SC, this is about the image of the school [13, 16, 29]. Veljković connects the brand identity with a set of associations and experience with the brand. In this context, we can present a logical matrix that connects the CBBE model and the AC^4ID school identity model (see Table 6).

Table 6
Logic Matrix of CBBE model and AC^4ID Test

CBBE model	AC4ID Test	School culture
Brand Identity	Actual, Communicated	Symbols, rituals
Brand Meaning	Conceived, Cultural	Academic success, awards
Brand Responses	Covenanted, Communicated	Stakeholder perception, communication
Brand Resonance	Ideal, Desired	School vision, teacher identity

Brand identity [8, 60] refers to how the school wants to be perceived by its stakeholders. Actual and communicated identity include actual practices and the way the school communicates its values. In this sense, SC makes basic assumptions, values and beliefs, rules, policies and procedures, and communication patterns, symbols and rituals shape the identity of the school. Brand meaning [8] refers to the functional and emotional aspects that the brand offers. Conceived and cultural identity include the perception of the school and its core values. This understanding is the same as Veljković's when he discusses brand associations. Therefore, SC consists of academic successes, school projects, publications, awards, and formal and informal school activities that shape the meaning of school. According to Keller [6], the brand response category here represents responses to the brand that include the judgments and feelings of stakeholders towards the school. This means that covenanted and communicated identity include formal and informal contracts and the way the school communicates its identity. This is confirmed by Balmer's AC^4ID Test. From the SC aspect, the perception of parents, students and the community, communication patterns, symbols, rituals, and formal and informal school activities shape responses to the school brand. From the aspect of brand resonance, we observe the highest level of loyalty and emotional connection with the brand. It is an ideal and desired identity that includes the long-term goals and vision of the school.

This is in accordance with Grönroos' understanding brand relationship [10]. In the context of schools, this means that school culture, teacher identity and service perception play a key role in shaping brand relationships. School culture can significantly influence the quality of service a school provides, which in turn affects the perception of the brand among students, parents, and wider communities. According to C. Grönroos, branding is closely related to building long-term relationships. In the context of school branding, this means that a school is not only an educational institution that provides an educational service, but also a social community that builds relationships with all stakeholders. SC becomes a key element of the brand because it shapes the perception of the school through values, norms, teacher identity and student experiences. Therefore, SC is crucial because it shapes the perception of the school as a brand through everyday interaction and atmosphere.

The exchange relationship implies that there is individual dependency between the two parties. In this sense, the relationship develops in interaction over time and signifies a shared orientation between teacher and student. Schools as service sectors are entering, conditionally speaking, the *brand age* [60]. For service provision, what is important is what lies *behind* the service, i.e. teacher satisfaction which is also manifested through SC. In this sense, service provision is a process. It is precisely such a process that is characteristic of the brand relationship to which C. Grönroos refers. Services are often evaluated by the behaviour of employees. The image of each service provider in a school is created by teachers themselves. Therefore, teachers are an important source of differentiation from other schools. This is why it is extremely important to understand the role of teachers and their personal views and values, i.e. the context of pedagogical culture as part of SC. Above all, teachers must be satisfied with their job, the school climate and they must know what the principal expects of them.

C. Grönroos [6] distinguishes between two constructs: brand relationship and brand contacts. A brand relationship is built through interactions with the school. A brand is not just a visual identity but an experience that users have through every contact with the organization. In this sense, the contact of students and parents with the SC, cultural dimensions, and teachers represents a brand relationship. Brand contact refers to every moment of contact between students and the brand. This includes direct interactions such as communication with teachers and indirect ones such as the perception of the school. C. Grönroos [6] emphasizes that all contacts are crucial for shaping brand perception, because they create an emotional connection and influence long-term loyalty. This is also in line with the brand theory according to Kapferer [60], and Keller[8, 74]. Therefore, a brand is not just a marketing construct, but a consequence of relationships that are built through interactions and experiences. Then the SC is an integral part of the brand relationship, because through the culture of the school it shapes the experiences, interactions, and perceptions of stakeholders.

Branding is the process of creating a school image. According to Grönroos [6], the brand of a service is created by users, i.e. in the context of school branding, teachers and students are co-creators of the school image [16, 29]. In this way, brand identity can serve as the image of the brand that the principals want to create. School stakeholders receive inputs about the school and identify with the messages the school sends. This is the classic understanding of brand communication according to Kapferer's understanding of the sender and receiver of the message [60]. However, the brand as such is intertwined with the SC, more precisely its subcategories such as pedagogical, didactic and communication culture [7], which together form the identity of the school. Therefore, Grönroos [6] is right when he claims that a brand is always an image because school users in the broadest sense of the word start from impressions of the school, which are another term for SC. It is precisely these dimensions of SC that are key to creating a brand image. Therefore, the role of

stakeholders in the school branding process is important because together with teachers, administration, and principal they create the school brand. This is a brand relationship between internal and external factors that together co-create the brand. Then the brand of the school is also a consequence of SC, i.e. ways of brand relationship.

Customer perceptions of a service brand directly impact the school's business results. According to Keller [8], a strong service brand is one that possesses the characteristics of distinctiveness, flexibility, and memorability. Key Performance Indicators (KPI) are measurable values that organizations use to monitor and evaluate performance [46, 47] in achieving their goals. In the context of schools, KPIs may include graduation rates, standardized test scores, attendance rates, student and parent satisfaction, and community involvement. These indicators help schools quantify their success and identify areas for improvement [48]. Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) use surveys to gauge student and parent satisfaction, identifying areas for improvement [49]. The Houston Independent School District (HISD) tracks events and volunteer hours to measure community involvement, enhancing their community hub image [50]. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) uses test scores and graduation rates to assess academic success [51], promoting their commitment to equity and access to education (see Table 7).

Table 7
Evaluation on KPIs, SC, and Schools

KPI	SC	Schools
Graduation rate	SC reflects the school's real identity	LAUSD uses test scores and graduation rates
Media presence	SC reflects school leadership	APS monitors the school's presence on social media
School Climate	Teacher's identity and SC	HISD uses a school climate index
Reviews	Desired image of SC	LAUSD monitors online school reviews
Community involvement	SC encourages cooperation	HISD tracks the number of events and volunteering
Net Promoter Score (NPS)	A high NPS indicates a positive SC	APS uses surveys to measure customer satisfaction

If a school has a strong media presence, it may mean that it promotes SC through transparent communication and public engagement. This builds on previous research on the impact of SC on building a school's reputation, image, and brand [13, 29]. Also, if a school actively engages in the community, they have a positive culture that encourages collaboration and teamwork. If we compare it from the AC^{4}ID Test [9] aspect, then conceived identity is reflected in the context of shaping the image through public perception. Likewise, the cultural aspect of a school can determines its narrative in the public, a school that actively communicates its values can create a positive and recognizable image. Schools that strategically align their real values with communication can achieve a consistent, authentic, and recognizable SC.

5. Conclusion

SC represents a fundamental aspect of educational institutions, shaping the daily life of the school through values, beliefs, and norms. Understanding and managing SC is key to achieving high educational standards and creating a positive environment. In this paper, we research different models and theories that help in analysing and understanding SC, including Schein's model of organizational culture, teacher's professional identity, Keller's CBBE model and Balmer's AC^{4}ID Test. Connecting different models and theories enables a comprehensive approach to understanding and

improving school culture and identity. A school with a strong culture of collaboration and innovation can attract more students and parents, which improves marketing results. The way a school communicates its culture to external stakeholders can improve marketing effectiveness. Consistent and authentic communication of school culture can increase trust and loyalty among stakeholders.

School culture can be a catalyst for more effective communication. If the school has a positive and inclusive culture, this will be reflected in all forms of communication, which can improve marketing results and above all the brand images. Customer's brand relationship is based on a variety of brand contacts. In this sense, we see the school as a service activity that achieves a communication function through SC. By combining elements from the CBBE model, the AC[4]ID model, schools can develop comprehensive strategies that not only improve internal practices but also strengthen external perception and emotional connection with the school brand.

In this sense, brand contacts represent the stakeholder's experience with the school, teachers and ultimately with the SC. Brand relationship can then be seen as a way of understanding and interpreting the school's identity that the school projects. Brand contacts can then be seen as forms of different brand messages that the school wants to send, but also messages that the school sends without wanting them. In other words, such contacts also represent a kind of way of deepening the understanding of Balmer's AC[4]ID identity test because certain SC messages are revealed through brand relationship and brand contacts. However, what is even more important, the school as such becomes a function of the brand image because it strongly depends on the perception of stakeholders, the teacher's understanding, and acceptance of the SC dimensions, as well as the vision of the principal. Simply put, such brand contacts represent the points of contact of the desired, communicated, conceived or ideal identity.

Conflicts of Interest
The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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