



# **RepUTAction:**

The innovative framework to  
boost small businesses'  
reputation

## **Transnational Analysis Report**

February 2025

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# INTRODUCTION

This Transnational Analysis Report (TAR) is developed as part of the RepUtAction Project, an initiative dedicated to enhancing corporate reputation management among micro-enterprises and start-ups. Recognizing the critical role of corporate reputation in business success, the project aims to equip small businesses with the necessary tools and strategies to strengthen their market position, build stakeholder trust, and ensure long-term sustainability.

As part of this effort, an in-depth transnational survey was conducted across multiple sectors within the 3 countries covered by the project (Italy, Greece and Portugal) to identify key obstacles, skill gaps, and company expectations related to corporate reputation. The findings of this research serve as the foundation for the RepUtAction Training Curriculum, an innovative learning program designed to help SMEs in adopting a strategic and modern approach to reputation management.

The primary objective of this Transnational Analysis Report (TAR) is to examine skill gaps within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), start-ups, and Business Associations, with a specific focus on corporate reputation. The study is based on a transnational and multisectoral analysis conducted in Italy, Portugal, and Greece.

The ultimate goal is to lay the groundwork for the development of a comprehensive training curriculum, addressing the key challenges identified during stakeholder research in each country. This curriculum will provide SMEs with practical tools and strategies to overcome corporate reputation management challenges, ultimately fostering business growth and long-term success.

After a brief explanation of the research methodology, the report presents an overview of the SME landscape in the three target countries, followed by an analysis of the key research findings.

The study began with an assessment of awareness levels regarding corporate reputation challenges, identifying existing obstacles and best practices in each national context. This assessment was conducted through a structured questionnaire consisting of 9 key questions, administered across Italy, Portugal, and Greece.

This report aims to highlight the similarities and differences in the approaches adopted by Italian, Portuguese, and Greek companies, emphasizing critical factors such as product quality, innovation, digital communication, and corporate social responsibility. Effective corporate reputation management will be treated as a central element for the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of SMEs, especially in an increasingly globalized and competitive business environment.



# 1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted is composed by a 6 steps approach:

## I – Desk Research Analysis:

The 3 partners produced a report containing information regarding the role played by Small and Medium Enterprises in Italy, Portugal and Greece and how corporate reputation is being managed considering the challenges of dealing with issues such as the permanent need for innovation and the effectiveness of digital presence. The results of this first analysis are integrated on the next chapter: “Overview of SME’s in Italy, Portugal and Greece”

## II - Stakeholders identification:

The partners have created their own stakeholders’ database in which they identified micro and small enterprises, start-ups, Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, as well as consultancies, SME associations, chambers of commerce, and other organizations offering services to SMEs.

## III – Gathering information – the questionnaire:

After identifying the stakeholders, the partners created a questionnaire containing 9 specific questions designed to explore various aspects of corporate reputation. The questions were crafted to gather information about participants’ perceptions of reputation management, the challenges faced, the practices adopted, and the training needs identified. After agreeing on the final version, the questionnaire was translated into the 3 languages.

The questions were organized into three distinct sections:

- a) **Stakeholder Identification:** This section gathered information on the name, country of origin, and the type of entity the participant belongs to, which could be an association, institution, or small and medium-sized enterprise (SME).
- b) **Previous Knowledge:** The second part of the questionnaire aimed to assess the participants’ pre-existing knowledge of the subject matter.
- c) **Training Requirements:** In the third section, participants’ previous experiences, such as having attended or conducted courses related to corporate reputation, were explored. Additionally, their expectations regarding a training curriculum aimed at developing skills in corporate reputation management were investigated.

Here are the 9 questions of the questionnaire:



**1. What do you understand by "business reputation"?**

- a. The perception customers have about the company's products or services b. How the company manages its customers and employees
- c. A combination of ethical values, customer service, communication, and social impact
- d. I don't know / I'm not sure
- e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Has your organization participated in any training program related to business reputation?**

**Yes**

**No**

If to the previous question your answer was yes, which topics were covered?  Customer Relationship Management

- Digital Marketing
- HR Engagement
- Communication Tools
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Do you consider business reputation a strategic priority for the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)?**

- a) Yes, because it builds trust and attracts more customers.
- b) Yes, because it helps secure better partnerships and investments. c) No, because other factors like pricing and product quality are more important. d) No, because SMEs can grow without focusing on reputation.
- e) Not sure, because it depends on the specific industry or context.



**Training Requirements - (Identifying Training Needs for Reputation Management)**

**4. In your opinion, what areas are most critical to strengthening business reputation in SMEs?**

- a) Customer service
- b) Business ethics
- c) Internal and external communication
- d) Digital presence and social media
- e) All the above

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. What are the most common challenges your organization faces in maintaining or building a positive reputation?**

- a) Limited financial resources to invest in reputation-building efforts.
- b) Difficulty in managing online reviews and social media presence.
- c) Lack of skilled personnel to handle public relations and communication.
- d) Negative public perception due to past incidents or misinformation.
- e) Inconsistent product or service quality.
- f) Limited awareness or visibility in the market.
- g) Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_.

**6. Does your organization currently offer any training programs that cover key aspects of business reputation?**

- a) Yes, we have comprehensive programs dedicated to business reputation management.
- b) Yes, but only as part of broader training programs (e.g., customer service or marketing).
- c) No, but we plan to introduce such training in the future.
- d) No, we do not offer training on business reputation at this time. e) Not sure.

**7. What would you expect from a business reputation training program?**

- a) Practical tools to improve communication



- b) Case studies and best practices
- c) Crisis management strategies
- d) All the above

**8. What learning methods do you consider most effective for this type of training?**

- a) Practical workshops
- b) Case studies
- c) Interactive online sessions
- d) Readings and instructional materials
- e) Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**9. What kind of example or case study would you like to see included in the course?**

- a) Successful small businesses
- b) Sectoral comparative studies
- c) Crisis scenarios and their resolutions
- d) Others: \_\_\_\_\_



#### **IV – Stakeholders engagement:**

Previous telephone contacts were made to explain to the identified stakeholders the objectives of the survey and ensure they engage on giving us their valuable insights about the topics covered by the questionnaire that was sent by email. The partners monitored the responses and extracted the results (including the graphs generated) forwarding it to CCIB.

#### **V – Analyzing Results:**

CCIP has then integrated all responses analyzing the overall results. On chapter 4, the detailed results of this survey will be presented, including an analysis of the responses, observed trends, and implications for the development of a training curriculum that addresses the identified needs.

#### **VI – Mapping of existing Training Offer:**

As part of the research process, the partners conducted a mapping of available and free training courses in the three countries, specifically focused on improving corporate reputation. The collected data was compiled into an [Excel file](#), providing a structured overview of existing educational resources. This effort aimed to identify gaps in the current training landscape and assess whether SMEs in Italy, Portugal, and Greece have access to adequate learning opportunities in corporate reputation management. By leveraging these insights, the project seeks to develop a value-added training offer tailored to the specific needs of SMEs, helping them enhance their reputation and competitiveness in the market.





## 2. OVERVIEW OF SMES IN ITALY, PORTUGAL AND GREECE

### 2.1 Italy Desk research: The Corporate Reputaction in italian SMEs

#### 2.1.1 Background analysis in Italy

In Italy, SMEs are the nerve center of the economy, accounting for more than 99% of active enterprises and more than 70% of employment. The data show that SMEs are a fundamental pillar of the Italian economy, contributing around 60% of national GDP. Comparing these figures with those of SMEs in other advanced economies, the weight of SMEs in GDP and employment in Italy is 10% higher than that of SMEs in other advanced economies. However, the potential of this important resource remains partly untapped.

If we look at productivity, the picture changes: in Italy, the productivity of small and medium-sized enterprises is on average 55% of that of large enterprises, compared with an average of 60% in advanced economies, led by the United Kingdom with 84%. Among the many factors affecting this gap (low propensity to use technology, lack of talent and skills, difficulty in accessing the capital market, etc.), the inability to 'know how to tell the story' plays an important role. In fact, in Italy there are many small companies that, despite having great content to communicate, ignore the value that the correct communication of this content would generate in terms of corporate positioning and reputation. Corporate reputation in SMEs, although a fundamental asset, is often not managed with the awareness and importance given to it in large companies.

#### 2.1.2 Corporate reputation in SMEs

The factors that influence the reputation of Italian SMEs are numerous:

1. Product/service quality: "Made in Italy" is often synonymous in the collective perception with quality, craftsmanship, tradition and attention to detail, all factors that positively influence the company's reputation;
2. Good communication and presence on social media: SMEs have the important advantage of being closer to their customers than large companies. Direct communication and the ability to respond promptly to their requests are elements that can contribute to a good corporate reputation. In this context, online reputation management becomes crucial. Reviews on platforms such as Google, TripAdvisor or social media can significantly influence public perception, especially in certain sectors (tourism, hospitality and retail). The ability to manage a crisis correctly and transparently is also crucial: business crises,



such as product quality issues or service failures, are inevitable. Transparent management of such crises, with timely responses and corrective actions, can significantly limit reputational damage;

3. Corporate social responsibility: Commitment to the environment, respect for workers' rights and involvement in social solidarity initiatives are all factors that can improve a company's image, both with its customers and with its suppliers and employees;
4. Innovation and adaptation to market challenges: The ability to innovate and adapt to market changes is crucial for SMEs, especially in an increasingly competitive global economic environment. SMEs that invest in innovation, digitalization and sustainable processes can gain significant reputational benefits.

It is clear from the above that corporate reputation, when properly managed, becomes a highly valuable element for SMEs, with a direct impact on their competitiveness and long-term sustainability. Learning how to manage reputation strategically, optimizing the use of available resources and strengthening online presence is a priority for SMEs. In an increasingly global and competitive marketplace, it is easy to see that SMEs that are able to build and maintain a good reputation will have an important competitive advantage.

### **2.1.3 Levers to act on corporate reputation**

In order to improve their corporate reputation, and based on the critical issues listed above, it is essential to support SMEs in the following areas:

1. Investing in employee training: Human capital is a key strength of SMEs. Adequate training for employees is essential for building a good reputation. There are many areas for training, from proper customer relationship management and service delivery to more specific skills in effective communication, with a focus on digital communication. With the advent of digital technologies and the expansion of social platforms, SMEs now have the opportunity to interact directly with their customers, respond to their needs and shape public perception in real time. SMEs need to be able to identify and operate correctly on the social media platforms most suited to their reality (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and TikTok), constantly monitor their online reputation, identify areas for improvement and respond promptly to negative reviews with transparency and professionalism, manage crises effectively and develop storytelling skills. Knowing how to tell the story behind a company is critical to building and strengthening brand identity. Rather than focusing solely on the features of a service/product, telling stories about who the company is, what it stands for, its history, its successes and challenges, its customer experience or the origins of the brand can not only differentiate the company from its competitors, but also engage and motivate employees, creating a strong sense of belonging and pride among team members. A motivated team is more productive and committed to achieving the company's goals.



2. Invest in sustainability: SMEs that engage in sustainability and green practices gain a positive reputation among consumers, who are increasingly sensitive to these issues. It is important to communicate these efforts in a transparent and visible way. ESG issues are an increasingly important area for SMEs due to a number of factors: from the constant evolution of international and national regulations governing ESG performance reporting, forcing organisations to adapt to new compliance requirements in order to avoid the negative impact of potential litigation risks and multi-billion dollar greenwashing lawsuits that can damage brand reputation, to the increasing pressure on companies from consumers, public opinion and investors to demonstrate a real and ongoing commitment to environmental and social responsibility. There are also financial spin-offs, as institutional investors and asset managers of sustainable funds increasingly incorporate ESG criteria into their investment decisions

## 2.1.4 Business success stories

### Caffè Corsini

Caffè Corsini is a historical company based in Arezzo, Tuscany. The company has been producing all kinds of products related to the world of coffee since 1950. Caffè Corsini was the first coffee to receive the DOC label in Italy and the first to certify its origin on its packaging. Another record, this time on the "green" side, is being the first company in Italy to completely eliminate the release of particulate matter into the atmosphere. For over 70 years, Caffè Corsini has always been one step ahead of its competitors.

### Reputation observations

- 1959 - At a time when the coffee shop was still in vogue, the company, still in the city, innovated its production process, equipping itself with an avant-garde plant capable of producing in a different way, with roasting machines and modern conservation techniques, including sliding trolleys, ageing silos, mixers, rooms for preparing blends, ageing roasted coffee and preserving it, while everywhere else coffee was still ground on the spot.
- 1987 - The second step represents another productive turning point, with the marketing of the first DOC coffee (Denomination of Controlled Origin), marking the birth of the concept of the product in Italy. It is 'Estrella del Caribe', from Santo Domingo, 100% Arabica, the first coffee in Italy to declare its origin on the packaging. It is a simple but revolutionary idea that immediately attracts the consumer, an innovation so successful that it has made a mark and become commonplace, now more than ever.
- 2005: The Caffè Corsini Academy, one of the first bartender schools in Italy, is born to complete the supply chain and guarantee quality right up to the cup. It trains the best professionals in the sector. The main goal of the Academy is to promote a deep and widespread coffee culture, that privileges quality over finance.
- 2012: The company's green philosophy becomes more and more concrete, eliminating the emission of particulate matter into the atmosphere - the first company in Italy to do



so! - and produces more than 35% of its energy needs thanks to its 6000 m2 photovoltaic roof.

- 2021 The shareholders of Caffè Corsini have agreed on close cooperation with the German Melitta Group. The aim is to cooperate in the future on market cultivation and product development for the mutual benefit of both companies and thus to open up new opportunities together. Under the terms of this partnership, the Melitta Group has acquired 70 percent of the shares in Corsino Corsini S.p.A..Governance remained in Italy and the operational base remained the historic headquarters in the province of Arezzo, where the company was founded in 1950
- Today Caffè Corsini's vocation is continuous innovation, the search for new objectives, in an eternal "renaissance" dictated by the professionalism of passionate pioneers of the bean.

### **Birra del borgo**

Birra del Borgo was founded in 2005 in Borgorose, a small town in the province of Rieti. It was here, in the brewery, that the first beers were born, beers that would become very successful and make Birra del Borgo known all over the world: ReAle, DucAle, Duchessa. The valorisation of the territory, the use of local ingredients in the various productions and the constant exchange with the inhabitants have characterised and still characterise the work of the brewery. The company's mission is to reinterpret tradition to tell the story of quality beer in Italy and around the world. Starting from classic styles, to create a uniquely Italian way of making beer.

### **Reputation observation**

2009-2014 Birra del Borgo inaugurates its new brewery in Spedino, which becomes the beating heart of the company, the springboard for our brewing ambitions. The key element is the research for new ideas and possibilities through the implementation of a chemical laboratory for quality control, which has opened the way to experimentation with indigenous yeasts and their combination with traditional ones. The aim is to create an original strain, characteristic of Birra del Borgo, from indigenous yeasts 'hunted' with real traps placed on fruit trees in the mountains around the brewery.

The yeasts are then "domesticated" in the laboratory before being used in special blends obtained by combining them with traditional beer yeast. It is a fascinating, unique and constantly evolving research.

Innovation has also involved the use of unconventional containers for fermenting and maturing beers, such as the ANFORE terracotta containers, which have become a symbol of the BdB's innovative spirit.

### **2.1.5 Conclusion**

The analysis carried out clearly shows the strategic role of corporate and digital reputation for SMEs. It is therefore essential to provide SMEs with adequate training aimed at increasing the skills within companies to know how to build and maintain a good brand identity. The data on the importance of soft skills training also speaks for itself: a 2023 study conducted by LinkedIn Learning found that 88 per cent of managers



believe that soft skills training is as important as technical skills training. The ability to communicate effectively is seen as an important skill. In addition, there is a direct correlation between productivity and companies that invest in training, as well as improved employee satisfaction and loyalty. An Assolombarda report from 2023 also showed that companies that invested in continuous training programmes experienced a 15% increase in productivity compared to those that did not undertake such initiatives. These companies also experienced a 10% reduction in staff turnover, highlighting how training can also improve employee satisfaction and retention. The two business cases reported show that the combination of innovation with the company's tradition and origins, together with the company's ability to tell its story in the digital world, is crucial to building and maintaining brand identity.

## **2.2 Portugal Desk research: The Corporate Reputaction in portuguese SMEs**

### **2.2.1 The Reputation of Portuguese SMEs: A Pillar for Success in the Global Market**

In Portugal, the classification of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) is governed by Decree-Law No. 372/2007, dated November 6. This framework provides a clear and standardized approach to defining businesses based on their size.

According to this legal definition, an SME is a business with fewer than 250 employees and either an annual turnover not exceeding €50 million or a total annual balance sheet not exceeding €43 million. Within this broader category, SMEs are further divided into:

- Small Enterprises: Businesses with fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet total not exceeding €10 million.
- Microenterprises: Businesses with fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet total not exceeding €2 million.

While multiple criteria apply, the number of employees is often the primary determinant in categorizing businesses. This classification system ensures a clear distinction between micro, small, and medium enterprises, facilitating access to specific benefits, funding opportunities, and regulatory frameworks that support their growth.

### **2.2.2 The Economic Role of SMEs in Portuguese Economy**

According to Eurostat, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) consistently accounted for 99% of importing enterprises and 98% of exporting enterprises across the European Union (EU) from 2017 to



2022. This highlights the indispensable role of SMEs in driving international trade within and beyond EU borders.

In Portugal, SMEs are even more crucial to the national economy, comprising 99.9% of all businesses (according to INE there were roughly 1.4 million active enterprises in Portugal on 2022). Their contribution to the country's total added value is approximately 67.4%, while they generate around 76.2% of total national employment. These figures surpass the EU averages of 53% and 65.2%, respectively, showcasing the significant impact of Portuguese SMEs. As in most European nations, the manufacturing sector and the wholesale and retail trade sectors are the primary contributors to SME driven employment and added value.

In today's globalized and competitive landscape, the long-term success and sustainability of SMEs are increasingly dependent on their ability to cultivate and sustain a strong corporate reputation. Several key factors influence this reputation, including:

- Product and service quality, which drives customer trust and loyalty.
- Commitment to sustainability, aligning with growing consumer demand for eco conscious practices.
- Innovation, fostering competitive differentiation and market leadership.
- Effective communication management, leveraging digital platforms to strengthen stakeholder relationships and public perception.

By focusing on these dimensions, Portuguese SMEs can enhance their global competitiveness, solidify their market presence, and contribute to the continued resilience and growth of the national and EU economies.

### **2.2.3 Strategic actions to promote Portuguese PME Reputation**

In Portugal, IAPMEI is a public agency under the Ministry of Economy and Maritime Affairs in Portugal. Its mission is to support SMEs by fostering innovation, enhancing competitiveness, and promoting sustainable business growth. Through initiatives like PME Líder and PME Excelência, IAPMEI highlights the critical role of SMEs in driving economic development and inspires businesses to pursue excellence in their operations.

The PME Líder and PME Excelência awards are prestigious distinctions created and promoted by IAPMEI (Instituto de Apoio às Pequenas e Médias Empresas e à Inovação), in collaboration with banking institutions and Turismo de Portugal. These awards aim to recognize small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that demonstrate outstanding performance, financial stability, and strategic excellence.

#### **PME Líder:**



- This distinction is awarded to SMEs that meet specific criteria, including financial soundness, risk management, and sustained growth.
- Companies recognized as PME Líder benefit from increased visibility in the market and improved access to financing and partnership opportunities.
- It is often seen as a mark of trust and quality, providing assurance to investors, customers, and stakeholders.

**PME Excelência:**

- A more selective distinction given to PME Líder companies that achieve the highest standards of performance and stability.
- It highlights SMEs that excel in their business practices, with robust financial results and a clear contribution to the national economy.
- These companies are considered role models within their sectors.

Key aspects such as environmental sustainability, technological innovation, and communication management—essential for building a strong brand and gaining the trust of consumers and partners—are not included in the PME Líder criteria. These factors are increasingly relevant in a globalized market, where social responsibility and adaptability are crucial for long-term competitiveness. Without addressing these dimensions, the award may fail to fully represent the qualities of companies that excel beyond financial performance.

To enhance their corporate reputation, SMEs must receive support in areas beyond financial stability. Communication management is vital; by engaging effectively through digital platforms and fostering transparent communication, SMEs can strengthen relationships with stakeholders and enhance public perception. Additionally, investment in employee training and hiring is critical. Providing specialized training and creating opportunities to attract and retain talent can improve workforce capability and motivation, directly influencing service quality and innovation.

While the PME Líder and PME Excelência awards remains an essential driver of financial excellence, its criteria could be expanded to incorporate dimensions like sustainability, innovation, and social impact. This would offer a more comprehensive view of business success, aligned with the growing market demand for ethical and sustainable practices.

Beyond the initiatives of IAPMEI, other organizations contribute to enhancing the reputation of Portuguese businesses. LAUREL (a Portuguese Association of Excellence Brands) is a non-profit association, focused on promoting Portuguese brands of excellence, emphasizing the country's unique craftsmanship and heritage. While not exclusively focused on SMEs, LAUREL's efforts to cultivate a strong brand culture within Portugal and facilitate internationalization through strategic initiatives and events provide valuable support for smaller enterprises seeking to establish a global presence and reputation. For example, LAUREL actively promotes the know-how of Portuguese artisans and manufacturers, a key differentiator for fashion brands aiming for international recognition. This promotion occurs through various activities, including events, partnerships, and communication efforts. Furthermore, LAUREL strives to build a robust brand culture within the Portuguese luxury sector, encouraging companies to



invest in developing strong and recognizable brand identities, a crucial step for SMEs competing globally. The organization also hosts events such as the Luxury Brands Summit, which brings international experts to Portugal to share knowledge and best practices, providing valuable networking and learning opportunities for SMEs. By highlighting the quality and distinctiveness of Portuguese production, LAUREL complements the work of IAPMEI, contributing to a broader narrative of excellence and reinforcing the positive image of Portuguese businesses on the world stage. This collaborative approach, encompassing both financial recognition and brand development, is crucial for fostering sustainable growth and enhancing the overall reputation of Portuguese businesses.

## 2.2.4 Business Success Stories in Portugal

### Valérius Têxteis

Valérius Têxteis, founded in 1987 and headquartered in Barcelos, Portugal, stands as a premier example of how a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) can excel in a competitive global market. Specializing in the production and commercialization of medium- to high end apparel, Valérius has earned recognition for its exceptional quality and innovative approaches. The company's partnerships with internationally renowned brands such as H&M Group, Moschino, Max Mara, and Carven underscore its standing as a trusted and influential player in the textile sector.

What sets Valérius apart is its steadfast commitment to sustainability and innovation. Through initiatives like Valérius 360°, the company integrates circular economy principles into its operations, pioneering the reuse of textile waste to create new products. This initiative, which represents a €9.9 million investment, highlights Valérius's forward-thinking approach to environmental responsibility and its determination to lead the transition towards a more sustainable textile industry. By minimizing resource consumption and reducing environmental impact, Valérius not only meets but anticipates the demands of environmentally conscious consumers and partners.

Moreover, the company's technological capabilities extend beyond production. Its digital innovation includes the development of advanced systems that enhance transparency and operational efficiency, such as platforms that allow clients to track orders in real-time. These advancements have bolstered trust among partners and customers, solidifying Valérius's reputation for reliability and excellence.

Valérius's global success is further driven by its export strategy, with a significant portion of its production destined for international markets. This international orientation reflects the company's adaptability to diverse market demands and its capacity to maintain high standards across varying customer bases.

In its ongoing pursuit of excellence, Valérius demonstrates how a Portuguese SME can effectively combine tradition and innovation. By prioritizing sustainability, investing in technology, and forging strong partnerships, the company exemplifies the potential for SMEs to achieve global impact while contributing to local economic and social development.

### Reputation Observation





Awards and Recognitions: Valérius’ dedication to innovation and efficiency has not gone unnoticed. In 2018, the company received the PwC Scale Up Award in the Industry 4.0 category. This recognition highlighted the development of an advanced internal platform that enables real-time tracking of order status, enhancing transparency and fostering trust among clients and partners. This technological leap not only streamlined operations but also reinforced the company’s reputation for reliability and customer centric solutions.

Sustainable Impact: The Valérius 360º project exemplifies the company’s ambitious goal to reduce its carbon footprint to near-zero by 2030, a testament to its forward thinking environmental strategy. By leveraging cutting-edge technology and sustainable practices, Valérius sets new benchmarks for eco-conscious manufacturing. The production of eco-paper and other innovative uses of textile waste reflect the company’s ability to marry environmental responsibility with economic viability, creating a blueprint for the future of the textile industry.

Valérius Têxteis’ journey is a powerful example of how an SME can leverage innovation, sustainability, and transparency to build a strong corporate reputation. By addressing the demands of conscious consumers and maintaining a consistent commitment to ethical practices, the company not only thrives in a competitive global market but also positions itself as a catalyst for positive change within its industry.

## **Miranda & Irmãos**

Founded in 1946, Miranda & Irmãos has become a globally recognized leader in the production of bicycle components, particularly in the mid-to-high-end market. Known for its innovative approach and precision engineering, the company supplies some of the most prominent bicycle brands worldwide, solidifying its reputation for quality and reliability. Miranda’s commitment to rigorous environmental practices and its focus on ecological responsibility at every stage of production set it apart as a visionary in the cycling industry.

By integrating state-of-the-art technology and sustainable methodologies, Miranda & Irmãos not only enhances product performance but also minimizes environmental impact. The company’s export strategy has extended and its reach to over 50 countries. This global presence is underpinned by a commitment to excellence, innovation, and sustainability, reinforcing Miranda’s position as a trusted partner in the cycling ecosystem.

## **Reputation Observation**

Sustainability Initiative and Recognition: In 2023, Miranda & Irmãos was honored with the SME EnterPRIZE Award – European Sustainability Award for SMEs, organized by Generali Tranquilidade. This recognition highlighted Miranda’s dedication to reducing its ecological footprint through innovative production techniques and the use of recycled materials. According to João Miranda, a board member, the award significantly boosted the company’s visibility, attracting new clients and further establishing Miranda as a benchmark for sustainable practices in the cycling industry.



This acknowledgment reflects the company’s unwavering commitment to sustainability. Beyond recognition, Miranda actively works to incorporate environmentally conscious solutions into its manufacturing processes, demonstrating leadership in aligning business growth with ecological responsibility.

**Sustainable and Technological Impact:** Over its remarkable 73-year history, Miranda & Irmãos has championed the integration of cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices, earning it a reputation as a trailblazer in the bicycle components sector. By using recycled and renewable materials, Miranda reduces waste while maintaining the high quality and durability its products are known for.

In 2022, the company achieved a turnover of €36.9 million, with more than 90% of its production exported. This success underscores Miranda’s ability to balance technological innovation with environmental stewardship. Its efforts to streamline production processes while reducing carbon emissions position the company as a leader in driving sustainable change across the industry.

Miranda & Irmãos exemplifies how a steadfast focus on innovation, sustainability, and global collaboration can yield long-term success and a positive industry impact. By addressing the growing demand for eco-friendly and high-performance bicycle components, Miranda sets a benchmark for responsible manufacturing. Its journey illustrates that sustainability is not only an ethical obligation but also a powerful driver of competitiveness and market leadership, contributing to the evolution of the global cycling industry.

### 2.2.5 Conclusion

The analysis underscores the vital role that corporate reputation and strategic innovation play in the success of Portuguese SMEs, particularly in the context of the global market. A strong brand identity, both in traditional and digital spaces, is essential for long-term sustainability and growth. Moreover, SMEs must recognize the importance of continuous investment in training programs, not only to enhance technical skills but also to develop soft skills such as communication, leadership, and adaptability. These skills are increasingly valued in the modern business environment.

The examples provided clearly demonstrate that innovation and reputation go hand in hand in strengthening and consolidating an SME's brand. Companies that embrace innovation while maintaining their core values and traditions build a solid foundation for future success.

Furthermore, as we approach 2024, it is evident that sustainability is becoming a cornerstone of corporate reputation. An SME's commitment to sustainable practices is not only critical for environmental responsibility but also plays a key role in shaping its public perception and market position. In today’s competitive global market, businesses that prioritize sustainability, alongside innovation and strong brand management, will be better equipped to navigate challenges and secure long-term success.



## 2.3 Greece Desk research: The Corporate Reputacion in greek SMEs

### 2.3.1 Background analysis in Greece

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), an important pillar of the Greek economy and entrepreneurship, accounting for 99.9% of enterprises in the non-financial sector. In 2022, SMEs employed 83.5% of employees or 2.2 million people and producing 57% of value added or €34.8 billion to the national GDP. When comparing these data with other advanced economies, Greek SMEs play an important role in employment and added value, especially in micro-enterprises, where Greece ranks significantly above the EU average.

However, Greece is third from the bottom in terms of the percentage of SMEs that are characterised by very high digital intensity in the EU, with most of them ranking very low in the Digital Intensity Index (DII) established. Specifically, 56.2% of enterprises in Greece are characterised by very low digital intensity. This gap is compounded by challenges such as limited access to technology, capital markets, and skilled talent.

Moreover, even though SMEs differ significantly from one another, they range from micro-enterprises in wholesale and retail to high-tech start-ups, they fail to leverage effective communication strategies. It seems that Greek SMEs are incapable of spreading their story, and therefore reinforcing their reputation which reduces their competitiveness and hinders opportunities for growth. Greater awareness of the value of communication, corporate positioning, and reputation management could unlock untapped potential and further enhance their contribution to the Greek economy.

### 2.3.2 Corporate reputation in Greek SMEs

There are many factors influencing the reputation of Greek SMEs, these factors are different and rooted in both local culture and the broader economic environment. Some of these include:

1. Greek SMEs, especially those in sectors like food, tourism, and traditional crafts, are often associated with authenticity, heritage, and attention to detail. The concept of "Made in Greece" evokes high-quality standards, particularly in industries such as olive oil production, wine-making, and hospitality, where local traditions and natural resources play a vital role. These qualities positively impact the reputation of Greek SMEs, both domestically and internationally.
2. Communication and online presence: Greek SMEs benefit from close customer relationships, which allow for direct and personal communication. However, the potential of online platforms for reputation building remains underutilized. Online reputation management, including active engagement on social media and review platforms such as Google, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor, is critical—especially for SMEs in tourism, retail, and hospitality. Negative reviews or crises, such as service mishaps, can have outsized impacts. Transparent and timely management of these situations, coupled with proactive



communication, can significantly limit reputational damage and even turn challenges into opportunities to build trust.

3. **Corporate social responsibility:** In recent years, Greek SMEs have increasingly recognized the importance of CSR, with initiatives focusing on supporting local communities, preserving the environment, and respecting workers' rights. SMEs that actively engage in and communicate their commitment to sustainability and social responsibility enhance their image among customers, employees, and stakeholders.
4. **Innovation and adaptation to market challenges:** The ability of SMEs to adapt to market changes, embrace innovation, and integrate digital technologies is an important factor in shaping their reputation. Greek SMEs that invest in digital transformation, sustainable practices, and innovative processes—particularly in challenging sectors like agriculture, shipping, and logistics—can build a strong competitive edge and bolster their reputation in both domestic and international markets.

Corporate reputation is a strategic asset for Greek SMEs. Properly managed, it enhances competitiveness and supports long-term sustainability. By learning how to manage their reputation effectively—leveraging digital tools, strengthening community engagement, and promoting their unique strengths—SMEs can unlock significant value in a rapidly evolving market.

### **2.3.4 Business success stories**

#### **Korres**

Korres is a Greek cosmetics company founded by Giorgos Korres, a pharmacist who used to work at the oldest herbal apothecary of Greece. This pharmacy was later passed on to him where he developed a deep knowledge of natural ingredients and their applications. His expertise, along with a growing demand for natural and effective solutions, laid the foundation for the creation of a cosmetics brand that bridges the gap between traditional Greek remedies and modern science. Inspired by the rich biodiversity of Greece, Korres developed products that utilized native herbs and cutting-edge research. The brand prioritizes sustainability, eco-conscious formulations, and supporting local farmers, ensuring its operations positively impact both the environment and the community. Today, Korres is internationally recognized for its innovation and dedication to natural, high-quality ingredients.

#### **Reputation observations**

Korres commitment on innovation and sustainability has been its driving force when establishing its identity in the cosmetics industry. One of its standout achievements is the development of the Full Circle Process, a unique and sustainable production model. This process incorporates the entire lifecycle of ingredients, by sourcing native herbs from local farmers, extracting potent active ingredients, and repurposing waste materials, Korres ensures minimal environmental impact while maintaining product efficacy. Last but not least, Korres also follows eco-friendly practices, such as reducing its environmental footprint through recyclable packaging and renewable energy initiatives. Its commitment to biodiversity and collaborations with Greek farmers help protect native plant species while ensuring high-quality,



authentic ingredients. Its focus on creating a bridge between tradition, science and sustainability has made Korres a pioneer in natural cosmetic solutions, combining Greek heritage with advanced technologies to inspire global recognition.

## **Carpo**

Carpo was founded in Athens in 1991, and has been active in the field of importing, processing, packaging and merchandising nuts and dried fruits. Over the years, an advanced production unit has been created that flaunts the latest mechanical equipment. Quality control always ensures that processing and packaging never affect the product. In recent years, carpo has expanded its operations into the retail market with an innovative concept where the three basic categories of their products are prevalent: nuts, chocolate & coffee. With the highest quality products, the excellent customer service and exquisite merchandise, each carpo store offers a unique senses experience: The carpo 5 senses experience. Following the opening of the carpo Kolonaki store, the company operates eight stores in total, five in Athens and three in London.

## **Reputation observation**

Carpo has established a strong reputation for its dedication to providing quality, authenticity and a uniquely customer-centric experience. The brand is elevating its offering by designing stores that combine gourmet food with a luxurious, sensory-stimulating atmosphere. This approach creates a multi-sensory journey for customers, engaging taste, sight and even smell in a curated, immersive environment. The company emphasizes sourcing local Greek ingredients whenever possible, reinforcing its support for Greek agriculture and promoting the rich traditions of Mediterranean food culture. This commitment, combined with high-quality offerings as well as thorough presentation, has helped to establish Carpo's position as a leading brand in the gourmet food sector, both in Greece and internationally.

## **2.4 Corporate Reputation in SMEs: Common challenges and strategic priorities across Italy, Portugal and Greece**

The analysis of SMEs in Italy, Portugal, and Greece highlights several common trends and challenges related to corporate reputation. A key finding is the significant economic role played by SMEs in all three countries, contributing over 60% of GDP and employing more than 70% of the workforce. Despite their crucial position in the economy, SMEs often struggle with productivity gaps, digital transformation, and access to capital, all of which impact their ability to build and sustain a strong corporate reputation.

Moreover, while SMEs recognize corporate reputation as a critical factor for competitiveness, they generally lack a structured approach to improving their skills in this area. Key elements such as strategic communication, digital presence, crisis management, and corporate social responsibility are often underutilized or inconsistently applied. The inability to effectively "tell their story" limits their market



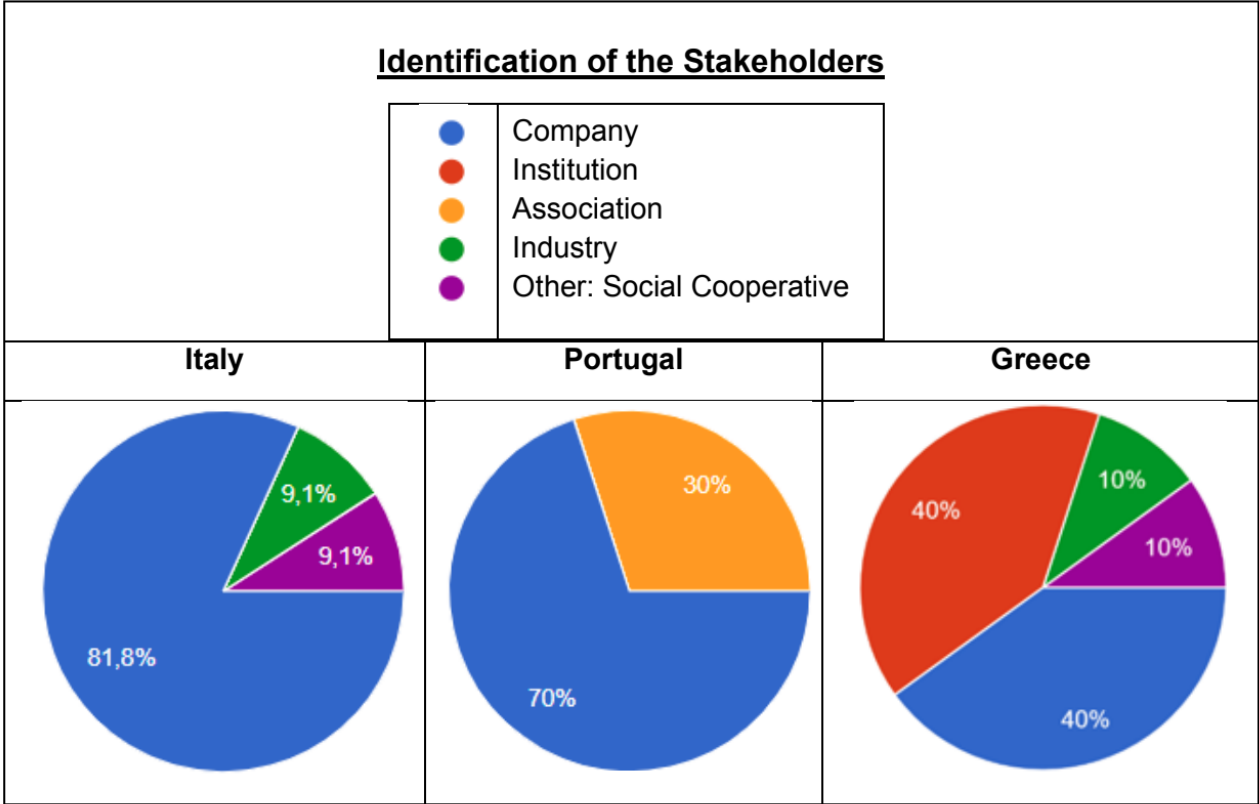
positioning and growth potential. Across all three countries, there is a need for targeted training and support to help SMEs develop reputation management strategies, leverage digital tools, and align with evolving market expectations. Strengthening these capabilities would not only enhance their individual competitiveness but also contribute to the broader economic resilience of each nation



# 3. SURVEY RESULTS

We collected a total of 31 responses on the questionnaire sent to the stakeholders previously identified by the 3 partners: 10 from Portugal, 11 from Italy, and 10 from Greece. This data provides valuable insights into the perspectives and challenges faced by organizations in these countries, allowing us to better understand regional differences and similarities in key areas.

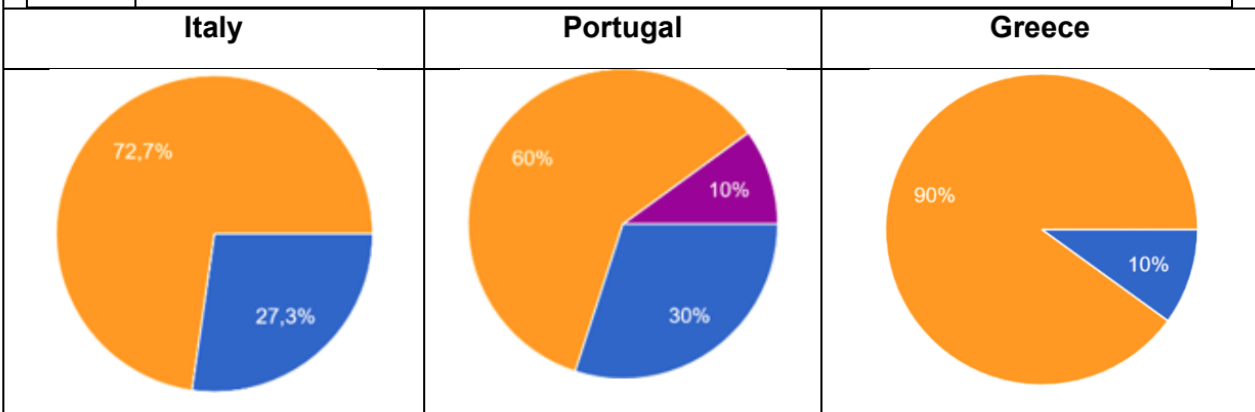
- Italy: 9 companies, 1 training institution, 1 Social Enterprise.
- Portugal: 7 companies, 3 Associations.
- Greece: 4 companies, 4 Institution, 1 Industry, 1 Social Cooperative Enterprise. Identification of the Stakeholders Enterprise.



## 2nd Section

### 1. What do you understand by "business reputation"?

- The perception customers have about the company's products or services
- How the company manages its customers and employees
- A combination of ethical values, customer service, communication, and social impact
- I don't know / I'm not sure
- Other: \_\_

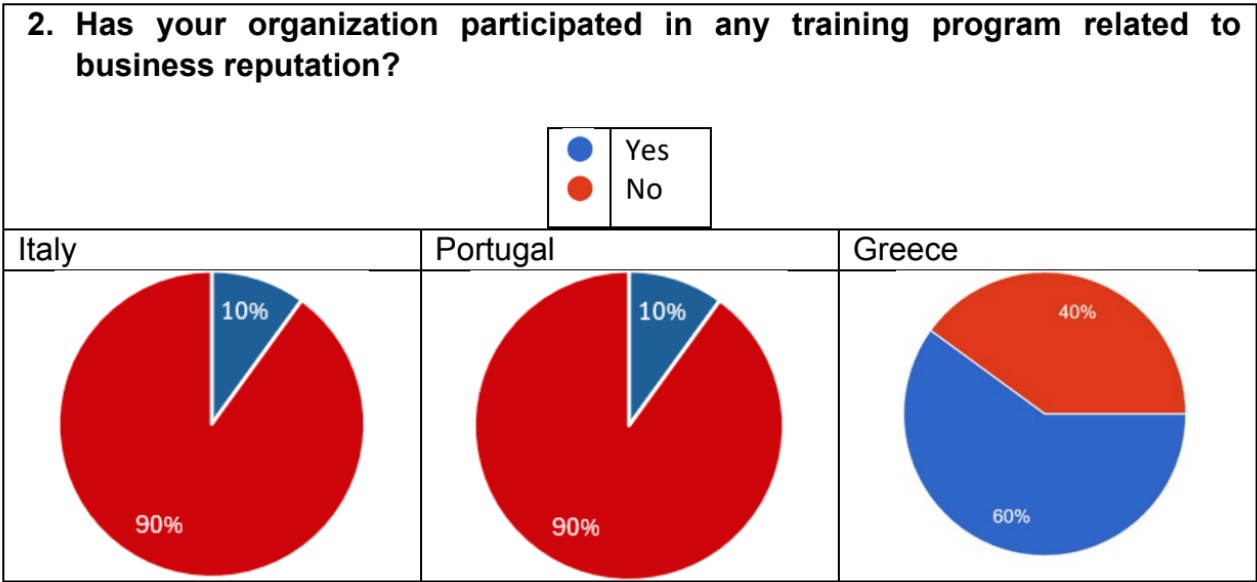


Most respondents in the 3 countries, specially in Greece, connect the idea of Business Reputation to a combination of ethical values, customer service, communication, and social impact.

It is worth noting that around a third of the Portuguese and Italians interviewed identify reputation with the perception that customers have of the products and services offered by a company.

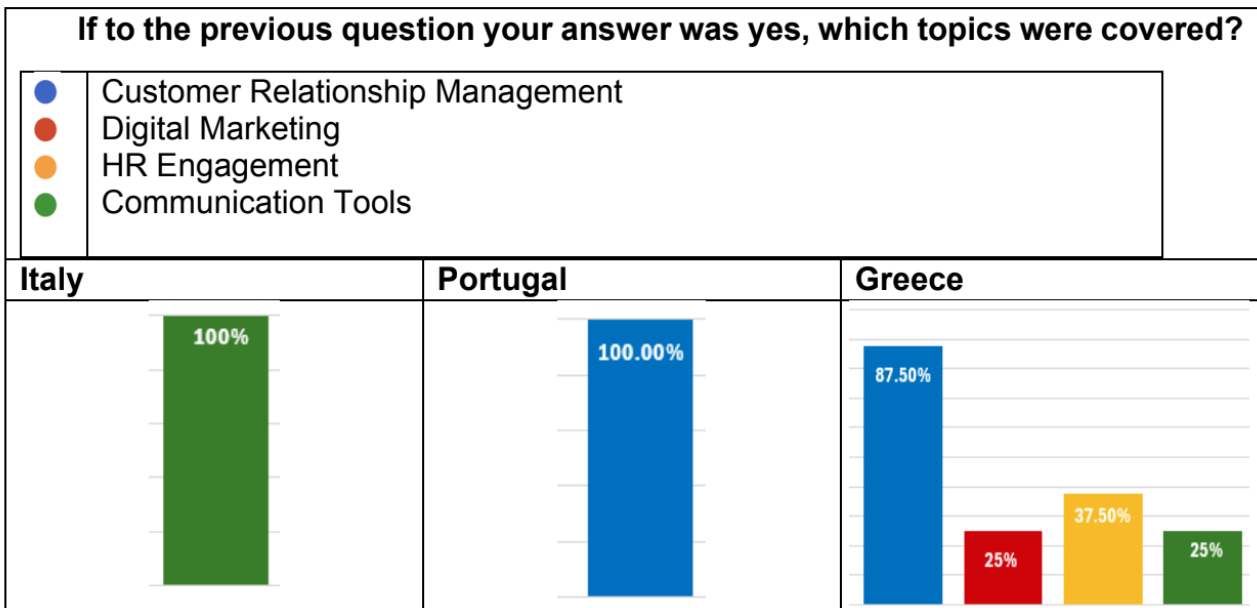




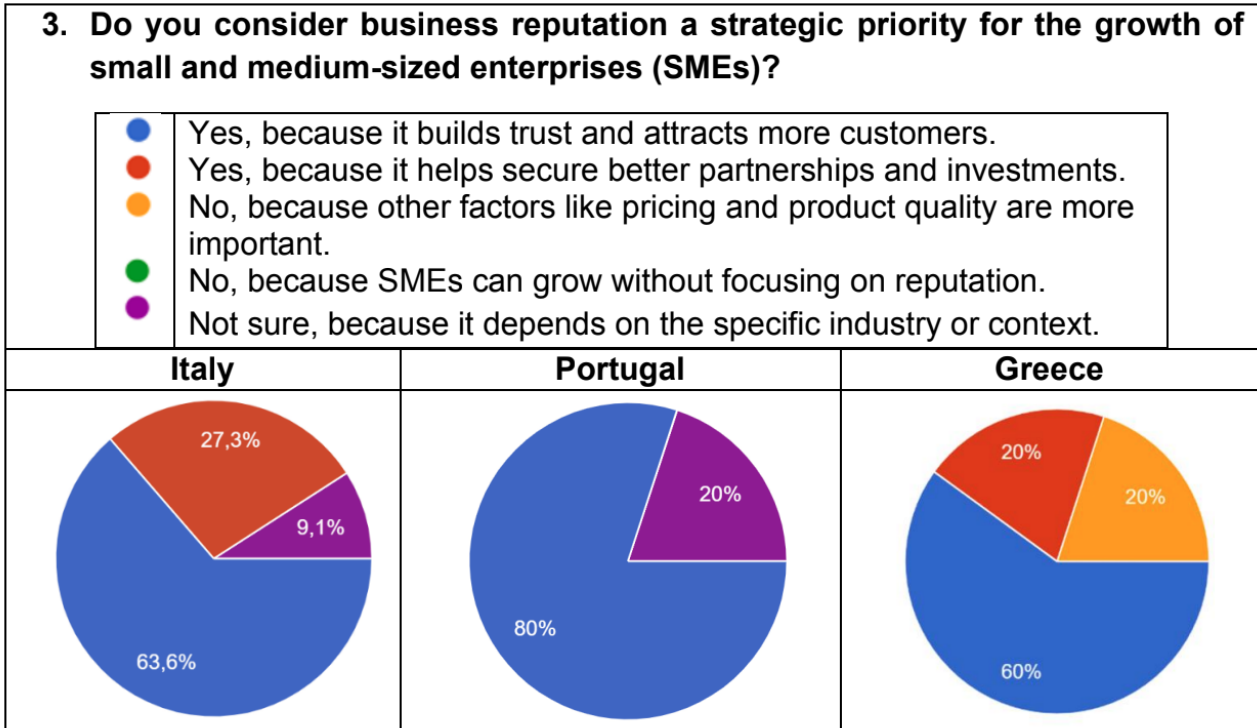


In Greece, there is a significant difference compared to Italy and Portugal: 60% of stakeholders have some form of training program related to business reputation. In contrast, in Portugal and Italy, only 10% of respondents report having received any training in this area.

This highlights an important gap that needs to be addressed, which could be effectively tackled through the Reputation Project.



In Portugal, one stakeholder participated in training programs focused on Customer Relationship Management (CRM), while in Italy, one stakeholder stated the training focused on communication tools and strategies. In Greece, the majority of stakeholders attended courses in CRM, HR Management and Digital Marketing, reflecting a more diversified approach to business training.



In Italy, most respondents (63.6%) also believe that corporate reputation is important for the growth of SMEs because it builds trust and attracts more customers. A smaller portion (27.3%) agree that reputation is important, but because it helps to secure better partnerships and investments. A small portion (9.1%) believe that other factors, such as price and product quality, are more important. No one believes that SMEs can grow without focusing on reputation.

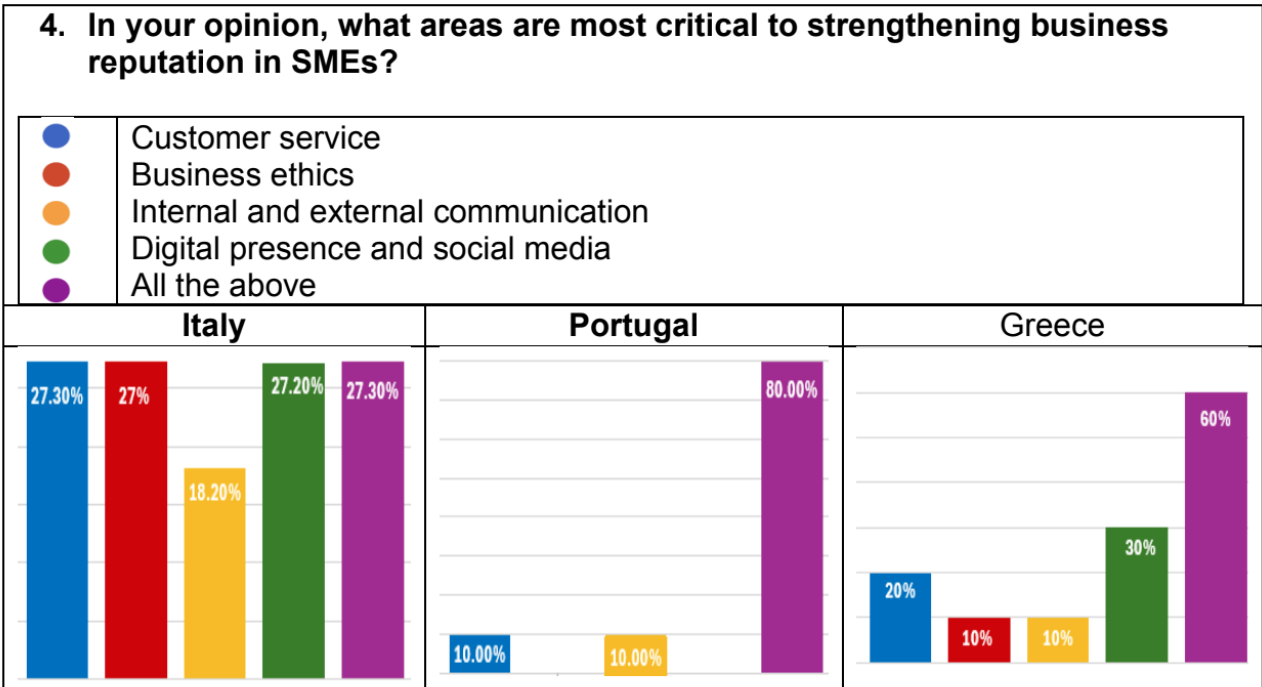
In Portugal, most respondents (80%) believe that corporate reputation is important for the growth of SMEs because it builds trust and attracts more customers.

A smaller portion (20%) agree that reputation is important, but because it helps to secure better partnerships and investments. No one believes that reputation is not important. In Greece, a clear majority (60%) of respondents feel that a good reputation builds trust and attracts more customers, highlighting the link between reputation and customer acquisition. An additional 20% emphasize the role of reputation in securing better partnerships and investments, suggesting that Greek SMEs see reputation as a tool for strategic growth. While a further 20% believe other factors like pricing and product quality are more important.



The graphs demonstrate that business reputation is widely recognized as an important factor for the growth of SMEs in the three countries. However, there are nuances in the responses of each country, which may reflect cultural, economic, and sectorial differences.

**Third Section: Training Requirements - (Identifying Training Needs for Reputation Management)**



In Portugal, a resounding 80% of respondents believe all listed areas (customer service, business ethics, internal/external communication, and digital/social media presence) are crucial. This suggests a holistic understanding of reputation management, where each element plays a vital role in the overall perception of the business. The remaining responses were split evenly between customer service and business ethics, indicating these two areas might be seen as particularly foundational, even within the broader context of "all areas being important."

Conversely, the Italian responses demonstrate a more nuanced and selective approach. While communication (both internal and external) and digital/social media presence are still highly valued, they are not seen as universally encompassing. Business ethics also stands out as a key factor, tying with communication and digital presence as the most frequently cited critical area. Customer service, while important, receives less emphasis than in the Portuguese responses.



On the Greek side, the majority (60%) believe that all the listed areas—customer service, business ethics, internal and external communication, and digital presence and social media—are important. Notably, 30% of participants specifically highlight digital presence and social media as crucial, emphasizing the growing role of the online world in shaping a company's reputation. Customer service, business ethics, and communication are also recognized as relevant, though with less emphasis, at 20% and 10%, respectively. These findings suggest that, according to respondents, a strong reputation is built through a combination of both traditional and modern factors, reinforcing

the need for a holistic approach to reputation management.

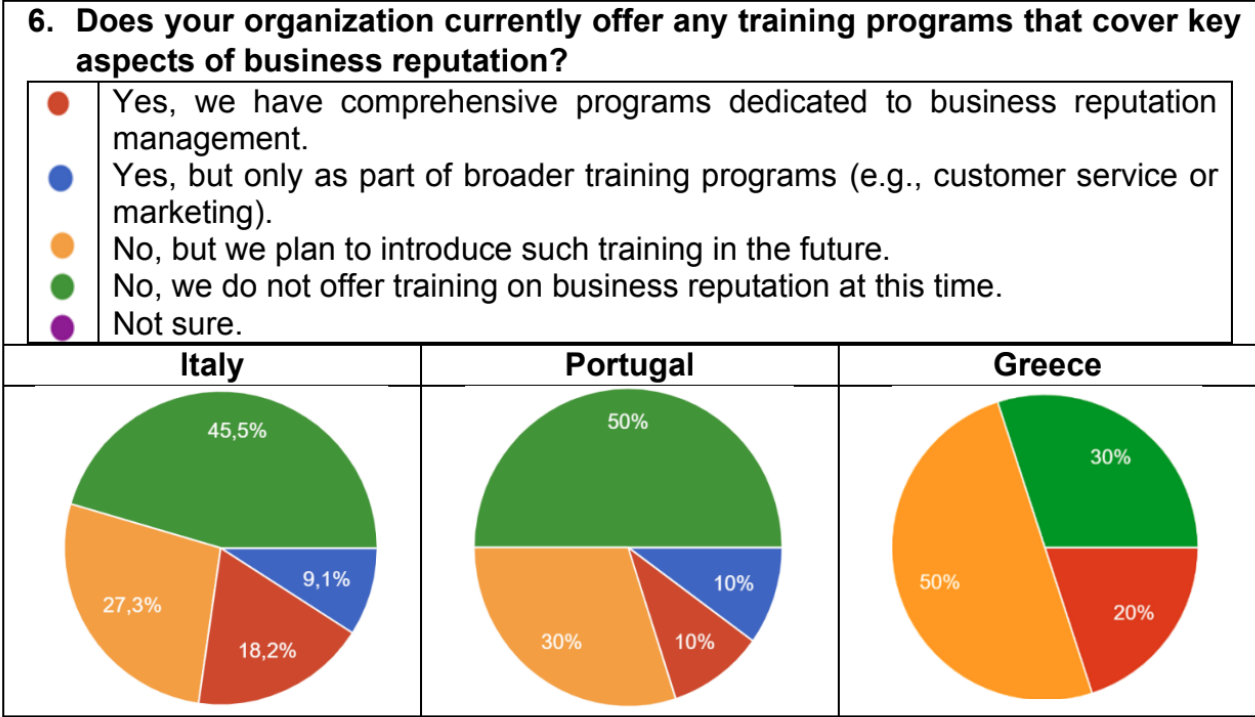
While all three countries acknowledge the importance of a strong business reputation, their perspectives on the most critical contributing factors differ. Portugal demonstrates the strongest belief in a comprehensive, all-encompassing strategy. Italy favors a more focused approach, highlighting specific areas of strength. Greece, while leaning towards a holistic view, places considerable emphasis on the increasingly vital role of digital presence in shaping reputation. These variations likely reflect differences in cultural values, economic landscapes, and the specific challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs in each nation.



In Italy, the challenges follow a similar pattern. The most significant issue is also limited financial resources for reputation development (45.5%), followed by a shortage of skilled personnel for public relations and communication (27.3%). In third place, 18.2% report difficulties in managing online reviews and social media.

In Portugal, the primary challenge for organizations is limited financial resources for reputation-building efforts (50%). Additionally, 20% cite a lack of skilled personnel to manage public relations and communication, while 10% struggle with handling online reviews and social media. Another 10% highlight a lack of market knowledge or visibility, making it difficult to communicate their value proposition and stand out from the competition.

In Greece, the most significant obstacle, indicated by 50% of respondents, is the lack of skilled personnel to manage public relations and communication. Both limited financial resources and difficulty in managing online reviews and social media presence are cited by 20% of respondents each. Finally, limited awareness or visibility in the market presents a challenge for 10% of the SMEs surveyed.



In Portugal, half of organizations (50%) report that they do not have comprehensive training programs dedicated to corporate reputation management. This significant figure highlights a clear gap in training and investment in specialized curricula.



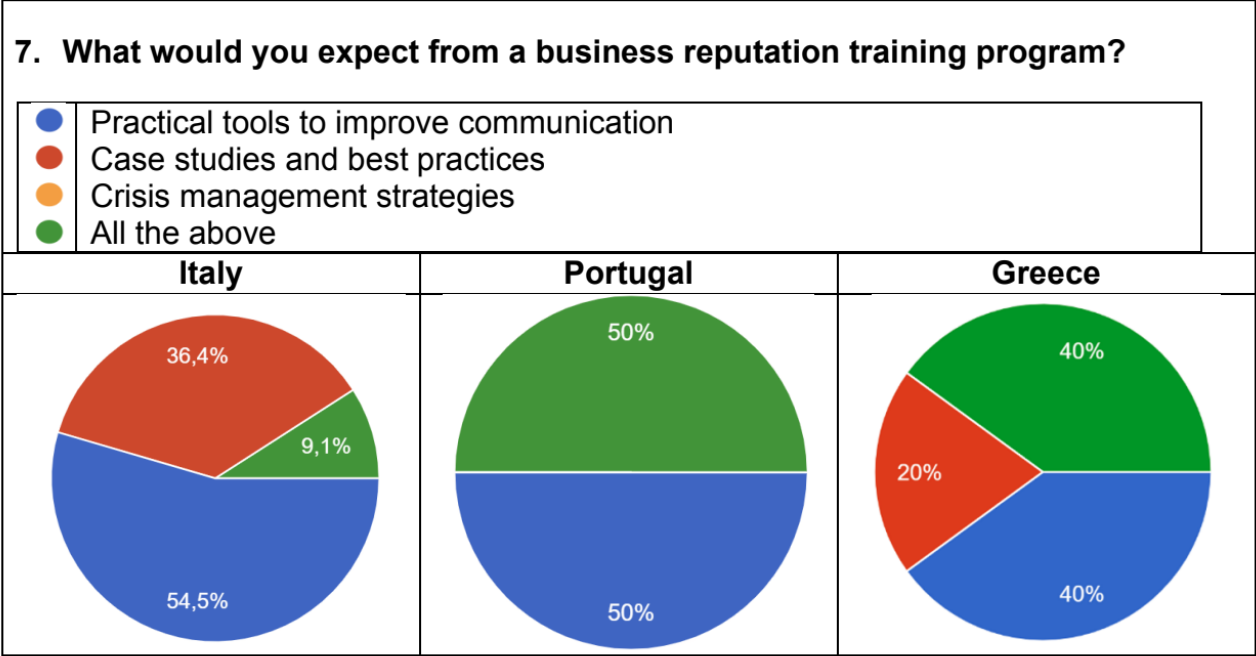
Encouragingly, 30% of organizations plan to introduce training focused on business reputation. Another group (20%) already offers training on corporate reputation, but only as part of broader programs. In these cases, reputation is covered alongside topics such as marketing or communication, indicating that companies view it as an integrated aspect of various business functions rather than a standalone priority.

In Italy, the situation is similar, with 45.5% of organizations stating that they do not have comprehensive training programs dedicated to corporate reputation management.

However, a larger group (27.3%) plans to implement corporate reputation training in the future, suggesting growing awareness of its importance.

In Greece, 50% of respondents expressed their intention to implement training courses aimed at improving corporate reputation. Additionally, 20% stated that they already have some form of training incorporated into a broader context.

In the 3 countries those who have stated that already have a comprehensive training program (red area on the graphs), it means that if we consider this survey as a representative sample of the markets in Italy, Portugal and Greece, it would suggest that around 74% of SMEs and Associations would be receptive to gain knowledge on Business Reputation.

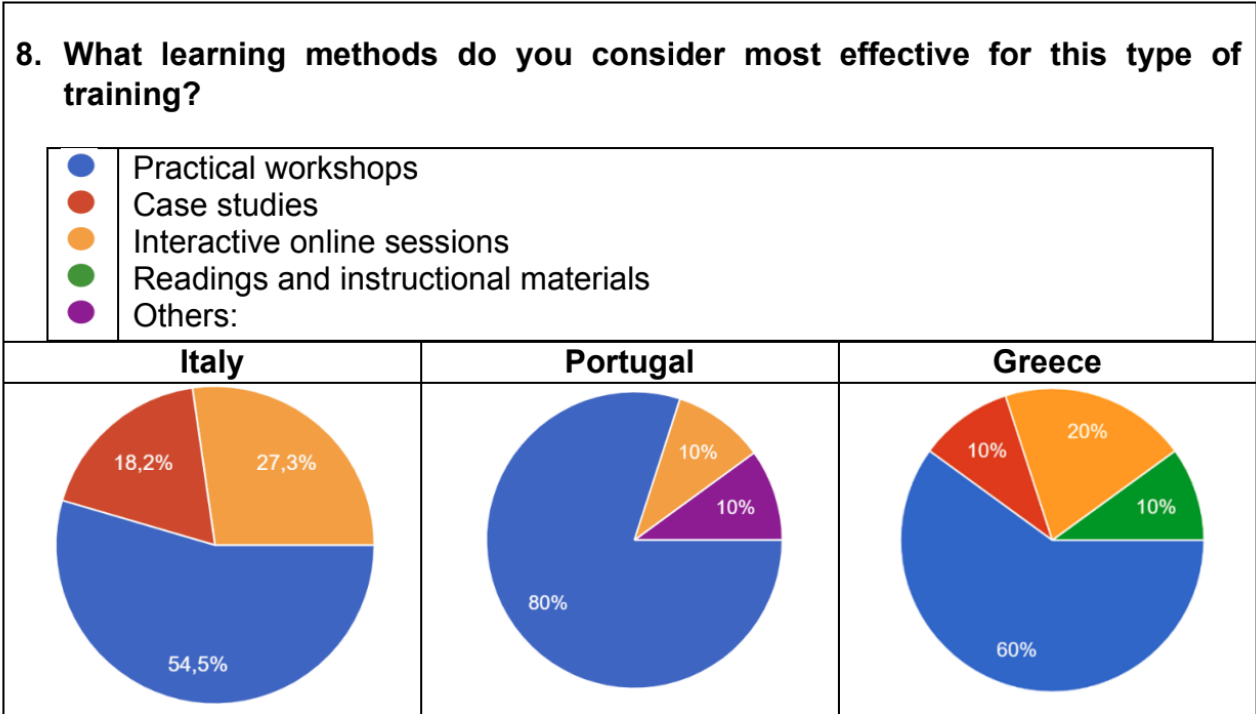


In Portugal, expectations for corporate reputation training are evenly divided between a demand for practical tools to enhance communication and a broader approach that includes case studies, best practices, and crisis management strategies. This result suggests that Portuguese participants value both hands-on skill development and learning through real-world examples.

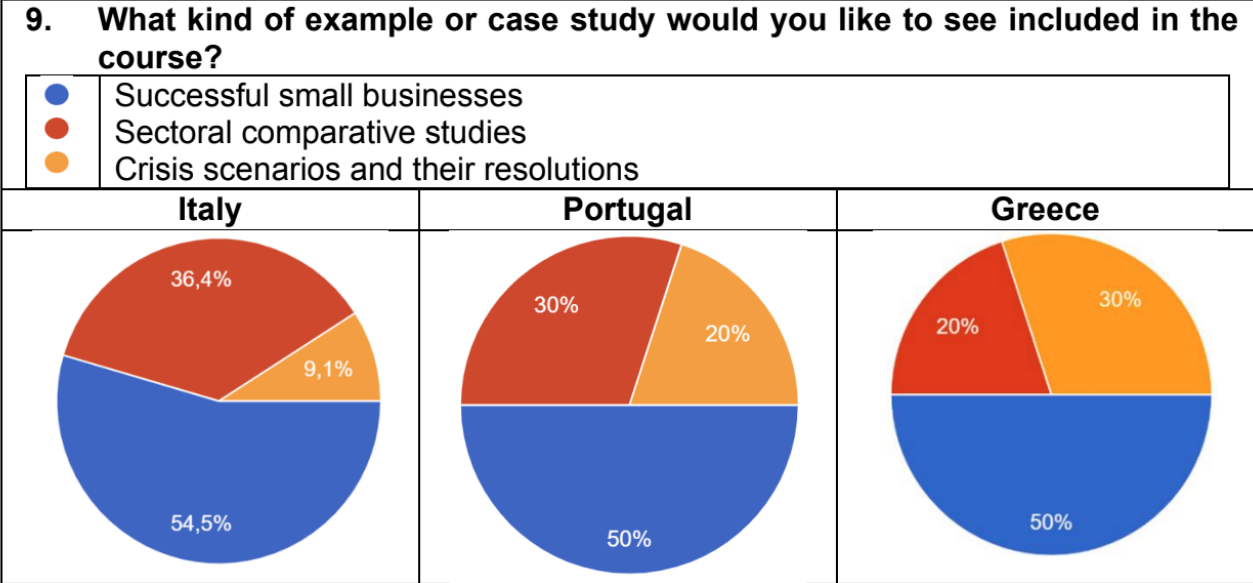
In Italy, the emphasis on practical tools and case studies is equally strong, with most respondents aiming to improve their communication skills and gain insights from practical examples. Similar to Portugal, crisis management does not emerge as a primary focus.

In Greece, the responses followed a similar trend to those in Italy and Portugal. The majority of answers (40%) indicated that practical tools to improve communication are what participants would expect from a business reputation training program.

The overall analysis of this question would indicate that the 3 topics mentioned are considered to be interesting themes to be focused by the training activities, especially in Portugal and Greece, while Italian respondents highlighted Practical Tools and Case Studies as key elements.



In Portugal, the majority of participants (80%) consider practical workshops the most effective method for corporate reputation training. A similar trend is observed in Italy and Greece, where 54.5% and 60% of respondents, respectively, share the same preference. Interactive online sessions are valued by a smaller portion of participants, with 10% of Portuguese stakeholders favoring this flexible and engaging format, compared to 27.3% in Italy. Practical workshops emerges as a preferred teaching methodology.



In Italy, the most preferred approach is sectoral comparative studies (54.5%), followed by case studies of successful small businesses (36.4%). Interest in crisis management is even lower (9.1%), reinforcing its lower priority in training preferences.

In Portugal, 50% of participants prefer case studies of successful small businesses as part of corporate reputation training, while 30% value sectoral comparative studies. Interest in crisis management is lower (20%), indicating it is not a primary concern.

In Greece, a similar trend emerges, with 50% of respondents favoring case studies of successful small businesses, while 30% prioritize crisis management and 20% prefer sectoral comparative studies.

Overall, the findings highlight that learning from successful companies is a top priority across all three countries. However, Portugal demonstrates a more balanced interest between case studies and industry comparisons, while Italy places a stronger emphasis on sectoral analysis. Crisis management remains a secondary concern in all contexts.





## 4. ANALYSIS - HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE TRAINING CURRICULUM OF REPUTATION PROJECT

The results suggest that corporate reputation is a multifaceted concept that encompasses both the quality of products and services and the way a company interacts with its stakeholders. When analyzing stakeholder participation in training programs related to business reputation, a significant disparity emerges between Greece and the other two countries. In Greece, 60% of stakeholders have undergone some form of training on this topic, while in Portugal and Italy, this figure is substantially lower, with only 10% of respondents reporting any related training. This would highlight a crucial gap between Greece and the other two countries. But we must take into consideration the result of Greek respondents to question # 6 “Does your organization currently offer any training programs that cover key aspects of business reputation” in which only 20% stated their companies offer a comprehensive program dedicated to business reputation management, and 50% indicate they plan to introduce training activities.

Therefore, this comparative analysis reveals a clear need for targeted educational initiatives in order to strengthen corporate reputation management among SMEs, institutions, start-ups and Associations.

Italy and Portugal face common challenges related to limited financial resources and difficulties in managing online reviews, underscoring the importance of online reputation management and the need for investment in this area. However, in Greece, the primary challenge is the lack of qualified professionals in this field. These findings indicate that financial constraints and expertise gaps are the most pressing barriers to effective reputation management.

The absence of structured training programs represents a significant gap for these companies. In Portugal and Italy, 50% of stakeholders do not offer any type of training focused on developing or enhancing the reputation of SMEs, whereas in Greece, this percentage is slightly lower. However, in all three countries, at least 30% of selected stakeholders have expressed a future intention to implement courses in this area. This is particularly relevant to the work being developed within the Training Curriculum, as these companies and organizations will have the opportunity to adopt the tools created by the project and integrate them effectively into their business strategies.

To develop this curriculum successfully, it will be essential to choose a methodology that aligns with the interests and needs of stakeholders. Research findings reveal a clear consensus across all three countries: participants expect a course or curriculum to provide practical tools for improving communication and strengthening corporate reputation. Additionally, stakeholders emphasize the importance of case studies and best practices as key components of the learning process.

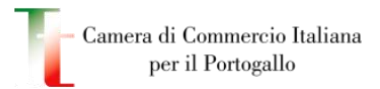
The preferred learning method among the majority of respondents in all three countries is practical workshops, combined with an increasing recognition of the benefits of digital and interactive approaches.

Our Transnational Analysis reveals that most participants favor case studies of successful small businesses as a key component of corporate training. Overall, the findings highlight that learning from real-world success stories is a top priority across all three countries, reinforcing the importance of practical, experience-based learning in corporate reputation management.





**PARTNERS**



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