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PERCEIVED BRAND LONGEVITY AND BRAND HERITAGE

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Overview: This research aims to clarify how individuals interpret brand longevity. The result shows that it incorporates four dimensions related to brand heritage and to its components.

Showcasing the longevity of brands has been a common communication strategy in recent years used by companies to influence consumers' behaviour. For instance, in 2011, Nivea indicated in its "100 years" campaign the number of years that it took skincare of consumers: "100 years skincare for life". In the same way, Lindt communicates its longevity through its founding date in the brand's logo: "Lindt, Master Chocolatier Since 1845". Both brands used their longevity to show their level of expertise to consumers. These examples allow us to justify the importance of studying brand longevity. In theoretical terms, brand longevity refers to the number of years that a brand has been operating. It is a component of brand heritage which is in turn a dimension of brand identity (Urde, Greyser and Balmer, 2007). In this sense, brand longevity helps in the brand differentiation. Empirical studies showed that brand longevity has an influence on the perceived risk and consumer preference (Desai, Kalra and Murthi, 2008). However, the notion of longevity has only been conceptualized from a chronological perspective. Unlike this literature and past research, our study focuses instead on brand longevity from a perceptual perspective. We argue that the perception of longevity depends on what consumers know about brands and how they use brand associations to infer longevity. In the current research, a qualitative study is pursued in order to understand the consumer perception of brand longevity. Four dimensions are settled: brand expertise, brand globalness, brand pioneering and brand authenticity.

In our methodology, a list of 151 brands¹ was submitted to ten participants (50% female, age between 14 and 64 years) who were asked to estimate and rank each brand longevity on a likert scale (1 [Very young] ; 7 [Very old]) with the following question : "*Based on your personal opinion, how old is this brand ?*". Then, in-depth interviews were conducted to discuss their answers.

¹Top 100 global brands from « BrandZ 2014 » + A selection of leading brands on the French in 2014 (Sources: <http://www.millwardbrown.com/> ; <http://www.lsa-conso.fr/>).

The thematic content analysis shows that brand longevity perceptions can be classified into four categories. First, the **brand expertise**. Participants believe that brands with expertise, production performance, good sales records and a strong market position must be old established brands (e.g. “*Nivea is old because to me it is related to its expertise, good market position and high sales*”; “*Gap manufactures very good outfits, so they must know what they do, they are experts in their field*” Gaëlle, 27 years). Second, the **brand globalness**. Participants consider that global, well known and broadly implemented brands are therefore the oldest (e.g. “*Santander (bank) is quite old for me,... wherever you go in the world you will find this bank... and I believe that they needed time to be all over the world*” Mathieu, 25 years). Third, the **brand pioneering**. For many participants, a brand that has been the first to develop or create a specific concept is as a consequence the oldest one (e.g. “*For me, McDonald's is a pioneer in the fast-food category, they were the first to start this, so it must be a very old brand*” Gaëlle, 27 years). Fourth, the **brand authenticity**. Participants view brands that show symbols of authenticity (e.g. respect of traditions, natural components, local products) as being the oldest (e.g. “*Palmolive is old because it does contain natural stuff, such as olive oil, etc.*” Marie, 27 years).

Perceived brand longevity signals a broad set of positive dimensions. These dimensions converge with the “Innate Heritage” components as introduced by Hudson and Balmer (2013) and based on Mead’s (1929) theory of time past. Perceived brand longevity relates to both “structural heritage” including brand leadership (i.e. pioneering) and authenticity and “implied heritage” with the brand expertise and, to some extent, reliability. This study gives an empirical support to the theoretical link between brand heritage and its alleged components. Furthermore, it introduces brand globalness as a new component. In fact, the brand’s ability to expand into global markets can induce a substantial longevity that is required to achieve such a performance (i.e. implied heritage). Hence, as global brands can infer longevity, they may also infer brand heritage.

The current research reveals how perceived brand longevity can be relevant to brand heritage. From a managerial perspective, this work presents key brand aspects able to infer longevity. Managers should highlight or improve these aspects in order to increase their brand’s perceived longevity and thus enhance their brand heritage.

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