

brand heritage

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Brand heritage is an emerging concept within the marketing discipline, which suggests that the consumer appeal of products and services offered by older companies may be enhanced by the historical characters of their brands (Hudson, 2011a; Urde, Greyser, and Balmer, 2007). Although the topic seems obscure, the phenomenon is relatively common. A recent study of leading global brands in a variety of industries indicated that more than 40% were established over 100 years ago (Hudson, 2011b).

Examples of marketing related to heritage include the citation of company founding dates on packaging, descriptions of company histories on websites, and the celebration of corporate anniversaries. Such marketing may also involve references to a company in historical context or to iconic artifacts in possession of the company. It could even include the creation of updated products that incorporate visual elements from prior versions, or the design of new offerings that represent idealized or artificial memories of historical reality.

The purpose of heritage marketing is not to indulge antiquarian sensibilities, but rather to influence future purchasing behavior by employing historical references in current marketing initiatives. Heritage elements may be used as evidence to support claims about the attributes or status of a brand or its products, especially in relation to concepts such as authenticity or pioneership. An historical brand may also serve as an instrument of existential definition, on which consumers project associations from their own pasts, producing affective reactions such as nostalgia. The former is operative in defining the identity of the brand alone, while the latter is also operative in defining the identity of the consumer (Hudson and Balmer, 2011).

Historic brands constitute a distinct conceptual category and require a different approach to brand management than younger brands (Urde, Greyser, and Balmer, 2007). A brand heritage approach involves uncovering aspects of heritage through archival and consumer research, activating that heritage through the

use of symbols in product design and marketing communications, and protecting that heritage through stewardship and attention to continuity. Older brands have unique histories that cannot be duplicated or appropriated by competitors, and such heritage represents a defensible point of differentiation.

The concept of brand heritage builds on prior scholarship in brand equity (Aaker, 2004), brand management (Keller, 2008), corporate identity (Balmer, 1998), retrospective marketing (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry, 2003), nostalgia (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003), and authenticity (Grayson and Martinec, 2004). It also relates to prior research about heritage as a cultural phenomenon (Lowenthal, 1998), heritage effects in tourism (Timothy and Boyd, 2003), and heritage effects for monarchies (Balmer, Greyser, and Urde, 2006).

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