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# When and why does the name of the brand still matter? Developing the temporal dimension of brand name equity theory

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to fill a current gap in the literature, through the development of theory concerned with changes that occur over time to the functions and importance of the brand name element of a branded entity.

**Design/methodology/approach** – An initial theoretical conceptualisation was developed from the existing literature. Study participants whose behaviour was found not to conform to this initial conceptualisation were included in subsequent research in order to obtain greater understanding. The study method employed was a series of interviews, with the obtained qualitative data analysed using template analysis. This resulted in the development of a revised theoretical conceptualisation.

**Findings** – Various functions of the brand name element, identified as connotation, denotation, linking and branded entity constancy are ongoing important providers of brand equity to some consumers for established branded entities. This challenges a position obtained from existing literature that the brand name element of an established branded entity becomes of minimal importance over time.

**Originality/value** – Value generating functions of the brand name element that persist over time were identified, leading to the development of a theoretical conceptualisation of the change in the importance of brand name equity over time.

**Keywords** Branding, Brand Names, Brand Equity, Temporality

**Paper Type** Research paper

## Introduction

This paper develops theory concerned with changes that occur *over time* to the functions and importance of the brand name element of a branded entity. This is a key contribution because, whilst the temporal dimension is acknowledged as important within consumer based brand equity, it is under researched and inadequately theoretically conceptualised.

A basic premise within branding theory is that a branded entity holds equity (Kapferer, 2012). This follows from the assertion that the branding of an entity creates value, for the business and also for the consumer. It is from the viewpoint of the consumer that consumer or customer based brand equity is particularly focused (Keller, 1993; Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2010). There is broad agreement within the literature that the amount of equity that a branded entity holds is not generally static in nature (Keller, 2013). In other words, time is an implicit relevant variable within the consideration of the brand equity of any entity. However, this temporal dimension of brand equity is rarely the focus of branding theory or literature.

This limited consideration of the temporal dimension appears surprising as time is regarded as integral to social life (Adam, 2004) and consumer behaviour, both of which directly interface with branding. Many aspects of consumer behaviour, such as repurchase, habit, ritual, knowledge and recall, are temporal (Russell and Levy, 2012). Present consumer behaviour is often predicated by past consumer behaviour (Hetzl, 2003).

The brand name is regarded as integral to the branded entity (Aaker, 1991; de Chernatony *et al.*, 2010) and therefore a key source of the equity provided to the consumer by the branded entity. Recent empirical research by Round and Roper (2015) suggests that the importance of the brand name element to a consumer generally declines over time as a branded entity moves from being new to being established, thereby highlighting the relevance of the temporal dimension. However, this decline was not universal within their study. For some of their consumer participants the brand name element of the branded entity was perceived as being of very considerable importance to them, even when the branded entity had been established in the marketplace for many years. Reasons for this continued importance were not apparent and could not readily be determined through reference to any

existing empirical or theoretical work.

This paper seeks to address this gap within the literature and to develop the temporal dimension of brand name equity theory. It approaches this through the consideration of the findings of an exploratory qualitative study. This research specifically focused on the examination of the various reasons for the continued importance to particular consumers of the brand name element for particular established branded entities. This work forms part of an ongoing structured research programme that aims to improve understanding and clarify the importance of the brand name element (Round and Roper; 2012, 2015).

There are a number of reasons why this paper makes an important contribution. First, it improves our understanding of the brand name element, its relationship with the branded entity and how this changes over time. With the exception of new branded entities (e.g. Gunasti and Ross, 2010; Hillenbrand *et al.*, 2013), the brand name element has not been well explored empirically or theoretically. Second, development of temporal theory for the brand name element has wider applicability within the branding domain. It foregrounds the changeable nature of the branded entity and its equity over time. Finally, it highlights actions that corporations should take in relation to the management of the brand name over time.

The approach adopted by this paper is to commence with examination of relevant literature. As a consequence of this, an initial theoretical conceptualisation is presented. The empirical study and its findings are then reported and discussed. These are subsequently combined with the existing literature to develop a revised conceptualisation of the equity of the brand name element over time. Implications for theory, management practice and further research are then discussed. Finally the contribution of the paper is summarised.

## **Literature review**

A number of streams of literature are of particular relevance and are now reviewed. Given that the focus of the paper is on the temporal dimension of brand name equity, literature concerned with the importance of time as a variable in the consideration of brand equity is examined. This underlines limited deliberation of the temporal dimension within theoretical discussion about branding. Second, as the paper is centred on the brand name element, literature that looks at the sources of equity for a branded entity is reviewed, with a particular focus on the relevance of the brand name element as a key equity source for the branded entity. The final section looks at literature that has attempted to bring together the brand name element, brand equity and the temporal dimension. This is analysed to draw out the research gap within the literature.

### *The temporal dimension within branding theory*

The conceptualisation of customer or consumer based brand equity has always acknowledged the existence of time as a variable. This can be seen within the extensive literature that is concerned with suggested management actions for the development of the brand equity of a new branded entity (e.g. Ghodeswar, 2008). A key focus of Keller's (1993) seminal work is concern for how brand equity can be managed. Managers are advised on actions that they should take to increase the equity of their branded entity *over time*. Managing brand equity over time is similarly an integral objective for Aaker (1991). For example, he talks about identifying the actions that "*will meaningfully affect the elements of equity*". Clearly, the notion of brand building implies the relevance of the temporal, as building cannot occur instantaneously.

However, with the exception of certain specific categories, such as nostalgia, heritage and retro brands (e.g. Brown, 2001; Orth and Gal, 2012; Kessous *et al.*, 2015; Rose *et al.*, 2016), writing specifically exploring the temporal perspective of a brand once established in the marketplace is limited.

An explicit consideration of the temporal aspect of changes to a branded entity after

its initial developmental stage is presented by Bivainiene (2010). This work explores the idea of a brand life cycle, based on product life cycle theory (e.g. Nadeau and Casselman, 2008). The key notion in this work is that the type and value of equity that a branded entity holds changes over time, as it moves through the various life stages found within the product life cycle model (i.e. introduction, growth, maturity and decline). Clearly this argument is premised on the assumption that the product life cycle concept is itself of merit and such an assertion has been challenged (Grantham, 1997). In addition it is argued that as brands often consist of changing portfolios of products, brands can continue to thrive even when individual products die (e.g. Du Pont, Virgin) (Kapferer, 2012). Consequently it is argued that decline and death of brands is not inevitable or indeed even the norm (Russell and Schau, 2014; Lovett *et al.*, 2014). A few alternatives to a brand life cycle approach, that also make the assertion that equity provided by the branded entity will differ by value and type over time, can be found within the literature. For example de Chernatony (1993) explores the idea that brands undergo an evolutionary process over time, with a general move from being manufacturer centred to being consumer centred and from being a provider of functional value to one of symbolic value.

Several arguments can be offered to account for the limited discussion of the temporal dimension within branding literature. It can certainly be argued that empirical research of the temporal tends to be challenging in nature. Longitudinal study is presupposed, which can be difficult to resource in terms of time, funding and people (Hassett and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). Nevertheless, a call has been made for more research of this type within the branding domain (Keller and Lehmann, 2006).

However, empirical difficulty is not in itself sufficient for the lack of theoretical discourse within the literature and various authors (Hamlin *et al.*, 2015) have argued that this absence of literature is a consequence of a key presumption within the dominant consumer-based branding strategy paradigm. This asserts that once a brand has become established within the marketplace the focus of brand management is on the protection of its identity (variously designated as DNA, kernel or essence) (Kapferer, 2012). It is assumed that as environmental changes occur over time, management take appropriate marketing actions to offset their impact on the brand, thereby maintaining its identity (Park *et al.*, 1986; Keller, 2013). Whilst innovation does occur, it is still assumed that the brand should stick to its core values and image (Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Kapferer, 2014). It has been argued that this approach to brand management has resulted in a tendency for the established brand to be viewed through a timeless static lens (Hamlin *et al.*, 2015), leading to the neutralisation of the relevance of the temporal and pushing time into the background as a priority for the theoretical development of branding.

The argument that the dominant consumer-based brand paradigm has led to a static conceptualisation of the brand is made particularly forcibly by Holt (2002, 2004), within his alternative cultural approach to branding. For him the emphasis on consistency “*come hell or high water*” is seen as the “*Achilles heel*” of the dominant consumer-based branding paradigm (Heding *et al.*, 2016, p. 266), asserting that a brand needs to change dynamically over time in line with societal changes. In addition much of the value of the brand is regarded as resident within its historical narrative, that changes over time (Lundqvist *et al.*, 2013).

#### *Conceptualisations of sources of equity to a branded entity*

In order to explore the sources of a branded entity’s equity to consumers, a branded entity can be usefully conceptualised in a variety of ways.

Keller’s seminal Customer-Based Brand Equity model (1993) focuses on equity being created through the development of both the awareness and associations of a branded entity, whilst Aaker (1991) sees brand equity originating from a number of sources, namely brand

loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations and other proprietary brand assets. Alternatively the sources of equity of a branded entity to consumers can be broken down into the following functions that the entity offers to consumers: rational (Kapferer, 2012), relationship (Fournier, 1998; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), habitual (Verwijmeren *et al.*, 2011) and symbolic (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998).

However, another fruitful approach towards conceptualisation is consideration of the various different elements of a branded entity encountered by the consumer. In other words, one can look at individual elements such as the logo, the brand name and the packaging and consider the extent to which brand equity to the consumer results specifically from each of these elements. For example, empirical work has identified that the choice of a particular brand name at the introduction of a branded entity to the marketplace can have a major impact on the equity held by this brand (e.g. Hillenbrand *et al.*, 2013). It is the brand name element and its equity over time that is the primary concern of this paper and the relationship between it and the branded entity is discussed in the next section.

#### *The relationship between brand name equity and branded entity equity*

The brand name element only forms a part of the branded entity. Consequently, the equity held by a branded entity cannot all be attributed to its brand name. However it is generally asserted that a material proportion of the equity of a branded entity arises from the brand name element (Keller, 2013).

Based on theoretical conceptualisation by Bastos and Levy (2012), it can be argued that the brand name element provides equity to the branded entity in three ways: through denotation, connotation and linking functions. The denotation function is the function that the brand name performs in the representation of the branded entity. A positive brand name can create equity for the branded entity to the consumer, through improving the awareness of the branded entity (e.g. Samu and Krishnan, 2010). The connotation function is comprised of the provision of additional value to a branded entity by the brand name element, through the associations held by a particular name (Argo *et al.*, 2010; Klink and Athaide, 2012). The linking function of the brand name arises where the brand name is used as a primary device for the linking together of different branded entities in the mind of the consumer, such as occurs with brand extension and multi-level brand architecture strategies. This linking function can increase the equity of the branded entity, through enabling it to access the equity of these other branded entities (e.g. Isen *et al.*, 2004).

#### *Temporal changes to branded entity equity from the brand name element*

Given the above assertions that brand equity varies over time and that the brand name element is responsible for a notable proportion of this equity, it is valuable to consider how the equity from the brand name element might vary temporally. Arguments are presented within the literature suggesting that the equity resulting from the brand name element will become of substantially less importance to the branded entity over time.

When a branded entity is introduced into the marketplace it has been asserted that the brand name is likely to be the most important denotation element (Batey, 2008). However, it is argued that over time other elements will start to fulfil this denotation function, in addition to the brand name element, as the consumer gains usage experience of the branded entity (Rindell *et al.*, 2011) and the corporation engages in ongoing marketing campaigns. A number of points can be offered in support of this argument. First there have been a number of branded entity name changes of established products (e.g. Jif to Cif, Dime to Diam) with no apparent impact on the equity of the branded entity (Edwards, 2010; Kapferer, 2012). Second copycat brands have grown in importance. However, in general they do not exploit the brand name of the copied branded entity that they are attempting to denote (van Horen and Pieters, 2012; Aribarg *et al.*, 2014).

Similarly, when a branded entity is introduced into the marketplace, it will offer few associations to consumers, apart from those provided through its brand name. As the branded entity becomes established new associations will result from usage and corporate marketing programmes (Misrah *et al.*, 2014), so that the brand name will cease to provide such a significant connotation function (Riezebos, 1994).

These assumptions of decline in the importance of equity from the brand name element over time, derived from the existing literature and discussed above are conceptualised in Figure 1.

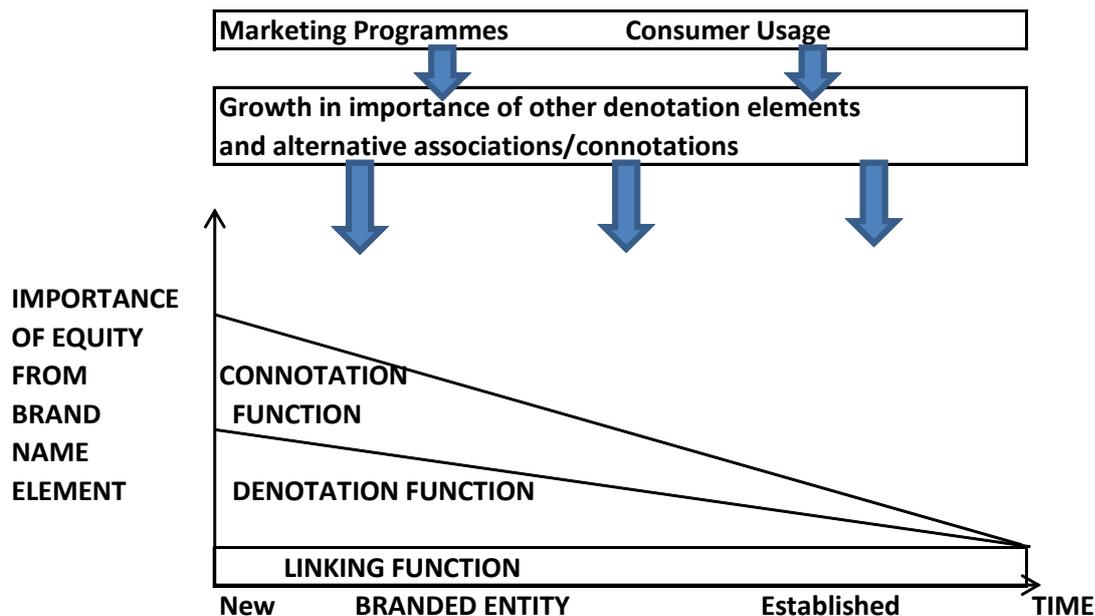


Figure 1-Change in importance of brand name equity over time-Initial conceptualisation

#### *Requirement for development of brand name equity temporal theory*

This initial theoretical conceptualisation asserting that equity from the brand name element would substantially decline over time was examined empirically by Round and Roper (2015) in an experimental study with a gender and age diverse group of over one hundred participants. The nature of their experimental approach required the researcher to be physically present and therefore was limited to North West England.

In general they found that this theorised decline in equity was indeed the case, with 87% of participants reporting that they placed minimal or no value on the brand name of an established branded entity. This study also obtained short written participant responses on why they valued the brand name in this way. These responses were analysed and found to be in line with the arguments suggested above within the literature. Common responses were that the specificity of the brand name was no longer of importance and that corporate marketing and usage experience now provided the primary associations with the branded entity.

However, surprisingly their study also revealed a deviant group of participants, which continued to place very high importance on the brand name of a branded entity, even when established. To be specific, 13% of participants appeared to value the brand name of an established product at more than 65% of its purchase price. A high percentage of this exceptional group was female. The limited number of exceptional participant cases meant

that analysis of their written responses in the study could not yield sufficient information to provide a meaningful understanding for this.

The discovery of a material number of exceptional cases, with such particularly high levels of importance being placed on the brand name element, suggested that a temporal theory of brand name equity that solely maintains a substantial decline in the importance of brand name equity over time as a branded entity becomes more established is too simplistic. Consequently, more empirical investigation and theoretical reflection was considered to be required to fill this gap in understanding. Accordingly, a further study was developed to investigate these case exceptions. This is described in detail next.

## **Method**

Given the requirement for theory building in an under researched area, it was determined that this could best be achieved through the use of an exploratory and qualitative approach (Doz, 2011). There was a need for rich and deep individual data, with a study that was focused on gaining insight about a specific issue (Hogg and Banister, 2001). This centred on the meaning, structure and essence given to the phenomenon of the brand name element within the lived experience of particular individuals. An issue of this nature suggested that an interpretivist and phenomenological perspective should be employed (Carson *et al.*, 2009).

The population of interest for this study consisted of the exceptional cases which had been identified in the previous study as placing substantial value on the brand name element of established products. The justification for this population was that it would only be through discourse with people who had deviated from our initial theoretical conceptualisation that an understanding would be gained of where this conceptualisation was mistaken.

Accordingly, purposeful sampling was used, employing a deviant case method (Patton, 2015). This required the application of strict inclusion criteria (Luborsky and Rubinstein, 1995). In order to qualify as a participant for this study they were required to be one of the exceptional cases that had placed substantial value on the brand name of a particular established branded product, in the previous study discussed above (Round and Roper, 2015). All participants who fell into this category were asked to take part in this further study. The sample was therefore composed of those who agreed. As such the research sample is highly representative of the population of interest. Most of the study participants were female, which is a direct reflection of the composition of the deviant cases from the initial study. No attempt was made to force gender balance because this would have led to the sample not being representative of the population of interest.

Phenomenological research, focused on a particular idiographic aspect, does not usually involve large numbers of participants (O'Reilly and Parker, 2013). This is particularly the case where participants are homogeneous in relation to this aspect, as a result of purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011; Baker *et al.*, 2012). Generalisability, with its demand for large sample sizes, is not the focus of theory building research (Myers, 2000; Leung, 2015) and is more relevant for studies that are testing theory. Instead "purposeful samples should be judged according to the purpose and rationale of the study" (Patton, 2015, p. 311). Literature recommends a typical sample size for research of this type of three to sixteen participants (Morse, 2000; Smith *et al.*, 2009). Achievement of data saturation (Guest *et al.*, 2006; Corbin and Strauss, 2015), being the point at which no new relevant information is being obtained from participants, is an approach advanced for the determination and justification of the actual sample size of a study. In our case, where analysis of the data was ongoing concurrently with the interviews, this was achieved after the involvement of twelve participants.

The study took the form of a series of in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interviews in North West England during 2014/5. This method was selected as previous research (Round

and Roper, 2012) had identified that consumer relationships with brands can be highly personal in nature and participants may be inhibited discussing these candidly in open forums, such as focus groups (Krueger and Casey, 2009).

An interview guide was developed focused on the temporal dimension of the brand name element. In particular, this explored participant perceptions of the causes of ongoing brand name element importance to them. Interviews were structured to attempt to initially elicit reasons for importance without interviewer prompting, before subsequently suggesting potential causes. The explicit use of the various conceptualised brand name element functions (i.e. connotation, denotation, linking), as discussed in the above relevant literature review stream, was avoided within the interviews, as it was felt that such language would not be familiar to participants. However, such constructs were applied within the analysis of the obtained data.

A number of potential causes from the literature, that might be relevant across these different brand name functions, were suggested to participants, as detailed below. One potential reason for the continued importance of the brand name element considered was corporate brand investment that had occurred specifically in the brand name element itself, rather than being diffused throughout the branded entity. Another potentially relevant variable examined was that of product type. Literature argues that the role and potential value of branding varies for different types of products (e.g. Bristow *et al.*, 2002) and this variation by product type might also be pertinent to the role and importance of the brand name element.

Another possible cause considered was that of product involvement, typically formally defined as “*a person’s perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values and interests*” (Zaichkowsky, 1985) or in other words how important a product is to their life. For example typically a high priced product, such as a car, would be considered to be associated with much higher involvement than a low priced product, such as toothpaste. However this is not always the case for any given individual and measurement is usually obtained using a validated scale, such as the Personal Involvement Inventory Scale (Bearden *et al.*, 2011). It could be argued that the greater the involvement with an established branded product the more important the brand name element would remain for an individual consumer.

A contemporary approach asserts that the importance of a brand name to an individual is partially determined by that individual, often for idiosyncratic personal reasons (Pitt *et al.*, 2006). For example, this importance might be due to the specificity of the name or meaningful events in the life of the individual. This was therefore also suggested to participants as a possible cause of ongoing importance. Finally, continuing significant importance of the brand name to a participant might be caused by individual differences. Research has identified that there are differences in terms of how individuals respond to branding (e.g. Love *et al.*, 2010) and this was considered for potential relevance.

All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed into NVivo software and analysed using template analysis. Template analysis is a technique for the thematic organisation and analysis of text (King, 2012). With this approach, themes are initially obtained from the existing literature and used to commence coding of the text. However, during the coding process additional codes are allowed to emerge from the data leading to an ongoing amendment both to the codes used and in the way in which the analysed data is structured. The eventual final themes and associated text data then form the basis for the findings. Given the difficulty in anticipating results, no specific hypothesis was formulated for the study.

Details about the twelve participants and branded products included within the study are shown below. Participants had initially been permitted to select any branded product where they were active users.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Branded Product</b>
Natalie	23	Female	Twirl
Page	21	Female	Nike
Symran	23	Female	Innocent
Fleur	29	Female	Nike
Leon	44	Male	Pepsi Max
Aaron	23	Male	Lucozade
Annabelle	22	Female	Lipton Iced Tea
Anita	45	Female	Body Shop
Helena	23	Female	Coca-Cola
Jo	42	Female	Galaxy
Lucy	23	Female	Yorkshire Tea
Sarah	36	Female	The Guardian

In order to reduce the risk of drawing inappropriate conclusions from the study, issues of validity and reliability, within the context of a qualitative piece of work, were considered using the seminal criteria of LeCompte and Goetz (1982). The study was structured so that it was capable of replication. Interviews were compared holistically with the results from template analysis, in order to check for consistency in data interpretation. Full records were kept throughout the research in order to provide a complete audit trail (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Subjectivity was reduced through the use of interview guides, template analysis and NVivo software. Finally, the data was reviewed independently of the interviewer to address issues of confirmability.

## **Findings**

There was general confirmation from all of the participants that the brand name element of their particular established branded product was indeed of ongoing significant importance. This is an important finding as it is supportive of study validity, through demonstration of consistency with the previous study.

Five key themes emerged from data analysis. The first theme was the establishment of product involvement as a key antecedent to ongoing brand name element importance. The next themes were the identification of the ongoing importance over time of the three value-generating functions of the brand name element to consumers, which were discussed in the literature review section concerned with the relationship between brand name equity and branded entity equity. The final key theme was the discovery of an additional ongoing function performed by the brand name element, that of Branded Entity Constancy. These themes are discussed in turn below.

### *1-Product involvement as key antecedent to brand name element importance*

Of all the potential causes of ongoing brand name importance suggested in the literature and explored within the participant interviews, there was only one that was identified as being of general relevance, namely product involvement. It was invariably the case that participants were heavily involved with the relevant branded entity. They were often heavy purchasers of the branded product, had been for many years and were reluctant to use alternatives. In many cases, the branded product played an important role within their day-to-day life.

I'd just drink it all day every day if I could <laughs> [Annabelle]

[Interviewer] So what would you do if you couldn't get hold of a Twirl?

It's NEVER happened... [Natalie]

I mean I could text lots of friends and family members or colleagues and say 'Hey page 6 of The G today' and we all know what The G is ...We all know...and I would say 80% of people amongst my acquaintance, 80% of my UK friends and colleagues would know...It's quite funny that it's the paper that I think connects a lot of my left-wing liberal... [Sarah]

However, taking this finding in the context of Round and Roper's (2015) study, a high level of product involvement should best be regarded as a key antecedent for placement of high importance on the brand name element, rather than its primary cause. Their study identified many examples of participants that had high involvement with the branded entity but had only minimal concern about the brand name element.

### *2-Ongoing importance of connotation function of brand name element*

For around half of the study group the brand name provided significant, ongoing association value to the branded entity; in other words its connotation function remained important. This was in contrast to assertions contained within the literature about the decline in the importance of this function over time. In particular, the examples of the Body Shop, Yorkshire Tea and Innocent were identified, where the value of the branded entity to the participant was considered to be significantly impacted by the particular name used.

*(Talking about a change in the name of Yorkshire Tea)* Well it would annoy me actually in my mind, because it's a different name and it is a very small thing, but it is a different name. I know it's the same product, but it's the perception in my head of what I think it is, and changing the name would really annoy me. [Lucy]

*(Talking about a change in the name of the Body Shop)* Yes I mean the Body Shop is a good name. It tells you about what the shop is all about-your body. Why would you want to change the name? [Anita]

*(Talking about a change in the name of Innocent)* I think if it changed...it doesn't really show the brand in the same light. Like Innocent describes it as innocent, it says what it says on the tin. All the ingredients are in there and that's all you're getting. It's very pure and innocent. [Symran]

### *3-Ongoing importance of denotation function of brand name element*

For around half of the study group ongoing importance of the denotation function of the brand name element was also apparent. Again, this contrasted with assumptions taken from the literature.

For many participants the branded entity, represented by the brand name element, did not simply consist of a series of rational features, e.g. pleasant taste. The branded entity also provided them with symbolic value, some of which had been developed by the corporation and some created by the individual. For example, for Natalie the branded entity Twirl not only provided value to her through its taste but also provided her with symbolic value through its associations with Coronation Street (corporate created) and also the associations that Twirl had with her childhood memories (individual created).

The existing brand name was regarded as representing this complex branded entity. In other words, the brand name continued to perform a denotation function, even when the branded entity had become established. Some participants asserted that a different or changed brand name would cause interference in accessing all of the values currently associated with the branded entity. It would require the consumer to perform unwelcome translation activity. In particular, it was believed that personal associations with the branded entity would become harder to retrieve.

...I don't think that it would be the same because Twirl and Whirl...have different meanings for me...Whirl's in 2014, do you know, I've had Twirl since I was a little girl twenty years ago-two different histories. [Natalie]

...Obviously if was to be changed, it wouldn't be the tea that was...my grandma's tea... [Lucy]

#### *4-Ongoing importance of linking function of brand name element*

Ongoing importance of the linking function of the brand name element was less apparent. However, one case, that of The Guardian and Sarah, offered a clear example. The brand name provided an ongoing link between the branded entity The Guardian and a consumer tribe (Maffesoli, 1996) within society, with liberal left wing views commonly known as Guardian readers (e.g. Reay, 2007).

...I hate to be defined by...but I am a Guardian reader yes. I wouldn't want it on my gravestone but I think it would be something that my friends would all know about me as well... [Sarah]

A change in the name of this newspaper would break this link and potentially threaten the survival of this societal sub-group.

#### *5-Discovery of additional ongoing brand name element function*

Findings suggested another reason for the ongoing importance of the brand name element.

##### *-Desire for unchanging brand entity amongst participants*

This unexpected additional reason was strongly connected with the general desire that study participants had for an unchanging branded entity. Participants generally considered that a change to the branded entity would lead to a reduction in the value that they would receive from it and therefore they had a strong desire for this not to happen. Sometimes expected value reduction from a branded entity change was perceived as resulting from a different brand name not being able to perform its functions as effectively. So, for example, the name The Power Shop offers less connotation value to the branded entity than The Body Shop.

However, in other cases the value reduction on branded entity change was not regarded as being caused by a changed brand name.

##### *-Unchanging brand name acting as proxy for unchanging branded entity*

Participants generally considered that an unchanging brand name was a good proxy for an unchanging branded entity. Equally, a changed brand name was considered to represent a likely changed branded entity. In other words, the change in brand name was seen as *signalling* the change in the branded entity, rather than *causing* the change in the branded entity. Participants used the brand name element as a proxy because it was difficult to assess directly whether a branded entity was remaining unchanged, due to its complex and multi-dimensional nature (Kapferer, 2012).

There were a number of reasons why participants associated a change in brand name with a change in the branded entity.

The first reason was that they doubted that a change in a brand name would occur unless there had been some change in the branded entity. For example, this was the position taken by Natalie and Anita.

If they changed the name then I'd be a bit like, well, why'd they change the name? Has the product changed? Is there something they're not telling us? I'd want to know the reason why 'cause I wouldn't trust them. I'd be like something's changed and they're not telling us. They're keeping a secret from us, then I'd probably lose trust in that brand...[Natalie]

Well if the Body Shop was to change its name to the Power Shop then I would have to be absolutely convinced that it was going to maintain its ethical stance and continue to use natural ingredients.  
[Anita]

Paige and Fleur both had similar views about a change in name from Nike to Ike. However, their concern was more with what other people would think regarding the changed name. In other words, even if they were personally convinced that there had been no change in the branded entity, they were worried that other people would not share this view. Consequently, there would be a reduction in the symbolic value that they received from the branded entity.

Now you're actually making me say it out loud, I suppose, yeah, the fact that I'd be wearing Ike and then people are like "Oh, what's that? Oh it's not Nike". [Paige]

They might think, well she's wearing something that trying to be something else 'cause they haven't realised that the name's changed. [Fleur]

The second reason relates to relationship value. A number of participants considered that much of the value that they received from the branded entity resulted from the ongoing relationship that they held with it (Fournier, 1998; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). An unchanging brand name was seen as an ongoing signifier of this relationship. If the brand name were to change then it was considered inevitable that there would be a substantial weakening in their relationship going forward. This is because such a change would have been carried out unilaterally by only one party within the relationship, thereby destroying the illusion of a true two way relationship by what might be called a "*cruel violation*" (Schroiff and Arnold, 2003). In other words, a change in brand name signalled to the participant the misconception that they had about the nature of their bond with the brand entity. This appears to be the primary reason why Helena could not countenance a change in the name of Coca-Cola, nor Annabelle a change in the name of Lipton's Iced Tea, nor Symran a change in the name of Innocent.

*(Talking about Coca-Cola change of name)* I don't think I would still buy it, I really don't...I think that if you change any other variable like the packaging, the promotional activity, the price, then I would stay loyal, but it really is the Coca-Cola name that my loyalty is built on...and I would find it hard to accept that changing. [Helena]

*(Talking about Lipton Iced Tea change of name)* ...I probably wouldn't drink it as much 'cause instantly the taste wouldn't be the same. Is that weird? ...You'll try it...and you'll be like, well it's not Lipton's is it and you'll try it and then it might be alright but to me my brand loyalty wouldn't be there because it's not Lipton's. In my head I might know, well they've just changed the name but it's still not Lipton's. [Annabelle]

*(Talking about Innocent change of name)*...I think as well for sentimental reasons, like you wouldn't want a brand to change, something you like and you might be attached to. If they change the name, you might just go against them, because they're changing their name to something that you don't really agree with or you don't really want to be buying into. [Symran]

#### *-Conceptualisation of Branded Entity Constancy function*

A way of conceptualising this additional value that the brand name element is providing to consumers in signalling the unchanging nature of the branded entity is to consider it as an additional function of the brand name element. This function could be designated the *Branded Entity Constancy function*.

These findings suggest that, in order to assess the likely constancy of the branded entity, consumers make a comparison of the present brand name with that of a past time period. If the brand name has remained unchanged then they receive assurance value that the branded entity is likely to have remained constant. Unlike the other functions of the brand

name element within the initial conceptualisation in figure 1, this function only becomes apparent through consideration of the temporal dimension of brand name equity.

## Discussion

In this section the implications of these findings for the development of theory and for management are discussed. In addition further research plans are presented.

### *Theoretical development*

A key contribution of the study is the development of theory relating to the temporal dimension of brand name equity, thereby filling the gap found within the literature.

### *a-Revision to conceptualisation of change in importance of brand name equity over time*

The findings suggest that the denotation, connotation and linking functions of the brand name are still important for the established branded entity, albeit declining and less than when the branded entity was new. Consideration of the study also provides another reason, in addition to those developed from Bastos and Levy (2012)'s work, why the brand name element may continue to remain important to the consumer; the brand name element also has an important function to play in the determination of whether or not the branded entity is remaining constant.

There is no suggestion that this *Branded Entity Constancy* function will reduce in importance over time. Indeed, it could be argued that, where a consumer has particularly high involvement with a branded entity, this function would increase in importance as the consumer's relationship (Fournier; 1998, 2009) with the branded entity lengthens and the desire for an unchanging branded entity increases.

The findings suggest that the original conceptualisation of the change in the importance of equity from the brand name element over time, derived from the literature and shown in figure 1, should be amended. A revised conceptualisation of the change in the importance of brand name equity over time is shown in Figure 2.

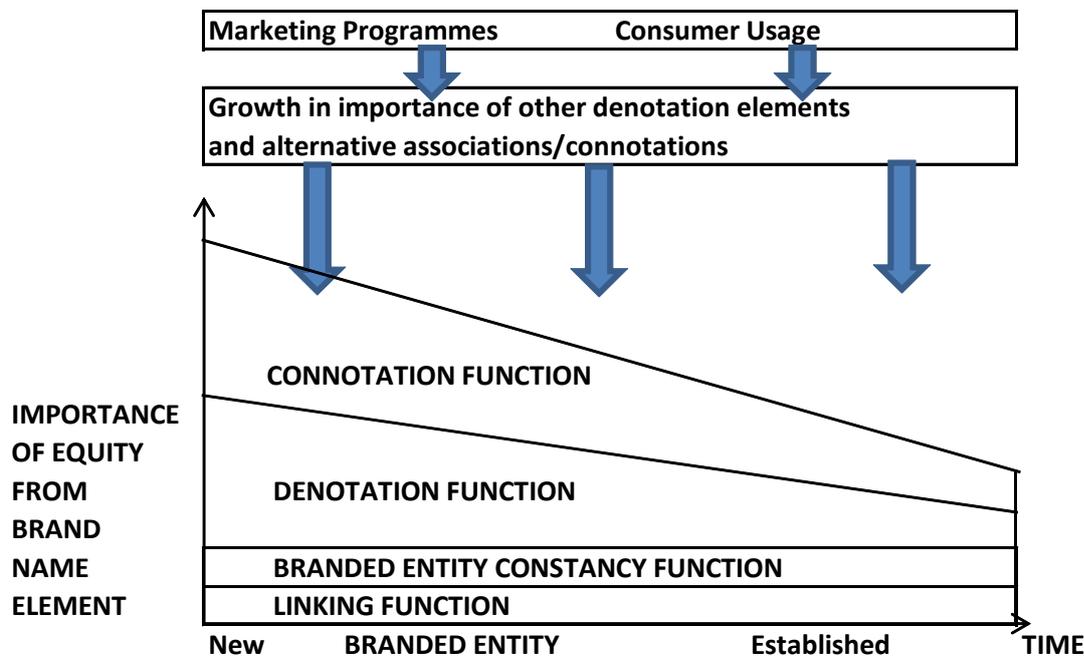


Figure 2-Change in importance of brand name equity over time-Revised conceptualisation

The above figure summarises diagrammatically the theoretical development resulting from the research undertaken. If this figure is compared to the original conceptualisation in Figure 1 the key differences of this revised conceptualisation can be seen to be a) the continuing relevance of the connotation and denotation functions and b) the addition of the branded entity constancy function.

In other words, in this revised conceptualisation as a branded entity moves over time from being new to being established the brand name element does decline in importance in terms of its provision of equity to the branded entity. However, the brand name element does also continue to perform four different equity generating functions.

*b-Illustration of relevance of temporal dimension for brand name equity*

It is beneficial to discuss further how the additional brand name function of *Branded Entity Constancy* became apparent. The value to consumers manifests itself through their comparison of the brand name element in the present time with the brand name element in a past time period. In other words, it is only through the taking of a temporal perspective that consumers receive value from this function. This can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Consumers make a determination of whether the established branded entity has remained constant between the present and the past, through the comparison of the brand name element in the present with the brand name element in the past. In other words, if the brand name has not changed then consumers are much more likely to believe that the branded entity has not changed. They do this by using the *Branded Entity Constancy* function of the brand name.

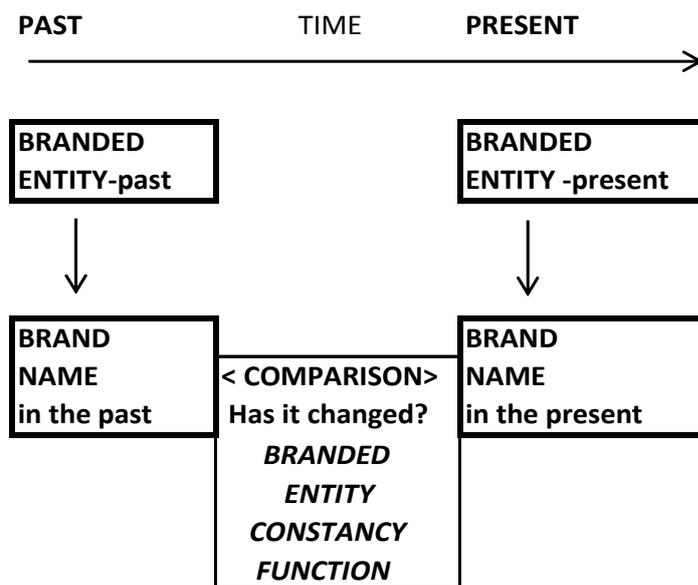


Figure 3-Temporal dimension and Branded Entity Constancy function

The relevance of the temporal dimension of brand name equity can therefore be seen, as it is only then that the *Branded Entity Constancy* function becomes apparent. This illustrates that if time is not explicitly considered as a relevant variable within branding theory an incomplete picture results.

*The temporal dimension of branding*

Consideration of the findings highlights a number of other aspects of the temporal that are relevant to the development of branding thought.

The first of these involves the way that time is most usefully conceptualised. A common conceptualisation is that of clock time (Giddens, 1987), where time is regarded as a

quantifiable, measurable entity; in other words, for example, there are sixty minutes in an hour. This type of conceptualisation dovetails nicely with the quantitative research often carried out within the branding domain. However, an alternative conceptualisation focuses on time consisting of the past, the present or the future (Adam, 2004). Whilst this lacks the apparent preciseness of clock time it may be a more useful approach to theoretical development, as can be seen with its use in Figure 3 above.

Second, conceptualisation of time as past, present or future may be advantageous in exploring the idea of time perspective. Writers have asserted that the way time is experienced is subjective (Wittman, 2017) and that temporal orientation tends to vary by individual (Bergadaà, 1990; Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999). It is argued that some individuals tend to be past oriented and accordingly place greater importance on permanence and the status quo. It could therefore be contended that the role and importance of branding differs for individuals with different temporal orientations. In the case of those with a past orientation, the desire for the branded entity to be unchanged and for this unchanging to be demonstrated through the brand name element might be assumed to be greater than for those with a present or future orientation. This offers a potential direction for further exploration of why the particular participants within this study placed such ongoing importance on the brand name element.

Third, time perception is generally regarded as being culture-bound (Graham, 1981; Levine, 2006). In other words, it varies both historically and geographically. This provides an obstacle to any assumption that the consideration of the temporal dimension of branding can solely be considered at the global level. Findings from this study need to be taken within this context.

#### *Managerial implications*

This paper has several important implications for management.

First, the specific brand name of their branded entities will remain important to some of their customers on an ongoing basis. It is not a trivial element that can be tampered with without consequence. As an example, it is nearly thirty years since Marathon was renamed Snickers and yet this event is still regularly discussed disparagingly in the media (e.g. Jenkins, 2015).

Second, a minority of customers will never accept that the name of a branded entity can change without a change also having been made to the branded entity. The particular challenge for management is that this minority appears to be slanted towards their most involved customers. This suggests that management should consider very carefully whether making a name change is worthwhile, even if it does not impact the majority of their customers. Certainly a proposed change in name should be considered with a managerial expectation or even a desire for certain existing customers to become ex-customers (Gromark and Melin, 2011).

Third, if the brand name is to be changed this should be accompanied by a communication campaign, highlighting the reasons for a name change and stressing that the underlying branded entity is unchanged. This has not always been the case and the example of the brand name change of Treets to M&Ms is often cited as an example of inadequate communication (Pottker, 1995; Kapferer, 2012).

Finally, the research provides more support for the assertion that brand equity is not solely a creation of management but is co-created by the customer (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Rindell, 2013). Whilst this limitation on control may not be welcomed by management, it needs to be acknowledged, incorporated and indeed embraced in their branding strategy (Hatch and Schultz, 2010).

### *Further research*

This study has developed theory in an under-researched area and carries the usual limitations of qualitative work (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Having now developed a revised theoretical conceptualisation, it is proposed to test this theory with a study involving more participants to address these limitations. However, in addition to increased numbers, there are a number of variables that will be particularly examined as follows.

There is an obvious gender imbalance in the participants included within this current study. This suggests that gender may be a particularly relevant variable for examination. Gender differences have been sometimes identified within branding and consumer behaviour research (e.g. Kempf *et al.*, 2006; Tifferet and Herstein, 2012).

Individual differences (Cooper, 2010) are also suggested as potentially relevant for the identification of consumers for whom brand name continues to matter. In other words, there is significant variability amongst individual consumers in how branding variables and brand equity interact over time. As discussed above, the temporal orientation of individuals may prove to be particularly relevant.

There are clearly other aspects that need further research, in particular examination of the impact of geographical culture. Research needs to be undertaken in a variety of global locations.

### **Summary of Contribution and Conclusion**

This paper makes an important contribution through the development of theory on how the functions and importance of the brand name element, in its relation to the overall branded entity, change over time.

A theoretical conceptualisation of the temporal dimension of brand name equity is developed. This fills a gap within the existing literature and enhances understanding within this area. In particular it identifies four ongoing value-generating functions of the brand name element and challenges a position that the brand name element becomes of minimal value once a branded entity has become established.

In addition the paper highlights a number of aspects of the temporal that are relevant for the development of branding thought. It is our hope that this paper will encourage more exploration of this under-researched area.

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