

## Towards a co-creational perspective on corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands

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### ABSTRACT

This theoretical chapter links the field of *corporate heritage (branding)* scholarship with the emerging *co-creation perspective* and approach to corporate branding. By adopting a co-creational perspective, this chapter argues that corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands are always also co-created by multiple stakeholders (internal and external) and not only marketers or managers alone. It suggests that stakeholders actively shape the temporal relations between past, present and future that are constitutive for corporate heritage (brands). By drawing on the insights from the corporate heritage (branding) literature and combining it with a synthesis of the co-creation perspective, the chapter outlines key co-creation processes characteristic of corporate heritage (brands): valorising, (re)interpreting, manifesting, appropriating, augmenting the past in the present and for the future as heritage. These processes are linked to temporal co-creation as an additional generic form of corporate brand co-creation in addition to the co-creation of value, meaning, identity and experience. Finally, a conceptual framework is developed to show the links between these different processes and dimensions of co-creation as they apply to corporate heritage (brands).

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to link the field of *corporate heritage (branding)* scholarship (see Balmer, 2017 for an overview) with the emerging *co-creation perspective* and approach to corporate branding (Iglesias et al., 2020). Both research areas have grown in popularity within marketing in recent years but have not yet been discussed in conjunction specifically. This is surprising because corporate heritage (branding) researchers stress the important role of stakeholders - past, present and future - for corporate heritage brands and identities (Balmer, 2017; Lee and Davies, 2019) while corporate branding scholars adopting a co-creational perspective highlight the role of history and the past, for example (Iglesias et al., 2020).

By adopting a co-creational perspective, I argue in this chapter that corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands are always also predicated on the temporal agency of multiple stakeholders (internal and external) and not only marketers or managers alone. Temporal agency broadly refers to the ability of stakeholders to shape and influence, produce and reproduce temporal relations that have constitutive import for their own subjectivities as well as the organisational, social and cultural contexts they inhabit (Emirbayer and Mishe, 1998). This implies that the relevance of corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands is dependent on the specific socio-historical context and situation in which some aspects of an organisation's and/or brand's past are turned into heritage through the active involvement of stakeholders too. They are not simply passive perceivers of corporate heritage (brands) but through their temporal agency stakeholders actively establish meaningful links between past, present and future that are constitutive for corporate heritage and the strategic efficacy of corporate heritage brands. In other words, what constitutes corporate heritage and its relevance and consequence for the organisation and its stakeholders is always negotiated and co-created (Balmer and Burghausen, 2019) as much as corporate brands are co-created in terms of their value, meaning etc.

First, the general background and wider context of this chapter's focus on corporate heritage (branding) is outlined providing a concise overview of this emerging field of scholarship. The subsequent parts establish and discuss conceptual aporias and implications of the notion of corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands from the paradigmatic position of co-creation in a dynamic socio-cultural and multi-stakeholder context.

## 2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF CORPORATE HERITAGE (BRANDING)

The research area of *corporate heritage (branding)* has seen growing scholarly support since its formal inception 15 years ago (Balmer et al., 2006, Urde et al., 2007). In recent years, marketing researchers have garnered a body of empirical evidence and conceptual works (see Balmer, 2017) that has established the concept of heritage and with it the problem of temporality - broadly understood here as the relation(s) between past, present and future - as an important contemporary marketing and branding topic in its own right. This concern goes beyond and is different from the traditional interest in the history of marketing as a discipline and practice or the use of the historical method in marketing (Balmer and Burghausen, 2019; cf. Jones and Tadjewski, 2016).

## 2.1 Heritage and other temporal concepts in marketing and beyond

The growing interest in corporate heritage (branding) specifically originated with the work of John Balmer, Stephen Greyser and Mats Urde who formally introduced the concepts of corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands to marketing and branding in two foundational articles (Balmer et al., 2006; Urde et al., 2007). Of course, the term ‘heritage’ is being used in the branding and marketing literature by others and had been so before 2006 already. However, these contributions frequently do not focus on heritage as the main concept of interest (e.g. Brown et al., 2003) or use it very loosely as a generic label in lieu of other concepts or issues of primary concern. For example, various contributions use the term for simply denoting temporal progression, change or accrual over time (Berthon et al., 2003); longevity, maturity and age of an organisation or its brand (Aaker, 1996); or historical references and temporal associations vis-à-vis a (corporate) brand (Keller and Lehman 2006). Mostly, though, the term ‘heritage’ has been and is often still being used in marketing and branding scholarship as a mere synonym for various other temporal modes - most prominently standing for history or the past per se - without further specification, elaboration or a dedicated adoption of the concept of heritage itself (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a; Balmer and Burghausen, 2015a).

Further, there is a parallel and related stream of scholarly work in marketing that is concerned with the notion of *brand heritage* and *heritage brands* (Wiedmann et al., 2011; Rose et al., 2016). This research area is interested in the effects of brand heritage for product and service branding vis-à-vis consumers (Orth et al., 2019; Pecot et al., 2019; Mencarelli et al., 2020) but not corporate heritage (branding) as such (but cf. Santos et al., 2016; Pecot and de Barnier, 2018). Because of the great overlap and interdependence between product, service and corporate branding, both fields of brand scholarship have productively influenced each other and have jointly contributed to the growing interest in heritage and related temporal concepts within marketing in general (see Pecot, E23). Due to the focus of this volume on corporate brands and this chapter’s concern with the contributions and relevance of corporate heritage (branding) scholarship, though, I do not elaborate on this stream.

Concurrently, marketing has seen a lasting interest in consumer nostalgia (Holbrook et al., 2003) and nostalgia advertising (Muehling and Sprott, 2004), retro-branding (Brown et al., 2003), history marketing (Schug, 2003) and other forms of marketing and consumption for which temporal relations between past, present and future are of importance (de Groot, 2009). The same goes for the various topical and timely strands of research on history, memory and temporality in management and organization studies. Various research streams of management research have been established with potential relevance for corporate heritage and corporate branding scholarship. These include but are not limited to questions of the various ‘uses of the past’ (Wadhvani et al., 2018) and the role of history (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Suddaby et al., 2019), memory (Anteby and Molnar, 2012) and temporality (Hernes and Schultz, 2020) in instrumental, conceptual and methodological terms (Bucheli and Wadhvani, 2013); including apropos organisational identities and identification (Schultz and Hernes, 2013; Ravasi et al., 2019). At the same time the concept of heritage as it has been developed and discussed within marketing could be highly relevant for the above debates too (see Balmer and Burghausen, 2015b; Andersen, 2020). Yet, there has been to date little or no

dialogue between organisation theory and management research on the one hand and corporate heritage and brand heritage scholarship on the other. This dialogue is overdue but again beyond the scope of this chapter.

More generally, the above developments indicate a fundamental reorientation within business and management studies as well as marketing witnessing a new, or better renewed interest in history (Maclean et al., 2020), the past (Balmer and Burghausen, 2019) and temporality (Dawson and Sykes, 2016) akin to a ‘historic turn’ (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004). Similar ‘turns’ have been suggested for the social sciences and humanities (Adam, 1995; Tamm and Olivier, 2019) and fundamental temporal shifts in the relation between past, present and future have been observed within current societies more widely (Assmann, 2013; Hartog, 2015; Landwehr, 2016). The same goes for the scholarly interest in and quotidian popularity of heritage and other temporal concepts such as memory as social and cultural phenomena (Lowenthal, 1998; Zerubavel, 2004). The interest in corporate heritage (branding) can be seen as a contribution to these debates and a manifestation of these wider trends and shifts.

## 2.2 Foundations of corporate heritage (branding)

More specifically, *corporate heritage (branding)* scholars have suggested and shown that certain organisations and/or their corporate brands exhibit and can be characterised by particular traits that qualify as a kind of ‘institutional heritage’ (Balmer et al., 2006), which is in simplified terms ‘the heritage of an organisation’ that is distinct from the organisation’s past or history per se (Urde et al., 2007; Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a).

Some organisations, it has been shown, successfully leverage this ‘institutional heritage’ for corporate marketing and/or branding purposes as *corporate heritage*. Heritage in that sense is about meaningful and relevant organisational and/or brand traits that are valued by and valuable for internal and external stakeholders in the present not only because of a retrospective link to the past but concurrently due to a prospective link to an envisioned future (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a). Thus, it is not only about an actual or perceived inheritance from the past (cf. Pecot and de Barnier, 2017) but always also about a bequest to the future (Burghausen, 2013) that turns some aspect of the past into heritage and not mere history, for example. Drawing on these insights, *corporate heritage* is defined as:

‘...all the traits and aspects of an organisation [and/or corporate brand] that link its past, present, and future in a meaningful and relevant way. Thus, it refers to some aspect of an organisation’s [and/or corporate brand’s] past that is still deemed by current internal and/or external stakeholders to be relevant and meaningful for contemporary concerns and purposes but concurrently perceived as worth to be maintained and nurtured for future generations; it is the selectively appropriated and valorised past [...] or “all that is (still) relevant” in the light of contemporary concerns and purposes.’ (Burghausen and Balmer 2014a, p. 394-5).

The above definition clearly already identifies and stresses the importance of all stakeholders (including consumers) and their pivotal role in constituting corporate heritage.

Apart from leveraging *corporate heritage* for corporate marketing purposes more generally (e.g. corporate websites, advertising, anniversaries, museums), it has been suggested that certain organisations utilise it for corporate branding specifically (Urde et al., 2007).

Thus, a distinction has been made between *corporate heritage brands* proper and corporate brands with a heritage (Urde et al., 2007). The former are corporate brands with a dedicated brand identity and positioning based on and derived from the corporate heritage while the latter do not utilise the corporate heritage for that purpose specifically (Urde et al., 2007). For example, while department stores Selfridges and Fortnum & Mason in London both boast a rich and meaningful corporate heritage, only the latter of the pair would qualify as a corporate heritage brand in the above sense. The activation and utilisation of corporate heritage as a branding asset is contingent and thus a strategic decision (Urde et al., 2007; Balmer, 2011b). Similarly, while all organisations evolve some form of identity - corporate and/or organisational - (Hatch and Schultz, 2000) not every organisation requires a corporate brand (Balmer and Gray, 2003). The latter is a strategic decision too.

The same group of scholars also argued from the beginning that corporate (brand) heritage potentially affords these organisations a competitive advantage if used, managed, and maintained as a strategic resource and asset underpinning their corporate brand identity and positioning (Urde et al. 2007). However, they also cautioned that the usefulness and effectiveness of heritage-based corporate branding is not a given or universally feasible per se. It requires strategic deliberation (of internal and external circumstance and context) and ongoing, careful and dedicated management stewardship of the corporate heritage and, if applicable, the corporate heritage brand (Balmer et al. 2006; Urde et al. 2007).

The notion of corporate heritage (brand) stewardship outlines fundamental management requirements of said brands (Urde et al., 2007; Balmer, 2011b), which was later empirically substantiated and developed into a coherent management framework (see Burghausen and Balmer, 2014b; Burghausen and Balmer, 2015). These management imperatives refer to the uncovering, validating, articulating, activating, relating, adopting and finally protecting of the corporate heritage of an organisation and/or its corporate brand (Urde et al., 2007; Burghausen and Balmer, 2014b; cf. Iglesias et al., 2020). These imperatives (and activities) are based on - at once - retrospective brand exploration as well as prospective brand strategizing in order to maintain the relevance of the corporate heritage for current and future purposes (Balmer, 2011b; Moussa and de Barnier, 2020). This concurrence of retrospection and prospection may lead managers to uncover or rediscover some aspect of the past as a latent corporate (brand) heritage that can be activated for current marketing purposes and a future-oriented strategic renewal and innovation too (Cooper et al., 2015; Santos et al., 2016; Sammour et al., 2020).

Since 2006, the field of corporate (brand) heritage has blossomed in conceptual and empirical terms. Subsequent research and publications have considerably substantiated, broadened and advanced the area. The stream of conceptual and empirical research has successfully employed corporate heritage and related concepts as a theoretical lens and shown their descriptive and explanatory efficacy in relation to corporate heritage branding in varied contexts and beyond (see Balmer and Burghausen 2015a; Balmer 2017 for overviews).

### 2.3 Key conceptual traits of corporate heritage (branding)

More broadly, the scholarly domain of *corporate heritage (branding)* is concerned with certain organisational and marketing phenomena - such as corporate heritage (Balmer et al., 2006) and corporate heritage brands (Urde et al., 2007) - that are characterised inter alia by a specific temporal relation between past, present and future, viz. *omni-temporality* (Balmer, 2013).

Conceptually, *omni-temporality* sets corporate heritage apart from other temporal modes such as corporate history, memory, tradition, nostalgia etc. (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a; Balmer and Burghausen, 2019). It is a defining feature of corporate heritage brands too (Balmer, 2013). For the purpose of this chapter, *omni-temporality* ‘refers to the conflation of the temporal strata of past, present and future into a new temporal form that is qualitatively different from each stratum separately’ (Burghausen, forthcoming). This quality manifests as a corporate heritage brand’s perceived ‘timelessness’ (Urde et al., 2007) or ‘relative invariance’ (Balmer, 2011a, 2013), based on an actual and/or perceived intergenerational continuity (Balmer, 2013), despite substantive and/or symbolic changes over time (Balmer, 2011a, 2013; also see Brunninge and Hartmann, 2019). In other words, corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands are paradoxical as they seem to stay the same while nonetheless changing over time (Balmer, 2011a, 2013; Cooper et al., 2020).

In addition to the above mentioned key trait of omni-temporality as a defining quality of corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands (Balmer, 2013; Burghausen, forthcoming), various other related traits have been established through conceptual (Balmer, 2011a, 2013) and empirical work (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014b; Balmer and Chen, 2017) such as such as intergenerational continuity or relative invariance and perceived trait constancy (see Lee and Davies, 2019; Spielmann et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2020). These complementary traits qualify the notion of omni-temporality and distinguish corporate heritage brands further but are not elaborated here (see Balmer, 2017 for an explication).

These defining and qualifying traits already imply the involvement of stakeholders. For example, corporate heritage brands in practice often acquire additional relevance for stakeholders as cultural markers of identity beyond the organisation itself, such as for communities, places or cultural groupings (Burghausen and Balmer, 2014b; Balmer and Chen, 2017; Spielmann et al., 2019). They resume this wider social and cultural role qua their status as corporate heritage brands and their relation to other ‘heritages’ too (e.g. communal, industrial, national etc.). For instance, the status and appeal of Shepherd Neame (a UK brewery based in Faversham, Kent) as a corporate heritage brand is not only predicated on its own omni-temporality, its inter-generational continuity over time as ‘Britain’s Oldest Brewer’ (Burghausen, 2013), but concurrently rests on a substantive and symbolic link with the past, present and future of Faversham (communal), Kent (regional), the UK (national) as well as the industrial heritage of brewing and hop growing in these geographies and so on (Burghausen, 2013). Recently, Spielmann et al. (2019) have shown a similar dynamic for wineries across cultural contexts while Balmer and Chen (2015) show the wider socio-cultural relevance of the Chinese brand Tong Ren Tang as a corporate heritage brand.

Finally, the power of corporate heritage brands rests on the interplay between a perceived or ascribed authenticity of the corporate heritage (brand) due to the above characteristics (Balmer, 2011b; Hudson and Balmer, 2013). Mutual trust and affinity of stakeholders with the corporate brand and its heritage across generations are co-constitutive too (Balmer, 2011b). Thus, the status of the corporate heritage brand itself and its wider socio-cultural import and appeal for stakeholders as mentioned above are requirements for the mutual and reciprocal *authenticity, trust and affinity* of corporate heritage brands with stakeholders and vice versa (Balmer, 2011b, Burghausen, 2013; cf. Hatch and Schultz, 2017). This notion of reciprocity implies active stakeholder involvement and engagement and already augurs to some extent a co-creation approach to corporate heritage (brands).

## 2.4 Key constitutive processes of corporate heritage (branding)

In addition to the defining conceptual traits of corporate heritage (branding) mentioned above, the corporate heritage (branding) literature has also identified a number of constitutive processes that underpin it. Consequently, the above generic conceptual traits can be said to be based on and are derived from five interdependent and ongoing *transformations of the past into corporate heritage* (Burghausen, forthcoming; also see Balmer, 2017; Balmer and Burghausen, 2019). These transformations are predicated on activities and practices that frequently involve stakeholders and are thus highly pertinent for this chapter. From the extant literature the following generic processes of transformation can be synthesised:

- *Valorising* the past in the present and for the future: This is the selective investment of the past as heritage vis-à-vis an organisation and/or its brand with value in the present and concurrently(!) with an assumed value for the future by and for stakeholders (Urde et al., 2007; Burghausen and Balmer 2014a).
- *(Re)interpreting* the past in the present and for the future: This is the imbuing with symbolic relevance of a selected past as heritage vis-à-vis an organisation and/or its brand that is temporally extended beyond the past itself. It is being given a new or expanded meaning by and for stakeholders in the present and for the future, which is different from the meaning of the past per se (Balmer 2011a; Burghausen and Balmer 2014a; Brunninge and Hartmann, 2019).
- *Appropriating* the past in the present and for the future: This is the active acceptance and adoption (i.e. ‘taking ownership’) of a selected past as heritage vis-à-vis an organisation and/or its brand by managers, consumers and/or other stakeholders. It becomes to them concurrently(!) ‘our inheritance’ in the present and ‘our bequest’ made to the future, which affords opportunities and responsibilities but may also be a constraint, burden as well as a source for contestation and resistance (Balmer 2013; Burghausen and Balmer 2014b; Brunninge and Hartmann, 2019).
- *Augmenting* the past in the present and for the future: This is the ascription of socially and culturally relevant identity roles and affiliations of the organisation and/or its brand qua heritage by and for stakeholders, which goes beyond the organisation and/or corporate brand itself. It is predicated on a substantive and/or symbolic (direct or vicarious) link

between the past, present and future of the organisation and/or its brand vis-à-vis a wider socio-cultural context (Balmer 2013; Balmer and Chen, 2017).

- *Manifesting* the past in the present and for the future: This is the substantive actualisation and affective experience of the past as heritage vis-à-vis an organisation and/or its brand through meaningful cultural artefacts and social practices by and for stakeholders (Hudson, 2011; Santos et al. 2016; Burghausen, forthcoming).

These transformations are interdependent processes which implies that the ongoing translation of some aspect of the past into heritage is co-dependent on an all five processes that can be depicted as a continuous cycle of constitutive activities and practices (figure 1).

<INSERT FIGURE 1>

To illustrate this, the past of an organisation and/or brand becomes heritage because it (still) adds some form of value for the organisation and its stakeholders in the present and for an envisaged future. It is not simply a past that stakeholders commemorate (in a corporate brand museum, for example) but a past that (still) has instrumental and/or symbolic relevance and import (e.g. the use of archival materials for product and process innovations, the legacy of a founder's ethos shaping the current corporate culture; a sense of familiarity and stability derived from the continuity of the organisation and its brand). Yet, by investing the past with additional value in the present and for the future its meaning also changes (it is not mere history or memory that informs the present). As such, valorisation always also requires (re)interpretation and by reinterpreting the meaning of the past it acquires additional symbolic value as heritage in the present and for the future too. Even further, the past is valuable to us as heritage only insofar it is or becomes 'our heritage' through the process of appropriation, taking ownership of the past, which in turn again requires a changed meaning through (re)interpretation.

Likewise, the wider socio-cultural relevance of a corporate heritage (brand) is based on an augmentation of its role and affiliations beyond the organisation or its brand. This in turn necessitates the (re)interpretation of the temporal relations not only between the past, present and future of the organisation or its brand but also relation with the past, present and future of other social and cultural entities such as a community, nation, industry and so on. Yet, it is often this wider socio-cultural relevance of the corporate heritage (brand) which adds value in the present and for a future.

Finally, the past as corporate heritage needs to be given some substantive and affective form in the present through cultural artifacts and social practices in order to have a continued value for the organisation and its stakeholders. It is not merely a 'dead past' but a 'living past' that



is very much present as heritage. By being very much present in the sense that it can be experienced as heritage the past still adds value, has meaning and can be made into our own, often with an appeal way beyond the organisation and its brand alone.

Thus, these are also expansive processes that potentially anchors the past as heritage in the present and for the future, beyond the focal organisation and corporate brand, within the wider socio-cultural context of shared cultural meanings, value and identities. As such, corporate heritage brands can acquire a relevance akin to cultural heritage for certain groups, a community or a place (see Balmer and Chen, 2015, 2017). Take for example the strong and vociferous reactions to the closure of Whitechapel Bell Foundry in London and the community campaign to save it and its heritage (O'Brien, 2021). This expanded relevance of the past as corporate heritage beyond the organisation itself is always also a shared relevance; a relevance related to shared value, meaning, identity and experience for now and in the future that requires the active involvement of stakeholders to be of instrumental efficacy and constitutive import.

### **3. CORPORATE HERITAGE (BRAND) CO-CREATION**

The so far presented foundations, conceptual traits and constitutive processes derived from the extant corporate heritage (branding) literature already indicate an active role of internal and external stakeholders. Thus, apart from managerial stewardship, the above transformations always also imply and require stakeholders actively shaping the temporal relations between past, present and future, viz. *temporal agency*. By exercising their temporal agency through the valorisation, (re)interpretation, appropriation, augmentation and manifestation of the past in the present and for the future, stakeholders transform aspects of the past into corporate heritage and jointly constitute the key traits of corporate heritage brands too. Moreover, the contemporary bearing of a corporate heritage brand itself and its wider socio-cultural relevance and appeal are likewise actively negotiated with multiple stakeholders. For this notion to be conceptually, empirically and pragmatically relevant and efficacious adopting a co-creation approach to corporate heritage branding is warranted and timely.

Yet, the original contributions by Balmer and colleagues and most subsequent contributions too are very much still steeped in a more traditional instrumental reading of corporate heritage (branding). So far, the main body of research on corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands has largely adopted a managerial approach (but cf. Brunninge and Hartmann, 2019; Balmer and Burghausen, 2019) but not yet a decidedly co-creational perspective. As such, the question of how stakeholders, other than marketers and managers, are actively involved in the constitution and also contestation of corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands remains obscured and requires further conceptual and empirical work. The co-creation approach to corporate branding offers a perspective that has the potential to clarify and specify the above; lifting the veil of obscurity that still muffles corporate heritage (branding) in this respect.

### 3.1 Corporate brand co-creation and stakeholder agency

The *co-creation approach to corporate brand management* is the logical next step in the development of our field (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Ind et al., 2013). It takes seriously the original notion of stakeholder orientation as suggested by the earliest contributions (Balmer, 1995; Ind, 1997) as well as subsequent elaborations of corporate branding (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003).

However, this new perspective acknowledges more explicitly the active involvement and engagement of stakeholders in the creation of value (Iglesias et al., 2013), meanings (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013), identities (von Wallpach et al., 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020) and experiences (Stach, 2019), to name just few important dimensions and aspects of co-creation (see Ind and Coates, 2013).

It addresses, inter alia, the challenges posed by shifting, blurring and dissolving boundaries of organisations, within and between their internal and external spheres (Hatch and Schultz, 1997, Hatch and Schultz, 2009). This perspective strives to come to terms with the fluid, dynamic and less stable articulations of corporate (brand) identities (da Silveira et al., 2013), which are negotiated (Gregory, 2007) through constant interaction and dialogue with stakeholders (Johansen and Nielsen, 2011; Cornelissen et al., 2012). The co-creation perspective also addresses the embedded nature of corporate brands as they are constituted in fragmented, polyvocal and often contradictory organisational and institutional environments of acting and activist stakeholder groups (Handelman, 2006; Palazzo and Basu, 2007; Kornum et al., 2017).

It represents an extension of the ‘shared ownership’ (Balmer, 2006, 2010) and corporate brand covenant perspective (Balmer and Greyser, 2003), coming to term with the more widely ‘shared control’ (Hatch and Schultz, 2009, 2010) of corporate brands; sometimes akin to a perceived or actual loss of managerial control over them (Fisher and Smith, 2011; Iglesias and Bonet, 2012). From a co-creational point of view the substance and relevance of corporate brands - their value, identity and meaning - cannot be decided by management alone.

I see this development towards a co-creational perspective as a timely and warranted evolution rather than revolution in our thinking about corporate brands that ought to influence theorizing and practice in the future more directly. It raises important and challenging questions about participation, conscientiousness, ethicality and sustainability regarding corporate brands vis-à-vis multiple active stakeholders and their interests (Iglesias et al., this book A1). There is no monolithic public, there are no passive audiences and no accepting constituents anymore, if they ever were in the first place.

The extant scholarly debate re corporate brand co-creation often revolves around questions of value in various ways and contexts (Ind and Coates, 2013). The extent and quality of stakeholder participation varies between tactical and strategic managerial views and/or between instrumental and collaborative approaches to stakeholder involvement and engagement (Ind et al., 2017).

The above is linked to the question whether co-creation is primarily seen and used as a tactical or strategic tool (Frow et al., 2015) - a mere instrumental extension of managerial agency in fact - in order to appropriate value for the firm (e.g. through product and service innovation and market intelligence generated with the help of consumers and/or their data and information, for example) or as a truly participatory and reciprocal endeavour of value creation and sharing (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Ind et al., 2013; Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016).

The challenge of genuine participatory and reciprocal corporate brand co-creation is not only a question of by whom, where and when value creation takes place or how that value is eventually shared between firm and stakeholders. It is also a question of 'shared control' over the corporate brand (Hatch and Schultz, 2009, 2010), its value, identity and meaning(s) that potentially and actually reduces managerial control and alters managerial agency (Fisher and Smith, 2011; Iglesias and Bonet, 2012; Ind, 2014).

Sharing control requires continuous negotiation (Gregory, 2007) and dynamic alignment (Balmer, 2012) as well as constant interaction and dialogue with stakeholders (Johansen and Nielsen, 2011; Cornelissen et al., 2012). This also raises the question of how feasible are an assumed stability, coherence and specificity of a corporate (brand) identity (Moingeon, B. and Ramanantsoa, 1997) and its meaning(s) more generally under the precepts and conditions of co-creation (da Silveira et al., 2013; Iglesias et al., 2013).

Consequently, there has been a shift in our focus from enduring to evolving traits (Balmer, 2010) on towards an emergentist, constructionist and relational perspective on the constitution and gestation of corporate brands (Iglesias et al., 2013; Biraghi and Gambetti, 2015).

In addition, shared control implies fluidity, fragmentation and polyvocality (Schmeltz and Kjeldsen, 2019) in terms of corporate brand co-creation if a multitude of stakeholders are actively involved (Kornum et al., 2017; von Wallpach et al., 2017); potentially leading to tension, conflict and contestation in a multi-stakeholder environment too (Handelman, 2006; Palazzo and Basu, 2007).

As such, the conceptual and practical question of corporate brand co-creation is not only a question of individual or collective stakeholder agency vis-à-vis the corporate brands but also a question of multiplicity and the continuous alignment, negotiation, accommodation and sometimes conciliation of multiple interests, meanings, voices, identities etc. within a wider socio-cultural context that is co-created too.

Drawing on the above, at a more abstract level we can discern at least four main generic dimensions of co-creation that have been discussed or alluded to in the extant and fast-growing literature on corporate brand co-creation. These four dimensions of corporate brand co-creation, to me, each imply different general forms of stakeholder agency:

- The dimension of *value co-creation* implies pragmatic, including utilitarian and functional, agency of multiple stakeholders vis-à-vis corporate brands.
- The dimension of *meaning co-creation* implies symbolic, including hermeneutic and semiotic, agency of multiple stakeholders vis-à-vis corporate brands.
- The dimension of *identity co-creation* implies individual (self-identity), collective (group-identity) and institutional (entity-identity) agency of multiple stakeholders vis-à-vis corporate brands.
- The dimension of *experience co-creation* implies aesthetic, including emotive and performative, agency of multiple stakeholders vis-à-vis corporate brands.

Of course, the above generic dimensions of co-creation and their associated abstract types of stakeholder agency are not mutually exclusive but often overlap and are jointly constitutive for co-created corporate brands. For example, the question of identity co-creation at the level of the individual, group or institution in relation to a corporate brand always also implies questions of meaning, value and experience co-creation; while co-created experiences are meaningful and valuable to stakeholders for their individual, collective or institutional identity projects vis-à-vis the corporate brand too.

### **3.2 Temporal co-creation and temporal agency**

In addition to the above-mentioned generic co-creation dimensions and their associated types of stakeholder agency, I suggest here a fifth dimension of co-creation (figure 2), which so far has rarely been addressed directly in the corporate marketing literature outside corporate heritage scholarship (see Balmer and Burghausen, 2019) and a few other recent exceptions, for example (see Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Iglesias et al., 2020).

<INSERT FIGURE 2>

I suggest labelling this additional dimension of co-creation *temporal co-creation*, tentatively defined as the co-creation of specific temporal relations between past, present and future that are constitutive for corporate brands predicated on stakeholders' *temporal agency*. To reiterate, temporal agency broadly refers to the ability of stakeholders to shape and influence, produce and reproduce temporal relations that have constitutive import for their own subjectivities as well as the organisational, social and cultural contexts they inhabit (Emirbayer and Mishe, 1998).

This additional dimension of corporate brand co-creation suggests that stakeholders are not just passively experiencing or perceiving temporality as a specific link between past, present and future as given, for example, but are individually and collectively shaping temporal relations and structures too. In this view, time, memory, history and heritage etc. are ongoing - individual and collective - socio-cultural accomplishments rather than natural constants or ontic essences. These temporal relations and structures are foundational for corporate brand co-creation too, the corporate brand and its ascribed and perceived relevance, import, legitimacy and authenticity vis-à-vis stakeholders. In other words, these co-created temporal relations, which may manifest as history, memory and indeed heritage, are co-constitutive for the co-creation of the meaning, value, identity and experience of a corporate brand.

In that sense, organisations and their corporate brands are always also temporal entities and constitute a nexus of multiple temporal relations (Adams, 1995; Landwehr, 2016). These include, inter alia, durations, tempos, rhythms, orientations, directions, periodizations or punctuations of time (Adam, 1995; Zerubavel, 2004), but also the narrations and manifestations of past, present and future and the link and direction between these timeframes (Ricoeur, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1998) that are locally specific to an organisation and its corporate brand. To put it differently, the corporate brand is co-created by stakeholders in time, through time and as time as well as in history, through history and as history etc. Thus, history (memory, tradition etc.) and indeed heritage, which all and their wider instrumental effects and cultural and social relevance in the present (and for the future) are themselves contingent on a socio-historic context of widely shared and accepted temporal mentalities, practices, and so on, which themselves are temporally dynamic and situationally specific (i.e. evolving and emerging).

As such, *temporal agency* by stakeholders is exercised through temporal practices, discourses, interactions, performances etc. and gives rise to emergent temporal processes, forms (e.g. artefacts, habits, narratives and individual orientations or shared mentalities) and institutions, which constitute multiple temporal relations vis-à-vis a corporate brand and other stakeholders as well as the perceived historicity of the corporate brand itself.

### **3.3 Co-creation and corporate heritage (branding)**

A couple of related questions arise from the above for corporate heritage (branding) scholarship. First, in what form and to what effect are multiple stakeholders (in addition to marketers and managers) involved in the temporal co-creation of corporate heritage per se and corporate heritage brands in particular? Second, and more fundamentally, what is their role and how are they involved in the constitution of the temporal relations between past, present and future that are characteristic for corporate heritage and corporate heritage brands (i.e. omni-temporality)?

Adopting a co-creation perspective, the emerging insights generated by corporate heritage (branding) scholars outline in this chapter so far suggest that internal and external stakeholders (additional to management and marketers) exercise their *temporal agency* and co-create a corporate heritage (brand) through actively and continuously engaging in the

valorisation, (re)interpretation, appropriation, augmentation and manifestation of a corporate brand's and/or organisation's past as corporate heritage in the present and for the future.

First, conceptually this means that the co-creation of a corporate heritage (brand) happens by stakeholders actively engaging in these transformative processes turning some aspect of the past into heritage by exercising temporal agency. Yet, these transformations, at a more fundamental level, are predicated on and are more specific manifestations of this temporal agency exercised in conjunction with other forms of agency characteristic of multiple forms of corporate brand co-creation as outlined previously (i.e. value, meaning, identity and experience). As such, the temporal relations between past, present and future characteristic for corporate heritage (brands) as they are co-created by stakeholders are not constituted in isolation but conflate with other types of co-creation. Thus, temporal agency and the temporal co-creation of a corporate heritage (brand) involves the four other dimensions of co-creation and their associated types of stakeholder agency too.

*We can say that corporate heritage (brand) co-creation by stakeholders is predicated on temporal co-creation conflated with other forms of stakeholder co-creation that underpin the transformations of the past into heritage and are co-constitutive for shaping the specific temporal relations that characterise a corporate heritage (brand). Temporal agency vis-à-vis corporate heritage brands is conflated agency, so to speak.*

By way of description and example, the valorisation of the past into heritage as a form of temporal co-creation by stakeholders is predicated on value co-creation but also implicates other forms of co-creation such as meaning (as symbolic value), experience (as affective value), identity (as affinity value). Likewise, the (re)interpretation of the past as heritage is surely linked to meaning co-creation, which may also entail a form of value co-creation (symbolic value), may be linked to issues of identity and identification (identity co-creation) and so on. The way the past manifests in the present as heritage first links to experience co-creation, surely, but experiences also carry meaning (meaning co-creation), may perform identities (identity co-creation) and constitute a value too (value cocreation). The appropriation of the past as 'our heritage' implicates questions of identity and identification (identity co-creation) and affective appeal (experience co-creation), which may acquire value for us and others (value co-creation) and necessitates interpretive efforts (meaning co-creation). Finally, the augmentation of the past as heritage beyond the corporate heritage requires identity co-creation but concurrently involves other forms of co-creation too so that the corporate heritage (brand) acquires a wider socio-cultural meaning that has value and can be positively experienced by different groups.

Second, the relevance and import of co-created corporate heritage brands in the present and for the future - as a nexus of multiple temporal relations - is predicated on and embedded in a wider, equally co-created and evolving, temporal and historical context (Assmann, 2013; Hartog, 2015). In other words, corporate heritage (brand) co-creation as described just above plays out not only vis-à-vis the organisation or its corporate brand but stakeholders also shapes the dominant temporal relations that enable or inhibit the social or cultural relevance and strategic efficacy of corporate heritage (branding) as an approach to corporate branding in a particular time and place but not others. For example, changes in the temporal fabric of

modernity (Assmann, 2013; Hartog, 2015), of which the growing concern for and interest in heritage are just indicators (Lowenthal, 1998), provide the contemporary contextual conditions that make a corporate heritage (branding) strategy viable and efficacious. Yet, taking the notion of co-creation seriously suggests that these contextual and situational conditions are also dynamic and predicated on social and temporal relations brought about by the (collective) agency of stakeholders.

We can say that *the strategic efficacy and socio-cultural relevance of co-created corporate heritage (brands) is predicated on temporal co-creation conflated with other forms of stakeholder co-creation that are co-constitutive for shaping the specific temporal relations that characterise the contextual and situational conditions for corporate heritage (branding). Temporal agency vis-à-vis corporate heritage brands is temporally embedded agency, so to speak.*

In figure 3 visually integrates and depicts these conceptual points and links developed in this chapter in graphical form.

<INSERT FIGURE 3>

#### **4. TOWARDS CORPORATE HERITAGE (BRANDING) CO-CREATION**

What are the implications of a co-creational perspective then? The following points are noteworthy in light of extant debates within corporate heritage (branding) to date but by no means exhaustive.

Regarding corporate heritage (brand) co-creation we can broadly say that the material and ideational remnants of the past that are being turned jointly into corporate heritage by stakeholders afford certain usages in the present and for the future and not others. Yet, there are always substantive limits, not yet well specified, on how far the past and what aspects of the past can be valorised, (re)interpreted, appropriated etc. as corporate heritage. Yet, despite this observation the agency of stakeholders is never completely determined by that state of affairs, but these past remnants and more importantly the temporal relations between past, present and future that manifest through them can be more fundamentally altered, rendering them into corporate heritage through these interdependent transformations that underpin corporate heritage (brand) co-creation.

For example, both managers and stakeholders may at first adopt the past (their own or 'borrowed' from elsewhere; Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a; see Brunninge and Hartmann,

2019) in the present and for the future for various reasons and purposes such as the co-creation of a corporate brand. Yet, through their adoption managers and stakeholders not merely ‘represent’ or ‘use’ the past (as found) in the present and for the future, again, for the purpose of corporate brand co-creation, for example. Instead, they actively constitute and refashion that past as corporate heritage through the multiple transformations (i.e. valorisation, (re)interpretation, appropriation, augmentation and manifestation) in accordance with present objectives and purposes and anticipated future concerns. Thus, through these transformations stakeholders exercise their temporal agency and co-create corporate heritage (brands) in the first place.

Further, the active constitution of the past in the present and for the future as corporate heritage has the positive implication that the past as heritage is not fixed but malleable and flexible (see Burghausen and Balmer, 2014a; Balmer and Burghausen, 2019; Brunninge and Hartmann, 2019) to be adapted in light of changing organisational or societal concerns. However, it also implies the potential for contestation if the version of corporate heritage espoused by the corporate heritage brand conflicts with the lived experiences, shared meanings or current concerns of stakeholders and wider society. Thus, from a co-creation perspective a unified version and singular purpose of the past as heritage cannot be assumed. It suggests temporal multiplicity too. Multiple temporal relations constituted by various stakeholders require active negotiation between the corporate brand (or better its management) and its various stakeholders (as individual and as a group). Consequently, the negotiation of multiple temporal relations between corporate heritage brand and stakeholders is not necessarily a harmonious affair. Temporal tensions, contradictions and contestations may ensue. These can be productive and destructive, because the temporal dimension of linking past present and future and turning the past into heritage is always conflated with the value, meaning, identity and experience of the corporate brand itself and beyond (as suggested above).

For corporate heritage (brand) co-creation the above notion of multiple temporal relations indicates that the relevance and import of omni-temporality - the perceived ‘timelessness’ and relative invariance of a corporate heritage brand - is predicated on a specific constellation of these multiple temporal relations within and without the organisation and vis-à-vis the corporate brand in the present and for the future that are evolving over time. This renders corporate heritage (branding) either fruitful or futile during certain periods and not others. In other words, the symbolic and instrumental relevance of corporate heritage is waxing and waning over time. Yet, more importantly these multiple temporal relations determine what management and stakeholders collectively agree to be a relevant and meaningful corporate heritage in the first place. Thus, the material and ideational substance and content of corporate heritage is contingent itself and needs to be renewed and validated by each new generation of stakeholders which requires their active engagement in co-creation.

In that sense, the omni-temporality of corporate heritage (brands) is co-created through continuous cultural transmission over time and validation in the present and for an anticipated future. Again, this is and needs to be negotiated with multiple stakeholders and their sometimes, conflicting priorities and interests and cannot be deduced from some inherent immutable traits nor unilaterally decreed by the corporate brand (and its managers) once and



for all. Likewise, omni-temporality requires intergenerational continuity and relevance of corporate heritage (brands). In other words, temporal relations do not only coexist and require negotiation in the present but across time and between generations of stakeholders too. This is specifically pertinent for corporate heritage (brands) due to their omni-temporal nature as they conflate and cut across the temporal strata of past, present and future. Corporate heritage brands cannot ignore historical corporate responsibilities or valorise something into heritage for purely nostalgic reasons without endangering the present and future relevance and import of the corporate heritage (brand) for their various stakeholders, who themselves are active temporal agents dealing with multiple temporalities and often temporal contradictions themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The suggested integrative framework (figure 3) derived from my reading of the corporate heritage (branding) and corporate brand co-creation literatures presented in this chapter ought to help interested readers in exploring the co-creation of corporate heritage (brands) further. The framework is not meant to be conclusive nor dogmatic but intended as guidance and an inspiration for future debate only.

This chapter has tentatively outlined a co-creation perspective on corporate heritage (branding). I hope that my preliminary theoretical musings encourage and maybe even inspire other colleagues to explore and engage with the, to me, fascinating but also complex questions of time, temporality, historicity in marketing more generally as well as temporal agency and multiplicity vis-à-vis corporate branding more specifically. To me, these questions are not just pertinent for corporate heritage scholarship but for the growing community of corporate brand co-creation scholars too.

This realisation might very well reflect our current *Zeitgeist* and the challenges of our times, which can catch up with us again from the past and already greet us from the future. *Time matters*, as do futures and pasts, whether as history, memory, utopias etc. and indeed as heritage too!

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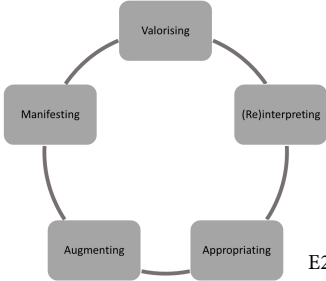
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E21.1



Value  
co-creation

Meaning  
co-creation

**Temporal  
co-creation**

Identity  
co-creation

Experience  
co-creation

E21.2

