

The Presence of the Omni-temporal:

Theoretical Foundations of (Corporate) Brand Heritage Design

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper explores and articulates the theoretical bases of (corporate) brand heritage design. It is conceptualised as the multifaceted actualisation of a (corporate) heritage brand's quality of omni-temporality and as a purposive instrumental creative act of translating it into material and ideational manifestations. These intended manifestations are said to imbue a brand with an "aura of heritage" affording a specific "heritage atmosphere" that enables consumers or other stakeholders to experience the heritage brand in a multi-modal and multi-sensory way. The paper argues that design is a relevant but often overlooked or taken-for-granted dimension of (corporate) brand heritage, which is not only of instrumental strategic efficacy but constitutive for (corporate) heritage brands and identities per se. Based on a reading of the extant literature a tentative theoretical framework is developed that may guide future conceptual and empirical work in the field of corporate and brand heritage scholarship. The framework is illustrated by selected case vignettes of (corporate) heritage brands. The findings suggest that corporate/brand heritage is actualised in and by design through an ongoing translation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present via four interlinked dimensions. The paper advances extant scholarship in conceptual terms in that it shows the central significance of (corporate) brand heritage design for the pertinence of (corporate) brand heritage as a strategic resource for brand management.

KEYWORDS: (corporate) brand heritage, brand, design, aesthetics, temporality, experience

ARTICLE TYPE: conceptual/theoretical paper

INTRODUCTION

Irrespective of whether one enters the department store of Fortnum & Mason on Piccadilly in London (UK) to buy some delicatessens, marvels at the fine porcelain at the flagship store of Royal Copenhagen on Amagertorv in Copenhagen (Denmark), samples the famous macarons at Maison Ladurée on Champs-Élysées in Paris (France), or buys some delicious chocolates at Rogers on Government Street in Victoria, BC (Canada), tea at A.C. Perch on Kronprinsensgade in Copenhagen (Denmark) or Wine at Berry Bros. & Rudd on St James's Street in London (UK), every time one enters a world apart. A world that seems to transcend the here and now, a world where time seems to slow down, a world that does not only provide a service or useful products but an aesthetic experience of their (corporate) brand heritage in a very direct and visceral way. A world that makes you feel enchanted by the sheer abundance of the sublime and beautiful so different from our more rational and accelerated daily lives. Even if one does not know much about these (corporate) heritage brands and their (hi)story or harbours personal or vicarious nostalgic sentiments, you can immediately sense and feel that these brands are somewhat different, something unique and special simply by coming in contact with their products and services without necessarily being able to explain why and what it is that makes you feel that way. In other words, they have an aura about them that helps these brands to create a specific atmosphere which enables us to aesthetically experience their “heritageness” in a direct and immediate way. Yet, this is no accident or coincident but a matter of design. A design that allows us to experience what is so special and unique about these (corporate) heritage brands, *viz.* their omni-temporality.

This conceptual article explores and articulates the theoretical bases of *(corporate) brand heritage design* as the multifaceted actualisation of a (corporate) heritage brand’s quality of omni-temporality (Balmer 2013, 2011). *Omni-temporality* refers to the synthetical conflation of the temporal strata of past, present and future into a *sui generis* temporal form that is

qualitatively different from each stratum separately (Balmer 2013, 2011). It is a generic quality that helps to distinguish (corporate) brand heritage from history or other temporal modes (Balmer and Burghausen 2019; Burghausen and Balmer 2014a) and is a defining trait of (corporate) heritage brands and identities (Balmer 2013, 2011). Thus, (corporate) heritage brands are a specific type of brand that link the past, present, and future in a meaningful and relevant way *vis-à-vis* consumers and other stakeholders (Balmer 2013, 2011; Urde et al. 2007). *(Corporate) brand heritage design* as it is understood here then is the *purposive instrumental creative act* (Feige 2018; Sparke 2013) that translates the heritage of a brand (and its omni-temporal quality) into material and ideational manifestations thereof (i.e. *transformation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present*). In this way imbuing this brand with an *aura of heritage*, which enables consumers or other stakeholders to authentically understand it in a multi-modal (i.e. brand meaning predicated on multiple media and sources in conjunction such as textual, visual, auditory brand elements) and experience it in a multi-sensory (i.e. brand experience by drawing on at once multiple senses such as touch, sound, smell, sight etc.) way. Consequently, the aforementioned is resulting in the joint establishing of a specific *heritage atmosphere* of such brand and its “heritageness”.

Why should we concern ourselves with *(corporate) brand heritage design*? First, there is a growing scholarly interest in the corporate and brand heritage domains due to their empirical pervasiveness (e.g. Balmer 2017, 2013, 2011; Balmer and Hudson 2013; Balmer et al. 2006; Blombäck and Brunninge 2016, 2013, 2009; Burghausen and Balmer 2015, 2014a, 2014b; Hakala et al. 2015, 2011; Hudson 2011; Merchant and Rose 2013; Pecot et al. 2018; Pecot and de Barnier 2018, 2017; Rindell et al. 2015; Rose et al. 2016; Urde et al. 2007). Second, one recent strand within this field has argued that the strategic appropriation of (corporate) brand heritage for marketing purposes is predicated on multi-modal and multi-sensory manifestations of that heritage in order to make it accessible and possible for consumers and other stakeholders

to not only symbolically comprehend the heritage of an organisation or product/service brand, but to affectively experience it in an aesthetic, embodied and material way (e.g. Balmer 2013, 2011; Balmer et al. 2006, Bargenda 2015; Burghausen and Balmer 2014a; Hudson 2011; Maier 2017; Maier and Agerholm 2017; Santos et al. 2016; Spielmann et al. 2019). Such a holistic experience of (corporate) heritage brands is said to be closely linked to the actual and perceived authenticity of heritage institutions and brands; providing a necessary prerequisite for consumers' and other stakeholders' affinity and trust with such brands (Balmer et al. 2006; Balmer 2011; Hudson and Balmer 2013). Third, the above is in line with a continuous or resurgent scholarly interest beyond brand management in, *inter alia*:

- (1) the **aesthetics** of (corporate) marketing/branding and organisational phenomena (e.g. Biehl-Missal 2011; Molli et al. 2019; Hatch 2012; Kotler 1973; Lindström 2005; Mazzalovo 2012; Olins 1989; Schmitt and Simonson 1997; Schmitt, 1999; Schroeder 2005; Strati 1999; Taylor and Hansen 2005; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008, 2006);
- (2) the **experiential and sensory** aspects of marketing and branding (e.g. Bartholme and Melewar, 2011, 2009; Brakus et al. 2009; Charles et al. 2014; Gustafsson 2015; Hulten 2011; Krishna 2012; Patterson and Larsen 2019; Pine and Gillmore 1999; Ponsonby-McCabe and Boyle 2006; Schmitt 2009, 1999; Scott and Uncles 2018; Stach 2019, 2015; Wiedmann et al. 2018);
- (3) the **materiality** and material culture of organisation and consumption (e.g. Appadurai 1986; Bitner 1992; Boxenbaum et al. 2018; Carlile et al. 2013; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Leonardi et al. 2012; Lury 2011; McCracken 1988; Miller 2010, 1987; Orlikowski and Scott 2008; Rafaeli and Pratt 2006); and
- (4) **design** and design thinking vis-à-vis organisation and consumption in general (e.g. Beverland et al. 2017; Elsbach and Stigliani 2018; Johansson-Sköldberg et al. 2013; Knott 2015; Montaña et al. 2007; Ravasi and Stigliani 2012; Stigliani and Ravasi 2018).

In light of the aforementioned debates a better conceptual and empirical understanding of *(corporate) brand heritage design* and its potential relevance seems timely and warranted. Further, design is central to the actualisation (their development and implementation) of product and service brands (Montaña et al. 2007; Schmitt 1999) and corporate identities and brands alike (Balmer 1995; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006). The growing ‘aestheticisation’ of consumption, marketing, corporate and organisational activities (and actors) beyond mere functional form and purpose has frequently been noted, discussed and critiqued (e.g. Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012; Dickinson and Svensen 2000; Drügh et al. 2011; Hancock 2003; Haug 2009; Mazzalovo 2012; Schmitt and Simonson 1997; also see Böhme 2016; Featherstone 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Moor 2007; Reckwitz 2015, 2012). By virtue of their aesthetic qualities, designed artifacts (and spaces and places such as “themed” retail and servicescapes; see Bitner 1992; Mari and Poggesi 2013; Sherry 1998) reach beyond mere functional or symbolic relevance and acquire sensual and somatic meaning as well (Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012; Hancock 2005). This indicates a purposive conflation of function, beauty and meaning that manifests through designed artifacts and spaces (amongst others) and their affective and embodied experience by consumers or other stakeholders (Joy and Sherry 2003; Venkatesh and Meamber 2008). Hence, commercial and quotidian life is characterised by a growing ‘designification’ (Fallan 2019, p. 16) and the widespread use (and sometimes abuse) of design as a panacea as well as a placebo is increasingly debated in business and management (Beverland et al. 2017; Elsbach and Stigliani 2018) and beyond (Feige 2018; Forsey 2013; Heskett 2005; Julier et al. 2019; Milev 2013; Parsons and Carlson 2008; Sparke 2013).

Irrespective of these wider debates (that cannot be addressed here in any detail) and to reiterate the above points, the design provenance of concepts such as corporate identity and branding and the centrality of design for their implementation have long been acknowledged in the

academic and practitioner marketing literature (e.g. Balmer 2001, 1998, 1995; Balmer and Baker 1997; Birkigt and Stadler 1980; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006; Melewar and Saunders 2000; Montaña et al. 2007; Moor 2007; Olins 1978; Schmitt 1999; van Riel 1995). In fact, modern corporate identity and branding practice has one of its origins in early 20th century industrial and graphic design (Birkigt and Stadler 1980; Olins 1978; Pilditch 1970), for example. Yet, this pertinence of design as a core function of identity and brand management has received surprisingly little scholarly scrutiny to date (Beverland et al. 2017; Bloch 2011; Montaña et al. 2007; Moor 2007) especially at a theoretical and conceptual level and also vis-à-vis (corporate) heritage brands (but cf. Balmer 2013).

To this end, the article articulates different tentative perspectives on (corporate) brand heritage design and suggests several theoretical implications for (corporate) brand heritage scholarship. In particular, this article argues that (corporate) brand heritage design is a relevant but often overlooked or taken-for-granted dimension of (corporate) brand heritage management, which is not only of instrumental relevance and strategic efficacy (i.e. how these kind of brands are best implemented as a functional tool) but constitutive for (corporate) heritage brands and identities *per se* (i.e. how these kind of brands come about as *sui generis* empirical phenomena). Prima facie, current debates on the effects and implementation of (corporate) heritage brands seem to privilege often textual and visual manifestations of heritage (e.g. logos, narratives, pictures) as well as cognitive or symbolic aspects (e.g. attitudes, cognitions and interpretations) to the detriment of multi-modal and multi-sensory actualisations as well as pre-cognitive and pre-interpretive affective experiences of (corporate) brand heritage and (corporate) heritage brands (e.g. Pecot and De Barnier 2018; Wiedmann et al. 2011, but cf. Balmer 2009; Bargenda 2015; Hudson 2011; Maier and Agerholm Andersen 2017; Santos et al. 2016). Yet, I contend that a thorough understanding of *(corporate) brand heritage design* and its effects in theoretical terms is only possible if we expand our conceptual repertoire and methodological toolkit to

include the more elusive aesthetic dimension more explicitly (also see Mazzalovo 2012; Schmitt and Simonson 1997 for similar arguments re branding in general) and sharpen our phenomenological sensitivities more generally, for example. In a broader sense, this article insinuates that we are still in much need for a rekindling of the artistic and aesthetic side of marketing (Brown 1996); branding also seen as an “art” (as well as a craft and praxis) versus treating it as a “scientific” endeavour only or primarily (also see Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006).

More specifically, this article suggests that *(corporate) brand heritage design* is a necessary and consequential vehicle for translating the *omni-temporal* – as a defining trait of (corporate) heritage brands – into something *(omni-)present* (i.e. the omni-temporal quality of the brand “being present” and “having presence”), which potentially then manifests as an auratic (i.e. aura-like) presence and atmospheric experience of that quality (these concepts will be introduced and explained in more detail later in the article). This also indicates that the (perceived) trust, affinity and authenticity of (corporate) heritage brands (Balmer 2011) does not only hinge on cerebral deliberations and semantic understanding of symbolic meanings but likewise on affective and embodied aesthetic experiences (purposively created by and through design and designers but also always “co-created” in situ and context by consumers and other stakeholders). The perspective expounded in this article draws on a largely phenomenological and holistic understanding of brands and their appearance and experience (i.e. a brand as an emergent Gestalt at the nexus of material and ideational manifestations, representations and interpretations). It is predicated on a synthesis of:

- (1) **aesthetics** (e.g. Böhme 2001; Reckwitz 2012),
- (2) affective and embodied **materiality** (e.g. Gumbrecht 2012) and
- (3) **meaning** beyond semiotics and hermeneutics alone (see Hatch and Rubin 2006).

In other words, brands are not only comprehended and interpreted but also felt and lived (and vice versa). While the “reading consumer” (Hatch and Rubin 2006) requires special cultural knowledge in order to understand the semiotic codes of a brand the “feeling consumer” and “interacting consumer” (who is also in that sense always a “co-creating” consumer) does not necessarily need such sophisticated knowledge in order to nonetheless viscerally and pre-cognitively “get” the brand meaning in an aesthetic way (as an affective, sensuous and embodied experience; see Damasio 2006, 2000 for a general scientific argument). The latter, of course, does not preclude collectively shared and culturally impregnated aesthetic sentiments and sensitivities (e.g. Böhme 2016; Bourdieu 1987) which are spatially and temporally contingent, influencing our affective and sensuous experiences as much as the shared meanings we ascribe to brands, institutions or our lifeworld at large. Yet, the dominance of the cognitive and cerebral as well as the textual and interpretive often overshadows the non-cognitive and visceral as well as the non-textual and non-hermeneutic in our conceptualisations of brands and their effects (see Böhme 2014; Gumbrecht, 2012, 2004 for the general argument).

In short, this article seeks to provide a basis – in form of a tentative conceptual framework – for further debate. It invites reflexion amongst and dialogue between branding academics and practitioners interested in (corporate) heritage branding to think beyond received and established wisdom(s) and veracities (and practical functional concerns). In this sense, this article is conceptual – even audaciously speculative – rather than empirically substantive or managerially instrumental *per se*.

The remainder of the article first presents the general background and context referring to the field of (corporate) brand heritage and (corporate) heritage brand scholarship. The notion of omni-temporality is elaborated on and (corporate) brand heritage design is introduced. Following on from this, the framework is explained, the constitutive dimensions of the

framework are articulated, and it is illustrated with the help of three case vignettes. Finally, the article charts several directions for future conceptual and empirical research.

(CORPORATE) BRAND HERITAGE AND (CORPORATE) HERITAGE BRANDS

The corporate heritage brand and (product/service) heritage brand literatures are relatively recent and still young areas of branding scholarship and research. While the term heritage had been used sporadically and rather loosely in the branding and marketing literature before (e.g. Aaker 1996, 2004; Berthon et al. 2003; Blackston 1992, 1995; Hatch and Rubin 2006; Keller 2001; Keller and Lehman 2006) it was only with the now seminal work of John Balmer, Stephen Greyser and Mats Urde published in the Journal of Brand Management that (corporate) brand heritage and (corporate) heritage brands were established as distinct branding and marketing concepts and *sui generis* empirical phenomena (see Balmer et al. 2006; Urde et al. 2007).

The originating authors suggested that certain organisations and their (corporate) brands are imbued with a (corporate) brand heritage – different from history – and thus are a distinct category of organisation and brand characterised by specific traits (Balmer et al. 2006; Urde et al. 2007); different from other organisations and brands (that all have a history but do not marshal a heritage as such). The concept of (corporate) brand heritage may be defined here as “...all the traits and aspects of an organisation [and/or brand] that link its past, present, and future in a meaningful and relevant way...it refers to some aspect of an organisation’s [and/or brand’s] past that is still deemed by current customers and/or other stakeholders to be relevant and meaningful for contemporary concerns and purposes but concurrently perceived as worth to be maintained and nurtured for future generations...” (Burghausen and Balmer 2014a, p. 394-5).

The same scholars who originated the concept also argued from the outset that a (corporate) brand heritage – if part of a (corporate) brand identity – may potentially afford these organisations a competitive advantage if used, managed, and maintained as a strategic resource and asset (Urde et al. 2007). Yet the efficacy of heritage-based (corporate) branding is not a given or universally feasible *per se* but requires strategic deliberation and ongoing management stewardship (Balmer et al. 2006; Urde et al. 2007).

Since then, the scholarly field of corporate and brand heritage marketing and communication (Balmer 2013) has blossomed and subsequent research and publications have considerably substantiated, broadened and advanced the area (for overviews see Balmer 2017; Balmer and Burghausen 2015). This is the case in conceptual and empirical terms.

In conceptual terms, for example, building on Urde et al. (2007) various defining generic conceptual traits have been established for corporate heritage brands specifically and corporate heritage identities more generally (see Balmer 2011, 2013 in particular). Amongst those, the following defining generic characteristics are noteworthy (for the purpose of this article):

- **Omni-temporality:** The concurrence of the three timeframes of past, present and future that are all constituted simultaneously vis-à-vis an organisation, product or service (Balmer 2013);
- **Intergenerational continuity:** The substantive and/or symbolic exchange across generations of (internal and external) stakeholders providing a link between past, present and future of an organisation, product or service (Balmer 2013);
- **Relative invariance/trait constancy:** The apparent temporal constancy of traits and characteristics despite substantive and/or symbolic change over time (Balmer 2011, 2013).

The notion of omni-temporality (or the omni-temporal) is the most relevant in the context of this article. This is because to me it is a primary trait in the sense that other defining qualities of (corporate) heritage brands such as intergenerational continuity or relative invariance and trait constancy are more specific manifestations of that overall quality (i.e. omni-temporality/the omni-temporal).

It has also been suggested – again following on from the foundational work (Balmer et al. 2006; Urde et al. 2007) – that these generic conceptual traits are based on a number of *transformations of the past into heritage*, which are primarily:

- **Augmentation of the past:** The accrual of a multitude of identity roles/affiliations in the present – beyond the organisation and/or brand itself – predicated on a substantive and/or symbolic (direct or vicarious) link between past, present and future (Balmer 2013, 2011);
- **Valorisation of the past:** The selective investment of the past with value in the present and concurrently(!) with an assumed value for the future (Burghausen and Balmer 2014a; Urde et al. 2007);
- **Reinterpretation of the past:** The symbolic relevance of the past vis-à-vis an organisation, product or service is temporally extended and given a new/expanded meaning in the present and for the future which is different from the past or history *per se* (Balmer 2011; Burghausen and Balmer 2014a);
- **Appropriation of the past:** The active acceptance by managers, consumers and/or other stakeholders of the past being concurrently an inheritance in the present and a bequest to the future which affords opportunities and responsibilities but may also be a constraint or burden (Balmer 2011, 2013; Burghausen and Balmer 2014b, 2015).

Following on from the above, this article conceptually introduces another necessary transformation, *viz. the transformation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present*. This is deemed necessary and timely. Extant research has conceptually advanced the descriptive qualities and outlined managerial necessities of (corporate) heritage brands and identities (see Balmer 2017; Balmer and Burghausen 2015 for an overview) as well as has started to explore its strategic and behavioural consequences vis-à-vis consumers and other constituents in more detail (e.g. Balmer and Chen 2017; Lee and Davies 2019; Pecot and De Barnier 2018; Rindell 2017; Sammour et al. 2019; Spielmann et al. 2019; Wilson 2018). Yet, further conceptual (and empirical) work is required in order to better understand and explain their constitutive actualisation and instrumental implementation. In other words, the literature has already articulated the normative qualities of (corporate) heritage brands at some length/detail and is increasingly accumulating empirical evidence (qualitative and quantitative) but we do not yet have sufficient clarity as to the nature and gestation of some of the thus identified generic qualities of this category of brand such as omni-temporality: how it might come about, is experienced, and can be usefully fashioned and actioned by marketers. Thus, the conceptual focus of this article is not so much on formal properties (e.g. defining or characteristic traits) of (corporate) heritage brands or their effects *per se* but rather their phenomenological qualities (e.g. affective, sensory experience) and how these (intentionally or accidentally) emerge (e.g. through design) and link up.

BRAND PRESENCE AND OMNI-PRESENCE

To reiterate the transformation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present is a necessary transition that may be of conceptual, explanatory and instrumental value if better understood and specified. Again, *omni-temporality* refers to the synthetical conflation of the temporal strata of past, present and future into a *sui generis* temporal form that is qualitatively different from each stratum separately (Balmer 2013, 2011). The tentative concept of “omni-presence”

(or the omni-present) then shall simply denote – by way of a “working definition” – the *omni-temporal presence* (or *presence of the quality of omni-temporality*) of a (corporate) heritage brand. As such, it is a specific and conceptual use of the term “omni-present” in order to indicate the link with the notion of the omni-temporal. It should not be read as or mistaken with the term’s more colloquial usage (i.e. denoting something pervasive and ubiquitous; albeit such brands may very well acquire such quality as well). It is a new conceptual dimension introduced here that is derived from the broad and variedly discussed concept of “presence” in literary and cultural theory and philosophy (see Gumbrecht 2012, 2004 in particular; also Nancy 1993, Fischer-Lichte 2004 in a narrower more specific sense) which has also been explored in history more recently (Ankersmit 2012; Runia 2014).

Presence itself, as tentatively understood here in a very generic sense, refers to the *affectively and sensuously perceivable* (and perceived) phenomenological “being there” of a “thing” (which can be an object or a subject) in some form somewhere (Gumbrecht 2012, 2004). In that sense, presence is always co-presence or “being there with” because a perceiving and sensing subject such as a consumer is always required as much as the present “thing” itself whether that “thing” is a brand, product, or person, for example. Presence then also implies “being in touch with” (Runia, 2014) in some way (directly or in a mediated form) suggestive of varying degrees of proximity and contiguity (between perceiving subjects and “*things*” with *presence*). The latter is not merely a matter of distance within Euclidean physical spaces or presence/absence in a physical and temporal sense (e.g. that what was but is not now or that what is not yet) but closeness/remoteness as an aesthetic and sensuous experience as well (Böhme 2014; also see Benjamin 2010).

Consequently, a “*thing*” with *presence* can be an object as much as a subject (or a relational combination thereof as in a service setting), as it is situated in a place or distributed in a space

(real or virtual), and of relatively stationary/stable (e.g. viewing of a sculpture or painting) or dynamic/ephemeral quality (e.g. visiting a live sport or music event). In addition, “presence” is a matter of degree (or intensity) and context rather than an absolute quality (Gumbrecht 2004) but always requires some form and degree of proximity (and interaction) between sensuous and perceiving subjects and the present “thing” in question. Yet, the phenomenon of “presence” cannot be reduced to either some qualities of the “thing” or the perceiving subject alone; but is an emergent quality superseding both. Thus, “*things*” with *presence* may possess certain affordances (i.e. indicative and suggestive properties; see Norman 2013; also Gibson 1986) that allow a perceiving subject (such a consumer) to intuit not only the mere presence of a “thing” (such as a branded product or corporate brand) but also other qualities (e.g. omnitemporality) prior or concomitant to any cognitive processing and interpretive sensemaking (again see Damasio 2006, 2000 for a general scientific argument).

Understood in this way, instrumental “things” such as corporate, product and service brands also have a “presence” (i.e. *brand presence*) of differing intensity and set of affordances that may aesthetically affect consumers and other stakeholders through “being there” and “being in touch with” somewhere in a specific and relevant way (predicated on the consumption of a product, the experience of a service, corporate events and architecture, for example). In that sense, brands may not only be “co-created” in terms of meaning or value but also in terms of their aesthetic qualities and experiences predicated on their “presence”. In other words, brands are not only dependent on “co-creation” but also require “co-presencing” in order to have instrumental effects (so that consumers are also “touched by” the “thing” they are “in touch with” through this co-presence). In that sense, the notion of a brand’s touch points is (implicitly) predicated on the notion of presence (which is conceptually often taken for granted, though).

Classic examples of phenomenological presence are usually derived from arts or cultural performances (Gumbrecht 2012; see Fischer-Lichte 2004 for a specifically performative perspective on presence and co-presence). Yet, branding as an aesthetic activity – albeit mundane – also seeks to create unique (aesthetic) experiences with affective relevance for consumers (Brakus et al. 2009; Hultén 2011; Mazzalovo 2012; Schmitt 2009, 1999; Schmitt and Simonson 1997); seeking the sublime and beautiful in the phenomenological¹ auratic and singular (the new *modus operandi* of early 21st century western societies according to Reckwitz 2017). As such, the successful creation of *brand presence* (in addition to brand meaning, for instance) may be an important but overlooked aspect of branding (and marketing in general) and the concept of presence may provide us with an additional conceptual tool for comprehending and explaining the power of brands.

In terms of and in the context of (corporate) heritage branding, the notion of (*corporate heritage brand (omni-)presence*) translates the temporal question of continuity and discontinuity (e.g. between past, present and future), for example, into a spatial and objective problem (in the sense of object-related) in that the absent (or ephemeral) and abstract (i.e. the omni-temporal) is made present (in the above sense) and substantive (see Runia, 2014 on continuity/discontinuity of the past and the question of presence). To reiterate, the latter is not just a matter of physical presence but also an aesthetic affective question. As such, it is based on material and ideational manifestations of a (corporate) heritage brand in conjunction rather than isolation.

¹ “Phenomenological” in so far as branded products and services are of course not materially singular but mass-produced repetitions of the same that are neither unique nor special (as a piece of art is) in a technical or formal sense. Yet, the value and meaning associated with brands is predicated on their uniqueness and singularity promise nonetheless. We may very well call this the “uniqueness paradox” of modern brands and consumer culture (i.e. we successfully individuate ourselves by doing and consuming largely the same things).

Following on from the above discussion of presence, this transformation then is a necessary pre- and co-requisite for aesthetic experiences of and interpretive meanings ascribed to that thing “being there” to be possible (i.e. the various manifestations of a heritage brand affording specific sensuous experiences and symbolic meanings). In other words, omni-presence is a necessary condition for consumers and other stakeholders to actually experience and make sense of the omni-temporal quality of a (corporate) heritage brand in the first place. The question for (corporate) heritage brand managers now is how to fashion and action this omni-temporal presence in particular; what kind of affordances and activities would allow the aforementioned *transformation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present* to take place?

The concept of presence (and omni-presence) as suggested above is conceptually related to two other key aesthetic concepts that will help to underpin the notion of (corporate) heritage brand design, *viz.* aura and atmosphere.

BRAND AURA AND AURA OF HERITAGE

The concept of *aura* was first popularised by Walter Benjamin in 1936 and broadly refers to a specific aesthetic quality of directly encountered original and singular art objects (such as a painting or sculpture) that uniquely captivate and affect us differently from other items that we encounter only in a reproduced or mediated way (Benjamin, 2010). In that sense, aura always requires uniqueness and presence. Benjamin would surely not concur with the concept of aura to be applied to modern brands (or branding and marketing in general). Philosophers and cultural theorists probably will strongly object to my outrageous sacrilege of suggesting otherwise, because to them brands are often the epitome of everything that undermines aura and authentic aesthetic experiences in the modern commercialised world (see Mersch 2002). Although I sympathise with the sentiment I also dare to disagree with the excessive cultural pessimism implicit in such objections. Similar to Alexander (2009) I suggest that certain

brands, such as (corporate) heritage brands may indeed possess a form of aura (i.e. *brand aura*) because of their phenomenological uniqueness and presence that sets them apart from other brands in that they aesthetically captivate and affect consumers and other stakeholders in a special way. This more encompassing perspective is expedient in a society increasingly focused on the singular (Reckwitz 2017), where branding is part of culture (Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006; Schroeder et al. 2015), and consistent with the rise of aesthetic capitalism more generally (Böhme 2016; also see Moor 2007 on the role of branding and design in this). (Corporate) heritage brands are such a specific type of brand that may acquire an “*aura of heritage*” because of the unique way in which the omni-temporal manifests in and through the (omni)-present vis-à-vis consumers and other constituents. The practical question for marketers and (corporate) heritage brand managers is how to best institute, maintain and manage that “aura of heritage” of their brands. What kind of aesthetic and other qualities are required to instigate the phenomenological uniqueness and presence of such brands different from others? How are consumers and other stakeholders aesthetically affected and do react to this? How does it concur with and influence their cognitive and interpretive sensemaking, for instance?

BRAND ATMOSPHERE AND HERITAGE ATMOSPHERE

Another related aesthetic concept, linked to aura and presence, is that of a phenomenological *atmosphere* (Böhme 2014, 2001; Schmitz 2016) that we may experience in certain situations and contexts. The notion of atmosphere is a spatial (but not necessarily physical) concept increasingly popular in architecture and interior design, for instance (Böhme 2013; Hasse 2015; Lehnert 2011; Ruth 2017; Sloane 2015). In marketing the notion of atmosphere goes back to Kotler (1973) and has been adopted *inter alia* as a key concept in retailing (e.g. store atmosphere; Donovan and Rossiter 1982), services (e.g. servicescapes; Bitner 1992; Mari and Poggesi 2013) and sensory marketing (see Krishna 2011; Spence et al 2014). It asks questions about how consumers experience spaces and places in an aesthetic and sensory way. Contrary

to the established marketing debate – largely predicated on the SOR (stimulus-organism-response) paradigm – the notion of atmosphere advocated here requires a more holistic and syncretic (and synesthetic) understanding and phenomenological approach (also see Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012; Julmi 2016). Similar to aura it presupposes presence and co-presence and may have affective and embodied effects and manifestations (e.g. the atmosphere of a brand store that you immediately sense upon entering and that instantly affects your individual mood, feelings, visceral or somatic state without much or any conscious or explicit deliberations). An atmosphere actualises at the nexus between objects and subjects (i.e. it is neither subjective nor objective only) in their co-presence and is conditional on aesthetic affordances and experiences (Böhme 2014, 2001) that cannot be neatly separated into stimuli and responses but need to be thought together. In that sense, an atmosphere is not different from an aura (Böhme 2014, 2001). However, for reasons of conceptual expedience and contrary to Böhme (2014, 2001), I suggest that both differ in the following way (figure 1a): while aura has its conceptual focus/locus on the aesthetic qualities of a “thing” with presence *qua* “thing” (without being reducible to only that “thing” and its qualities) the concept of atmosphere is more expansive and has its focus/locus on the aesthetic experience of a “thing” with presence in context and in situ (without being reducible to experience or situation only). In other words, a brand aesthetically manifesting itself through the traits of its products (or the features of its store design), for example, can have a specific aura (of uniqueness and presence) yet may also afford a specific brand atmosphere affecting the holistic aesthetic experience of consumers and other stakeholders of that brand (e.g. in a store, at a corporate event or through usage and consumption). As such, the aesthetic concepts of brand aura and brand atmosphere are conceptually linked interdependently through and predicated on the concept of brand presence as a foundational pre- and co-requisite (see figure 1b).

FIGURE 1

Based on this understanding, I argue that (corporate) heritage brands afford an *aura of heritage* through their omni-presence that enables a special *heritage atmosphere* which affects the aesthetic experiences of consumers and other stakeholders. These aesthetic affordances and effects are usually not accidental but require *purposive instrumental creative acts* (Sparke 2013) that translate the heritage of a brand (and its omni-temporal quality) into material and ideational manifestations thereof, viz. *(corporate) brand heritage design*. Thus, design is being addressed in the subsequent section.

DESIGN AND (CORPORATE) BRAND HERITAGE DESIGN

There is a resurgence in the interest in design within marketing, business and management and beyond (Beverland et al. 2017; Elsbach and Stigliani 2018; Micheli et al. 2019; Wilner and Ghassan 2017). Despite and maybe because of this growing concern with design, the term and concept of design is expansive (e.g. inflation of its usage), culturally impregnated (e.g. different traditions, mentalities, understandings), and varied in scope (e.g. abstract/universal vs. concrete/particular) (Milev 2013; Sparke 2013). Consequently, there is no universally agreed definition of design as it is an ubiquitous and ambiguous term that can – in a generic sense – refer to, for example (Feige 2018; Forsey 2013; Milev 2013; Sparke 2013):

- (1) design as doing/making (e.g. as a practice, activity, process);
- (2) design as having/being (e.g. as a state, property, quality, formation, gestalt);
- (3) design as intention/purpose (e.g. as a concept, plan, template, idea);
- (4) design as knowledge (as theoretical and applied, codified/explicit and embodied/tacit forms of knowledge).

Yet, there are a number of key characteristics that set categorially apart design from art, craft or nature (Feige 2018; Forsey 2013; Sparke 2013). First, design involves the *intentional*

creation of human artifacts (in a broad sense) possessing specific *definitive functions* serving a useful quotidian and instrumental purpose (Feige 2018; Forsey 2013). These definitive functions are not just accidental or derivative but deliberate and essential for a designed object, space, process etc. *to be what it is* (Feige 2018; Forsey 2013). Designed objects and spaces may serve more than one function or purpose, of course. A handbag is first a handbag in core functional terms, even if a Hermès or Louis Vuitton handbag may also (or even primarily) serve symbolic purposes for consumers, for example. However, it is a Hermès or Louis Vuitton handbag and not just any handbag because of a particular combination of certain intentional qualities designed for specific purposes (which are subsequently incorporated by consumers into their individual and collective sensemaking etc.). Hence, designed objects, spaces, processes etc. are intentionally given a *form and certain properties* (aesthetic, semiotic, functional) that make them into the things they are (Feige 2018) that are indicative of their function and purpose (i.e. affordances), which also includes an intended meaning (Sparke 2013). Further, design also involves an act of *human creativity* in order to bring about these kind of artifacts, irrespective of whether they are objects, spaces, places, processes and so on (Sparke 2013). In other words, they are not mere naturally givens that may or may not serve a human purpose (Forsey 2013). Finally, because it serves a functional purpose in mundane contexts design is not just a matter of aesthetic perception or hermeneutic interpretation as forms of human contemplation (of a painting in a gallery, for example) but always also involves some form of *usage and utilisation in quotidian contexts* (Feige 2018; Forsey 2013). The latter indicates that a function and purpose of a design cannot be understood in isolation but is always also predicated on social, cultural and economic conditions and contingencies (Milev 2013; Prinz 2013). In short, design is understood here as both the result/outcome and a type of *purposive instrumental creativity* of humans (e.g. professional designers working together with marketers and brand managers; today often in conjunction with consumers) bringing about cultural artifacts (in a broad sense also including digital objects and spaces, for example) with

instrumental (function), hermeneutic (meaning), and aesthetic (experience) qualities, relevance and utility in quotidian contexts (e.g. branded products, service settings, corporate visual identities, marketing events).

Following on from this generic definition of design and the notion of presence, aura and atmosphere outlined previously, *(corporate) brand heritage design* is understood here as the *purposive instrumental creative act* that translates the heritage of a brand (and its omni-temporal quality) into material and ideational manifestations thereof (i.e. its *omni-presence*). In this way imbuing this brand with an *aura of heritage*, which enables consumers or other stakeholders to authentically understand it in a multi-modal (i.e. brand meaning predicated on multiple media and sources in conjunction such as textual, visual, auditory brand elements) and experience it in a multi-sensory (i.e. brand experience by drawing on at once multiple senses such as touch, sound, smell, sight etc.) way. Consequently, enabling the joint establishing of a specific *heritage atmosphere* of that brand predicated on its auratic omni-presence setting it apart from other brands (see figure 2).

FIGURE 2

Based on these preliminary and foundational conceptual deliberations I will now continue and introduce a conceptual model drawing together several dimensions that for me are constitutive for the transformation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present and for (corporate) heritage brand design more generally. Its purpose is to provide a basis for a future conceptual and empirical research programme on (corporate) heritage brand design (and its contexts, practices and effects).

THE VIRTUOSIC/VIRTUOUS CIRCLE OF (CORPORATE) BRAND HERITAGE DESIGN

Drawing on and integrating my preliminary conceptual deliberations, the conceptual model (figure 3) indicates that (corporate) brand heritage is manifested through *(corporate) brand heritage design* by an ongoing *translation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present* via the interlinked dimensions of temporality/historicity (time), materiality/spatiality (object/space), aesthetics/atmospherics (experience), and semiotics/hermeneutics (meaning). These dimensions are interlinked through ongoing bilateral/dialogical processes of concretisation (“objectivating”), actualisation (“presencing”), interpretation (“sensemaking”) and contextualisation (“situating”).

FIGURE 3

The circularity of the model suggests that the process is ongoing with transformations and interactions that may enter a positive/reinforcing loop (i.e. it is a virtuous circle at best) but are not merely functional steps but require aesthetic and phenomenological understanding as well (i.e. it is to be taken as also a virtuosic circle). In other words, the relevance of *(corporate) brand heritage design* for (corporate) marketing strategy and implementation is predicated on a purposeful and artful integration of the postulated dimensions through these processes.

Temporality/historicity (time)

Obviously, for a category of brands, such as (corporate) heritage brands, that is fundamentally defined by its omni-temporality (as defined previously) and a specific relation between (or better conflation of) past, present and future, *temporality and historicity* (short: time) constitute a joint foundational dimension in any conceptual model. The notion of temporality and historicity has already been discussed extensively in the (corporate) brand heritage literature

and I will refrain from elaborating it again here (see Balmer 2017, 2013, 2011; Balmer and Burghausen 2019; Pecot et al 2019).

Temporality is foundational because a new temporal form is assumed (i.e. the omni-temporal) that also manifests through other temporal relations (i.e. intergenerational continuity, relative invariance/trait constancy etc.) while historicity reflects the various transformations and translations of the past into heritage (i.e. augmentation, valorisation, reinterpretation, appropriation) which are in and by themselves historically specific and dynamic (i.e. contingent on wider socio-cultural sentiments and mentalities at a particular point in time or during a specific period; that what is experienced as heritage today may not apply tomorrow because of a changing understanding of what constitutes heritage or how we expect it to manifest, for example).

In other words, this dimension highlights the special temporal and historic character of (corporate) heritage brands as *sui generis* phenomena. Yet, as argued throughout the article, in and by itself this dimension has limited explanatory or instrumental import. It requires further purposive transformations in order to acquire practical and instrumental relevance, *viz. a transformation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present through purposive instrumental creative acts*. A first necessary step is the *concretisation or objectivation* of the temporal into some concrete and substantive manifestations (enabling specific aesthetic qualities and affordances) as cultural artifacts which leads us to the next dimension of the framework.

Materiality/spatiality (object/space)²

There seems to be an implicit acceptance or growing consensus within the corporate and brand heritage literature that designed material artifacts are important for (corporate) brand heritage marketing in instrumental and scholarly terms (e.g. Balmer et al 2006; Bargenda 2015; Hudson 2011; Santos et al 2016). There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence from business practice that indicates a strong link between material design (past and present) and (corporate) heritage branding and identity management. Yet, there is, so far, little conceptual and empirical work that seeks to comprehend and integrate the relevance of aestheticised materiality and space *per se*. As such, this dimension requires a more elaborate justification.

Following but also expanding on Gagliardi (1992), cultural artifacts are intentional (purpose serving) products of human activity (in a broad sense material outcomes) that take on an ‘independent existence’ of their creator once created. They are endowed with corporality, physicality, and aesthetic qualities (including digital or spatial equivalents) making them perceptible by human senses. They are imbued with instrumental (utility), aesthetic (experience) and symbolic relevance (meaning) which is spatially and temporally contingent. These material objectifications range from discrete objects and physical structures to spatial arrangements (and again, their equivalents in the digital/virtual sphere).

Consistent with my previous discussion of presence and design in general, designed material artifacts are neither solely predicated on inherently meaningful qualities nor are they void of any affordances vis-à-vis social actors. They acquire their particular qualities through the (re)productive activities of social actors who are embedded within a particular socio-cultural context and a specific situation of interactions and encounters. Yet, certain qualities are indicative of particular functional and aesthetic purposes that limit the interpretive and agentive

² These deliberations are partially a product of my collaboration and discussions with Fernando Pinto Santos and I would like to acknowledge his contribution and thank him for his inspiration on my thinking about the material dimensions.

freedom of individual social actors irrespective of their immediate familiarity with the socio-cultural context of an object's or place's creation. The affordances of material, spatial (and digital) objects are also predicated on natural and other material factors that may change but are usually more persistent. The notion of ANT (Latour 2005) and socio-materiality (Orlikowski and Scott 2008) is indicative of this understanding but is too focused on technical/functional aspects of materiality. As such, this take on socio-materiality seems to underestimate the aesthetic and semiotic affordances of cultural artifacts and their temporal and spatial transience or portability. In phenomenological terms, the appropriation of a material or spatial artifact by a social agent requires a 'fusion of horizons' (in a metaphorical sense) between the intent of the creator (such as a designer, marketer or brand manager), which manifests in the particular affordances of a designed artifact, and the intent of the social agent who appropriates it.

In addition, the materiality of cultural artifacts brings the past to the present due to their relative persistence (Olsen 2013). It functions as a 'tangible point of reference' for the temporal and spatial exchange of ideas and meaning that contribute to social identification and coherence (Jones et al 2013) and provides a spatial and physical context for mnemonic practices that make the past of an individual, group, or institution accessible in the present (Nora 1989). Thus, the materiality of cultural artifacts constitutes a physical mnemonic vehicle for intergenerational exchange of cultural memories (Assmann 1999; Assmann 2010, 1995); material objects and spaces becoming also mnemonic objects and spaces (also see Nora 1989).

Material artifacts and spaces are hence not only functional, aesthetic or symbolic devices but also always temporal objects. Not temporal in the sense that they are not permanent (e.g. in terms of their material substance, for example) but insofar as they become mnemonic objects for an individual, collective or institution enabling/facilitating inter- and transgenerational

transmissions and transformations (again, not only in a substantive form but also in a symbolic and hermeneutic fashion; the intergenerational exchange of meaning, knowledge, frames of reference as well as material possessions).

As such, the dimension of *materiality and spatiality* (short: object/space) is a necessary part of this conceptual model. It is fundamental for our understanding of (corporate) brand heritage design as a purposive instrumental creative act bring about cultural material, spatial and digital artifacts on the one hand and the notion of creating temporal objects as mnemonic, symbolic and aesthetic objects that link past, present and future in a meaningful way. Yet, in order for these cultural artifacts to have practical import a further transformation is required (i.e. *actualisation*) that actualises them into a manifest presence and subsequently co-presence (i.e. “*presencing*”) with perceiving and sensing human beings who aesthetically experience them in a specific way. This leads us to a third dimension in this conceptual model.

Aesthetics/atmospherics (experience)

The addition of *aesthetics and atmospherics* (short: experience) as a third dimension of this conceptual model is a logical consequence of the key underlying premise and main argument developed in this conceptual article so far. To reiterate, it is an addition that stresses the constitutive relevance and practical importance of aesthetic experiences that mediate between material/objective manifestations of (corporate) heritage brands (and their omni-temporal quality) through designed artifacts and spaces, for example, and their hermeneutic/semantic interpretation ascribing and/or extracting meaning. The key concepts introduced and discussed to capture this additional dimension were aura, atmosphere and presence. As such, this dimension foregrounds the *actualisation* or phenomenological “*presencing*” (i.e. making present; imbuing with presence) of a (corporate) heritage brand beyond its mere substantive manifestations as cultural artifacts with a focus on their affective and sensuous experiences that

not always require much cerebral deliberation or interpretive sensemaking (or cultural knowledge of the symbolism involved). Yet, irrespective of this focus on pre-cognitive or embodied phenomena of experience (via aura, atmosphere and presence), it is of course only an additional dimension but not a substitute for or an argument against meaning making and ascription (whether subsequent or in concurrence). As such, the last constitutive dimension of the model captures the aspect of meaning specifically.

[Semiotics/hermeneutics \(meaning\)](#)

The *semiotic and hermeneutic dimension* (short: meaning) of brands and brand management is well-established (Hatch and Rubin 2006) and brand meaning (albeit not always under the same label or term) is a central concept (Batey 2016, 2008). Despite the focus of this article on the aesthetic dimension, meaning consequently also features as a core dimension in the conceptual model.

To reiterate, the focus on aesthetics is in addition to the other more established aspects of brand management. More importantly, of course, one main argument is that meaning may be derived in a more direct and visceral or somatic way without much interpretive deliberation based on aesthetic experiences. Again, these experiences may still constitute some form of non-symbolic or non-hermeneutic “meaning” that enable consumers and other stakeholders to nonetheless “get” a brand. One of the reason for the potential impact of aesthetic experiences on consumers’ and stakeholders’ perception of uniqueness of a brand may be the dominance of meaning and mediation in our world (Gumbrecht 2012, 2004) making more embodied and visceral experiences rare, special and unique (and sought after). One could even argue that consumers actually seek such aesthetic experiences based on auratic and atmospheric presence effects when they talk about “authentic” experiences (which has so far primarily been discussed as a

matter of symbolic sensemaking and interpretation, see Beverland 2006; Goulding 2000; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Leigh et al. 2006; Peñaloza 2000; but cf. Rickly-Boyd 2012).

However, following Gumbrecht's (2012, 2004) notion of differentiating between meaning and presence cultures, we do live in a culture where meaning is central and we cannot suspend or bracket meaning totally or for very long. As such, semiotic and hermeneutic sensemaking always creep back in sooner or later and are therefore constitutive for the overall relevance of brands to consumers and stakeholders (Hatch and Rubin 2006). Through, *interpretation and sensemaking* consumers and other stakeholders integrate the aesthetic experiences into a wider narrative and discourse vis-à-vis themselves and the brand in question (and also the wider cultural and social context, see Brown et al. 2003; Holt 2004, 2002).

From a (corporate) heritage brand point of view, of course, the notion of sensemaking links it back to the question of historicity and the translation of the past into heritage by multi-modal means as well. As such, the dimension of *semiotics/hermeneutics* (short: meaning) closes the loop through the final transformation of *contextualisation*, which is *situating* the aesthetic and meaningful experiences of a (corporate) heritage brand, predicated on their material and spatial manifestations and auratic and atmospheric (co-)presence, vis-à-vis a changing cultural and social context (which is by definition also temporal and historic).

Three case vignettes illustrate the logic of the model in more practical terms (see case vignette 1, 2 and 3).

CASE VIGNETTE 1

CASE VIGNETTE 2

CASE VIGNETTE 3

DISCUSSION

Drawing on the above and the emerging debate within (corporate) heritage scholarship the concept of *(corporate) brand heritage design* can be defined as referring to all manifestations of omni-temporality predicated on purposive instrumental creativity which transforms the temporal – phenomenologically ephemeral or abstract – into the material and spatial – phenomenologically perennial or concrete – and by doing so establishes the omni-presence of an entity (organisation/brand) in context and *vis-à-vis* internal and external stakeholders *in situ*.

The main purpose of (corporate) brand heritage design then is to actualise an aesthetic dimension in addition to and in conjunction with the semantic and narrative manifestations of omni-temporality making the heritage of an organisation and/or product (service) brand phenomenologically accessible through affective (visceral and embodied) experiences together with or (sometimes) as a substitute or prerequisite for hermeneutic (interpretive) understanding and psychological (cognitive) processing. A similar process can be observed in luxury branding where the mundane and quotidian is transformed into the rare and exclusive through the purposive utilisation of semiotics, semantics and aesthetics. As such, (corporate) heritage brands are imbued with an “*aura of heritage*” that – in instrumental terms – requires translation into/activation as an “*atmosphere of heritage*” for consumers and/or other stakeholders to experience the “*heritageness*” of a brand/organisation. The “atmosphere of heritage” manifests through a consumer’s (other stakeholder’s) interaction and engagement with cultural artifacts in material and spatial form. Material and spatial objects play a vital role in the translation and constitution of cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986, 1988) while brands are cultural appropriators of meaning as well (Holt, 2004, 2002). In contrast to McCracken’s model and

Holt's reasoning the relationship that is suggested in this paper is a dialogical (bi-directional) one, in which material, spatial (and digital) artifacts and their positioning within a context and *in situ* of consumer and stakeholder encounters with them "mediate" between broader societal discourses, organisational/brand-based narratives, and individual-collective practices and experiences of (corporate) brand heritage. Albeit direct (unmediated) contact with designed objects and spaces through presence (co-presence) seems to be the primary (authentic?) form of such interactions the paper indicates that an "atmosphere of heritage" can also be activated in digitally mediated form (likewise acquiring auratic qualities through presence albeit in a virtual/digital space). As such, (corporate) heritage brands are constituted through design in a multi-modal and multi-sensory form. The question arises as to what the specific multi-modal and multi-sensory forms are that articulate and manifest the heritage dimension of (corporate) heritage brands? This should be the core question of a future research programme inquiring the role and impact of (corporate) brand heritage design as articulated in this conceptual article. As such, the final section suggests briefly a number of possible future avenues for such a programme of scholarly inquiry.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The conceptual framework seeks to enrich our conceptual debate in our field and shall inspire future work by drawing on base theories and subject areas from outside (corporate) brand heritage scholarship, marketing and business and management per se. It contributes to the emergent debate *vis-à-vis* the multi-modal and multi-sensory nature and implementation of (corporate) heritage brands/identities as well as issues such as stakeholder authenticity and relevance. Derived from the theoretical and conceptual reasoning the paper has outlined possible research themes for a future joint research programme on (corporate) heritage brand design and the link between omni-temporality and omni-presence of (corporate) heritage brands emerge. The following non-exhaustive research themes come to mind:

- (Corporate) heritage brand design as a sensory stimulus with perceptual effects and behavioural outcomes (*psychological-behavioural perspective*): Research on multi-sensory perception in psychology and neuroscience; also the synesthetic perception of time (and omni-temporality) by multiple senses; **the psychology of (corporate) brand heritage design.**
- (Corporate) heritage brand design as applied activity/process/knowledge (*pragmatic-functional perspective*): Ethnographic and action research into design practice and tacit/performative/habitual knowledge of designers (and other practitioners) that create aesthetic experiences through material, spatial and digital artifacts; **the praxis of (corporate) heritage brand design.**
- (Corporate) heritage brand design as socio-cultural phenomenon (*humanistic-anthropological perspective*): Sensory anthropology/phenomenological research and historical research on aesthetic sentiments and mentalities and how they change (and affect the heritageness of brands); **the culture of (corporate) heritage brand design.**
- (Corporate) heritage brand design as a socio-economic phenomenon (*political-sociological perspective*): Critical discourse/social semiotic research; historical research on the (problematic) reinterpretation of the past and aesthetic manifestations that mask past and present inequities and inequalities, for example; **the politics of (corporate) heritage brand design.**

Based on these research themes possible broad research questions arise, inter alia:

- How do we effect customers' (and other stakeholders') aesthetic experiences of a brand's "heritageness" through (corporate) brand heritage design?
- How does (corporate) brand heritage design translate into perceptual, interpretive and behavioural outcomes of a brand's experienced "heritageness"?
- How is the aesthetic experience of a brand's "heritageness" through (corporate) brand heritage design related to but also differentiated from other aspects of a brand's presence vis-à-vis consumers and other stakeholders?

- How are aspects of (corporate) brand heritage design and its effectiveness linked to wider socio-cultural discourses, conditions and developments (vis-à-vis heritage and per se)?
- How precisely and by what mechanisms does the temporal manifest by multiple sensory means (e.g. colour, texture, taste etc.)?
- How can we understand, measure and manage the auratic and atmospheric presence of a brand beyond only accounting for its effects on consumers in terms of behaviour and attitudes?
- How can we tap into and make explicit the tacit knowledge of designers and other aesthetic agents in terms of scholarly and applied concerns?
- What kind of multi-modal representations and interpretations best constitute omni-temporality in instrumental terms and how and what kind of multi-sensory experiences do they affect?

These suggested research themes and research questions are only indicative and tentative; they require further deliberation and debate (which this article invites, of course). They are not yet tightly defined research questions nor hypotheses but broad questions and directions of possible directions for inquiry and theorising vis-à-vis (corporate) heritage brand design.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have outlined the importance and relevance of (corporate) heritage brand design predicated on translating the definitive yet rather abstract and elusive quality of omni-temporality into something that enables or more direct access (in terms of experience and understanding) to this key trait of (corporate) heritage brands. Conceptually the generic notion of presence (and co-presence) was introduced to capture this something that has been missing from our conceptual debate so far. I suggested that the question of aesthetics constitutes a fundamental dimension that mediates between objective, spatial and digital manifestations of (corporate) heritage (and the quality of the omni-temporal) and their interpretation as symbolic and cultural meanings that consumers and other stakeholders derive from and ascribe to it. Three interrelated concepts were suggested to capture the aesthetic dimension of (corporate)

heritage brands: brand aura (aura of heritage), brand presence (omni-presence as the presence of the quality of the omni-temporal) and brand atmosphere (heritage atmosphere). Based on this understanding a circular model was introduced that integrates the aesthetic with other dimensions of (corporate) heritage brand design (i.e. time, object/space, experience, and meaning) through various bi-directional transitions between the different dimensions (i.e. concretisation, actualisation, interpretation, and contextualisation). These ongoing transitions are fundamental for the successful translation of the omni-temporal into the omni-present which to me is the fundamental task of (corporate) heritage brands design as a purposive instrumental creative act of bringing about the “heritageness” of a (corporate) heritage brand. It is this “heritageness” that we immediately sense, feel and experience as unique, “otherworldly” and special whether we shop at Fortnum & Mason, visit Maison Ladurée or buy a piece of Royal Copenhagen for ourselves or loved ones.

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FIGURES

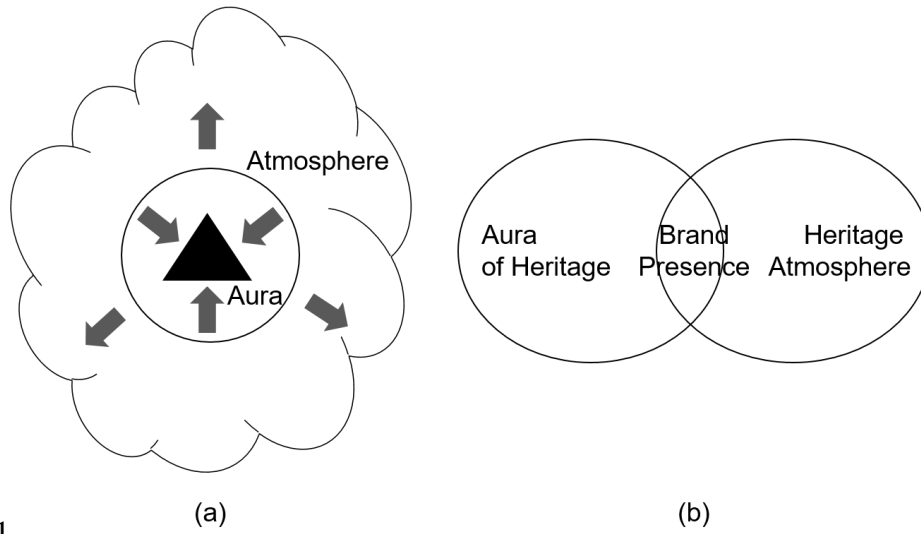


FIGURE 1

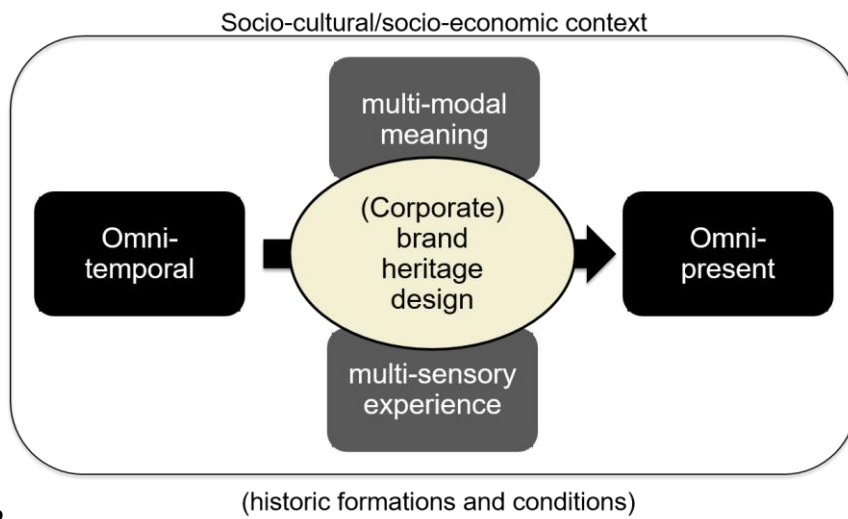


FIGURE 2

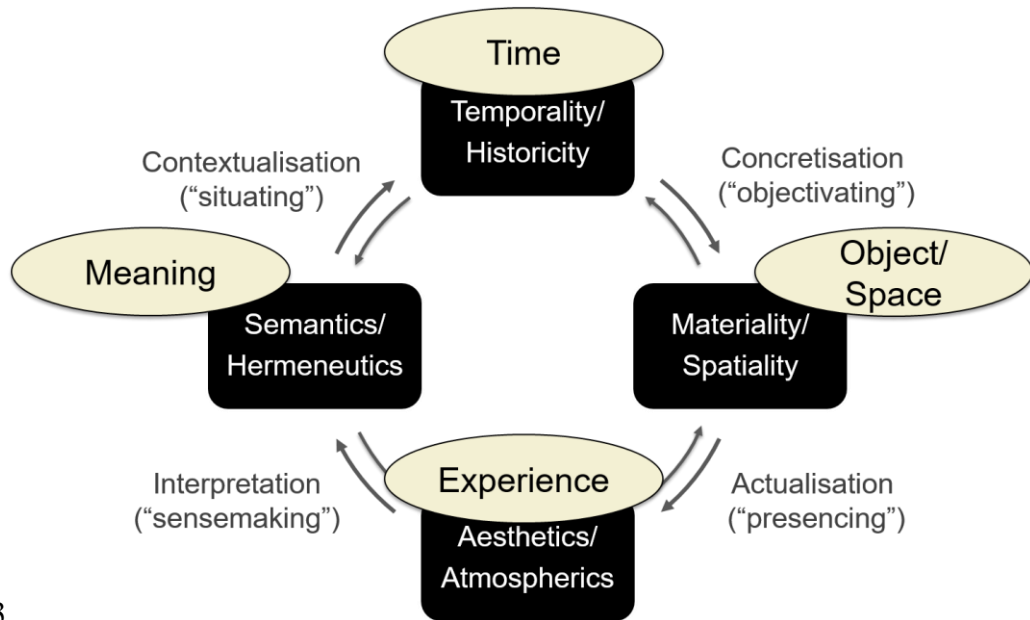


FIGURE 3

CASE VIGNETTES

MAISON LADURÉE was originally a small Parisian patisserie, café and tea room founded in 1862 that is usually credited with “inventing” the Parisian macaron. Since the then flagging shop was bought by the Holder Group in 1993, a billion dollar revenue industrial bakery conglomerate and family business, it has been transformed into a globally successful luxury/high-end heritage brand representing French Savoir Vivre. The brand has successfully appropriated, reinterpreted and valorised the past of the small original store (and its legacy as the “inventor” of the Parisian macaron) by innovating (e.g. new and creative flavours and colours of the macarons) and “taking the macaron global” while stylistically alluding to the Second Empire and Belle Epoque in Paris. While the pastries and macarons are mass-produced and sold in 85 stores in 30 different countries (an estimated 20,000 macarons per day), the brand has created and maintained a specific aura and atmosphere revolving around its signature product the macaron, part of its brand heritage and as a cultural culinary heritage of France, and the interior design of its stores (and packaging, graphic design etc.). It has also successfully expanded the product range (e.g. chocolates, candles, cosmetics) and engaged in co-branding activities (most recently the Louvre for its Da Vinci exhibition) reinforcing this status as a Parisian and French premier heritage brand. Its flagship store on Champs-Élysées in Paris has become a tourist destination for tourists seeking out the “home” of the macaron and an “authentic” Parisian patisserie experience (which neither the flagship store nor the products actually are in any material sense).

Using the logic of the conceptual model one could argue that Ladurée has become omni-temporal in that it conflates past, present and future into a new temporal existence that is not purely retrospective (and nostalgic about the Belle Epoque, for instance) nor solely future oriented (innovation without foundation) in orientation but transcends both in the present (Ladurée stands for Savoir Vivre, yesterday, today and tomorrow). This dimensions of time (temporality/historicity) is successfully and strategically objectivated and made concrete (concretisation) through its product, packaging, graphic and interior design. Only through this intentional and creative translation of the brand’s temporal status as an omni-temporal heritage brand are customers and visitors able to aesthetically experience the brand Ladurée as something unique which is readily accepted by them as an “authentic” experience (despite being nothing of that sort in a strict material sense). Albeit the narrative and symbolic meaning of the brand and its heritage story is important (and a great example of transforming an appropriated past through reinterpretation into brand heritage), the aesthetic multi-modal and multi-sensory experience is paramount for Ladurée’s appeal with customers and visitors alike. Its stores and products are imbued with an aura of heritage that enables a heritage atmosphere to emerge from the presence and co-presence of the brand and its customers. Finally, the brand is actively linked back to the wider socio-cultural and historic context of Parisian and French history and cultural heritage as much as contemporary culture (i.e. contextualisation).

CASE VIGNETTE 1: MAISON LADURÉE (FRANCE)

ROYAL COPENHAGEN was founded as the Royal Porcelain Factory in 1775 first producing tableware for Danish royalty and aristocracy and was also owned by the Danish crown until 1868. It is famous for its unique patterns and decors such as Blue Fluted and Flora Danica. It is today owned by the Finnish consumer goods group Fiskars, itself a corporate heritage brand (founded in 1649). Fiskars owns a portfolio of heritage brands in the home décor and tableware segments (e.g. Wedgwood, Waterford, and Roerstrand). The logo of Royal Copenhagen features three blue waves which are representative of Denmark's three main sea waterways surrounding the country and a crown due to its royal associations. The products are still hand painted but most items are now produced in Thailand (and only the most expensive series still being produced in Denmark). Royal Copenhagen is very popular in Denmark (and Norway) but has also a growing presence globally (especially Japan, South Korea and Taiwan). Royal Copenhagen items are often bought as gifts or collectables to mark festive and special occasions. The brand has a special place in the Danish Christmas season with dedicated annually themed plates (since 1908) and an annual Christmas table exhibition (since 1963) at its flagship store in Copenhagen curated by different Danish artists and designers. They also stage regular hand painting workshops and other events at their flagship store which is the brand's prime location since 1911. The flagship store in the three storey Renaissance building from 1616 is part shop and part museum exhibiting current past porcelain items. As such, it is also being marked and promoted as a Copenhagen tourist destination. The museum/store combination creates an auratic presence with porcelain items being shown as pieces of art (and not simply as products) which is supported by textures, patterns, colours, lighting and materials (e.g. its signature blue) for the store's interior design. The presentation alludes to the heritage of Royal Copenhagen without feeling old-fashioned or merely nostalgic but always conveying a contemporary twist (because of the modern designs interspersed with classic ones). Apart from the spatial atmosphere within the store the brand has recently also run a number of digital campaigns via micro-sites and social media (e.g. "lace anniversary" in 2018) that clearly aimed to convey the heritage of Royal Copenhagen combining narrative, visual, and auditory elements recreating an aesthetic presence in a virtual/digital space. Yet, it is the skilful combination of digital and non-digital campaign elements (e.g. store, outdoors, events) that creates the specific heritageness of Royal Copenhagen.

In terms of the model the focus on heritage and the fusion of past, present and future is always present in the way Royal Copenhagen communicates its brand. This notion of temporal transcendence is achieved by reinterpreting classic patterns and designs into modern porcelain items as well as an 'on brand' interior design of its store, packaging and digital communication campaigns. Especially its digital campaigns are a good example of how a heritage atmosphere and the heritageness of the brand can be created not only in a physical space or through material objects but also in the digital/virtual domain (through multi-modal elements). Of course, a consistent narrative supports the heritage story conveying semantic and symbolic meaning that helps to integrate the brand into the wider socio-cultural context and history of Danish culture and design.

CASE VIGNETTE 2: ROYAL COPENHAGEN (DENMARK)

FORTNUM & MASON is an up-market and iconic London department store and delicatessens purveyor founded in 1707 by a former domestic servant of the royal household starting his business as a reseller of used wax candles (from the royal palace) and his landlord. Fortnum & Mason with its illustrious and long history are famed for being the inventors of the Scotch Egg (1738), providing food and provisions for the royal household as well as famous explorers and writers (one Charles Dickens amongst them), but also for introducing tinned Heinz baked beans to the UK (in 1886) or its rooftop bee hives (2008). Today, Fortnum & Mason is a true heritage brand that combines tradition and history with contemporary appeal and service in a unique way and is owned by a private investment firm. Its home on Piccadilly in London is not simply a store but an aesthetic experience in its own right; equally popular with Londoners and tourists. Its food and delicatessens are not only of high quality but also sold in nicely designed packaging conveying the heritage of Fortnum & Mason through colour, texture and graphic design elements. Its service is old-worldly but never old-fashioned. Fortnum & Mason is also popular for its afternoon tea and restaurant services and has an on-site barber shop for the discerning gentlemen of today. It is famous for its Christmas and picnic hampers shipped to destinations all over the world every year. What makes Fortnum & Mason special and unique is the combination of different aesthetic pleasures that convey a timeless sense of tradition with an innovative twist. It is the atmosphere of the store, the design of its packaging, the impeccable knowledge and decorum of its service staff, and the quality of its food baskets that all contribute to the auratic presence of Fortnum & Mason as quintessentially British in an almost mythical way. Yet, Fortnum & Mason is going forward in that they have always been adding new features and services that seem to be of long-standing but are relatively recent additions (rooftop bee hives, Jubilee tea room, Champagne bars and restaurants at new locations). Fortnum & Mason seems to stay the same but constantly changes. Thus, it is a typical heritage brand (in a Weberian and colloquial sense).

Fortnum & Mason nicely illustrates the integrated nature of the suggested model, addressing all dimensions (with reference to time, object/space, experience, and meaning) at once which bring about the “heritageness” of the brand and contribute to its auratic presence and atmosphere. It is the latter that makes it so popular and special, not the quality of products or services alone. The overall aesthetic experience of its timelessness as a heritage brand makes one feel as if you step into a different world upon entering the store without feeling out of place or out of time really. It is this artful articulation of heritage through these aesthetic experiences interwoven with a mythical and historical narrative that connects the brand to British history and culture in multiple ways. It is mythical because it reinterprets that past not as history but as valorised heritage of a past that never precisely was in the way it unfolds in the present.

CASE VIGNETTE 3: FORTNUM & MASON (UNITED KINGDOM)