Operationalising brand heritage and cultural heritage

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Abstract

Purpose – Brand heritage is acknowledged as one of the future priorities in branding research. Adopting it in an international context is challenging. In order to maximize its use it is necessary to know how strong it and the target country's cultural heritage are. Accordingly, the aim of the study is to construct a pioneering operationalisation of both brand and cultural heritage.

Design/methodology/approach – The study begins with a discussion on the focal concepts. Definitions are proposed and suggestions for operationalisation put forward. Thereafter, the concepts are applied in an analysis of brand heritage in different countries.

Findings – It is suggested that brand heritage is a mixture of the history as well as the consistency and continuity of core values, product brands, and visual symbols. A country's cultural heritage could be conceived of as homogeneity and endurance.

Research limitations/implications – The preliminary operationalisation of the concept needs to be further tested. Nevertheless, the clarification and suggestions offered here should open up opportunities for further research.

Practical implications – The exploitation of brand heritage in international markets is likely to be further accentuated. The operationalisations generated are easy for practitioners to apply, enabling companies to better evaluate what brand heritage means for them and to effectively plan its use in an international setting.

Originality/value – To the authors' knowledge, this study is the first to suggest operationalisations of brand heritage and cultural heritage.

Keywords- Brand heritage, Cultural heritage, International branding, Brands, Heritage

Papertype - Research paper

Introduction

As businesses currently face the challenge of keeping up with rapid change in areas such as technology, the brand has become one of the few resources to provide long-term competitive advantage (Lindemann, 2003). One way of dealing with the environmental turbulence is to accentuate historical elements and thereby convey stability and confidence. It has become trendy for consumers to seek consolation in the past, and brands with an image including elements such as authenticity, heritage and stability are gaining in popularity (Brown *et al.*, 2003; Loveland *et al.*, 2010). It has also been argued that symbolic and emotional attachment between a brand and a consumer is more probable with brands that connect heritage and authenticity to their image (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2006).

Coincident with its current attraction to marketers, heritage is acknowledged as a key organisational resource imparting long-lasting strategic value: companies are unique in terms of their heritage, and the heritage can provide the basis for

superior performance (Balmer, 2009; Balmer and Gray, 2003). Unlocking the potential hidden value of a brand's heritage may be one way of harnessing the past and the present in order to safeguard the future (Urde *et al.*, 2007). Managers today face the challenge of marketing a brand's heritage in a way that brings out its historical reliability but does not make it appear out-dated. Indeed, it is argued that

this will be the key to building successful brands in the future: due to the abundance of choice, today's marketing environment demands strong brand identities and decries imitation (Aaker, 1996; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2006).

Coincident with the extensive research interest in brands in general is a growing fascination with nostalgia and retro brands (cf. Boutlis, 2000; Brown, 2001; Brown *et al.*, 2003; Kessous and Roux, 2008; Loveland *et al.*, 2010). However, research from the conceptual perspective of brand heritage is still scarce (e.g. Liebrenz-Himes *et al.*, 2007). The studies conducted by Urde *et al.* (2007) and Greyser *et al.* (2006) are among the few thus far focusing specifically on this, whereas others only mention it in passing, and the concept still lacks operationalisation.

Despite, or perhaps because of globalisation, there is an increasing need for research on cultural differences between nations in the business context (Leung *et al.*, 2005). There have been many attempts to measure national cultures. Most cultural mappings (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Schwartz, 1994) emphasise differences in value priorities between individuals in a given national group in comparison with individuals in

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other national groups. They do not take into account how deeply rooted – or strongly inherited – these values are within a nation, however. Studies on national cultural heritage are scarce. The few that exist tend to consider heritage a cultural resource (i.e. cultural capital) and thus evaluate its benefits to a country/region (e.g. Bostedt and Lundgren, 2010), or they analyse it as a determinant of organisational behaviour (e.g. Fargher *et al.*, 2008).

However, national cultural heritage is rarely discussed in the academic literature on marketing, except for brief references to the cultural heritage in the country of origin (e.g. Tellström *et al.*, 2006), and is largely neglected as far as the target country is concerned. This is surprising given the large amount of literature on adaptation vs. standardisation of the different elements of marketing in target markets (Ryans *et al.*, 2003): one would assume that knowledge about cultural heritage would be a prerequisite. Like brand heritage, cultural heritage lacks operationalisation. Discussion of the two concepts that is restricted to definitions is pointless, however, without an understanding of their practical application. Moreover, combining these concepts in one study will enhance knowledge of brand management across cultures.

As a pioneer in this respect, Banerjee (2008) considered the cultural heritage of the target country in relation to branding. His conceptual framework for matching brand heritage and cultural heritage, although seemingly a valuable tool for enhancing understanding of brand heritage in international markets, has not, to our knowledge, been applied empirically. Its application is complicated, however, because of the lack of measurements for the two concepts. This constitutes the research gap for this study, the aim of which is to construct a preliminary operationalisation of brand heritage and cultural heritage.

Thus, the constructed operationalisations will constitute the main contribution of the study, and will be a major step forward in terms of theory development. Moreover, it will be of use to researchers focusing on international branding, allowing more systematic comparison of the strength of brand heritage in different brands and of the strength of the national cultural heritage in different countries.

The article proceeds as follows. First we define and discuss the concepts of brand heritage and cultural heritage, and suggest how they might best be operationalised. We then briefly evaluate the usability of the suggested measures in line with Banerjee's (2008) framework. Empirical cases are used to illustrate the theoretical discussion and to support the operationalisation. Finally, we suggest theoretical implications in the form of propositions, which lead us to the practical implications.

Brand heritage

Defining a brand and brand associations
A brand is often defined as a set of functional attributes and symbolic values, branding being the process of associating the attributes with the product in order to add value to it (e.g. Simões and Dibb, 2001; Knox and Bickerton, 2003). According to Kapferer (2004), a brand's success is based on its saliency, differentiability and intensity, and on the trust attached to the associations. In addition to these, Davis (2010) emphasises the role and accumulation of experiences in brand recognition. Brand preference ultimately depends on

what the brand means to the customer and on the strength of its emotional effect, in other words on its place in the heart (e.g. Ballantyne *et al.*, 2006). Brands are intangible assets (Kapferer, 2004), and have traditionally been associated with physical goods, but the notion of branding has been extended to companies as well. A company brand is defined primarily in terms of organisational associations.

Brand intangibles cover a wide range of associations and represent a significant element and future priority in branding research. Brand heritage is one of the associations that marketers can use to differentiate their brands from those of their competitors, ultimately helping them to create a unique image for the offering (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). In turbulent times consumers become less confident in the future, wishing to protect themselves from the harsh, unpredictable realities of the outside world and seeking reassurance from the products they buy. This increases interest in brands with a heritage: skilfully exploited they can evoke past events (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Going back to one's roots and seeking comfort in the past in order to be ready for the future appears to be a growing trend. Brands representing stability, familiarity and trust can speak to people in periods of uncertainty, helping to create an image of authenticity and integrity that is likely to appeal to today's consumers. According to Ballantyne *et al.* (2006), in difficult times brand heritage offers a basis for stabilisation and growth. Indeed, Aaker (2004) recommends "going back to the roots" particularly for companies that are struggling. When external circumstances call for corporate change, however, overly strict adherence to the brand heritage can turn into inertia (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009).

A related concept that seems to be gaining popularity in these economically challenging times is "retro". Whereas brand heritage is deeply rooted in the company's or product's history, and cannot be copied, "retro" is a marketing and advertising tactic that any company can apply: reviving old products or brand slogans, incorporating images of days gone by, rehashing and re-contextualising old ads and old cultural representations, and evoking any kind of nostalgia associated with the past. It is even used when a company wants to position a new brand based on consumers' pre-existing emotional touch points (Sullivan, 2009; Brown *et al.*, 2003; Boutlis, 2000).

Dimensions of brand heritage
What is meant by brand heritage and heritage brands? Defining them is not straightforward. It should also be said that a company or product with a heritage is not necessarily a heritage brand. Having a heritage does not in itself create value but it may constitute the foundation of brand building (Urde *et al.*, 2007). The word heritage is generally associated with inheritance: something transferred from one generation to another. As a concept, therefore, it works as a carrier of historical values from the past (Nuryanti, 1996).

Accordingly, Banerjee (2008, p. 314) describes its history, image, expectancy and equity as the four pillars of a brand's heritage. History represents its rich eventful past, and the image "an after effect of the brand communication and positioning based on the benefits to be enjoyed by the consumers". Brand expectancy refers to the physical and emotional benefits that consumers receive from the brand. Finally, equity comprises two subsets: a homogeneous and a heterogeneous set of competences that, respectively, facilitate

progression and give the edge over the competition. With the exception of its history, the elements of brand heritage in Banerjee's (2008) description are difficult to measure.

Meanwhile, according to Urde *et al.* (2007), a heritage brand is recognisable from the following characteristics: a track record, longevity, core values, history, and the use of symbols. A track record means demonstrated proof that the company has lived up to its values and promises over time, whereas longevity reflects consistent performance among other heritage elements. Core values are an integral part of a brand's identity, and over time may constitute its heritage. History is another significant element of identity, and for the heritage brands at issue embraces three timeframes: the past, the present and the future. As Urde *et al.* (2007, p. 7) put it:

> Heritage brands are about history and history in the making.

History can make a brand relevant to the present and, prospectively, the future.

One way of creating a brand history is to link the brand to a sense of cultural continuity and communal tradition by means of its ubiquitous presence, of which Coca Cola is a good example: the Coke name and logo are discernible virtually everywhere, and the vast majority of people alive today can recognise it (Beasley and Danesi, 2002). However, according to some authors (e.g. Winkler, 1999), a long history is not a prerequisite in that some brands develop a strong heritage over a short period of time. This applies to many products of the e-era, such as eBay and Google, as the digital age has shortened time spans. Finally, symbols and other visual elements are used to identify the brand and express its meaning and values (Urde *et al.*, 2007). In our opinion, of Urde *et al.*'s (2007) brand-heritage elements, track record overlaps with history and core values, and consequently their definition is not applicable as such. In addition, we prefer the terms consistency and continuity to longevity because they better capture the idea of the same overall look and feel in the positioning strategy and underlying theme over time (see Percy and Elliott, 2009).

As shown above, definitions vary and, in many respects, overlap, but none of them explain how to measure brand heritage per se. As mentioned, the research in this paper is on the operationalisation of both brand and cultural heritage. Consequently, brand heritage is seen here as a composite of the history as well as the consistency and continuity of a company's core values, product brands and use of symbols (see Figure 1, which shows the "visible" and "invisible" from a consumer's perspective), and a potential measurement

Figure 1 Elements of brand heritage
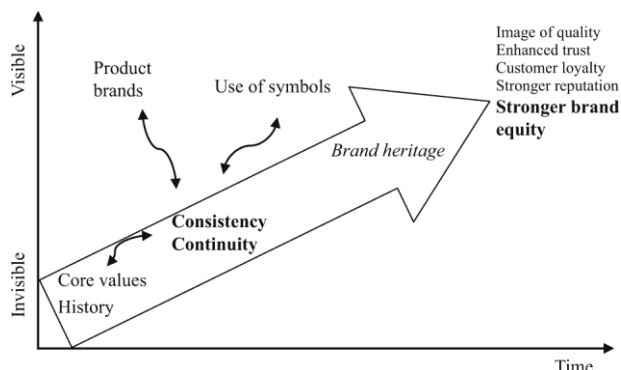
mechanism is proposed. The elements, in turn, produce an image of quality, enhanced trust, customer loyalty and a strong reputation – eventually leading to stronger brand equity. These components are discussed in the following.

Regardless of the contradictory notions (e.g. Davis, 2010), we consider history to be a prerequisite of brand heritage. For one thing, all companies have one. History – and here we mean a time span of some decades or more – can represent a depth of experience and a sense of permanence, and as such may be an important element in image creation (Fill, 2009) as well as in maintaining brand loyalty (Dahlen *et al.*, 2010). It also matters in terms of identity: employees know who and what they are as well as where they come from and where they are heading (Davis, 2010; Urde *et al.*, 2007). Respecting and highlighting the history of a company or a product should not be associated with being old-fashioned: it is possible to develop a modern brand without throwing away the history that made it what it is, in other words something that customers can trust (Dinnie, 2009; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2006).

Its history can include the "story" of the company or brand, and stories make the past relevant to contemporary life (cf. Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009). A good story can engage audiences, build long-term relationships and support organisational claims. At best, the essence of the brand resonates with the memories and emotional connections of the audience (Dahlen *et al.*, 2010; Flory and Iglesias, 2010), thereby making the story of the company a success story that retains its attractiveness over the years.

Secondly, consistency and continuity in a company's operations and in its marketing communications enhance its brand heritage. For one thing, they concern the company's core values, and in this context help in defining the corporate strategy, and thus become part of the brand heritage (Urde *et al.*, 2007). Brown *et al.* (2003), referring to core values, mention the brand essence or the "aura": the core values are the consistent and essential guiding principles for which the brand stands. Moreover, they do not change with current trends, or even with changing conditions in the market, and they are not to be confused with financial or short-term aims (Collins and Porras, 1996). As Urde (2003) states, they should be part of a realistic future identity. The support of the whole organisation is needed in linking core values and the brand tightly together in a way that is hard to copy.

In the context of marketing communications, consistency implies a "one voice" approach, integrating the company's strategy and creative actions over the long term. Adding to this certain timelessness is an element of responsibility, which means respecting what has been done before, yet allowing change and improvement. Every new generation brings something new to the brand, but without the previous knowledge and tradition the branding would have to start all over again (Urde *et al.*, 2007; also Percy and Elliott, 2009).

Given the visibility of a company's brand heritage in its products, it is important to take the individual product brands into account. Besides, brands with a heritage are often the oldest ones in their respective product categories (cf. Aaker, 1996). Questions such as "how has the product line changed?" and "what were the focal product brands of the company at the time of its foundation, and what are they now?" need to be asked in order to assess the consistency and continuity of the product range.

Brands with a heritage can speak to consumers through various ways: symbols, graphics, nostalgia, packaging and

advertising (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2006). Symbols act as a means of expressing the core values, indicating what the brand stands for (Urde *et al.*, 2007). Visual symbols have more potential than words because a symbol is more ambiguous, imbued with meanings and rich in information, and at best can create an emotional bond with consumers. (Vestergaard and Schrøder, 1985; Borja de Mozota, 2003) The little Hariboy and the Gold Bear of Haribo Candy, not to mention the contoured Coca Cola bottle, are symbols that reflect and express the organisation's meaning and heritage (Urde *et al.*, 2007; Kessous and Roux, 2008). A consistent symbol can bring coherence and structure to the identity of a brand by associating it with the past, which makes it easy for consumers to recall and recognise it and to differentiate it from competing brands (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000).

Symbols that reflect heritage can be anything that represents the brand, including logos, shapes, colours and patterns (Urde *et al.*, 2007). They also appear in the form of taglines, such as "Snap, Crackle, Pop, Rice Krispies!" (Kellogg's, 2010), or as metaphors, gestures, musical notes, packages and even events or programmes (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Constructing a logo is not only finding a name that creates familiarity for the brand. Successful brands develop a visual identity and a marketing-communication process that persist and are distinctive (Borja de Mozota, 2003). A colour, for example, can become so consistently linked with a specific brand and its heritage that it acquires a secondary meaning; accordingly, companies are increasingly registering colours as trademarks (Hoek and Gendall, 2010).

Operationalising brand heritage

Operationalisation is complicated because product and company brand heritage tend to be intertwined. This is even more accentuated in companies/products with a long history. In practice a company contemplating internationalisation needs to consider its brand architecture (Kapferer, 2004). With regard to fast-moving consumer goods the main emphasis is on the product. Figure 2 depicts the proposed operationalisation. As indicated, in referring to the intangible and tangible past of a company and its products, brand heritage is not only in the past but is also a representation of it.

The cultural heritage of the target country

Even though the brand heritage is considered valuable, its significance may vary according to where the brand is

Figure 2 The proposed operationalisation of brand heritage
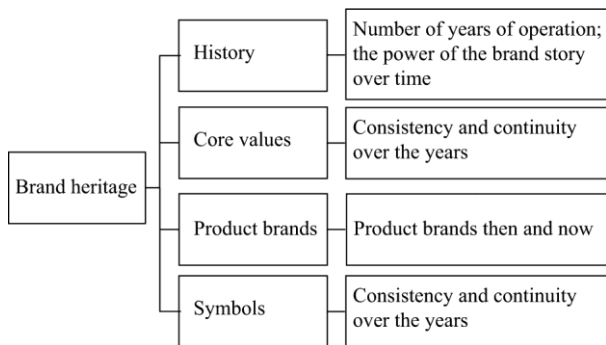
marketed: it may have a heritage in a global as well as a local sense, but the two may differ considerably (Van Gelder, 2003). Internationalising companies should therefore consider the extent to which they are able to – or should – utilise the local heritage. As Banerjee (2008) advises, the brand's heritage should be set in the context of the cultural heritage of the target country, and potential gaps in strength between them weighed up before the target country is approached.

The cultural heritage of the target country is relevant in that – in spite or perhaps because of globalisation – it has an enduring impact on the values of the individuals living in it (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). However, it is a complex phenomenon and assessing its strength is not straightforward. Culture could be defined as a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another (Hofstede, 2001). Societies develop their own distinctive cultures over time. The country is often used as the unit of analysis, and there have been various attempts to classify national cultures based on value differences (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars, 1993). However, to our knowledge, there are no country classifications based on differences in cultural heritage.

In line with the definition of brand heritage suggested above we thus define the cultural heritage of a country as a composite of the history and the coherence and continuity of the nation's distinguishable characteristics. Given that it is a social construction, the understanding of cultural heritage depends on the evaluator's own historical and spatial context (cf. Arantes, 2007), and in order to be able to compare countries we would need clear, more objective measurement criteria. Moreover, if they are to be of use to companies they should allow fast comparison based on the secondary information available from each country.

According to Banerjee (2008), measurement of the cultural heritage of a country should be based on homogeneity (in fact, he refers to the degree of diversity), endurance, tolerance and impediment, but he does not explain how to do it. In particular, impediment and tolerance would be hard or even impossible to measure in practice. We therefore suggest that two dimensions – homogeneity and endurance – would be sufficient for evaluating and comparing the cultural heritage in different countries.

Measures of homogeneity could be based on the dominance of a single language, ethnic background and religion within a country. For instance, the higher the proportion of speakers of the dominant language, the more homogeneous the country would seem to be (Diener and Diener, 2009; Tonta, 2009). After testing the criteria on various countries, however, we decided to leave ethnic background aside because it correlated so strongly with language and religion that excluding it made no difference in the final assessment. Furthermore, it is rather easy to find information on the dominant language and religion, whereas ethnic diversity is not always documented.

Endurance is more difficult. Should we measure the period of independence or the years the country has been populated? Both are problematic: the former focuses more on political history and the latter is vague and does not differentiate countries from each other. We therefore propose that representations of cultural heritage and its conservation could be utilised in measuring the endurance of particular cultures. The UNESCO World Heritage Lists provide comparable data on cultural heritage sites (e.g. monuments

and groups of buildings), as well as on intangible aspects of heritage (e.g. traditions inherited from ancestors, rituals and festive events) covering 186 of the 192 Member States of the United Nations. UNESCO describes heritage as the legacy from the past, what people live with today, and what they passon to future generations (UNESCO, 2010).

Even though the UNESCO World Heritage List affords fast access to comparable data, and is provided by an international neutral player, it has certain shortcomings. For example, it has been accused of promoting a European viewpoint on cultural heritage, ignoring minority groups, and applying strict nomination criteria with which less developed countries may find it impossible to comply (Labadi, 2007; Rao, 2010). However, the fact that the list seems to be the only available comparable data source on the cultural heritage of different countries justified its utilisation as a proxy for endurance. Thus the number of nominations of any particular country on the list could be considered an indicator of endurance. In sum, Figure 3 depicts the suggested operationalisation of the cultural heritage of a country.

Utilising brand heritage in different cultures

Utilising brand heritage is more complicated when a firm operates in different cultures. Banerjee (2008) proposes four different strategies from which a firm considering its use in an international setting can choose. Together they comprise a matrix, illustrated in Figure 4. The selection of strategies depends on whether the heritage of the brand is weak or strong, and on whether the cultural heritage of the target market is weak or strong.

Of the brand strategies suggested, matching seems to be the most challenging in that it may need to be tailor-made for each country. Assimilation requires country-based adaptation as well, but it tends to be easier because the brand's particular Figure 3 The
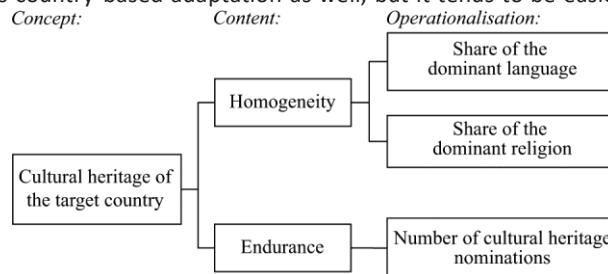
operationalisation of cultural heritage

Figure 4 Brand strategies for different cultural heritage sheritage is not so deep-rooted. Both convincing and initiating emphasise communication with consumers, and thus do not seem to differ from the strategies adopted in the home market (cf. Banerjee, 2008).

Methodology

In order to pilot the operationalisations created in the previous sections we decided to concentrate on fast-moving consumer goods (FMCGs). It has been suggested that consumer-goods companies benefit from their heritage more than business-to-business organisations (Holt, 2004), and that more research is needed given that FMCGs rarely include brands that are associated with heritage (Alexander, 2009). Of the various industries represented in FMCGs we selected the food industry. Food is essential to the traditions of a culture, and a company can convey cultural elements of its country of origin along with its food brands (Tellström *et al.*, 2006).

Empirically we investigated the phenomenon through case research. Case studies are appropriate when there is a need to understand complex phenomena that are not easily separable from their contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1989). The comprehensiveness that this approach allows is highly relevant to this research because of the novelty of the topic and because of the temporal dimensions of heritage. The study incorporates four cases (four food-product brands), thereby allowing both rich description and systematic comparison (see Miles and Huberman, 1994). The cases were selected on the basis of the companies' international scope, long history (offering maximum insight into their heritage), access (Finnish cases) and cooperativeness (i.e. information provided and trust gained during previous research projects). The brands chosen for this study were Fazer Puikula bread and Fazer Blue milk chocolate produced the by Fazer Group, and Elovena oat flakes and Sunnuntai baking products produced by the Raisio Group. Various forms of data were gathered in order to capture the versatility of the phenomenon (Table I). The data collection took place in 2007-2010.

The first task in the within-case analysis was to organise the data according to the agreed brand-heritage criteria: history, consistency and continuity of the core values, the product brands and the visual symbols. We also analysed the international scope (international markets and brand strategies utilised). Engaging in careful conceptual contemplation, having three researchers analysing the data, and asking the informants to review the draft cases ensured the construct validity of this qualitative analysis (cf. Daymon and Holloway, 2002; Yin, 1989).

Evaluation of cultural heritage relied on homogeneity and endurance, and was based on the conceptual studies by Banerjee (2008) and Arizpe (2004). The assessment of national homogeneity relied on quantitative data obtained from public sources (see Table II in the next section). The investigation concentrated on the main target countries of the case brands, which limited the number of countries in the analysis. The operationalisation of homogeneity compared with that in previous studies (e.g. Diener and

Diener, 2009), and the shares of the dominant language and religion correlated (r 0:701) in the countries concerned, indicating internal consistency. Endurance was more difficult to operationalise. The number of nominations on the

Table I Empirical data

Type	Quantity			
	Case Elovena	Case Fazer Blue	Case Fazer Puikula	Case Sunnuntai
Face-to-face interviews	1	3	3	1
Telephone discussions	4	1	1	1
E-mails	2	6	6	2
Company's own material (annual reports, internet pages)	41	21	49	34
Books	2	1	1	2
Press articles	6	12	9	4
TV documents	1	1	1	0
Observation (Company visits)	1	2	2	1

Table II Cultural heritage in the target countries of the studied cases

Main target countries for Fazer, Elovena and Sunnuntai	Homogeneity		Endurance
	Share of the dominant language[a]	Share of the dominant religion[a]	Number of cultural heritage sites and intangibles[b,c]
Estonia	Estonian 68%	Unaffiliated 34%	
	0.68	0.34	5
0.30		*0.51*	*0.08*
Latvia	Latvian 58%	Unspecified 64%	
	0.58	0.64	4
0.34		*0.61*	*0.06*
Lithuania	Lithuanian 82%	Roman Catholic 79%	
	0.82	0.79	6
0.46		*0.81*	*0.1*
Poland	Polish 98%	Roman Catholic 90%	
	0.98	0.90	12
0.57		*0.94*	*0.20*
	Russian 95%	Orthodox 70%	
	0.95	0.7	17
0.56		*0.83*	*0.28*
Sweden	Swedish 95%	Lutheran 87%	
	0.95	0.87	13
0.56		*0.91*	*0.21*

Note: The mean of homogeneity and endurance are in italic
Sources: [a]*The World Fact Book* (2010); [b]UNESCO, 2010

UNESCO World Heritage List was used as a proxy, as   at the time of the company's foundation are still on the

explained previously. The measurements of homogeneity and endurance correlated (r 0:737) in the countries in question. The internal consistency in the measurements and scatter plots shown in Figure 5 indicate good construct validity, but given the lack of previous studies and the small number of countries in the analysis, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Data obtained from different sources were compared, and in the case of contradictory information clarified by means of additional phone calls or e-mails. Banerjee's (2008) framework was used for the cross-case analysis. The following section presents the results of the empirical study.

Applying the operationalisations in practice

The first case concerns the Fazer Group, the first industrial manufacturer of confectionery products in Finland, founded by Karl Fazer in 1891. Many of the brands that were launched market. Fazer Blue milk chocolate was launched in 1922, and has been voted among the most valuable brands in Finland for many years in sequence. Fazer's core values have remained the same since its establishment. In terms of symbols, the official logo has undergone small updates over the years but the registered colour remains the same. Fazer Blue was launched just a few years after Finland became independent, and the blue colour is thus – besides of nature – also a symbol of patriotism (cf. the Finnish flag). Continuity is expressed in the company's USP, which has been in use for decades: "It's good – it's Fazer's" (Donner, 1991, p. 19). The other Fazer example, Puikula bread, was launched in 1997 in Finland. Puikula builds its heritage on its oval shape, which is a traditional form of Finnish homemade bread, and on a fibre-rich composition.

Elovena is an 85-year-old oatmeal brand of the Finnish Raisio Group. Oatmeal was previously a bulk product, and it was Elovena that was first packaged and given a label. It

Figure 5 Scatter plots of the measurements related to homogeneity and cultural heritage
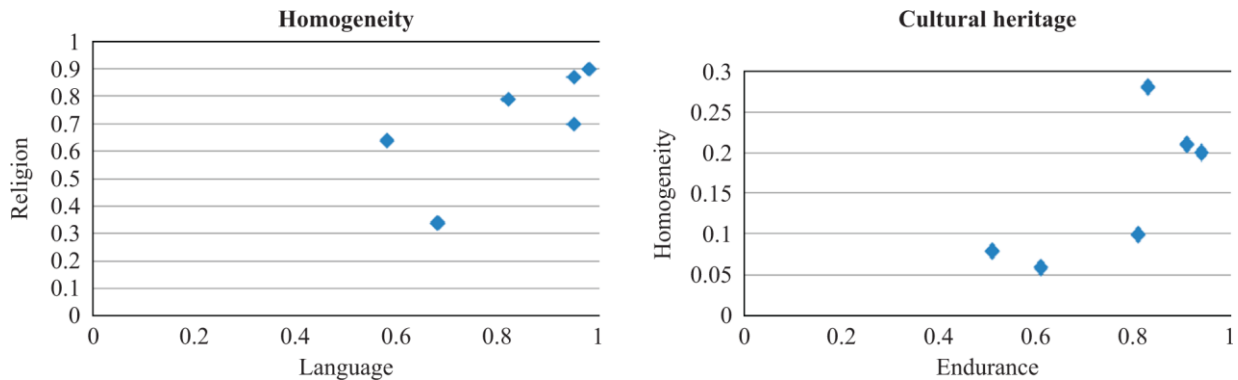
depicts a blonde girl in national dress with a sickle in her hand, standing by a cornfield, and has become a national icon. Another example from the Raisio Group is the Sunnuntai brand, which was launched as packaged flour in 1967 but soon developed into a family of products related to baking (margarine and yeast, for example). The warm, yellow background of the package, the round roll of sweet bread and the red rose were considered naïve at first but the concept worked, and it still does (cf. Heino, 1989). In sum, both the companies and the products analysed seem to have a rather strong heritage based on their long history, the consistency and continuity of their procedures, their core values and their visual symbols.

Table II gives a practical example of the evaluation of cultural heritage, listing the main target countries of Fazer Blue, Fazer Puikula, Elovena and Sunnuntai. The figure in bold under the name of the country is the mean of the homogeneity and endurance measurements. The homogeneity score was derived from the mean of the share of the dominant language (e.g. the mother tongue of 95 per cent of the population of Sweden is Swedish) and the share of the dominant religion (e.g. 87 per cent of people living in Sweden are Lutherans). Thus, in the case of Sweden the homogeneity score was 0.91. In deriving the endurance score we scaled the number of cultural heritage sites and intangibles in a particular country to the number of cultural heritage sites and intangibles in China (the country with highest numbers). Sweden, for example, has 13 cultural heritage sites and intangibles, which is 21 per cent of the Chinese figure (61), thus the score for Sweden was 0.21.

The higher the mean of homogeneity and endurance (the figures in italic), the stronger is the cultural heritage of the country concerned. It thus seems that Poland, Sweden and Russia are rather strong in cultural heritage, whereas Estonia and Latvia are weaker. Lithuania is in the middle, leaning slightly towards the weaker side. It is worth noting that even though we use the terms "weak" and "strong", which have been used in earlier research (cf. Banerjee, 2008), we do not mean to imply that "strong" is somehow better than weak. It

may be that even though a country with a strong cultural heritage is more stabilised, it is also more traditional and inflexible, whereas one with a weak cultural heritage may be modern and dynamic.

Figure 6 illustrates the proposed brand strategies for the selected cases in their main target markets. Given that allthese products appear to have a strong brand heritage, Figure 6 Suggested brand strategies for the selected cases convincing and matching strategies are proposed, depending on the target country's own cultural heritage.

Fazer Bakeries is active in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Russia. According to the framework (Figure 6), given the rather strong cultural heritage in Sweden and Russia is rather strong Fazer could adopt a matching strategy in those countries and a convincing strategy in the Baltic countries. Closer examination of the Puikula bread brand suggests that this assumption partly holds: a convincing strategy is used in Finland and the Baltics, whereas an assimilation strategy seems to have been adopted in Sweden and Russia. In the latter cases the decision stemmed from a market-entry strategy based on acquiring well-known local bakeries.

Fazer Blue milk chocolate is exported to Estonia, Latvia, Sweden and Russia. Again, one would expect to see a convincing strategy in Estonia and Latvia, and a matching

strategy in Sweden and Russia. In practice, however, Fazer adopts a convincing strategy in all of the countries: the brand is exactly the same. The name of the company founder, Karl Fazer, is emphasised even more in the international markets than in Finland. The convincing strategy may be justified because of Fazer Blue's extremely strong image in Finlandand the brand's position as the flagship product of the whole Fazer group.

The Raisio Group's Elovena oat flakes are sold in Poland and Estonia. According to the framework, a matching strategy should be adopted in Poland and a convincing strategy in Estonia. In fact, the firm uses matching in both countries: the brand differs slightly. The reason why the same strategy was adopted could be that international operations started in Poland and the Estonian market is rather small. It therefore made sense to use the concept developed for Poland in both markets.

The only market outside Finland for Sunnuntai baking products is Estonia. The brand is very strong in the Finnish market and the company did not want to change the product or its name. Consequently, a convincing strategy is utilised. This is in line with the framework.

In sum, the case studies show that, first, the proposed operationalisation of brand heritage and cultural heritage are rather easily applied in practice. Secondly, Banerjee's (2008) framework for evaluating brand strategies in international markets seems to fit well in some cases but – as the cases presented here show – branding decisions for international markets are influenced by many other things, such as internationalisation strategies, entry modes and the timing of market entry. Cultural heritage could thus be seen as one variable among many others that, through complex interaction, influence branding. This does not diminish its significance, however, but rather evokes the need to understand its interaction with other variables.
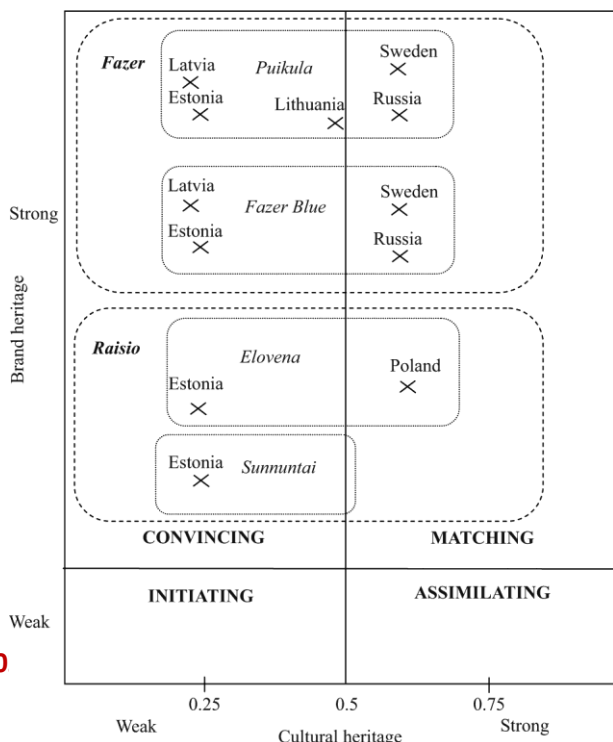
Discussion and conclusions

A company's brand heritage can be a noteworthy competitive tool as it enters international markets. However, brand managers should establish how the markets differ culturally, and construct a marketing strategy accordingly. In other words, the brand's heritage and the cultural heritage of the target country should be interlinked, thereby enabling companies to assess their relative strength in each target country. Assessment requires the objective operationalisation of both concepts, however, which was the purpose of this study. There have been studies focusing on conceptual definitions, but to our knowledge this is the first one to target operationalisation. Combining the definitions of brand heritage developed by Banerjee (2008) and Urde *et al.* (2007), and taking into account the measurability and the need to avoid overlapping concepts, we therefore propose that:

P1. Brand heritage is a composite concept incorporating the history of the brand in numbers of years of operation and the power of the brand story over time, as well as the consistency and continuity of the core values, the product brands and the visual symbols.

As Banerjee (2008) suggests, the brand's heritage should be considered in the context of the cultural heritage of the target country, and potential gaps in strength between them weighed up, before the country is approached. Previous literature (e.g. Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars, 1993) has classified countries based on cultural differences, but there is a dearth of tools for measuring differences in cultural heritage. This, again, calls for operationalisation. Having taken Banerjee's (2008) conceptualisation of national cultural heritage as a starting point and converted it into measurable form that proved to be usable in practice, we propose that:

P2. The cultural heritage of a country comprises homogeneity and endurance.

One way of assessing homogeneity is to analyse the coverage of the dominant language and religion, whereas endurance can be ranked in accordance with the number of cultural heritage nominations received.

The empirical application of the above operationalisations to Banerjee's (2008) framework, which to our knowledge is the first, leads us to our third proposition. It seems that both convincing and matching are often suitable strategies for internationalising companies with a strong brand heritage. We also found that both strategies could sometimes be adopted for one product brand simultaneously in different market areas. The timing of the market entry and the marching order of the markets also seem to matter. Hence:

P3. The utilisation of brand heritage in international markets is influenced by the strength of the brand's own heritage and the strength of the cultural heritage of the target country, and also by other variables such as the firm's internationalisation strategy and the timing of the market entry.

Thus, although it is extremely hard to estimate the impact of a country's cultural heritage on branding decisions – as there are other influencing variables – it should be borne in mind that "there are very few instances where culture does not matter at all" (Leung *et al.*, 2005, p. 368).

The above propositions are drawn from our theoretical discussion and case examples, and further research is needed to support their validity. We suggest that future studies should focus on specifying the circumstances in which cultural heritage matters more and when it matters less. Applicability of the brand-heritage concept should be considered in different product categories, and account taken of the strength of the heritage in the country of origin as well as the familiarity and traditions of the product category in the target market. Overall, more empirical research is needed to test the validity of the suggested operationalisations.

Managers are under increasing pressure to utilise brand heritage more efficiently in international markets. Given that the strategies seem to differ depending on the target countries' own cultural heritages, we recommend that firms basing their competitive advantage largely on a strong brand heritage in particular carefully consider how to enter countries with a strong cultural heritage. The operationalisations created in this study are easy for practitioners and managers to apply.

Our conclusions should be considered in the light of the limitations of the study. This research is primarily conceptual and the propositions are based on relatively scarce empirical evidence. In particular, the measurement of a country's cultural heritage is problematic and deserves further consideration. We assumed that both homogeneity and endurance would play an equal role in its determination: this assumption needs to be further deliberated. Furthermore, the utilisation of the UNESCO World Heritage List as a proxy for endurance could be carefully considered in future studies. The overlap between the corporate and product brand heritage may also complicate the operationalisation of the concepts. All that said, we hope that this paper will provide the basis for future discussion, and will act as a trigger for further empirical studies.

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