ARTICLES

THE EFFECT OF BRAND HERITAGE ON CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

Efeito da herança da marca nos relacionamentos entre consumidores e marcas

El efecto de la herencia de la marca en las relaciones entre consumidores y marcas

ABSTRACT

Heritage is a brand value proposition that provides a unique basis for building and maintaining strong relationships with consumers. Seeking to understand how this strategic resource influences the relations between consumers and brands, this study aims to examine brand heritage as a determinant of self-reinforcing elements (enticing, enabling, and enriching the self). A survey was carried out with 309 Brazilian and American consumers to test the proposed relationships. Based on a structural equation model, the results demonstrated that consumers process the characteristics related to brand heritage through the three self-reinforcing elements, but their overall effect on self-brand connection occurs only through the sensory and aesthetic pleasure that the brand offers (enticing the self). The study also presents academic and managerial implications and makes recommendations for future research.

KEYWORDS | Consumer-brand relationships, brand heritage, self-reinforcing elements, enticing the self, self-brand connection.

RESUMO

A herança é uma proposição de valor da marca que fornece uma base única para criar e manter relações fortes com os consumidores. Buscando compreender como esse recurso estratégico influencia as relações entre consumidores e marcas, este estudo objetiva examinar a herança da marca como determinante dos elementos de reforço do self (seduzindo, habilitando e enriquecendo o self). Uma pesquisa com 309 consumidores brasileiros e americanos foi realizada para testar as relações propostas. Baseados em um modelo de equação estrutural, os resultados da pesquisa demonstraram que os consumidores processam as características relacionadas à herança da marca por meio dos três elementos de reforço do self, mas seu efeito global na conexão self-marca só ocorre por meio do prazer sensorial e estético que a marca oferece (seduzindo o self). O estudo é concluído apresentando as implicações acadêmicas e gerenciais e sugerindo pesquisas futuras.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE | Relacionamento consumidor-marca, herança da marca, elementos de reforço do self, seduzindo o self, conexão self-marca.

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RESUMEN

La herencia es una propuesta de valor de la marca que proporciona una base única para crear y mantener relaciones fuertes con los consumidores. El objetivo de este estudio es examinar la herencia de la marca como determinante de los elementos de refuerzo del self (seduciendo, habilitando y enriqueciendo el self). Se realizó una investigación con 309 consumidores brasileños y estadounidenses para probar las relaciones propuestas. Basados en un modelo de ecuación estructural, los resultados de la investigación demostraron que los consumidores procesan las características relacionadas con la herencia de la marca por medio de los tres elementos de refuerzo del self, pero su efecto global en la conexión self-marca sólo ocurre por medio del placer sensorial y estético que la marca ofrece (seduciendo el self). El estudio se concluye presentando las implicaciones académicas y gerenciales y sugiriendo investigaciones futuras.

PALABRAS CLAVE | Relaciones consumidor-marca, herencia de la marca, elementos de refuerzo del self, seduciendo el self, conexión self-marca.

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INTRODUCTION

In a postmodern market, marked by increased dynamics, uncertainty, and massive disorientation in consumption, where consumers are exposed to a variety of brands daily, creating and maintaining strong relationships with consumers is the major challenge for strategic brand management (Oh, Prado, Korelo, & Frizzo, 2017). From this perspective, research in marketing literature and consumer behavior has emphasized that one way to achieve this goal is to associate brand-specific characteristics with consumer aspirations to reinforce their identities (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998).

Defined as a dimension of brand identity characterized by its longevity, core values, use of symbols, and history (Urde, Greyser, & Balmer, 2007), brand heritage is a key organizational resource for companies seeking to differentiate their offers in the market and wishing to gain a prominent position in the minds of consumers.

Contrasting the historical view that is focused on the past, heritage is characterized by incorporating elements of brand history into contemporary and future contexts, thereby ascribing a long-term strategic value to the brand (Hakala, Lätti, & Sandberg, 2011; Urde et al., 2007). Additionally, brands with heritage are seen as more credible and authentic by consumers, thus fostering personal identification and preference due to perceived exclusivity (Wiedmann, Hennigs, Schmidt, & Wuestefeld, 2011).

In order to understand how brand heritage influences the relations between consumers and brands, this research aims to test this construct as a determinant of the self-reinforcing elements (enticing, enabling, and enriching the self) described by Park, Eisingerich, and Park (2013). The brand attachment-aversion (AA) relationship model proposed by Park et al. (2013) describes how these elements build relationships between consumers and brands. Some brands help consumers gain aesthetic and/or sensory pleasure: they entice the self. Others allow consumers to control their environment, creating an effective and capable sense of self: enabling the self. There are also those brands that reinforce the self through the symbolic communication of values that resonate with the aspirations of consumers: they enrich the self. In this model (Park et al., 2013), to the extent that a brand has these three elements, it promotes a self-brand connection and, consequently, impacts the attitudes and behavior of consumers.

Although the brand AA model broadens the perspective of relationships in the consumer context, proposing important mechanisms that build the consumer-brand relationship, the failure to specify the role of marketing activities has been criticized (Oh et al., 2017). In particular, Schmitt (2013) emphasizes that this model does not specifically predict the determinants of the

relationship, since it is psychological, about internal constructs and processes, and does not specify the brand components that stimulate self-reinforcing elements. Considering that consumers reach their goals through their brand choices, understanding the background and consequences of these three elements will provide important information for the development of strategies that foster the consumer-brand relationship (Oh et al., 2017).

This research focuses on the fashion industry because it encompasses the evaluation of the three self-reinforcing elements through the purchase of products with multiple designs and symbolic attributes. It also extends the model proposed by Park et al. (2013) integrating brand heritage as a mechanism that determines whether a brand entices, enables or enriches the self. Furthermore, this research contributes to the brand heritage literature by demonstrating the mechanisms by which consumers process the historical aspects of the brand according to their self-identity goals. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model.

In practice, research of this nature is relevant because it addresses aspects of relational marketing that leave aside mass appeal and focus on the specific needs of individuals. In this way, the understanding of the new practices of brand management, and consequently consumer preferences, by companies and marketing professionals may result in a significant competitive advantage in the increasingly fierce competition for market share.

This article is structured as follows: first, the review of the literature conceptualizing the brand heritage and its effects on the consumer-brand relationship is presented along with related hypotheses. Then, the method used to collect and analyze the data is detailed and, finally, the results, implications, and limitations of the study are discussed.

THEORETICAL-EMPIRICAL FOUNDATION

Brand Heritage

The study of brand heritage as a transporter of historical values from the past to the present and future and an element that adds value in the eyes of consumers is an emerging concept that has gained increasing interest in recent years, both in marketing research and managerial practices.

Hudson's (2007) independent analysis of Interbrand's 100 leading global brands (2007) corroborates this interest by revealing that more than a quarter of all classified brands have existed since the 19th century, the oldest (Moët et Chandon) having been launched in the year 1743, evidencing the longevity of many modern brands that have survived beyond one human generation.

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Figure 1. **Proposed conceptual model**
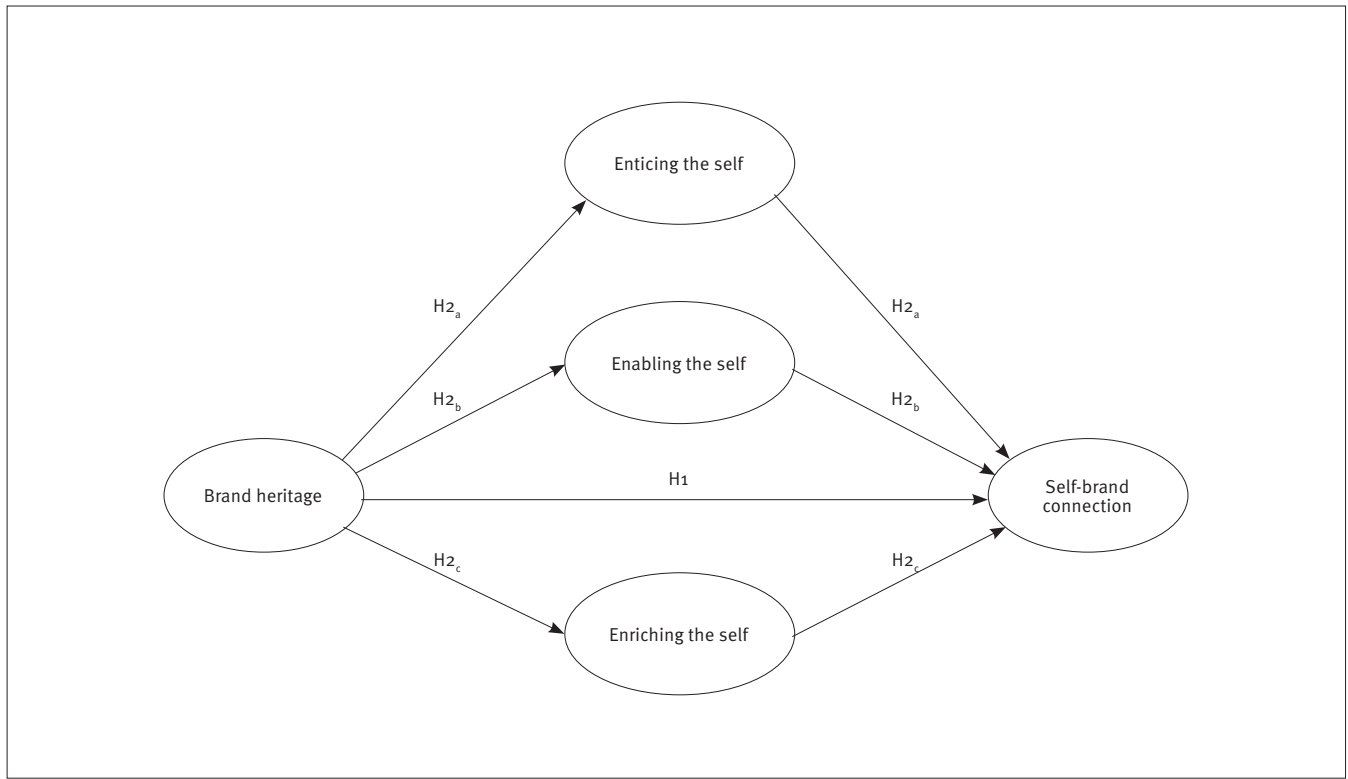
Notes: H1 hypothesis of the direct model;
H2a, H2b and H2c hypotheses of the mediated model

In marketing literature, the notion of brand heritage was introduced by Balmer, Greyser, and Urde (2006), who, by exploring the Swedish monarchy as a corporate brand, drew attention to the importance of heritage in this context. However, it was the seminal article by Urde et al. (2007) that proposed the definition of this construct: "... a dimension of a brand's identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols, and particularly in an organizational belief that its history is important" (pp. 4-5).

In contrast to the historical view, which is mainly focused on the past, the heritage of the brand incorporates, beyond this period, the present and the future (Urde et al., 2007). Brands born and maintained over decades or even centuries build a significant past, which helps make the brand relevant to the present and, prospectively, the future (Wiedmann et al., 2011).

To Aaker (2004), heritage is one of the first sources that add value and differentiation to brands, making their identity extremely strong, especially when they are reinterpreted in a contemporary light. Moreover, heritage is an important source of authenticity and legitimacy for a brand (Beverland, 2005; Urde et al., 2007). Brands with a strong heritage become, over time, synonymous with cultural values and acquire symbolic meaning beyond their original identity, which helps to establish a sense of legitimacy and authenticity among the target audience (Kates, 2004).

By addressing what constitutes the heritage of a brand, Urde et al. (2007) point out that many brands have heritage, but not all of them make this value proposition a part of the brand's position and identity. These authors suggest five main elements that denote whether, and to what extent, heritage is present in a brand. In this sense, brands that incorporate their heritage present a track record, which proves that the brand has kept its promises over time, are always aligned with the core values to which they are associated, make use of symbols as an expression of the brand's meaning over time, and communicate that they perceive their own history as important and meaningful to their identity. Adding to these characteristics, some brands have longevity, when they belong to multigenerational family businesses.

To Banerjee (2008), the four pillars of an inherited brand are brand history, its image, the consumers' expectancy in relation

to the physical and emotional benefits they receive from the brand, and equity, which comprises a set of competencies that facilitate the progression of the brand and bring an advantage over the competition.

Based on its contextualization and definition of the main elements and set of criteria, heritage is a distinct category in brand management, and its value proposition based on its equity is also a key component for the construction of brand identity (Aaker, 2004; Banerjee, 2008; Merchant & Rose, 2013; Rose, Merchant, Orth, & Horstmann, 2016; Urde et al., 2007; Wiedmann et al., 2011).

Effects of brand heritage

Heritage, especially in globalized markets, is an important organizational resource that helps to make the brand more authentic, credible, and reliable (Wiedmann et al., 2011), this being a strategic value that provides a unique basis for superior brand performance (Hakala et al., 2011). In addition, recent research has shown that heritage brands, by offering a value proposition to their target audience, positively influence overall brand assessment and consumer attitudes and behaviors (Merchant & Rose, 2013; Rose, et al., 2016; Wiedmann et al., 2011; Wuestefeld, Hennigs, Schmidt, and Wiedmann, 2012).

In their relationship model, Park et al. (2013) define the distance between the brand and the self as the place where the brand is in the consumer's mind and argue that the more the consumer perceives the benefits delivered by the brand in light of their personal goals and interests, the closer the relationship tends to be.

In this research, the term self-brand connection was adopted as a construct of the proposed relation. Like the concept of distance, the self-brand connection also represents a continuum that indicates how much the consumer feels distant and disconnected from the brand at one end, and close and connected at the other. Given this rationalization, it is expected that the connection between the consumer and the brand is greater with brands that incorporate their heritage in the construction of their identity and indicate that their fundamental values and level of performance are reliable and are maintained over time. Therefore, it is proposed that:

> H1: Brands with heritage impact the self-brand connection positively.

Brands also play an important role in the construction of individuals' self (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998). Recent studies

(Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005) indicate that consumers construct their self-identity and present themselves to others through their brand choices, based on the congruence between brand image and self-image.

In the AA relationship model, Park et al. (2013) suggest that individuals are motivated to approach brands to reinforce their identities, incorporating features and self-relevant characteristics of brands into the self. According to this model, the consumer feels close to a brand when it is perceived as a means of expanding the self, this being called brand attachment. At the same time, if the consumer perceives the brand as a threat to the expansion of the self, he/she feels distant from it, which we call brand aversion. This sense of AA to the brand represents opposite ends in the relationship continuum and is influenced by brand elements that reinforce the self.

These elements, as they help consumers to achieve their goals, perform different functions and have different characteristics (Park et al., 2013). The first of these, enticing the self, reinforces the self through hedonic and pleasurable benefits. According to Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), hedonic consumption refers to the characteristics of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy, and emotive aspects of a product experience. Thus, consumers can approach brands that evoke any combination of sensory pleasure (visual, auditory, gustatory, tactile, olfactory, thermal and/or synesthetic) or aesthetic pleasure (design of a product) (Park et al., 2013).

The second, enabling the self, acts through functional benefits. For Grewal, Mehta, and Kardes (2004), functional or utilitarian aspects are seen merely as a means to an end, derived from the functions performed by the product. Thus, a brand enables the self when it creates an effective and capable self-feeling that allows the consumer, through the performance of products and services, to perform the task reliably, thus approaching his/her desired goal (Park et al., 2013).

The last element, enriching the self, reinforces the self through symbolic benefits represented by at least three ways: representation of the ideal past, present, and future self. Specifically, brands can serve as an anchor to symbolically represent a core of the past self, providing a basis from which current selves are viewed, and future ones are framed (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2006). Also, they can enrich the self by symbolically representing the current "I," reflecting what one is and what one believes (Park et al., 2013).

The attachment-to-brand model expands the perspective of relationships in the context of consumption by proposing important mechanisms that build the consumer-brand relationship.

However, as observed by Schmitt (2013), this model does not specifically predict the determinants of the relationship, since it is psychological, with respect to internal constructs and processes, and does not specify the components of the commercial marketing entity called the brand, that stimulate the elements that reinforce the self. For this author, the determinants of marketing of the relationship with the brand should be explored more rigorously; he suggests that consumer experience, that is, the behavioral responses evoked by brand stimuli, can be a determinant of the relationship (Schmitt, 2013).

Based on the arguments proposed by Schmitt (2013) and considering that the elements of the brand that entice, enable, and enrich the self cater to a personally relevant and meaningful self-identity of the consumers and positively impact the self-brand connection (Park et al., 2013; Oh et al., 2017), it is proposed that each of these elements will mediate the effect of brand heritage on self-brand connection. That said, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: The relationship between brand heritage and the self-brand connection will be mediated by enticing the self.

H2b: The relationship between the brand heritage and the self-brand connection will be mediated by enabling the self.

H2c: The relationship between the brand heritage and the self-brand connection will be mediated by enriching the self.

METHOD

Data collection and sampling

A survey was conducted in the United States and Brazil to test the proposed hypotheses. In view of the characteristics and needs of the study, the sample was non-probabilistic for convenience, composed according to the accessibility of participants in these two countries; 309 consumers (148 in the Brazilian context and 161 in the American context), including students from the University of Florida (USA) and the Business Administration department of a university in Southern Brazil, participated in the study. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 60 years ($M = 24.61$, $SD = 7.46$), and the sample predominantly consisted of women (61.17%).

Data were collected online and by paper questionnaire. Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent by email, which provided a direct link to a specific section of a web page. In Brazil, the students answered the paper questionnaire.

To respond to the survey, participants were asked to choose their "favorite brand" of clothing, shoes, or accessories. A total of 139 brands were cited, with the most frequent being Nike (20.39%), Zara (3.88%), Forever 21 (3.24%), All Star (2.91%) and Vans (2.27%). The other brands (134) were mentioned below 2% each. Still, respondents ranked the brand chosen in three categories: luxury (14.9%), authentic (53.7%), and fashion (31.4%).

Measures

The indicators used to measure the variables of the proposed model were based on previous studies and adjusted to the context of our research. The reliability of all constructs was analyzed using Cronbach's alpha (α).

The brand heritage variable (α = 0.778) was measured using four indicators adapted from Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, and Farrelly (2014) (This brand reflects a sense of tradition; this brand reflects a timeless design); Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer and Heinrich (2012) (I think this brand offers continuity over time); and Urde et al. (2007) (This brand strengthens and builds on its heritage). All indicators were measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree."

The items for the enticing the self (α = 0.853), enabling the self (α = 0.811) and enriching the self (α = 0.858) were adapted from Park et al. (2013) and measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = "nothing" to 7 = "much".

Finally, the indicators of the model-dependent variable, self-brand connection (α = 0.797), were also adapted from Park et al. (2013) and measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = "away" to 7 = "very close" and 1 = "disconnected" to 7 = "connected". Details of all indicators can be seen in Table 1.

RESULTS

Measurement model

In addition to the Cronbach alpha (α) calculation, the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) were also calculated to verify the internal consistency and discriminant and convergent validity of the proposed model. The results presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the model is consistent, even considering the value of the AVE of the brand heritage below the recommended one (0.50), but within the tolerable limits. Additionally, it is observed that the adjustment statistics of the model met the standard criteria for a structural equation model.

Table 1. Measurement indicators, internal consistency, and model validity

Indicators	Stand. Loading	α	CR	AVE
Brand Heritage		0.778	0.786	0.483
I think this brand offers continuity over time	0.632 *			
This brand reflects a sense of tradition	0.779 *			
This brand reinforces and builds on heritage	0.771 *			
This brand reflects a timeless design	0.577 *			
Enticing the Self		0.853	0.857	0.666
To what extent is this brand attractive to you?	0.834 *			
To what extent is this brand appealing to you?	0.829 *			
To what extent is this brand pleasing to your senses?	0.784 *			
Enabling the Self		0.811	0.816	0.691
To what extent does this brand help how you manage problems in your daily life?	0.763 *			
To what extent does this brand enable you to deal with problems confidently?	0.894 *			
Enriching the Self		0.858	0.861	0.673
To what extent does this brand represent who you are as a person?	0.829 *			
To what extent does this brand express who you want to be?	0.843 *			
To what extent does this brand reinforce your values?	0.789 *			
Self-Brand Connection		0.797	0.807	0.677
Brand X is far away from me and who I am/Brand X is very close to me and who I am	0.841 *			
I am personally disconnected from Brand X/I am personally connected with brand X	0.804 *			

Note: a = Cronbach's Alpha, CR = Composite reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted

X^2 = 162.264, gl = 67, p ‹000, X^2/gl = 2.422, NFI = 0.922, IFI = 0.953, CFI = 0.952 and RMSEA = 0.068

* p ‹0.001

Two procedures were used to confirm the discriminant validity: correlation between the constructs and the square root of the AVE. Table 2 shows the results obtained, together with the descriptive statistics of the model.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and correlation between the latent variables of the model

		Average	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1	Brand heritage	5.05	1.25	**0.695**				
2	Enticing the self	5.55	1.30	0.349 **	**0.816**			
3	Enabling the self	3.65	1.81	0.215 *	0.340 **	**0.831**		
4	Enriching the self	4.45	1.53	0.443 **	0.637 **	0.581 **	**0.821**	
5	Self-brand connection	5.21	1.44	0.410 **	0.578 **	0.290 **	0.444 **	**0.823**

Note: Entries below the main diagonal are correlations between the latent variables; the main diagonal is the square root of AVE; square root of the AVE being greater than the correlation coefficient implies sufficient discriminant validity,

* p ‹0.05

** p ‹0.001

After these validation steps, the structural model and the discussion of the results are presented.

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Evaluation of the structural model

Table 3 presents the results of the structural model, tested based on the distributive properties of the elements of a covariance matrix. The estimated ratios, the respective standard regression coefficients (γ), and the significance associated with these values (p-value) are highlighted. The multigroup analysis showed that the model tested was the same for the two countries (Brazil and the United States). The free and fixed chi-square difference test (in which all structural coefficients and factor loads were fixed), taking into account the same parameters estimated for the two groups, was not significant. Even considering that the sample size (less than 200 cases per group) could lead to a type II error, this analysis was performed with the objective of testing the invariability of the entire model in the samples of the two countries and demonstrating that it remained stable regardless of the sample (X^2 = 87.68; gl = 70, p = 0.075).

Table 3. **Estimated standardized coefficients of proposed model relationships**

Paths of Regression	Standardized Coefficients (γ)	
Brand Heritage	Self-brand connection	0.27 *
Brand Heritage	Enticing the self	0.48 **
Brand Heritage	Enabling the self	0.35 **
Brand Heritage	Enriching the self	0.56 **
Enticing the self	Self-brand connection	0.42 **
Enabling the self	Self-brand connection	0.04
Enriching the self	Self-brand connection	0.04

Notes: X^2 = 299.832, gl = 70, p <0.000, X^2/gl = 4.283, *NFI* = 0.855, *IFI* = 0.885, *CFI* = 0.884 and *RMSEA* = 0.103,

* p <0.05

** p <0.001

The first estimated relationship between the brand heritage and the self-brand connection was positive and significant, with γ = 0.27 (p <0.05), corroborating hypothesis H1. These results are in agreement with the studies by Merchant and Rose (2013) and Rose et al. (2016), which demonstrated that brand heritage provides positive emotions that promote brand attachment and is generated, according to Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisengerich, and Iacabucci (2010), when consumers feel connected to a brand.

The relationship between the brand's heritage and the self-reinforcing elements was also positive and significant for the three attributes, enticing (γ = 0.48, p <0.001), enabling (γ = 0.35, p <0.001), and enriching the self (γ = 0.56, p <0.001). However,

the impact of these elements on the self-brand connection was significant only for the enticing the self (γ = 0.42, p <0.001) attribute, thus corroborating only hypothesis H2a. Hypotheses H2b and H2c, which also predicted positive and significant effects of the enabling and enriching self attributes on the self-brand connection, although following the expected theorization, were not confirmed.

GENERAL DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The focus of this research was to develop a model for a better understanding of how aspects related to brand heritage affect consumer aspirations to reinforce their selves, thus increasing the self-brand connection. The study's findings demonstrated that brand heritage is one of the determinants of the self-reinforcing elements, and its overall effect on the self-brand connection is processed through enticing the self.

The results found in this study differ from the findings of Park et al. (2013), which demonstrated a positive and significant effect for the three elements, with greater influence of enriching the self. It is worth noting, however, that in the model proposed by these authors, self-reinforcing elements are the determinants of the distance (connection) between the brand and the self and of the prominence of the brand, which represents the AA relationship of the consumer with the brand. It is believed that this particularity may have influenced the results. The context of data collection may also have led to this differentiation. This study was conducted in the fashion industry, and respondents were asked to choose their "favorite brand" of clothing, shoes or accessories to respond to the survey. In the study by Park et al. (2013), the brands Manchester United, Apple iPhone, and a large grocery store were used in the research. Another factor to be taken into account is the age of the respondents, since the sample of this study was characterized by young respondents (mean age 24.61 years) and, as in the study by Park et al. (2013), when tested for the moderating effect of age, younger consumers were more sensitive to the advantages and benefits provided by enticing the self.

This research contributes to the theoretical construction of consumer-brand relationships by expanding the AA model proposed by Park et al. (2013). Although this model broadens the perspective of relationships in the context of consumption, proposing important mechanisms that build the consumer-brand relationship, the real components of the brand that enhance this relationship have not been tested. The empirical evidence from

this study has demonstrated that the historical aspects of the brand may be one of the mechanisms that determine whether a brand entices, enables or enriches the self. Additionally, the respective contribution of each element of the self-reinforcing in the self-brand connection when stimulated by marketing mechanisms (brand heritage) has been demonstrated. Finally, this research also extends the theoretical value of brand heritage by demonstrating that consumers process aspects related to brand history through the three self-reinforcing elements, but their overall effect on the self-brand connection only occurs through the sensorial and aesthetic pleasure that the brand offers (enticing the self).

The results of this research also have implications for strategic brand management, providing a basis for the perceived value that brand heritage and self-reinforcing elements can deliver to the consumer. Thus, when applicable, managers can differentiate the positioning of their brands and trigger consumer preference by emphasizing the historical aspects of the brand through elements that entice the self. Starbucks is a successful example that combines its history and tradition in specialty coffees with a branded experience on a variety of sensorial channels, ranging from the aroma of coffee to the sound of the barista working the machine to store design.

Brands with heritage can also activate their past using aesthetic and sensory stimuli in their advertising and communication strategies, grounded by a narrative that emphasizes the brand's past or by a timeline of its historical facts. Implementing marketing actions that emphasize its founding date, such as the phrase *Fondé en 1743* (Established 1743) on the labels of the Moët et Chandon champagne bottles, or *since 1873* on Levi's labels, is also a way of reinforcing the historical aspects of the brand that, consequently, promote self-brand connection and impact the attitudes and behavior of consumers.

In future studies, the scope of this research may be widened, replicating it in other contexts. Also, one can test other attributes of the brand, such as brand authenticity or its specific dimensions as preceding the self-reinforcing elements. Carrying out a causal study also applies when testing the proposed model.

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