The use of longitudinal case studies and semiotics for analysing brand development as process of assimilation or accommodation

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose: Starting from the premise that brands must be managed in a consistent way over time, but also need to be expanded, the purpose of this paper is to define and understand the different models of brand development, according to the evolution of a brand's identity and the introduction of brand extensions. The second aim of this article is to introduce a specific methodology for studying the development of brands with a long-term approach.

Design/methodology/approach: The concepts of assimilation and accommodation as defined by Piaget (1983) provide an in-depth understanding of how and why brands evolve. This article is based on a multiple case study. Four luxury brands were studied longitudinally. Brand chronologies were drawn and images of brand communications and brand extensions were gathered. Structural semiotic analysis was then used to highlight the different processes of brand development. In addition, qualitative interviews with two experts were conducted.

Findings: Hermès and Louis Vuitton develop their brands according to the assimilation model. Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana follow the accommodation model. There is a link between the brand's identity type (symbolic / functional) and the model used for brand development. A detailed analysis of each model is presented highlighting the main features.

Research limitations/implications: To reinforce the distinction between the two models of brand development, it would be interesting to look at other brands. The choice of these brands depends on their country of origin and their age.

Originality/value: The main contributions of this paper are the dynamic and longitudinal analysis of brand development and the introduction of the assimilation and accommodation concepts. The use of semiotics constitutes another original feature of this research.

Keywords:

Brand extensions, Assimilation and Accommodation models, Multiple case study, Semiotics, Luxury

Article Classification:

Research paper

Introduction

Brands are built over time and space. Since the day of their creation, brands shape and develop themselves. Their identity is created through successive communication campaigns year by year. The launch of new products (or brand extensions) also helps to build brands (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2004).

This construction marks in time and space can take several paths. Brands can develop as a model of assimilation or as a model of accommodation (Veg-Sala and Nyeck, 2010). When the brands are expanded in a pattern of assimilation, brand identity extends upstream of the brand extensions'introduction. Conversely, when brands grow through accommodation, the introduction of brand extensions succeeds without an extension of its brand identity.

Using the accommodation model probably does not have the same consequences as using the assimilation model on the long-term management of brands. It is essential to study these models and consider this dynamic approach to brands. However, previous research focused mainly on the study of consumer perceptions at a given time. It analyzed consumers' perceptions of brand associations or brand extensions (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Keller and Aaker, 1992; Loken and Roedder John, 1993; Roux and Boush, 1996; Martinez and de Chernatony, 2004; Keller, 2009; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Jung and Tey, 2010). Moreover, if brands and their extensions are studied according consumers' perceptions, evaluations that marketers perform regularly, a preliminary analysis can be made on the basis of the message issued directly by the brands, that is to say the brand identity, which is less common (Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 2001, 2004).

Thus, the aim of this paper is to study the following question: Which model of long-term brand development (accommodation or assimilation) is the most relevant? In this article, we want to: (1) highlight the brand development (related to brand identity and extensions) in terms of the use of assimilation and accommodation models, (2) analyze the consequences of these development models and (3) propose a methodology for studying models with a dynamic vision of brand development. A multiple case study is used to provide an in-depth understanding of brand extension development models and their consequences. These case studies used a longitudinal approach and semiotics. Thereby the main contributions of this paper are based on the approach to long-term brand development, the use of the concepts of assimilation and accommodation and longitudinal and semiotic methodology.

Theoretical background

Brand development: between consistency and changes

Brands are cultural values that are shared by a group of people (Levy, 1981; Stern, 1995; Thompson and Holt, 1997; Thompson, 2004; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). They make up parts of legends or myths that they have in turn integrated and on which they base their legitimacy (Belk and al., 2003). They tell stories and create specific identities that they build in time and space. Their long-term stability contributes to proper brand management and has a positive impact on consumer loyalty and brand understanding (Aaker, 1996; de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 2004) and reinforces brand strength (Keller, 2003). Brand management must take into account consistency over time (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1999; Kapferer, 2004). The brand must remain clear, with specific and differentiated content. Continuity is essential for brand construction and brand durability.

While it is important to consider the consistency of the brand, researchers and managers also agree that brands must evolve (Keller, 1999, 2003). Throughout the life of brands, each brand makes changes to its identity. Being consistent is not synonymous with being the same (Keller, 1999, 2003). A brand needs to be dynamic and develop while maintaining its core identity for several reasons. If a brand does not adapt its content to the relevant technological or cultural environment, it can easily be diluted and impoverished. It can become fossilized and less relevant (Keller, 2003; Charters, 2009). Change is also essential when the brand appeals to a market that is too small, preventing it from developing, growing and surviving in highly competitive environments (Aaker, 1996). Then a balance must be reached between permanence and change (Aaker, 1996; Keller 1999, Kapferer, 2004).

Consistency and change can be managed through brand extensions (the use of well-known brand name to launch products in different categories) and brand identity (by analysing brand communication). In a long-term vision, the development processes are not the same for all brands. Changes in brand identity do not occur at the same time for each brand. The same process applies to the timing of the introduction of extensions. Thus understanding the dynamics of brand development models (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1999, 2003) and analysing how brands expand and change over time is essential. The concepts of assimilation and accommodation defined by Piaget (Piaget, 1962, 1968, 1974, 1983; Piaget and Inhelder, 1966; Wood, 1998) are introduced to study these points.

Accommodation vs. assimilation: two models of development

The concepts of assimilation and accommodation are derived from Piaget's research on

cognitive development (Piaget, 1962, 1968, 1974, 1983; Piaget and Inhelder, 1966).

The mental and physical actions involved in understanding and knowing is called a schema. It is a category of knowledge that helps us to interpret and understand the world. In his view, a schema includes both a category of knowledge and the process of obtaining that knowledge. As we experience new things, the information is used to modify, add to, or change previously existing schemas (Piaget, 1962, 1983; Wood, 1998).

The process of taking in new information into our previously existing schemas is known as **assimilation**. Assimilation is the mechanism by which the subject applies its existing schemas of reality in an effort to appropriate and incorporate new elements of its environment. This is the incorporation of an object or situation into an existing structure (structural assimilation) without changing it but with progressive transformation of the object or situation to assimilate. The process is somewhat subjective, because we tend to modify experience or information somewhat to fit in with our pre-existing beliefs. It is a matter of transforming things that we are not used to into familiar things.

Another part of adaptation involves changing or altering our existing schemas in light of new information, a process known as **accommodation**. Accommodation involves altering existing schemas, or ideas, as a result of new information or new experiences. When the new object resists, the mechanism of accommodation intervenes to bring about a change in the structure and allow the incorporation of new elements. This is the process of changing a pre-existing and inadequate schema (because of the failure to assimilate) to accommodate the characteristics of the new object. New schemas may also be developed during this process.

Piaget believed that all children try to strike a balance between assimilation and accommodation, called equilibration. As children progress through the stages of cognitive development, it is important to maintain a balance between applying previous knowledge (assimilation) and changing behaviour to account for new knowledge (accommodation).

The link between assimilation and accommodation models and brand extension strategies

By adopting a dynamic analysis of brands, and transpositing Piaget's concepts (Aaker, 1996, Caprara and al., 2002), we can identify two major patterns of brand development.

Some brands carry out brand extensions gradually without changing their identity (or schema, to borrow from Piaget's lexicon). These extensions fit with brand associations: they do not change brands, but rather reinforce what they are. In this case, brands assimilate innovations while remaining the same (assimilation model). Brand development is progressive and linear.

Other brands include new products that do not correspond to their identity (or schema) and thus have to make changes. The identity of these brands must be deeply modified to include all new extensions in a new entity (accommodation model); development often leads to sudden changes of what brands are. The brand's identity must evolve and undergo significant modifications.

Although previous research on brand extension were the short term and based on consumer perceptions, some comparisons can be made. Some links to the assimilation / accommodation models can be made. Brands with abstract associations (symbolic concepts) can be qualified as more extensible (Park and al., 1991; Kapferer, 2004). Indeed, abstract associations allow the integration of new products in a way that is consistent with what the brand is, meaning that the initial schema of the brand would not be changed by the introduction of new extensions. So when a brand is based on symbolic associations, it would have a greater probability of being developed according to the assimilation model. Conversely, if a brand were based on a functional concept, integrating extensions that do not share the same expertise for example, would not be consistent with the brand associations (Park and al., 1991; Kapferer, 2004). Such a brand would have less of an opportunity to expand into many categories of products. Furthermore, the integration of extensions that do not share the same initial association would lead to significant changes in what the brand is. So when a brand is based on concrete associations, it has a better chance of being developed according to the accommodation model.

Thus, connections between symbolic brands and the assimilation model, on one hand, and functional brands and the accommodation model, on the other, must be analysed using a dynamic study of brand identity and brand extensions. An in-depth understanding of the simultaneous interaction between the evolution of brand identity (depending of the type of brand associations) and the successive introduction of brand extensions is necessary. This follows the recommendations of Martinez and Pina (2003), who insist on the importance of studying the relationship between these two concepts. The purpose of this research is thus in agreement with these recommendations. We analyze the relevance of different models of brand development in a managerial approach by studying the evolution of brand identity and brand extensions.

Research methodology

A qualitative methodology was employed to analyse brand development models in a long-term approach. Through the use of case studies, we can understand how and why brands can extend in different ways (accommodation or assimilation) and we can study the relevance of these models. The methodology adopted herein to study the assimilation and accommodation models is based on multiple case studies; the objective is to highlight the contrasts between the two brand development models (Yin, 2009). Case studies are most relevant when the research question requires an extensive description of a given phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

The multiple case studies are based on a dynamic approach to brands from their creation and based on interviews of brand managers. Longitudinal analysis allows us to consider both brand's invariants (which constitute its identity) and its variants (which correspond to its evolution).

Structural semiotics is the method chosen to study these brand chronologies. This method is particularly relevant when studying the meanings, the deeper significance of brand narratives and their invariants (Floch, 1990; Courtès, 1991). Structural analysis is designed to understand the relationship of a number of elements under the principle of solidarity in terms of a structure (Barthes, 1964; Eco, 1970; Floch, 1990). It is based on the meaning. Such an approach seeks to reflect the conditions in which meaning is produced (Floch, 1990; Hetzel and Aubert, 1993). Structural semiotics is based on the concept of the "sign." This is formed by the relationship between a noticeable element, the "signifier" (also called "expression"), and the meaning given to this signifier, the "signified" (or "content") (Courtès, 1991). Semiotics and the structure of meaning are very close to symbolism, culture and anthropology (Barthes, 1964; Mick, 1986). All symbols relevant to the object being studied should be considered in a structural semiotic analysis: not only the words and language in general but also all types of visuals, gestures, concepts and all other elements (Eco, 1970; Barthes, 1964; Hetzel and Aubert, 1993; Joly, 1994). Studying the confrontation between these signs and symbols and their interactions helps to create a structure of meaning.

Process of the chronological analysis

The first step of this analysis was to create brand chronologies. Brand chronologies were established starting from the year of brand's creation and include general information about brand management (special events), the introduction of brand extensions and images of brand advertising and communication. The elements collected came from brand websites, Internet searches and contact with brand managers. Telephone interviews were conducted with

product managers from Hermes and Louis Vuitton and email were exchanged with the product managers from Gucci and Dolce happened in early 2011. They provided information on key dates for the introduction of extensions and communication campaigns.

The second step of the analysis was the identification of the different periods of each brand. To do this, each chronology was divided according to the launch date of all brand extensions. Thus a brand period corresponds to the time interval between two brand extensions.

The third step, designed to highlight the brand identity for each brand period, involved creating an analytical grid of brand advertising and communication. This helped to identify the signifiers and signified of each brand and all the communication associated with it. The grid was divided into four parts: a general description of the advertising, a study of the plastic message (frame, angle shooting, composition, shapes, colours, lighting and texture), a study of the figurative message (patterns, figures, real objects, characters) and a study of the linguistic message (pictures of words – typography, colours, shapes and letters – and their meaning) (Courtès, 1991; Joly, 1994; Tissier-Desbordes, 2004). For each brand period, the signifieds were identified and gathered. Any overlaps and redundancies were then analyzed. The stable meanings, for example those that are recurrent in the brand's communications in each period, were highlighted and constitute the brand's identity for this time interval.

The fourth step of the methodological process involved comparing the brand identities of all successive periods. The objective here was to study their similarities (invariants) and/or differences (variants). The ultimate aim of this research was to determine if there is an evolution in brand identity in relation to the launch of brand extensions and vice versa. The identification of assimilation or accommodation models occured during this step. If the brand identity extended upstream of the introduction of brand extensions, then the brand development was defined as using the assimilation model. Conversely, if the introduction of brand extensions occured without changing the brand identity, the brand development was defined as using the accommodation model.

Insert Table 1

Insert Table 2

The last step was to interview brand managers. This was done by two experts, consultants in a firm specialized in the management of luxury brands. Interviews were conducted in the managers' offices and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The objective was to better understand the value of each identified model and to understand how managers evaluate each

of these models. Using a guideline, managers were interviewed on the following topics: the brands' long-term management, brand extension strategies and brand identity management. They were asked to give their opinion on each of these two models (accommodation vs. assimilation), after being briefed on these concepts. The interviews were fully transcribed, and studied through manual content analysis, according to a categorical thematic analysis. Frequencies of the elements and themes were compared and grouped into meaningful categories. In this way, their respective benefits and risks could be highlighted and recommendations could then be made for brands.

Brand samples

Four brands from the luxury sector were examined for this study: Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Hermès and Louis Vuitton. This choice was determined by several factors.

It is particularly interesting to study the luxury sector when considering brand identity. Although all brands tell a story, those in the luxury sector combine more mythical, symbolic, cultural and fantasy components. In addition, brand extensions are inherent to the luxury sector (Kapferer, 2004). They are very numerous and sometimes quite far-reaching. It is important to note that the choice of studying only luxury brands is based on the need for consistency and a desire to compare development patterns. Another criterion for selecting these brands was the brands'creation date. The goal was to have two relatively new brands and two older ones. Finally, three of these brands have the same initial expertise (making trunks), which facilitates comparison and improves the internal validity of the study. The fourth brand, belonging to the fashion industry, is less specific. The choice of this brand will enable us to determine whether the research results depend on the brand's original sector.

Expert monitoring

An expert in semiotics, from the University of Limoges in France, was consulted in order to judge the validity of the results. He was asked to identify the meaning behind the communication associated with two brands. The expert's findings correspond with those of the author. A match rate of 95% was found. Moreover, the analysis procedure and the grid were judged to be satisfactory by the semiotics expert. For the expert, the methodology incorporates the basic points of semiotic theories principles.

Research results

The results are as follows: four cases are shown successively. In the Dolce & Gabbana case, an extract from the analysis table of brand identity and an extract from the chronology established are presented to explain how the analyses were performed.

Case no. 1: Dolce & Gabbana

Dolce & Gabbana was founded in 1985. Nine periods have been identified since that date, corresponding to the first product category of the brand – ready-to-wear clothing – and eight brand extensions. From 1985 to 1996, Dolce & Gabbana expanded its territory into many product categories (underwear, accessories, perfume, sunglasses and CDs). During this period, the brand identity corresponded to the fashion universe. The advertising was fairly conventional, emphasising the brand design with men and women pictured dressed in the brand's creations (dresses, suits, glasses, etc.). In 1997, Dolce & Gabbana began a makeover of its identity. It developed a narrative of provocation, a mix of opposites and extroverted sexuality. The advertising represented scenes of orgies, pictures of pornographic movies being filmed, and Alsatian women in a Las Vegas casino décor. This brand identity was reinforced throughout each brand period until now. The brand extensions launched on the market after the change of brand identity (household items and restaurants) follow the same codes of provocation and ostentation.

Dolce & Gabbana's development model corresponds to a massive introduction of brand extensions without consistency in the brand identity over twenty years. Then a radical change in the brand narrative occured ex-post and provided overall consistency with the brand and its many products. This process closely reflects the description of the accommodation brand development model.

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Insert Table 3

Insert Table 4

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Case no. 2: Gucci

Gucci was created in 1921. The case of Gucci is specific. Because several extensions have been launched simultaneously (for example in 1931, 1968 and 1978), only four periods have

been identified for this brand until now. We must remember here that a period corresponds to the time gap between two extensions (or two groups of extensions).The first four periods had the same brand identity. Despite the launch of many new products, the brand identity remained focused on the brand's original know-how: trunk making and leather craftsmanship. In ad campaigns, the bags were showcased up close, and the inscription "*Master craftsman trunk maker*" were featured. The 1976 advertising campaign portrays Gucci as a brand exclusively selling bags. It was only after the introduction of all its brand extensions, in 1994, that Gucci adopted a new brand identity: sensuality. Its new narrative gave consistency to the brand and its product categories because it was no longer anchored to a specific product. The sensuality of Gucci was staged in ads that used men and women in suggestive poses (Envy perfume in 1997; ads representing naked bodies; product names that are themselves sensual and often intended to be sensually romantic such as "Flora"). This period coincided with the arrival of Tom Ford as Gucci's creative director.

This brand development at Gucci was carried out in two phases: first with successive brand extensions that were not really consistent with the brand's identity, and secondly with a change in the brand's identity to federate and legitimise these extensions ex-post. This process closely reflects the description of the accommodation brand development model.

<center>Insert Table 6</center>

Case no. 3: Hermès

Hermès was founded in 1837. Nine periods have been identified for this brand since its beginnings, corresponding to eight brand extensions and the original product category: leather goods. The company initially manufactured products for saddlers, accessories for cars (trunks) and travel bags. In 1922, Hermès extended its brand identity to expertise in the broader sense and also to reflect the French flair for lifestyle: "*savoir-vivre à la française*". This identity was reinforced throughout the history of the brand through various communication campaigns: "*Elegance and comfort for sports and travel*" (1922), "*For your elegance*" (1927); "*Handcrafted French impressions inspired by the tradition of craftsmanship itself*" (1931); many visuals of craftsmanship and pictures of Paris streets. From 1922, Hermès gradually began to introduce brand extensions: leather goods (collection of travel bags and handbags), watches, ready-to-wear clothing, accessories (silk scarves and ties), ceramic products (crockery) and shoes.

Thus the integration of brand extensions was legitimised by the brand's previous evolution and the extension of its identity. The original identity of the brand was functional but became symbolic very quickly. The brand was thereby able to incorporate the brand extensions in a consistent way without bringing about a change of identity. This process is similar to the assimilation model of brand development.

Insert Table 7

Case no. 4: Louis Vuitton

Louis Vuitton was created in 1854. Ten periods have been identified, corresponding to nine brand extensions plus the initial brand expertise (trunk making). The brand identity in the first period, before brand extensions, was expertise as a trunk maker (with many visual and linguistic signs in its brand communication). Up until 1900, the company manufactured increasingly sophisticated items, but limited only to trunks. In 1901, the brand expanded into a category very close to its initial craft: leather goods. This extension was highlighted in brand communication: "*The master leather craftsman*". An enlargement of the brand identity marked this second period with the use of the slogan "*Travel Spirit*". The ad campaigns employed many images of landscapes (rocks, snow, mountains, etc.) and adventure. After 1993, the brand launched many extensions: literary collections, pens, notebooks, ready-to-wear clothing, tourist guides, costume jewellery, watches, high fashion jewellery and sunglasses. The brand identity was reinforced and deployed in each of these periods with representations of leisure and business travellers, cities and dream trips.

An evolution in the brand identity then took place before the progressive introduction of brand extensions. The brand's symbolic identity, developed very soon after its creation, has legitimised the successive brand extensions without changing what the brand was. This process is similar to the assimilation brand development model.

Insert Table 8

Results of expert interviews

Interviews with experts highlight the awarness of current brand managers to think long term: "*the brands must be considered over time*", "*it is essential to consider the development of brands over the long term*". However, financial pressures are often important (especially for fashion houses belonging to groups) and often result in the need to achieve short-term results:

"*Although many people think that they should take action for the long term it is sometimes complicated to implement. Companies do not necessarily have the ability or the time required*".

Management between consistency and change is also at the heart of the managers' concerns. However, it seems that few people in business are actually charged to think and work on these elements: "*strategic thought is established by the executives and only by them. They are in charge of deciding on what to keep and which ones can change*".

Once presented with the different models of brand development, namely the assimilation and accommodation models, both experts agree that brands can actually take different paths in time: "In my work, *I have repeatedly observe different models of development*". According to them, the choice of either model comes from management and different managers (marketing manager, brand manager). It must indeed take many years to implement these development strategies. The brand culture must be strong and stable "*in my experience, it seems that the management of the brand depends on the impulse that managers give. The choice of different directors is therefore essential. Any sudden change can have very negative consequences*".

Specifically related to the assimilation model, both managers agree that it is the ideal scenario for the development of a brand: "*If a brand is growing like that, it is a very good sign that it is a healthy brand*". For experts, this development model maximizes the chances for successful product launches, perceived as more consistent with the identity: "*when brands work on their identity prior to the launch of extensions, they are often accepted by consumers*". However, this scenario is complex to implement. Leaders are often focused on short-term results: "*How can we accept that shareholders lose money in the short term without being sure to earn more afterwards?*"

Regarding the accommodation model, the two experts consider that it is more frequent and easier to implement. It is simpler to think about their development strategy in the short term, especially with the introduction of extensions: "*it is clear that it is a more natural way ofthinking of the business. This is also what is mainly observed in firms today*". Although management gives its final approval for the development of brands, the level of reflexion is more operational. According to experts, this development model is often used to generate positive results in the short term, but there is a significant risk of facing long-term problems of consistency. According to them, the consequences can be disastrous "*when a brand does not have time to think about long-term consequences and develops many brand extensions. Often after a certain point, it is forced to withdraw a large number of products from the market in order to re-focus on its core craft*".

Finally, regarding the link between brand identity and the models of assimilation or accommodation, both experts say they do not have the opportunity to work on these elements, also evolving in a context where their work must also be focused on the short term. This element enhances the interest of this research where the dynamic and long-term vision of brands is studied.

Discussion

The purpose of this article is to analyse the dynamic vision of brand extension and to highlight the different models of brand development by using a specific methodology. The four cases studied highlight the dynamic processes of brand development in terms of brand extensions and brand identity.

Although each of the four brands has developed and launched many extensions, they do not all expand in the same way. Two brands (Hermès and Louis Vuitton) have used the assimilation model. These brands integrate brand extensions in a consistent and legitimate way without the need to change their brand identity. The other two (Gucci and Dolce & Gabbana) have developed via the accommodation model. The launch of their brand extensions has led to a change in brand identity. These two brand development models – assimilation and accommodation – are represented in the two diagrams below. The graphs below show the changes over time in brand identity and the number of brand extensions, based on the type of development model used.

<div align="center">Insert Figure 1</div>
<div align="center">Insert Figure 2</div>

According to the literature, the development models seem to depend on the type of brand identity (symbolic or functional brand). The following cross-analysis, supported by the results of interviews with experts, will allow us to study these elements and determine the features of each model.

Brands and the assimilation model

Brand identity evolved first in the cases of Hermès and Louis Vuitton. It was built on more abstract values than its know-how very soon after the brand creation ("travel spirit" for Louis Vuitton). It is only after this brand identity extension that we can observe successive launches

of new product categories. Brand extensions were legitimised by the prior development of the brand's symbolic identity. Thanks to their abstract values, these brands could introduce brand extensions in a consistent way without having an impact on their identity. This development model is consistent with the research of Park and al. (1991) and Kapferer (2004). They show that symbolic brands have a greater brand extension potential than others. The assimilation model of brand development corresponds to the recommendations made by managers and researchers on brand evolution, i.e. remaining consistent over time while introducing change. Under this model, brands are progressively strengthened, expanded and modernized (Keller, 1999, 2003; Kapferer, 2004); this is an adaptive structure. This development process shares the vision of Kapferer (2004), who states that not all brands are ready for brand extensions but that it is possible to prepare them. Thus the launch of communication campaigns to expand brand identity is a way to anticipate future product extensions and legitimise them. The assimilation model appears to be relatively secure and progressive. However it requires long-term thinking, which is often difficult for brands belonging to the groups listed. Note that the two brands using this model are French and are relatively old, created in the mid-19th century.

Brands and the accommodation model

For Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci, the pattern is the opposite. The introduction of brand extensions took place before the evolution of the brand identity. It was after the massive product extension that we observed a change in the brand narrative. Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci are in a system of accommodation. These brands have been stretched across many product categories apparently without paying attention to brand consistency. Indeed, the initial brand identity was based on the expertise of the brand. Because of its functional identity, the brand did not integrate as many legitimate extensions (Park and al., 1991; Kapferer, 2004).

These massive extensions led to the need to entirely change the brand identity. This new brand identity was more abstract and federated all the product categories around a broader concept (i.e. sensuality for Gucci). Therefore, this process of accommodation involves a total transformation of the existing brand identity to adjust it to new product categories. The radical change of identity for Dolce & Gabbana and Gucci does not follow the recommendations put forward in previous research (Keller, 1999, 2003; Kapferer, 2004). The accommodation model seems to work faster, with a short-term vision. It is often easier for managers and

leaders to introduce extensions in order to generate short-term profits. This strategy entails more risk because the failure of new product launches could be more significant. The need to change brand identity leads to very high marketing costs (financially and the time spent implementing the change). While assimilation seems to be a proactive brand development strategy, accommodation can be thought of as a strategy for remedying a loss of brand management. The two brands using this model are Italian and are relatively recent, created during the 21st century.

Based on these analyses, Table 9 summarizes the main findings. In summary, both models follow different specifications. Each has its advantages and risks. However these are related to the research context (luxury brands) and cannot be generalized at this stage. These elements will be discussed in the limitations and further research.

<center>Insert Table 9</center>

Theoretical and methodological implications

The results of this research lead to theoretical and methodological implications.

Regarding theoretical implications, this article deeply analyses brands and their long-term management. In particular, the focus on the two long-run models of brand development is a major research contribution. Beyond previous research on the short-term effects of brand extensions (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Keller and Aaker, 1992; Loken and Roedder John, 1993; Roux and Boush, 1996; Martinez and de Chernatony, 2004; Keller, 2009; Hagtvedt and Patrick, 2009; Jung and Tey, 2010), the analysis of assimilation and accommodation models can lead to several strategic plans for the long term. Moreover, previous research has focused on consumers' perceptions at a given time. In this work, we work on brand identity by analysing the speech emitted directly. These contributions complete previous research and thus can adopt a complementary managerial vision. This allows for studying how far brands can be extended, without having to use consumer research. It also guarantees the confidentiality of business strategies, avoiding dissemination of information to competitors

Concerning the methodological implications, research uses a longitudinal analysis with brand chronologies. This method is not used very often to study brand development. However, it can bring a better understanding of what a brand is over time. The use of semiotics also constitutes an important contribution of this research. It allows for analysing the core and invariant values of brands. These methodological contributions complete previous research on brands, offering an independent analysis process, different from consumer perceptions, also

giving a general overview of the brand's content.

Managerial implications

This article has highlighted two types of brand development strategy (assimilation and accommodation). This point can help managers be aware of the need to manage brand with a long-term perspective. They must be in a process of anticipation by analyzing the identity of their brand and their history (especially concerning brand extensions).

Regarding brands that are already established on the market, they should first make a diagnosis of the situation to see how they have developed until now. Then based on this diagnosis, several recommendations can be suggested.

If the brand has worked on its identity by expanding and developing its universe, from a product concept to a more abstract concept, then the brand has followed a model of assimilation and it is possible to run multiple brand extensions.

On the contrary, if the brand has launched extensions without previously enlarging its identity (as in the accommodation model), then it has a more complex situation. The risk of brand inconsistency or the risk of product failure is great. Thus, it is advisable to work quickly on brand identity and find a story or values that can unite or federate all brand products.

For a new brand, compared to the benefits and risks identified, it is recommended to go directly into a scheme of assimilation. It is important to be aware of the need for expanding the brand identity before introducing extensions.

Finally, the explicit methodology and the numerous grids used in this article could be used by managers to analyse their model of brand development and to decide how they need to act in the future.

Limitations and further research

The objectives of this research required a multiple case study (analysing four brands). Two different processes of brand development (assimilation and accommodation) have been identified. To further this research, it would be useful to study other brands, even though the case studies detailed herein were chosen because they are representative of brand development patterns.

The choice of brands should be based on other brand characteristics highlighted in the discussion of the findings, which could also illustrate the two models. In particular, brands

belonging to different countries should be taken into account in an effort to explain the hypothetical impact of brand management (Pedersen and Thomsen, 1997; Hofstede, 2004). More in-depth analysis of the differences between French brands (like Chanel and Dior) and Italian brands (such as Bonneta Veneta or Prada) would be welcome. The comparison could be extended further by studying American brands (such as Coach). The creation date of brands and their key events should also be taken into account.

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Table 1: Analytical grid of brand advertising and communication

		Signifier	**Signified**
Plastic message	*Frame*		
	Angle shooting		
	Composition		
	Shapes		
	Colours; Lighting and texture		
Figurative message	*Patterns, figures, real objects*		
	Characters		
Linguistic message	*Pictures of words (typography, colours, shapes, letters…)*		
	Meaning		

Table 2: Brand chronology and analysis

	19XX	19XX	19XX	19XX	19XX				2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Brand events													
Brand extensions	1st product category		1st Brand extension						Nth Brand extension				
Brand communication													
	Period 1		Period 2			Period …			Period N				
	Brand identity for period 1		Brand identity for period 2			…			Brand identity for period N				
	↔ Evolution analysis		↔ Evolution analysis			↔ Evolution analysis							

Table 3: Dolce & Gabbana chronology

Dolce & Gabbana chronology			
Brand periods	**Dates**	**Effective product territory**	**Brand identity**
Period 1	1985 – 1987	Ready-to-wear clothing	Fashion
Period 2	1988 – 1990	Ready-to-wear clothing + **Underwear**	
Period 3	1991 – 1992	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + **Accessories (headscarves)**	
Period 4	1992 – 1993	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + **Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume**	
Period 5	1994 – 1995	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + **Household linen**	
Period 6	1995 – 1996	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + **Glasses**	
Period 7	1996 – 1999	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + Glasses + **Music CDs**	1997 to present: mix of opposites and provocation (see table 4)
Period 8	2000 – 2005	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + Glasses + Music CDs + **Lingerie**	
Period 9	2006 – 2009	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + Glasses + Music CDs + Lingerie + **Restaurant**	

Table 4: Dolce & Gabbana (brand identity from 1997 to now)

		Signifier	**Signified**
Plastic message	*Frame*	Framing not on the product but especially on the context	Focus on the "mise en scene", the context, the world of the brand, not the product
	Angle shooting	Different angle depending on the scenes	
	Composition	Reading focuses on the context and only after the product	Importance of the mise en scene and the universe of the brand
	Shapes	Various shapes	
	Colours ; Lighting and texture	Various colors, with contrast effect (mixing colors, colors not matching, flashy)	Mixture of genres, blending of opposites
Figurative message	*Patterns, figures, real objects*	Naked bodies, multiple bodies in a scene Viewing suggesting sex scene several people Different types of mixtures: old apartment with modern decor and a old lady with a young couple...	Provocation stage displaced from the standard Sexuality (offset, provocative, ostentatious) Shift and mixing all genres
	Characters	Characters varied and numerous Reconciliation and proximity of naked bodies	Abundance of pleasures Sexuality Provocation
Linguistic message	*Pictures of words (typography, colours, shapes, letters…)*	Mixture of straight and curved writing	Mixing masculinity and femininity Mixture of opposites, daring
	Meaning	Website: « It's not what you wear, but how you wear it » No slogan	Focus on the attitude of the people and not only on the product Desire to focus on the image that the words (more expressive)

Table 5: extract from the chronology of Dolce & Gabbana

	1985	1989	1991	1992	1994	1995	1996
Brand Identity	Period 1 Fashion	Period 2 Fashion	Period 3 Fashion	Period 4 Fashion	Period 5 Fashion	Period 6 Fashion	Period 7 (a) Fashion
Products and extension	Ready-to-wear clothing	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves)	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) +	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) +	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + Glasses	Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume +

	1997	1998	2000	2001	2004	2006	2007
Brand Identity	Period 7 (b) Mix of opposites, sexuality and provocation		Period 8 Mix of opposites, sexuality and provocation			Period 9 Mix of opposites, sexuality and provocation	
Products and extension			Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + Glasses + Music CDs + Lingerie			Ready-to-wear clothing + Underwear + Accessories (headscarves + ties) + Perfume + Household linen + Glasses + Music CDs + Lingerie + Restaurant	

Table 6: Gucci chronology

Gucci chronology			
Brand periods	**Dates**	**Effective product territory**	**Brand identity**
Period 1	1921 – 1930	Trunk maker + Leather Goods	Expertise as a maker of trunks and leather goods
Period 2	1931 – 1967	Trunk maker + Leather Goods + **Gloves, shoes, belts**	
Period 3	1968 – 1977	Trunk maker + Leather Goods + Gloves, shoes, belts + **Ready-to-wear clothing, perfume and watches**	
Period 4	1978 – present	Trunk maker + Leather Goods + Gloves, shoes, belts + Ready-to-wear clothing, perfume and watches + **Fashion as a whole (all accessories)**	1994 to present: sensuality

Table 7: Hermès chronology

Hermès chronology			
Brand periods	**Dates**	**Effective product territory**	**Brand identity**
Period 1	1837 – 1921	Saddlery (and accessories for cars with first leather goods)	Saddler and leatherworking expert
Period 2	1922 – 1927	Saddlery (and accessories) + **Leather Goods (expansion of collections)**	1922 to present: saddler and leatherworking expert + French lifestyle know-how
Period 3	1928 – 1929	Saddlery (and accessories) + Leather Goods (expansion of collections) + **Watches**	
Period 4	1929 – 1936	Saddlery (and accessories) + Leather Goods (expansion of collections) + Watches + **Ready-to-wear clothing**	
Period 5	1937 – 1946	Saddlery (and accessories) + Leather Goods (expansion of collections) + Watches + Ready-to-wear clothing + **Silk scarves**	
Period 6	1947 – 1949	Saddlery (and accessories) + Leather Goods (expansion of collections) + Watches + Ready-to-wear clothing + Silk scarves + **Ties**	
Period 7	1950 – 1960	Saddlery (and accessories) + Leather Goods (expansion of collections) + Watches + Ready-to-wear clothing + Silk scarves + Ties + **Perfume**	
Period 8	1961 – 1982	Saddlery (and accessories) + Leather Goods (expansion of collections) + Watches + Ready-to-wear clothing + Silk scarves + Ties + Perfume + **Ceramic goods**	

Table 8: Louis Vuitton chronology

Louis Vuitton chronology			
Brand periods	**Dates**	**Effective product territory**	**Brand identity**
Period 1	1854 – 1900	Trunks	Expertise as a trunk maker
Period 2	1901 – 1993	Trunks + **Leather goods**	1983 to present: expertise as a trunk maker + "Travel spirit"
Period 3	1994 – 1996	Trunks + Leather goods + **Literary Collections**	
Period 4	1997 – 1998	Trunks + Leather goods + Literary Collections + **Pens**	
Period 5	1998 – 1999	Trunks + Leather goods + Literary Collections + Pens + **Notebooks** + **Ready-to-wear clothing**	
Period 6	1999 – 2000	Trunks + Leather goods + Literary Collections + Pens + Notebooks + Ready-to-wear clothing + **Tourist guides**	
Period 7	2001 – 2002	Trunks+ Leather goods + Literary Collections + Pens + Notebooks + Ready-to-wear clothing + Tourist guides + **Costume jewellery**	
Period 8	2002 – 2003	Trunks + Leather goods + Literary Collections + Pens + Notebooks + Ready-to-wear clothing + Tourist guides + Costume jewellery + **Watches**	
Period 9	2004 – 2005	Trunks + Leather goods + Literary Collections + Pens + Notebooks + Ready-to-wear clothing + Tourist guides + Costume jewellery + Watches + **High fashion jewellery**	
Period 10	2005 – present	Trunks + Leather goods + Literary Collections + Pens + Notebooks + Ready-to-wear clothing + Tourist guides + Costume jewellery + Watches + High fashion jewellery + **Sunglasses**	

Table 9: Summary of assimilation and accommodation brand development models

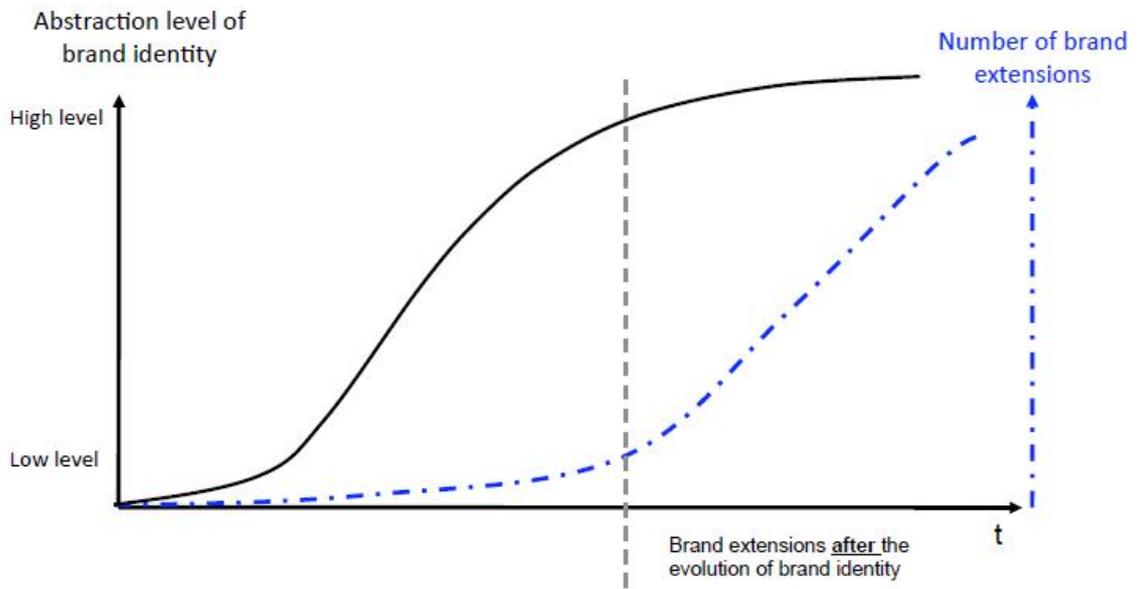|	Assimilation model	Accommodation model
Model definition	Evolution of brand identity prior to the introduction of brand extensions	Change in brand identity only after the massive introduction of brand extensions
Brands	Hermès Louis Vuitton	Dolce & Gabbana Gucci
Type of initial brand identity before the introduction of extensions	Symbolic identity	Functional (utilitarian) identity
Age of brand	Mid-19th century	Mid and late 20th century
Country of brand	France	Italy
Other features	More secure, Progressive	Faster
	Long-term vision of brand management	Short-term vision of brand management
	Difficult to implement because it requires long-term thinking	More risky because there is a high probability the brand extensions will fail

Figure 1: Assimilation brand development model
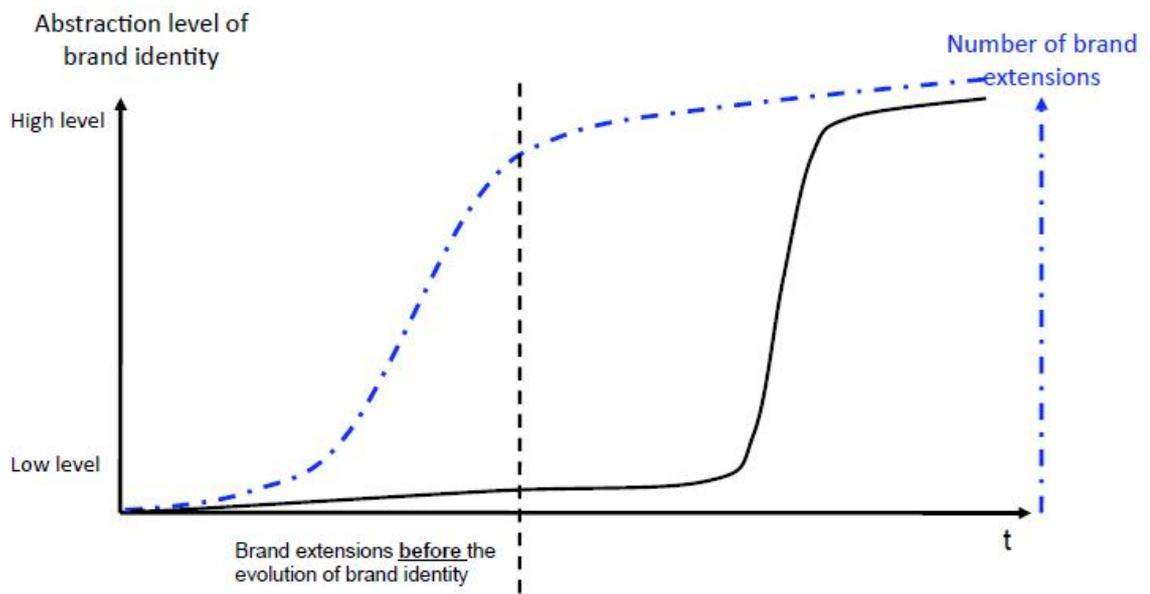
Figure 2: Accommodation brand development model