

Intergenerational Capital: A Strategic Lever to Enhance Consumer-Brand Relationships

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Abstract:

This research investigates how the transmission of culinary practices influences the consumer–brand relationship. Recognizing the significance of intergenerational transmissions for consumers and their implications for brands (Moore et al., 2002), we draw upon the theoretical frameworks of intergenerational capital (Guillemot, 2018) and consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998). Our aim is to determine to what extent intergenerational transmissions enrich the consumer–brand relationship. An experimental study (N = 320) with two brand types (Kessous and Chalamon, 2014) and three intergenerational capital representations (Ladwein et al., 2009) demonstrates that the consumer–brand relationship varies. We propose an integrative model. Our findings show the benefits of a positioning strategy centered on intergenerational capital, offering recommendations for marketing practitioners on brand types and implications (cognitive, conative, affective). This approach offers brands sustainable differentiation by integrating into family dynamic and enabling the materialization of transmitted family practices (Kessous et al., 2015).

Keywords: intergenerational capital, consumer-brand relationship, culinary practices

Track: Relationship Marketing

1. Introduction

“Happiness lies in the kitchen.” This quote from Paul Bocuse, a legend of French gastronomy, is indicative of contemporary practices. The enthusiasm for culinary activities continues to grow, with 83% of French people reporting that they eat and cook together (IPSOS, 2020). "Cooking" has become a practice of transmission (Piquandet, 2012) and a means of cultivating happiness (TNS, 2014). Food brands are leveraging intergenerational transmissions. In 2023, Nestlé Dessert has capitalized on moments of sharing in baking. Actimel followed suit with its March 2022 campaign: "Yesterday, like today, for your immune defenses." Bonne Maman proudly showcases its grandmother's recipes. Intergenerational transmissions have captured the attention of researchers (Guillemot, 2018), introducing the intergenerational capital. However, its conceptualization remains unclear (Ladwein, Carton and Sevin, 2009), and its influence on consumer-brand relationship has never been empirically established.

To investigate how brands could optimize the use of intergenerational transmissions in their strategy, we draw on the theoretical frameworks of intergenerational capital (Guillemot, 2018) and consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). Intergenerational capital encompasses "*a foundation of material and immaterial assets that is transmitted and evolves from generation to generation*" (Guillemot, 2018). These frameworks are relevant in the context of culinary practices, where transmission is supposed to strengthen the emotional and identity-based bonds between generations (Certeau, 1994), offering opportunity for brand's differentiation (Fox and Alldred, 2019). The intergenerational transmission of culinary practices raises the question of this research: to what extent can intergenerational transmissions enrich the consumer-brand relationship? Thus, an experimental study (N=320) involving two types of brands (Kessous and Chalamon, 2014) and three representations of intergenerational capital (Ladwein et al., 2009) was conducted. It demonstrates that the consumer-brand relationship varies depending on types of brand and representations of intergenerational capital. Then, an integrative model is proposed and tested. This article presents first the literature on intergenerational capital and consumer-brand relationship, followed by the methodology and the discussion of the results. Theoretical, managerial implications, limitations and future avenues are addressed in the final section.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The intergenerational capital

Research conducted over several decades has explored the notion of intergenerational transmission in consumer behavior (Moore and Lutz, 1988 ; Bradford, 2009 ; Cai, Zhao and

He, 2015). Two primary streams of research emerge: socialization (Ward, 1974) and demographic aging (Price, Arnould and Folkman Curasi, 2000). The first examines the process through which individuals acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for their consumer role (Ward, 1974). The second stream focuses on individuals' psychological aging (Urien, 2003), cultivating a close connection with the awareness of their own mortality. Intergenerational transmissions occur within an exchange system (Gire, 2003), involving both material (Price et al., 2000 ; Kessous, Valette-Florence and De Barnier, 2017) and immaterial objects (Moore, Wilkie and Lutz, 2002 ; Kessous and Chalamon, 2014). Intergenerational transmissions foster a close connection with the self-concept and nostalgia (Kessous and Chalamon, 2014; Moore et al., 2002). Generations are understood from a familial perspective (Kessous et al., 2017) as well as a demographic one (Belaid, Capelli and Sabadie, 2022). The generativity of consumers, defined as the motivation to invest in activities benefiting future generations, is central (Lacroix and Jolibert, 2015). Kessous et al. (2017) identifies it as a precursor to intergenerational transmissions.

The dynamics of transmission give rise to the emergence of an integrative foundation: trans/intergenerational capital. The prefixes "trans" and "inter" coexist. The former considers the recipients, while the latter includes both giver and recipient. Ladwein et al. (2009) highlight the creation of a foundation integrating knowledge and consumer skills. Transgenerational capital is defined as an *"intangible and enduring asset that incorporates the rules of 'family-consumption knowledge' accumulated over time and transmitted across generations."* It includes transmitted elements, transmission mechanisms, and life events. The authors propose three types of capital representations for brands to leverage in their strategy: the sharing between generations, the product as the center of transmission, and the integration of life dynamics (Ladwein et al., 2009). Guillemot (2018) offers a broader vision of intergenerational capital. He distinguishes four dimensions: sociocultural, economic, psychological, and genetic. Sociocultural capital aligns with Ladwein et al.'s (2009) vision by integrating attitudes, preferences, and consumption practices while adopting a bilateral approach to the roles of givers and receivers. Intergenerational capital provides an integrative framework for understanding how transmissions influence consumption behaviors and strengthen identity ties.

2.2. The consumer-brand relationship

The relational approach to brands offers major insights into the study of consumption practices. Fournier (1998) introduced the importance of building a relationship between brands

and consumers. Today, in addition to considering objectives related to loyalty and profitability (Fournier and Yao, 1997), brands must engage in societal initiatives (Gurviez and Sirieix, 2017). They contribute to promoting intergenerational transmissions. Brands play a role in the identity construction of individuals (Sirgy, 1982), confirming and reinforcing the image consumers cultivate of themselves (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Consumers can become attached to brands (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005). Such attachment reflects a lasting and unalterable emotional relationship (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci, 2010), with two antecedents: nostalgic connections and brand connections to the self-concept (Fournier, 1998). It also helps foster engagement and word-of-mouth (Lacoeuilhe, Amine, Herrmann, Des Garets and Michel, 2021). These concepts are especially prevalent in the food industry. Lévi-Strauss (1968) highlights the contribution of culinary practices to identity construction, serving as a means of expressing both individual and collective identities and contributing to food well-being (Boussoco, Dany, Giboreau and Urdapilleta, 2016).

These practices are conducive to intergenerational transmissions, leading to the creation of intergenerational capital that could influence brand relationships. While research has highlighted the dynamics of intergenerational capital, a theoretical gap remains regarding its impact on the consumer-brand relationship. Moore et al. (2002) demonstrated that intergenerational influence strengthens brand equity by fostering emotional bonds and brand loyalty. Cai et al. (2015) identified two types of intergenerational communication (conversations and recommendations), each having a significant impact on brand equity. These modes help develop brand associations and perceived quality, which in turn influence trust and loyalty. Despite these important findings on brand equity, the effects of transmissions on specific consumer-brand relationship variables remain unexplored.

3. Methodology

3.1. Experimental design and procedure

Our research investigates the role of brand typology—authentic and practical-economic (Kessous and Chalamon, 2014)—and representations of intergenerational capital, including intergenerational sharing, product at the center of the transmission, and integration of life dynamics (Ladwein et al., 2009), within the food industry through an online experiment. In addition, we test a causal model including those two factors into a global model that integrates brand nostalgia, self-brand connections and generativity. The online experiment (conducted via Prolific) was carried out in May 2024. Bonne Maman (authentic brand) and Panzani (practical

economic brand) were selected as two brands. Three fictitious pictures/ads (Sharing between two generations, Product at the center of transmission, Integration of life dynamics) were created for each brand. We took care to make the eight experimental treatments as similar as possible to isolate the effect of the brand character and the nature of the intergenerational capital. The “with control groups” quasi-experimental method was used to observe variations between one experimental group and another. The study comprised 8 experimental treatments and 2 control groups (Figure 1). Each respondent was exposed to only one treatment. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: "Your relationship with food brands," "[The tested brand] and you?" and "Your profile." The manipulation involved the launch of a new product, presented through a visual and detailed description. Two manipulation checks (brand typology, representations of intergenerational capital) and one attention check confirmed the success of the experiment.









Manipulation of Intergenerational Capital				
	Sharing between two generations	Product at the center of transmission	Integration of life dynamics	Absence of capital
Authentic: Bonne maman	<p>Rediscover the family moments of sharing around Bonne Maman's spread. It guarantees you convivial times cooking and enjoying together with your family. Bonne Maman contributes to these shared moments of happiness.</p> 	<p>Rediscover the taste of traditional shortbread cookies baked by your grandmother. Bonne Maman is your ally in crafting your family recipes. Passed down from generation to generation, Bonne Maman is the little secret in your family that makes all the difference.</p> 	<p>Bonne Maman and its traditional taste accompany you in all the moments of your life. Before school, before work, or even before a game of belote, Bonne Maman is the ally of your breakfasts throughout your life.</p> 	<p>Rediscover the unique taste of Bonne Maman's spread. Its quality ingredients and expert craftsmanship give it its distinctive flavor. It will be your ally for your breakfasts, snacks, and much more.</p> 
Practical-economic : Panzani	<p>Rediscover the family moments of sharing around Panzani pasta. They guarantee you convivial times cooking and enjoying together with your family. Panzani contributes to these shared moments of happiness.</p> 	<p>Rediscover the taste of traditional Bolognese pasta cooked by your grandmother. Panzani is your ally in crafting your family recipes. Passed down from generation to generation, Panzani is the little secret in your family that makes all the difference.</p> 	<p>Panzani and its traditional taste accompany you in all the moments of your life. Children, teenagers, parents, or with your grandchildren, Panzani accompanies you at every stage of your life. They enhance all your meals; young and old alike are delighted.</p> 	<p>Rediscover the unique taste of Panzani pasta. Their quality ingredients give them a perfect texture that will delight all food lovers. With tomato sauce, with cream, with or without parmesan, they will enhance all your dishes.</p> 

Figure 1. Experimental treatments

3.2. Sample, measurement and data analyses

The universal nature of food consumption allowed us to gather a convenience sample of 320 respondents (159 women, 161 men) divided into 8 experimental conditions, with 40 observations per cell (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1998). As proxies for the consumer–brand relationship, we selected brand attachment (Louis and Lombart, 2010), positive word-of-

mouth (Gebauer et al., 2013), and willingness to pay a premium price (Wiedmann et al., 2011) (dependent variables). These variables entail affective, cognitive, and conative consequences for consumers towards brands. Brand nostalgia (Kessous et al., 2015), self-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and generativity (Lacroix and Jolibert, 2015) were added as independent variables to test an integrative model. The literature identifies nostalgic connections, self-concept, and generativity as antecedents of intergenerational transmissions (Kessous and Chalamon, 2014; Moore et al., 2002; Kessous et al., 2017). Nostalgic connections and self-concept also emerge as antecedents of brand attachment (Fournier, 1998). Moore et al. (2002) reveal that intergenerational influence fosters emotional bonds with brands. Thus, we incorporated attachment as an affective outcome within the consumer-brand relationship. Hemonnet-Goujot et al. (2022) establish positive word-of-mouth and willingness to pay a premium as key cognitive and conative variables used to examine behaviors that build relationships with brands. We used only 5-point Likert scales and measurements whose reliability and validity had already been established by previous studies. The brand typology and representations of intergenerational capital were extracted from previous research (Kessous and Chalamon, 2014; Ladwein et al., 2009). Accordingly, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to verify the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement instruments. The influence of intergenerational capital representations on the consumer-brand relationship was established through MANOVAs and MANCOVAs, using SPSS software. The causal relationships between variables were further explored using PLS-SEM modeling via Smart PLS software. The validity of the structural model was confirmed through loadings, Cronbach's alphas, composite reliability, and extracted variance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Influence of Intergenerational Capital Representations

Our research shows how food brands can benefit from positioning based on intergenerational capital. The brand typology used ($M_{pratico} = 3.71$; $M_{auth} = 3.62$) and the representations of intergenerational capital ($M_{part} = 3.84$; $M_{prod} = 3.64$; $M_{dyna} = 3.39$) were empirically validated through manipulation checks. First, for the practical-economic brand (Panzani), brand attachment ($F(1,158) = 6.02$, $p < .02$), positive word-of-mouth ($F(1,158) = 8.67$, $p < .01$), and willingness to pay more ($F(1,158) = 5.71$, $p < .02$) were significantly higher when intergenerational capital representations are used (vs. control group). Then, for the authentic brand (Bonne maman), positive word-of-mouth ($F(1,158) = 10.611$, $p < .01$) and willingness to pay more ($F(1,158) = 13.75$, $p < .001$) were higher when intergenerational capital

representations are used (vs. control group), except for brand attachment ($F(1,158) = 3.078, p = .081$). The most influential representations of intergenerational capital for the consumer-brand relationship are the sharing between two generations and the product as the centerpiece. For practical-economic brands, sharing between generations significantly impacts attachment ($M_{\text{sharing}}=2.65; M_{\text{product}}=2.57$) and willingness to pay more ($M_{\text{sharing}}=2.8; M_{\text{product}}=2.65$). For authentic brands, the product as the centerpiece is key for attachment ($M_{\text{sharing}}=2.89; M_{\text{product}}=3.12$) and word-of-mouth ($M_{\text{sharing}}=3.68; M_{\text{product}}=3.88$). Authentic brands also show a higher propensity for attachment ($F(1,238) = 13.207, p < .001$) and willingness to pay more ($F(1,238) = 42.03, p < .001$). Marketing practitioners should prioritize the sharing between generations for practical-economic brands and the product as the centerpiece for authentic brands. Furthermore, practical-economic brands may capitalize on affective and conative variables, whereas authentic brands will primarily benefit from affective and cognitive variables. For brands using intergenerational capital representations, generativity positively influenced attachment ($\beta = .234$) and willingness to pay more ($\beta = .052$), but not word-of-mouth ($\beta = .149$). For brands using intergenerational capital representations, nostalgia positively influenced brand attachment ($\beta = .417$), positive word-of-mouth ($\beta = .407$), and willingness to pay more ($\beta = .229$). For brands using intergenerational capital representations, self-brand connections positively influenced brand attachment ($\beta = .793$), positive word-of-mouth ($\beta = .533$), and willingness to pay more ($\beta = .442$). Brands utilizing representations of intergenerational capital may thus leverage consumers' generativity to stimulate affective and conative variables, while nostalgia and self-brand connections will serve as supports for expanding affective, cognitive, and conative variables.

4.2. The Antecedents and Consequences of Intergenerational Capital Representations

In addition, results from the structural model establishes causal relationships (Figure 2). Intergenerational capital representations (ICR) have three antecedents with a direct influence from nostalgia and self-brand connections (SBC) and a moderating variable in objective familiarity. The significance of SBC highlights the identified identity aspect. The influence of generativity on sensitivity to ICR was too weak to be confirmed, although this effect may have been minimized by the sample choice. Moreover, nostalgia serves as an antecedent to generativity and is also an antecedent of SBC (Kessous et al., 2015). The variables influencing sensitivity to ICR have consequences for brand relationships. Attachment is influenced by generativity, nostalgia, and ICR. Word-of-mouth is influenced by ICR and SBC. Willingness to pay more is directly influenced by word-of-mouth and attachment and indirectly by ICR. Thus,

food brands utilizing representations of intergenerational capital enhance relational variables of an affective, cognitive, and conative nature. ICR thus presents an opportunity for food brands to strengthen their relationship with consumers.

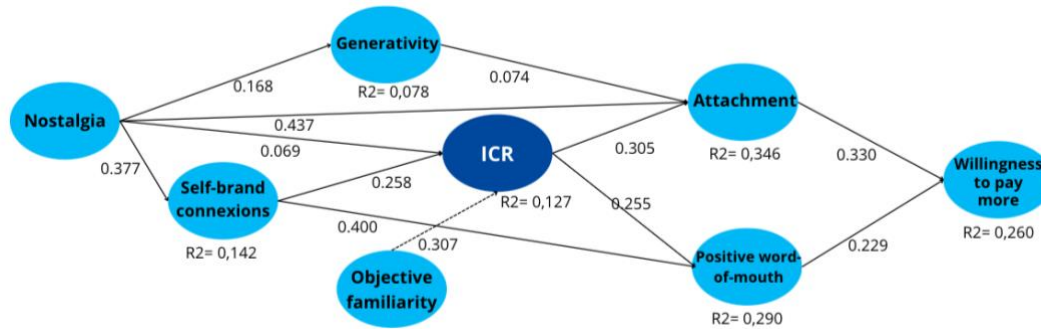


Figure 2. The structural model

5. Conclusions and Implications

Our managerial objective was to establish the benefits of a positioning strategy centered on intergenerational capital. Our findings demonstrate that this approach provides brands with an opportunity to integrate into family dynamics, allowing them to embody practices (Kessous et al., 2015). Intergenerational capital has tangible impacts on the consumer-brand relationship, with affective, cognitive and conative consequences. We have provided recommendations on the representations to adopt (brand types, outcomes). Practical-economic and authentic brands stand out in the intergenerational capital representations to mobilize (sharing between two generations, product as the centerpiece) and in the intended implications (affective, cognitive, conative). Segmenting generative consumers (Lacroix and Jolibert, 2015), those with strong nostalgic connections, and those with self-brand connections appears to be a beneficial strategy. The framework of the consumer-brand relationship is expanded (Fournier, 1998; Hemonnet-Goujot, Kessous, and Magnoni, 2022). Our research complements quantitative methods and opens avenues toward the creation of public policies, including awareness campaigns promoting healthy eating closely linked to transmitted culinary practices.

This research has limitations that open up new research avenues. Our study included only two types of food brands. Expanding the study to include more brands and differentiated sectors (e.g., kitchen utensils, cooking classes) would provide a more comprehensive view. While our research demonstrated the effects of intergenerational capital representations, developing a measure for intergenerational capital itself seems essential. A longitudinal study could also be beneficial to assess the long-term impact of brand positioning. These perspectives will enrich the theoretical understanding of intergenerational capital and continue exploring the intergenerational transmissions that offer valuable insights for marketing.

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