

Leveraging Continuity: Toward a Typology of Transgenerational Brands

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Abstract:

This study investigates the conceptualization of transgenerational brands (Bourcier-Béquaert & De Barnier, 2010) and their strategic implications through construal-level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Recognizing their significance for consumers (Cai et al., 2015), we draw on transgenerational capital (Guillemot, 2018) and consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). The research examines the advantages and risks of transgenerational strategies to propose a typology of transgenerational brands. Two qualitative studies with 51 participants (20 consumers, 31 practitioners) were conducted through semi-structured interviews and analyzed with thematic content analysis and textual statistics. Findings reveal benefits and vulnerabilities of transgenerational brands and lead to a four-part typology (inclusive, convivial, patrimonial, memorial) with strategic implications. The study highlights the dual nature of transgenerational brands as vehicles of continuity and strategic levers.

Keywords (3): transgenerational brand, brand typology, construal-level theory

Track: Product and Brand Management

1. Introduction

Many brands endure across generations, and consumers' enthusiasm continues to grow. In a context marked by economic and political crises, the consumption of "reference brands" provides a sense of identity and security (Kessous & Roux, 2012). Transgenerational brands share a common ambition: to persist across generations (Bourcier-Béquaert & De Barnier, 2010). Yet, their manifestations are diverse, even paradoxical. For instance, Herta's campaign "the first apartment" (May 2024) celebrates the conviviality of family meals, while French national lottery, in its "Origins" campaign (March 2025), reaffirms its cultural heritage and societal mission. The luxury sector is no exception: Patek Philippe's iconic slogan endures "*You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.*" Yet, a transgenerational strategy is not without risk (Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016). The discontinuation of Cachous Lajaunie, a brand passed down since 1880, reminds us that even transgenerational brands can vanish. Identifying strategies to mitigate these risks is essential.

The concept of transgenerational brands is rooted in transgenerational capital, defined as "a set of material and immaterial assets transmitted and evolving from one generation to the next" (Guillemot, 2018), in which brands play a central role (Cai et al., 2015). Although interest is growing (Ladwein et al., 2009), existing work still offers a partial view of brand transgenerationality, without distinguishing its different forms or articulating the associated risks and levers (Heilbrunn, 1999; Kessous, 2011). Understanding how brands unfold across generations remains essential. To address this gap, we draw on transgenerational capital (Guillemot, 2018) to explain transmission mechanisms and the brand's role, and on the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998) to capture consumer-brand bonds. This research addresses two questions: (1) What are the advantages and risks of a transgenerational brand strategy? (2) What types of transgenerational brands emerge, and what are their strategic implications? To answer these questions, we conducted two qualitative studies with 51 participants (20 consumers, 31 practitioners). The research identifies these advantages and risks and proposes a typology of transgenerational brands and their implications. The paper then presents the theoretical background, methodology, results, and implications.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The transgenerational capital

For several decades, research in consumer behavior has examined intergenerational transmissions (Moore & Lutz, 1988; Bradford, 2009; Cai et al., 2015). Two main streams can

be distinguished: the socialization (Ward, 1974) which examines how individuals acquire the skills to perform their role as consumers. The second focuses on demographic ageing (Price et al., 2000), emphasizing the importance of transmitting a symbolic legacy (Urien, 2003). Transmissions occur within an exchange system (Gire, 2003). Among the various elements transmitted, brands hold a central position. They encompass both material dimensions (products, consumption practices) and immaterial ones (values, memories, and identities) (Curasi et al., 2004; Kessous et al., 2017). Parental influence shapes brand preferences, which tend to persist over time (Moore et al., 2002). Brands operate as symbolic resources within transgenerational cultural transfer (Bulmer & Buchanan, 2011; Epp & Price, 2008). They contribute to family and cultural mythologies by intertwining commercial narratives with personal experiences (Diamond et al., 2009). Brands are transmitted as meaningful forms of heritage (Kessous et al., 2017). These contributions converge toward the notion that intergenerational transmissions are structured around a foundational construct: transgenerational capital. This capital comprises consumption-related knowledge and skills (Ladwein et al., 2009), as well as a set of symbolic markers embodied by brands. In Guillemot's (2018) extended framework, which distinguishes four dimensions (sociocultural, economic, psychological, and genetic), brands emerge as structuring vectors of sociocultural capital. They incorporate and transmit attitudes, preferences, and consumption practices. Transgenerational capital thus sheds light on the construction of transgenerational brands by reinforcing symbolic and identity continuity across generations, while the relational approach clarifies how such transmissions nurture the emotional bond between consumers and brands.

2.2. The consumer-brand relationship

The relational approach to brands provides a foundation for studying transgenerational brands. Fournier (1998) introduced the importance of building a relationship between consumers and brands. Today, in addition to considering loyalty and profitability (Fournier and Yao, 1997), brands must engage in societal initiatives (Gurviez et al., 2017). They contribute to promoting intergenerational transmissions. Transgenerational brands have been defined as “offers designed to address multiple generations simultaneously and capable of enduring across generations” (Heilbrunn, 1999; Bourcier-Béquaert & De Barnier, 2010). The literature distinguishes two main modes of expression: a segmentation logic (targeting consumers of different ages) and an intergenerational influence logic (reproducing familial consumption habits) (Moore et al., 2002; Ladwein et al., 2009). This distinction appears reductive given the diversity of observed brand. Moreover, prior studies have highlighted

strategic implications. They encourage word-of-mouth (Moore et al., 2002; Cai et al., 2015), foster longevity through generative tendencies (Curasi et al., 2004; Kessous & Roux, 2010), and increase brand value (Ladwein et al., 2009; Cai et al., 2015). They nurture emotional attachment through nostalgia and transmitted objects imbued with meaning (Kessous et al., 2017). However, transgenerational brands are not immune to risks. Brands may decline, and ageing can lead to disappearance (Lehu, 2004). Research on brand resurrection (Dion & Mazzalovo, 2016; Volpert & Michel, 2022) shows that brands may suffer from a loss of relevance and vanish. Identifying these risks is crucial for anticipating the pitfalls inherent in transgenerational strategies. These contributions reveal the diversity of transgenerational brand expressions but the multiple dimensions through which transgenerationality operates, temporally (past-present-future), socially (across generations and roles), and spatially (via shared uses, transferred objects, or symbolic experiences). To interpret how these forms of psychological distance shape consumers' representations, we draw on Construal Level Theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), which links distance to levels of abstraction and explains how consumers construe transgenerational brands, from concrete shared uses to more symbolic or heritage-based meanings. These three dimensions, temporal (generational continuity), social (relationships between consumers and brands), and spatial (vectors of transgenerationality), structure our typology and account for the heterogeneity of transgenerational brand forms.

3. Methodology

This research draws on two cross-exploratory qualitative studies designed to capture the dual structure of transgenerational brand representations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two populations (20 consumers and 31 marketing practitioners) to contrast experiences with strategic viewpoints. Two interview guides were developed, structured four sections following a funnel logic (Gavard-Perret et al., 2008). The consumer sample was constructed a diversity-based logic (age, gender, socio-professional status), including 12 women and 8 men aged 22-72. The practitioner sample reflected heterogeneity in expertise and market exposure (job position, seniority, functional department, industry, firm size, and brand transgenerationality), comprising 21 women and 10 men with 5-31 years of experience, from micro-firms to large corporations. Sample size followed the criterion of semantic saturation (Roussel & Wacheux, 2005). Data were collected between April and June 2025. Consumer interviews lasted an average of 62 minutes (419 pages), and practitioner interviews 42 minutes (425 pages). Data analysis combined thematic and lexical approaches. First, a thematic content analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 (Bardin, 2003). A floating reading

informed category development, which was then refined and structured according to the three components of construal-level theory. The typology was developed following the typological procedure (Doty & Glick, 1994; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). In line with the exploratory nature, the typology does not claim exclusivity and may evolve according to consumers' experiences and brands' positioning. Second, textual statistical analyses (Descending Hierarchical Classification and Correspondence Analysis) were performed using Iramuteq (Garnier & Guérin-Pace, 2010) to assess the robustness of the findings and to confront manual coding with automated treatments (Lebart & Salem, 1994). Finally, triangulation with secondary data (brand websites, press articles) strengthened contextual validity.

4. Results and Discussion

The results show that transgenerational strategies generate both structural assets and vulnerabilities. On the opportunity side, market weight reflects the symbolic authority accumulated through multigenerational familiarity, which reinforces legitimacy and competitive influence. Strategic durability arises from intergenerational continuity, securing a stable demand base and supporting long-term coherence. Relational and affective capital emerges from shared memories and family practices, strengthening trust, attachment, and loyalty. Conversely, several risks illustrate the tensions inherent to transgenerationality. Strategic dispersion occurs when addressing heterogeneous cohorts stretches positioning and organizational resources. Identity loss results from modernization efforts that undermine historical meaning and perceived authenticity. Lock-in and inertia reflect the constraints imposed by legacy codes that restrict innovation. Finally, an ageing or outdated image threatens relevance when brands fail to renew themselves without breaking continuity. Together, these mechanisms reveal the ambivalence of transgenerationality (Table 1).

Theme	Subtheme	Practitioner verbatim
Advantages	Market weight (35 verbatim)	<i>"When you arrive with a name like Lu or Danone, you carry weight. You have a history and a business strength that means you 'weigh in the game', so to speak." (P13)</i>
	Strategic durability (34 verbatim)	<i>"The advantages are that you already secure a pool of consumers. Because from one generation to the next, you will continue to be consumed." (P16)</i>
	Relational, affective capital (17 verbatim)	<i>"The advantages involve capitalizing on strong awareness and strong emotional resonance. It creates a specific attachment, and therefore a stronger potential for brand loyalty." (P29)</i>
Risks	Strategic dispersion (32 verbatim)	<i>"The drawback is that at some point the brand may lose itself, no longer knowing who it is speaking to, what needs it is addressing, or where it is going in terms of perception. So, it becomes lost." (P9)</i>
	Identity loss (23 verbatim)	<i>"The risk is a gradual loss of identity. Brands may lose themselves by trying too hard to modernize or adapt. They may overdo it and lose their essence. People no longer identify with the brand or recognize it. The challenge is to evolve without appearing opportunistic." (P17)</i>
	Lock-in and inertia (22 verbatim)	<i>"However, it can also become a constraint that makes evolution difficult. Sometimes it even becomes a burden or a weight to carry." (P10)</i>
	Ageing brand image (13 verbatim)	<i>"And I think it no longer is [transgenerational] because it hasn't managed to adapt to market codes. That's a risk, because these are brands that die with their consumers." (P19)</i>

Table 1. Perceived advantages and risks of a transgenerational brand strategy

Beyond this dichotomy, the analysis reveals four forms of transgenerational brands positioned along the dimensions of transmission (spatial, social, temporal) and the level of psychological abstraction (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Inclusive brands operate at a low level of abstraction and rely on the spatial dimension of transmission, where concrete, tangible products are used daily and often simultaneously across generations. Their transgenerationality stems from accessibility and routine co-use rather than symbolic meaning, and the relationship remains primarily utilitarian and practice-based (e.g., Decathlon, Apple). As one practitioner notes: *“Three generations are wearing [Birkenstock] at the same time. My 16-year-old daughter wants a pair. I’m on my third one. And I even convinced my mother to buy some.”* (P26). A consumer adds: *“The product can already be consumed by the entire family. And if the product is good and can be used whether you’re a child or a parent, then everything follows. And that’s how they endure over time.”* (C8).

Convivial brands mobilize the social dimension through shared family rituals (meals, snacks, celebrations) in which consumption is collective and emotionally charged. Situated near the concrete pole, they embed relational meaning through co-experience (e.g., Lu, Herta, Nutella). As a practitioner notes: *“Ferrero Rocher, Lindt, these are pleasure categories that foster sharing. They enable exchange across generations, from grandparents to grandchildren.”* (P29). A consumer echoes this: *“These are strong, longstanding brands that you’ve always seen in the family. They’re brands likely to be transmitted through practices, acting as markers of shared family moments.”* (C13).

Heritage brands move toward higher abstraction, grounded in the temporal dimension of generational succession. Transmission involves durable, symbolically valued objects that anchor identity over time (e.g., Hermès, Rolex, Le Creuset). As a practitioner states: *“Jaeger-LeCoultre, watches like that. [...] There is a true transmission. We talk about timepieces. And the brilliant idea was to say: you do not own this timepiece; you are merely its temporary guardian.”* (P10). A consumer adds: *“The story of the Kelly bag, these are objects that stand the test of time. I think pieces of jewellery have the same lifespan, like Cartier rings. They endure; you can rework, restore or renovate it. To be handed down, longevity is key.”* (C5).

Finally, memorial brands occupy the most abstract pole, functioning as repositories of cultural and emotional memory. They draw simultaneously on temporal depth and social inheritance, with transmission occurring through narratives, nostalgia, and symbolic experiences (e.g., Club Med, Harley-Davidson, Bonux). For practitioners *“It generates emotional adherence. It’s a real madeleine de Proust, even for people who never consumed it. There is something in the collective unconscious that makes them attached to it. They*

transgenerationality. Inclusive brands, grounded in tangible daily use and low-level construal, rely on universality and innovation to sustain relevance across cohorts, consistent with intergenerational influence mechanisms (Moore & Lutz, 1988). Convivial brands, rooted in social rituals and moderate abstraction, benefit from storytelling that amplifies collective and family practices, in line with research on family sharing (Moore et al., 2002; Schindler et al., 2014). Heritage brands, anchored in temporal depth and higher abstraction, reinforce continuity by integrating themselves into major life events (marriage, inheritance) while strengthening their legitimacy through the expression of brand identity and craftsmanship. Consumers position themselves as guardians of family memory, echoing research on symbolic possessions and intergenerational transfer (Curasi et al., 2004; Kessous et al., 2017). Memorial brands, located at the most abstract end of the continuum, operate through nostalgia, cultural memory, and emotionally transmitted narratives, consistent with research on collective memory and retro-marketing (Epp & Price, 2008; Diamond et al., 2009; Brown et al., 2003). Together, these configurations show how transgenerationality becomes a differentiating resource, leveraging spatial, social, and temporal dimensions and opening paths for theoretical and managerial advances.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This research pursued two objectives: distinguishing the advantages and risks of transgenerational brand strategies and identifying the forms such brands take. By combining consumer and practitioner perspectives with the lens of Construal Level Theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010), our findings refine the conceptualization of transgenerational brands beyond the segmentation versus intergenerational influence dichotomy (Bourcier-Béquaert & De Barnier, 2010). The results show that transgenerationality unfolds along two axes: generational interconnectedness versus transmissibility, and materiality versus experientiality, mapping onto the spatial, temporal, and social dimensions of transmission. This framework leads to a typology of four brand and extends the transgenerational capital (Guillemot, 2018) by demonstrating how brands operate as carriers of usage, memory, and identity at levels of psychological abstraction. It enriches the relational perspective on brands (Fournier, 1998) by showing that bonds are inherited and co-constructed across generations, adding transgenerational depth. Managerially, the study identifies the levers and pitfalls of transgenerationality, positioning it as a source of differentiation while revealing vulnerabilities. Methodologically, integrating thematic analysis and textual statistics enhances the robustness of the typological procedure (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Finally, by showing

how brands contribute to intergenerational continuity, findings open avenues for understanding their role in societal dynamics (Gurviez & Sirieix, 2017; Attias-Donfut, 1988).

This research presents limitations that open avenues for inquiry. Its exploratory qualitative design restricts generalizability, and confirmatory quantitative studies (e.g., Punj & Stewart, 1983) would allow for the validation of the proposed typology. Psychological distance could be operationalized quantitatively to examine how construal level shapes transgenerational perceptions. The study adopts a cross-sectional approach, whereas longitudinal designs would capture the temporal evolution of transmission. In addition, this research provides a conscious reading of perceptions of transgenerational brands, investigating non-conscious representations through projective methods (e.g., Albums Online, Kessous et al., 2017) would offer a deeper understanding of symbolic transfer. Finally, from an operational perspective, the development of a measurement scale for transgenerational branding would support the evaluation and managerial steering of such strategies. To our knowledge, this is one of the first empirical studies focused on transgenerational brands, and these extensions would refine theoretical understanding and support brands seeking relational durability across generations.

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