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The Threats of Brand Rejuvenation:
The Land Rover Defender Case

By:

Mihail Aittokallio, Tiziano Filippini, Emilia Marzouk

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Lund School of Economics and Management

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The Threats of Brand Rejuvenation: The Land Rover Defender Case

Mihail Aittokallio, Tiziano Filippini, Emilia Marzouk

Abstract

Introduction: Brand rejuvenation stands for bringing brand up-to-date. Any brand might face at some point an aging issue. One way to handle this issue is to perform brand rejuvenation. However, the process of brand rejuvenation is not a simple process for the company. There are various aspects that might affect the process which can turn into negative results. In this paper, we investigated the Land Rover Defender brand rejuvenation process, and why it received loud negative publicity.

Purpose: The purpose of this master paper is to analyze the Defender brand rejuvenation process through the application of brand identity and brand core models, in order to understand which parts of the brand platform were modified. Thus, we can identify the troublesome aspects of the process that caused the enthusiasts' dissatisfaction.

Research questions: We have four research questions. First; What are the brand identity and brand core and peripheral values of the old Defender? Second; What are the brand identity and brand core and peripheral values of the new Defender? Third; What are the core and peripheral differences between old and new Defender? Fourth; What differences can be assumed as potential causes of dissatisfaction?

Theoretical framework: In this master paper we utilized the following theories: brand rejuvenation and similar theories, brand kernel model and brand identity model.

Method: The research consists of a qualitative case study using secondary data. As for the methodology, we combined two theoretical models that we discussed, which are the brand identity prism and brand kernel model, in order to develop a comprehensive framework to understand the rejuvenation process.

Conclusion: The main finding from this study was that the rejuvenation process caused dissatisfaction among enthusiasts since it modified the brand's core values, which are the non-negotiable part of the brand identity.

Keywords: Brand Rejuvenation, Brand Identity, Brand Kernel, Land Rover Defender.

Introduction

Brands usually face aging or a decline in their lifecycle. The brand can be perceived as boring or out of date, or as having an issue with addressing the demands of current customer trends. To be able to survive in the market and not letting brands slowly die from the market, practitioners need to find possible ways to tackle and handle an aging brand. There are several approaches on how to face and manage the issue of an aging brand (Kapferer, 2012).

One way to manage an aging brand is to perform brand rejuvenation (Müller, Kocher, & Crettaz, 2013). Giving a brand a new facelift is a relatively widely used strategy among practitioners when the brand has been updated, or even completely changed towards current market trends. Rejuvenating is a difficult task to accomplish. Moreover, it is a process that cannot be performed overnight; in fact, it

represents a long-term change (Kapferer, 2012).

The history of the automotive industry offers a wide range of examples of brand rejuvenation, some were very successful, while others were received with some skepticism by the market. One of the most famous examples is that of MINI, which was acquired by BMW in 1994 and successfully relaunched as a stylish urban car that keeps the iconic design of 1959 original but transfers the brand values in a modern product (Kapferer, 2012). The huge success of the rejuvenation is proved by the increasing number of units sold every year (more than 4,5 million units have been sold from 2001 to 2018), the new updated versions launched and the many variants and brand extensions introduced (Cabrio, Clubman, Coupé, Countryman, Paceman, etc.). Another successful case is that of the new Fiat 500, launched in 2007 to revive the iconic model of the 60s, which has sold more than 2 million units in Europe (Carsalesbase.com, 2019) becoming one of the best-sellers in the super-mini segment and allowing some brand extensions (multi-space 500L and SUV 500X).

Conversely, there have been cases where the brand rejuvenation has been criticized by the enthusiasts of the old model, especially when the new version is perceived as lacking some key features of the original. One recent example is that of Toyota Supra. The Japanese manufacturer has reintroduced in 2019 its iconic sports car that was first launched in 1978 but became famous in the 90s with the fourth model, often associated with the popular movie "The Fast and The Furious". To reduce the production costs and avoid building a new engine from scratch, Toyota decided to co-engineer the model together with BMW (Motor1.com, 2019). This choice was not appreciated by the brand fans, who criticized especially the adoption of an engine and clutch powertrain developed by the German manufacturer, and thus the loss of the Japanese "soul" of the car (The Drive, 2019).

The case we are going to analyze in this paper is that of Land Rover rejuvenating its iconic

product brand Defender, an operation that caused a loud reaction among the audience.

Land Rover Defender Case

Background

The history of the iconic vehicle Defender started in 1947, after the end of World War II. The British manufacturer Rover, that had been producing luxury cars before the war, decided to develop a light utility vehicle based on the American Jeep Willys but intended especially for agricultural use. After the first prototypes, the "Land Rover" was launched in 1948 and featured an aluminum bodywork, flat panels and a box-section chassis, which guaranteed robustness and easy fixing, together with a low production cost (CarAdvice.com, 2019).

After many small improvements, this first model was replaced by Series II in 1958, which introduced some roundness in the styling of roof and sides. Later, in 1969, the headlights were moved from the grille to the side wings due to safety regulations in export markets (Landrover.co.uk., 2015). The appearance of this version in many documentaries and movies of the time made it highly recognizable by the public, and started to shape the iconic image of the model (Road & Track, 2016).

The third series was launched in 1971 and introduced different refinements both in styling and technology, to comply with stricter safety rules and appeal to a broader customer base. In 1983, with the introduction of coil spring suspensions, the model was renamed "One-ten" (referring to the wheelbase length of 110 inches) followed in 1984 by a new short-wheelbase "Ninety" version (Landrover.co.uk., 2015).

To avoid confusion with the other models of the brand, the Range Rover and the newly launched Discovery, in 1991 the company decided to rename his historic off-roader as "Defender", with 90, 110, and 130 as denominators of the length. This model remained almost unchanged, with minor improvements in safety and engines, until 2016 when the production was discontinued. The main reason was that,

due to the obsolete technical base, it was impossible to keep the model compliant with the new regulations regarding crash safety and carbon emissions (BBC News, 2016).

Problem discussion

During the 69 years of his history, the Defender acquired large groups of enthusiasts and loyal customers, who asked loudly for a new updated model to the brand, owned from 2008 by the Indian company Tata Motors. To show the intention to develop a new 21st-Century-ready Defender, a concept car called DC100 was unveiled at the Frankfurt Motor Show in September 2011. Design Director Gerry McGovern claimed: "We have no desire to mimic the past with this car, this must be a vehicle for the future." (Auto Express, 2019, n.p.). Hence, the aim was to create a new product experience, which could combine off-road capabilities with driving comfort, while keeping the price tag low enough: John Edwards, global brand director for Land Rover, claimed that the cost of the vehicle should have been "£20,000 to £25,000 [€23-27,000]" (Autocar.co.uk., 2012, n.p.). This concept received mixed reactions by fans and the press: some praised the commitment to develop a new true off-roader in the Land Rover range, but others criticized the loss of the original simplicity:

"The 1948 lineage has finished." "That to me is not a defender and should not be allowed to wear the same name badge as the classic that we all know and love." (Landyzone.co.uk., 2015, p.1)

The new Defender was planned to be launched in 2015, but in May 2013 brand director John Edwards announced: "the new Defender will not go into production in 2015 as originally envisaged" (Autocar.co.uk., 2015, n.p.). The delay was believed to be caused by the decision to adopt the new PLA aluminum platform and to move the production from India to Europe, in order to develop a more premium product, closer to the Discovery and Range Rover models (Autocar.co.uk., 2015).

Finally, in September 2019, the final version of the new Land Rover Defender has been

unveiled at the Frankfurt Motor Show. This production model has kept the general design of the DC100 concept but introduces some references to the original model, such as the "alpine roof" windows and the segmented backlights. The producer claims unmatched off-road capabilities combined with levels of comfort unreachable by the old version, thanks to the new unibody chassis and air suspensions. The car will be equipped with modern petrol and diesel engines and a plug-in hybrid version will be added later to the range (Landrover.co.uk., 2019). The strategy and objectives of this rejuvenation are clear, as stated by the head of design Gerry McGovern:

"The idea was to design a reinterpretation of the original [...] without offering a modernized copy. [...] In the last five years the orders were around 10 thousand units and they were decreasing. [...] Moreover, the original was ultra-specialistic, while for the new one we chose an approach more open to a new public. Interested in off-roading, but with a lifestyle different from the traditional customers. [...] It is likely that who owns an old Defender will not buy the new one" (Quattroruote, 2019, p.179)

"We aim at selling many more [than the original model], because we must return on the huge investment that we made to redesign it from scratch" (Quattroruote, 2019, p.179)

However, the response from the Defender enthusiasts has been very negative: the main complaints are about the change in the chassis construction (the body-on-frame chassis of the old model is tougher and more rigid), the high price tag (the base 90 version is expected to start from around €45,000, with the top-of-range reaching over €100,000) and the general less utilitarian design choices (for example the LCD screens in the interior, instead of analog gauges), that altogether make the new model more a luxury SUV for urban use than a work vehicle. For example, some users on the specialized forum LandyZone.co.uk comment so: (Landyzone.co.uk., 2019)

"The new defender is for rich school run mums. Not for crossing Africa."

“[...] LR have ignored their roots and sold their soul. They have no right to claim lineage to their past vehicles”

“How frickin much? I'll buy 4 old LR's instead”

“They have a new business model and we aren't part of it. We just need to accept it”

Similar opinions can be found in the comment sections of the various reveal videos on car-related YouTube channels:

“This car won't 'defend' anything. Not even its designers' dignity.” (YouTube, 2019a, n.p.)

“A huge expensive toy that has nothing to do with a Defender” (YouTube, 2019a, n.p)

“So they've taken a brilliant off roader that was incredibly basic and tough [...] and now they've filled it with gadgets that will break. How stupid can you get?” (YouTube, 2019b, n.p.)

“Without solid axles it's useless offroad” (YouTube, 2019b, n.p.)

“Main problem with this car - name” (YouTube, 2019c, n.p.)

“What happens when it breaks down in the middle of nowhere [sic]? It's only electronics!” (YouTube, 2019c, n.p.)

The negative halo created by this criticism has already influenced the perception of the automotive community, even before the new Defender has been distributed. The common idea is that, even though this new model can be very good itself, by changing what made the original model so different from the rest of the market, Land Rover has killed a myth instead of revitalizing it (InsideHook, 2019). Therefore, this rejuvenation process can be seen as threatening the value of the brand.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the Defender brand rejuvenation process through the application of brand identity and brand core models, in order to understand which parts of the brand platform were modified. Thus, we can identify the troublesome aspects of the process that caused the enthusiasts' dissatisfaction.

Research questions

1. What are the brand identity and brand core and peripheral values of the old Defender?
2. What are the brand identity and brand core and peripheral values of the new Defender?
3. What are the core and peripheral differences between old and new Defender?
4. What differences can be assumed as potential causes of dissatisfaction?

Theoretical framework

Brand rejuvenation

The concept of brand rejuvenation, that is, bringing a brand back to life (Kapferer, 2012) has been addressed extensively by the branding literature. This process appears to be vital for brand management, since any brand, regardless of how strong and successful it is, will at some point face a loss of vitality (Dev & Keller, 2014). This is especially true in the long-term and for already well-established brands that face the decline stage of the life cycle (Chenxi Li et al., 2019).

Rejuvenating, revitalizing or reviving a brand means “updating the overall offer of the brand while staying true to a part of its identity [...] aiming at a new growth market.” (Kapferer, 2012, p. 395). Thus, the objective is that of adapting the concept of the brand to a change in trends, and hence meeting the needs of contemporary consumers (Dev & Keller, 2014). The starting point of a brand rejuvenation process is usually the aging of the brand, both in the product and the customers: since the original consumers are unable to provide profit, the brand has to move to a new target, providing an updated product, new user occasions, and distribution (Kapferer, 2012). The critical issue is clearly the balance between old and new, through the preservation of the key elements and the addition of new components (Dev & Keller, 2014).

Retro branding

A closely related concept is retro branding, which means “the revival or relaunch of a product or service brand from a prior historical period” (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003). Also in this case, the brand platform and the product offer are usually updated to contemporary standards: what differentiates this approach is the key function of nostalgia, which is not necessarily involved in rejuvenation. According to Brown, Kozinets & Sherry (2003) the nostalgic element can be broken up into 4 elements, taken from Walter Benjamin’s philosophy: allegory (a symbolic storytelling), arcadia (a utopian sense of past), aura (a powerful sense of authenticity of the original) and antinomy (the paradoxical simultaneous presence of old and new). Consequently, we can trace a continuum between brand rejuvenation and retro branding, according to the degree of relevance given to these elements in the brand identity.

Community co-creation of meaning

It is widely acknowledged by academia that the brand meaning is not completely controlled by the company, but it is the result of a process of co-creation in the market (Närvänen & Goulding, 2016). According to a sociocultural branding perspective, the brand image is shaped through a dynamic process involving consumers’ interpretations of the brand core values and the sociocultural context in which the brand is consumed (Cayla & Eckhardt, 2008). This process is often taking place within what is defined as a consumer collective or community, that is “collectives of consumers who share the same consumption objects and/or practices, engage in loops of learning and create and co-produce content surrounding the brand” (Närvänen & Goulding, 2016).

The power of consumer communities has increased remarkably with the widespread use of the Internet and the social networks, which has made it easy for people who share the same enthusiasm for a specific consumption activity or product to connect without limitations of geographical position or time (Kozinets, 1999). These communities arise in the form of

specialized internet forums or specific groups within an online platform (such as Facebook or Reddit), and usually focus on a specific brand or alternately on a certain lifestyle that relates to several brands (Närvänen, Kartastenpää & Kuusela, 2013). The active interaction between enthusiasts plays a crucial role in the shaping of brand image, since the members of the consumption communities tend to uniform their judgments and behavior due to a “normative community pressure” (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005). Research suggests that this effect is stronger in those communities related to specific brands, such as car clubs (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005), while it is less relevant in those that concern more general interests and lifestyles (Cova & Cova, 2002). Revitalization of an old brand is at the peak of community co-creation, due to the role of the brand as a “totem that regathers its loyal users into a contemporary clan” through a common sense of belonging (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003, p.29).

Identity and change

Since the main objective of brand management is achieving sustainable growth, and growth only comes through movement, brands will always act as a “pendulum moving from an excess of sameness and an excess of diversity” (Kapferer, 2012, p. 243). Therefore, the biggest challenge for a manager will be balancing this contradiction that is embedded in the nature of brands. The main dilemma will always be the same: which elements of the brand need to stay consistent and which others can be modified?

To answer this question, managers need to identify the “core” of the brand, that is “what it can be reduced to without losing its fundamental meaning or its utility as a point of reference” (Urde, 2016, p. 26). In other words, the first step should be to understand what literature has defined as the “brand essence” (Ted Bates Worldwide, 1980 cited in Urde, 2016), “brand identity” (Aaker, 1996 cited in Urde, 2016), and “brand kernel” (Kapferer, 2012).

Brand kernel

All brands have kernel and peripheral traits. Together, these traits define the identity and the essence of the brand. The brand kernel is the core of the brand, which builds its character. It is the sum of the attributes that are necessary for the brand to remain itself (Kapferer, 2012).

Nevertheless, knowing the core values of a brand is essential in order to maintain the brand. Also, the products of a specific brand need to demonstrate all the central values, or core values of that particular brand. That is why the brand's kernel traits, or core, should be specified from the beginning. Nonetheless, the peripheral or changeable traits should be arranged respectively (Kapferer, 2012).

The peripheral attributes are the characteristics that do not directly represent the values and foundations of the brand but rather the traits that act as the key long term change agents within the brand. These peripheral or variable traits are specific to each segment and may be embodied in one market segment and not the other (Kapferer, 2012).

In order to identify these core traits and define them, one must study the heritage, roots and history of the brand, also known as the DNA of the brand. After studying these aspects, the potential facets of its core can be identified (Kapferer, 2012).

However, the company cannot do this alone. All the same, in the case of any changes in the products of a specific brand, or if new products are being introduced to the market, client evaluations should be assembled and regarded in order to form a market opinion. Asking the consumers about the product traits and attributes is a simple way of analyzing the core and peripheral values of the brand. For example, if the majority of the clients do not agree that a certain trait is negotiable, then it is probably one of the core values (Kapferer, 2012).

Brand identity

There are several approaches to understand brand core and firms' branding process. One way to understand the process is to utilize the

'brand identity prism', presented by Kapferer in 1986. Brand identity prism is a tool that aims to understand the identity of a brand via six different facets: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image (Kapferer, 2012). Brand identity can be viewed from a communication point of view, where each communication has two communicators, sender and receiver. The physique and personality dimensions define the sender's side of the brand, which is the company or product (Ciceo, 2013). The brand physique is created from a combination of salient tangible features that come to mind when discussing the brand.

Every brand has a personality: when it communicates, it builds its own character in a way that can be linked to human traits (Kapferer, 2012). Reflection and self-image define the users of the brand. Hence, reflection and self-image are the picture of the recipient (Ciceo, 2013). Kapferer (2012) stated that the brand is a user's reflection. Ponnampalath (2007) continued on the same matter and concluded that reflection can be said to be a perceived target with which the current user of a brand wants to be identified. Self-image is, according to Kapferer (2013), what users of the brand feel when they purchase or use the brand. To be able to fill the gap between the sender side and picture of the recipient, brand identity prism uses two dimensions to link the sides, consisting of the facets of relationships and culture (Ciceo, 2013). Relationship dimension of brand identity prism shows that brand is an exchange between people. However, the nature of brands does not only rely on personality or on a specific benefit, since brands are much more. Brands are also culture carriers: hence the cultural background of a brand helps defining its meaning and implications (Kapferer, 2012).

Urde (2016) aims to develop a framework to understand brand core that can be applied to different types of brands, providing both a point of reference (continuity criteria) and the possibility to adapt and change (dynamic criteria). The author uses rhetoric as a theoretical foundation of his model, and thus addresses the art of discourse as a whole, which

consists of three parts: logos (those arguments appealing to reason and understanding), ethos (those appealing through character, personality, and trustworthiness) and pathos (those appealing to emotions and will) (Urde, 2016). Hence, the same topic can be seen from different angles and conveyed through different arguments, and therefore a specific idea can remain unchanged even if the way it is expressed changes over time. In this sense, the core values of a brand are identified as the stable elements, whereas the facets of identity are the perspectives through which the values manifest, appealing to reason, trust or emotion alternately (Urde, 2016).

This approach allows the author to develop further the brand identity matrix suggested by Kapferer (2012). By including the rhetoric model of brand core inside of the brand identity prism, the relationship between core values and their manifestation as the different facets of the model can be seen as one of mutual connection: the brand identity must align with the core values, but at the same time the different perspectives of identity help defining what the core of the brand is. This can help to mitigate the paradox between continuity and change, since it allows to define a central point of reference (brand core) around which the way identity manifests can be adapted (Urde, 2016).

Method

We decided to examine the rejuvenation of the Defender brand through case analysis method. We will, therefore, apply the models provided by the literature on the case in order to answer our research questions. In our approach, we will use mainly two models, which are “brand identity prism” as developed by Urde (2016) and the “brand kernel” model illustrated by Kapferer (2012).

The first step will be to use the prism in order to describe the characteristics of the old Defender brand through the six facets. Using an outside-in point of view, we will then be able to identify the core values of the brand analyzing the prism as an emanation of them. Then, we will examine all the traits that we have

identified with the lens of the brand kernel model, in order to categorize them as kernel (necessary) or peripheral (negotiable).

Next, we will conduct the same analysis on the new Defender brand and finally, we will compare the kernel and peripheral traits of the old and the new, with the aim to identify if there have been changes. By doing so, we will be able to assess whether they changed only peripheral traits or also kernel traits. If the analysis shows that some kernel traits have been modified, then we could infer that as the reason for the community’s complaints.

To be able to compare kernel and peripheral traits of the old and new Defender, secondary sources will be utilized. The advantage of using secondary sources is that it has been gathered before. In our research, we gathered secondary sources of old and new Defender from different databases. The following sources were used: corporate website of Land Rover, Youtube videos and comment sections, specialized forums of Land Rover owners and enthusiasts, and old advertisement archives.

Analysis

Old Defender

We will start our analysis by applying the brand identity matrix to the old Defender brand. These are the six facets of the prism (figure 1):

Physique: examining the design and technical features of the old Defender, we can find three peculiar elements. The first and most important is the all-wheel-drive traction, which is necessary to give the vehicle off-roading capabilities in every terrain condition. The second main technical feature is the body-on-frame construction, which means that the structural frame and the car body are placed one on top of the other, in order to gain maximum robustness and torque resistance, both necessary in off-road. Finally, the design of the vehicle is very simple, consisting of flat panels and sharp edges, that allow cheap production and fix (Landrover.co.uk., 2015).

Personality: we can describe the personality of the brand as practical, adventurous and disheveled. The brand is practical because it does not give importance to appearance and comfort, focusing on what is needed to get the job done (YouTube, 2019d). It is adventurous because it evokes the possibility to reach every corner of the globe and explore uncharted paths (YouTube, 2019e). Finally, it is disheveled because it does not fear to get dirty and scratched in order to reach its objectives.

Relationship: the relationship that establishes itself between brand and customer is extremely functional. The owners need the vehicle to work or to reach locations where their business dwells: the capabilities and practicality of the Defender are fundamental to get their job done in every possible condition (Behance.net, 2019).

Culture: the cultural background of the Defender is rooted in the agricultural environment of the UK. The model was born with the aim to help farmers and people living in the countryside to restart their activities after World War II (Landrover.co.uk., 2015). During its history, the model has kept a tie with its British heritage, but it has become less and less important with time (Pinterest, 2019a). Another cultural bond is that of outland expeditions, especially those in the jungle or in the desert, which are often depicted in the advertising (Pinterest, 2019b).

Reflection: the archetype of a Land Rover Defender customer is an audacious person who often travels to remote places, but he does so not only for fun or need for adventure but because he has to, due to his job or activity (YouTube, 2019f).

Self-image: the image that Defender customers create about themselves is “I am practical, I want to carry out my tasks and I need this vehicle to do it” (Landyzone.co.uk., 2019).

Now that we have identified the main traits of the brand, we can apply the kernel model and categorize them as core or peripheral (figure 1). Based on our analysis, the core values of the brand are off-roading capability, functionality and simplicity. These traits can be found in every facet of identity and are the foundation of customer preference and satisfaction. In other words, they are the necessary traits that make the Defender different and without which the brand is not itself anymore.

On the other hand, there are some traits that still define the identity but have a higher grade of negotiability. One of these is the design, which has become iconic and recognizable but that is only a consequence of the functional needs of the vehicle. Second, the adventure element is frequently involved and has been increasingly conveyed in advertising over the years, yet it is not core, because it only relates to one of the possible uses of the car, that also serves as a multi-purpose country tractor. Finally, the UK origin is important in shaping the brand identity

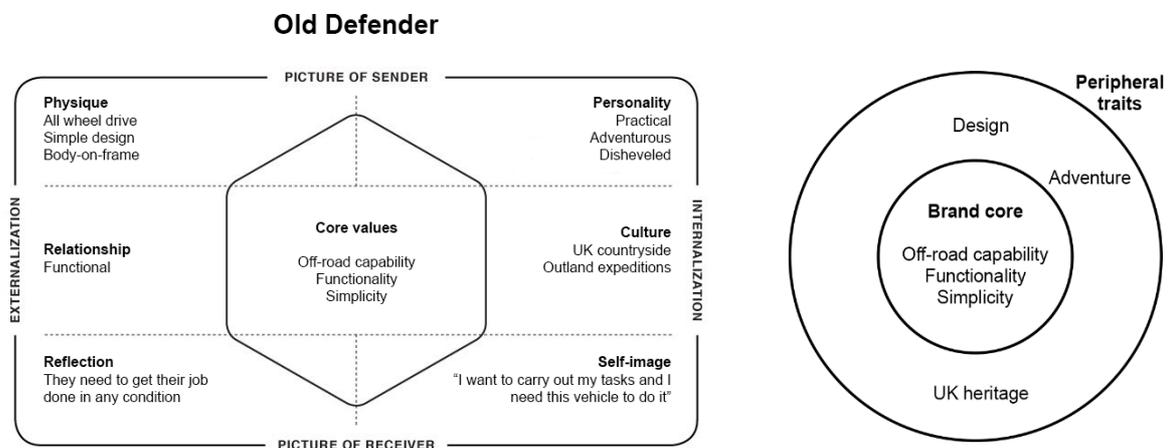


Figure 1

and especially in the differentiation from its main competitors (Jeep Wrangler, Mercedes-Benz G-Class, etc.), but has never been in the epicenter of positioning.

New Defender

Secondly, we continue by analyzing the identity of the new Land Rover Defender in accordance to the brand identity matrix as applied above (figure 2):

Physique: the key feature of the new Defender is still the high off-roading capability thanks to the four-wheel-drive technical base. Another physical trait that is emphasized is the design details that relate to the old model. An example would be the headlights and the backlights which, together with the so-called “alpine roof” and the shape of the car, allow the new model to be instantly recognizable as a Defender. Finally, the new Defender features modern air suspensions that make it possible for the car to drive in urban areas as properly as in harsher environments (Landrover.co.uk., 2019).

Personality: the personality of the new Defender is still very adventurous; however, the new model is also trendy and sophisticated, because it can fit in an urban context without being out of place. Another aspect of the new Defender personality is freedom. Maybe it will never be used to go off-roading, but still, that could be done if one would like to (Youtube, 2019g).

Relationship: the relationship between the consumer and the new Defender relies on the exploitability in different usage situations. The expediency of being able to go to remote places easily, and still effectively drive in the city is one of the main emphasis of the new Defender (Youtube, 2019g).

Culture: the cultural background of the new Defender draws both from the off-roading heritage of the old Defender and the luxurious legacy of the Range Rover models. Thus, the communication of the model sets a cultural tie with upper-class urban life (Landrover, 2019b), but at the same time suggests that the true nature of the Defender still relates to the universe of outland expeditions (Landrover.com, 2019a).

Reflection: the reflection of the fundamental Defender clientele is that they are upper-class urban consumers who still look for more adventure in their lives. This is displayed by the luxurious accompaniments that are included in the new model together with the off-roading capabilities of the car (Landrover.co.uk, 2019b).

Self Image: the self-image that is created by the consumers is that “I am an ordinary urban individual who is still seeking adventure in life”.

To conclude the analysis (figure 2), we have established that the core of the brand is its off-roading capability, its focus on adventure, and

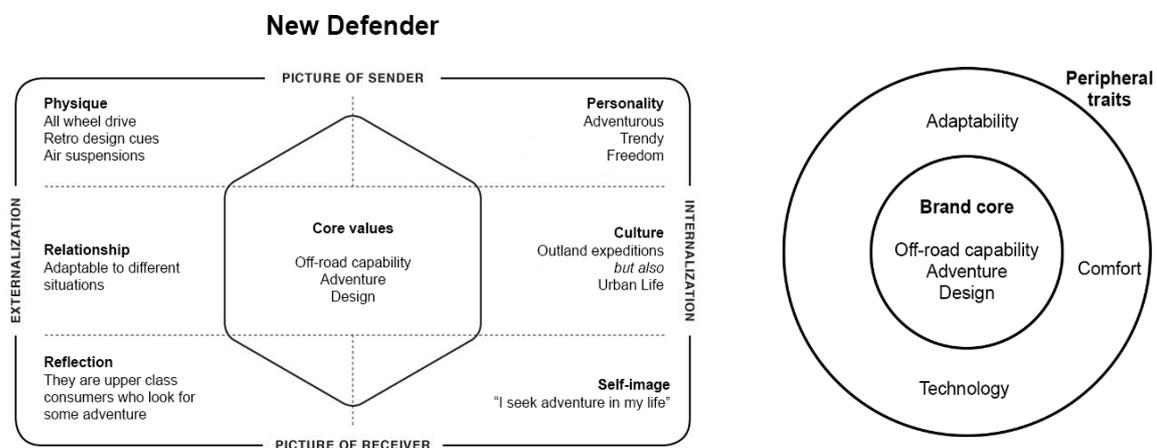


Figure 2

retro design. We consider the design of the new model to be a core value since it is a distinct feature of the Defender. Moreover, the changeable or peripheral traits of the new Defender are adaptability, comfort and technological advances (Carmagazine, 2019).

Comparison

After presenting and analyzing Defender through brand identity prism and applying onto the old and new models, we will further present the comparison of kernel values (figure 3). That said, the core and peripheral traits of the Defender will be analyzed. Starting from core values, Defender kept off-roading capability as a core value in the new model as it was in the old one. Nonetheless, whereas the old model was perceived more as a utilitarian vehicle that emphasized traits of simplicity and functionality, the new model discarded these core values. Instead, we found out that in the new Defender these values were substituted with a focus on modernized retro design and the “adventure” value.

When it comes to peripheral traits of Defender, some interesting shifting occurred. First of all, the design that was perceived before as a peripheral value, is now perceived as a core value for Defender: after all, the relation between the old and the new model is not technical, but rather mainly aesthetic. Another shift was found in the “adventure” trait. Even though adventure was already present before as a peripheral value, in the new model it was

converted to a kernel value. Moreover, we observed that leading technology, the comfort of driving and internal space have been added as Defender’s peripheral values due to the shift of target from a utilitarian niche to the general public urban consumer.

In general, we found out that the main core value that outlived the rejuvenation was off-road capability, whereas the rural and functional traits were exchanged for urban-related ones. That said, from our perspective what led to the disappreciation from enthusiasts was the change of core values. Old Defender was always perceived as a car that provides simplicity of use for the customers. Hence, easy maintenance and fixing have always been one of the main reasons for purchasing a Defender, rather than a comfortable driving. Thus, even though the new Defender might keep off-roading capability and design resemblance, it failed to deliver this key feature. Therefore, the public perceived a loss in its core identity.

Conclusion

After analyzing Defender brand rejuvenation process by applying brand identity prism and brand kernel model, we can suggest that the main reason causing dissatisfaction was a modification of the brand core values. By doing so, the company ignored the main rule in balancing identity and change, which implies that the kernel of a brand is not negotiable. Furthermore, the company did not take into account adequately the role of the community

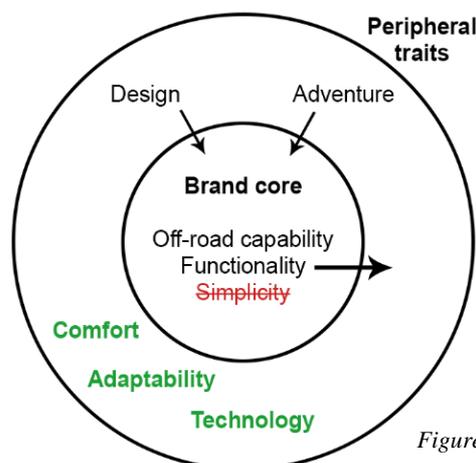


Figure 3

of enthusiasts in the definition of brand meaning and the influence of it on the public's brand perception.

Limitations & future recommendations

Like any other study, this research has its own limitations that we have to point out. First of all, the study was based on secondary sources, that already have embedded limitations. Utilizing primary data for conducting research would add broader depth from either customer or company point of view. Second, it was performed on a single case study, and thus lacks a comparative perspective over the topic. Comparing two cases together, for instance, successful brand rejuvenation versus unsuccessful, would also add broader depth to the research. Thirdly, it needs to be mentioned that this research paper is affected by a lack of resources. Certain decisions were made based on time and fund issues. Therefore, we would like to acknowledge certain directions for future research that could be interesting to investigate. Our paper delivered background for understanding how iconic brands can fail to achieve their rejuvenation process. The next step could be to understand this issue by doing research on primary data based either on company or customers' point of view, through interviews, focus group or quantitative research.

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