Brand Extensions of Authentic Brands

An Explorative Study of Consumers' Perceptions

By

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Abstract

Title:	Brand Extensions of Authentic Brands - An explorative study of consumers' perceptions.
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Keywords:	brand authenticity, brand extensions, brand identity, brand image, brand equity
Purpose:	The purpose is to explore the phenomenon of authentic brands extending into other categories to identify how this may affect the image of the brand and its authenticity.
Methodology:	A qualitative study, drawing upon a multiple case study supported by a netnography, with an approach that is both deductive and inductive, as well as social constructionist.
Theoretical Perspective:	To develop a new theoretical framework, the intersection between the theoretical fields of brand extensions and authentic brands are considered.
Empirical Data:	The empirical data consists of three in-depth case studies of authentic brands, supported by several netnographic materials in the form of comments on internet forums.
Conclusions:	The authentic brand extensions framework follows from consumer questions about extensions by authentic brands. It consists of six dimensions: continuity, integrity, credibility, symbolism, iconic features, and the alignment of authentic brand values.

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1   Introduction

This chapter presents the research areas on which the thesis is focused, including a presentation of key studies that are relevant. In the first section, this leads to the positioning of the research. Following this positioning, the research purpose, questions, and aim are presented. After this, the research delimitations are given, followed by a structural outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background and Problematization

Today, consumers are increasingly confronted with a copious amount of choice when it comes to brands. This is one of the reasons that consumers start to look for brands that are relevant, original, and genuine, for brands that stand out of the mass: they look for authenticity (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin & Grohmann, 2015). This development is strikingly captured by Gilmore and Pine (2007, p. 5): "authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability". They argue that authenticity, 'purchasing on the basis of conforming to self-image', must be added to the vital concepts that must be managed by companies, along with availability, cost, and quality (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Research by Barton, Ishikawa, Quiring, and Theofilou (2018) also shows that consumers look for something beyond price and quality in a brand, which they call the 'purpose-led brand'. According to these authors, a purpose-led brand must have a great culture, delivering on its promises, it must be transparent, and it must demonstrate authenticity in everything that it does (Barton et al. 2018). To identify authentic brands today, the company Cohn & Wolfe made the *Global Authentic 100*, a study involving more than 15,000 consumers in 15 markets, pinpointing brands such as Apple, Adidas, LEGO, and Rolex as highly authentic (Authentic 100, 2017). It is evident that authenticity is a concept that is important in consumer decision-making, making it a vital concept for brands to act on, now as well as in the future. While there is some research available on authenticity, there is no consensus about the exact definition or the operationalization of the concept. However, it is found that brand authenticity is often related to for example concepts such as legitimacy, relevancy, originality, and genuineness (Beverland, 2005; Morhart et al. 2015).

Furthermore, it is not clear where brand authenticity can be placed regarding the concept of brand identity. Brand identity is often seen as a concept with multiple layers (Urde, 2013) or at least as a concept with an external and internal part (Kapferer, 2008). Also found by Kapferer (2008) is the thought that brand identity means a brand 'being true to oneself', thereby helped through their core values, purpose, and vision. However, Beverland (2005) also mentions 'being true to oneself' in relation to the concept of brand authenticity. It may thus be clear that the two share certain attributes or overlap in a way. It is also argued that brand authenticity is a crucial factor as being a characteristic of brand identity (Beverland, 2005), as well as being one of the key attributes of brand image (Ballantyne, Warren & Nobs, 2006). Therefore, it is

necessary to explore how brand authenticity relates to brand identity. Brand identity and authenticity are thus of great importance for a brand, especially when the brand wants to grow or is aiming to stay relevant.

Firms that want to grow their brands or company, often use brand extensions to take advantage of brand name recognition and image when entering new markets, resulting in the creation of possible brand associations towards the extended products (Aaker & Keller, 1990). However, brand extensions are not always a successful way of growing your brand. Ernst & Young and Nielsen (1999, in Janjua, 2009) found in their research that brand extensions in the FMCG sector have a failure rate of around 80%. As a result, multiple studies have tried to predict success factors of brand extensions, related to various concepts such as brand identity (Viot, 2011), brand equity (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995) and 'fit' between the parent brand and the extension (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991; Spiggle, Nguyen & Caravella, 2012). Moreover, brands often use extensions to keep up with changing times or to just stay relevant to their consumers over the years. There is also, although very limited, research available on the touchpoint between brand authenticity and brand extensions. Spiggle et al. (2012) developed the concept of brand extension authenticity as an addition to fit.

Finally, brand image can be defined as the particular consumer perceptions of a brand's performance across various indicators, such as functional, symbolic, and experiential factors. These factors are relayed through the consumer's mental image of the brand, consequently affecting subsequent consumer or purchase behavior (Patterson, 1999; Zhang, 2015). This is the result of the brand's identity and its authenticity in the eyes of the consumer. Studying brand image can reveal whether a brand is truly authentic in the minds of their customers. A research gap can be identified by looking at how the brand image of brands with an authentic identity is influenced by their brand extensions. Therefore, our research will position itself on the intersection of these three concepts. In the next section, the research purpose as a result of this positioning will be explained.
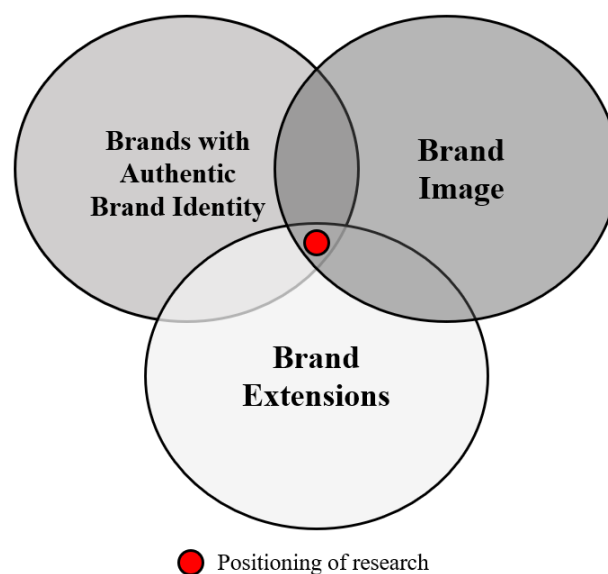
Figure 1. Positioning of research

1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand how authentic brands extend into other categories and to understand what the role of their brand authenticity is while extending their brands. To accomplish that, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ 1: *Why do authentic brands extend into other categories?*
RQ 2: *How do consumers perceive brand extensions of authentic brands?*
RQ 3: *How do consumer perceptions influence the authenticity of the extension?*

The aim is to identify novel insights on the theoretical intersection between brand image, brand extensions, and authentic brands. The main objective is to provide a framework through which authentic brands' brand extensions and consumer perceptions hereof can be understood. The main focus herein will be brand authenticity and brand extensions, although brand identity and image are also an important area of interest.

1.3 Research Delimitations

With this thesis, we explore the theoretical intersection between authentic brands, brand extensions, and consumer perceptions thereof. It should thus be clear that we do not aim to further conceptualize or define brand authenticity as a theoretical concept, but rather build on it and explore other implications about extensions. The perspective is focused on the consumers' insights on extensions of authentic brands, and the focus will thus not be on the internal company perspective of authentic brands and their extensions.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters, following a structure most suitable for achieving and answering the above-mentioned purpose and research questions respectively. Finally, a new theoretical framework revolving brand identity, brand extensions, and brand authenticity will be drawn.

Chapter 1: Introduction	An introduction to the main concepts that are to be researched, including positioning of the research. Moreover, this chapter includes the purpose, limitations, and contributions of this research and an overview of the structure of the paper.
Chapter 2: Literature Review	This chapter gives an overview of the existing literature on the main relevant concepts for this thesis; brand identity, brand authenticity, brand equity and image, and brand extensions.

Chapter 3: Methodology   Considerations about the research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, the selection and collection of cases and data and their validity and reliability

Chapter 4: Empirical Results   This chapter follows from the methodology and introduces the case studies about the companies Coca-Cola, Harley-Davidson, and LEGO. It presents the empirical results from the case studies and the conducted netnography

Chapter 5: Analysis   Building on the findings in the case studies and the netnography, conclusions are drawn that lead to the identification of the main finding of the thesis, which is the authentic brand extension framework

Chapter 6: Discussion   In the discussion, the framework is then placed in a broader theoretical context to find similarities and differences with previous literature

Chapter 7: Conclusion   Finally, the conclusion revisits the research purpose, questions, and aim as stated in this introduction, and draws the theoretical contributions and managerial implications, as well as the research limitations and suggestions for future research

2   Literature Review

This chapter mainly elaborates on the three main research areas of this thesis, but also includes other relevant research fields to get a better understanding of the researched topics. First, brand identity is explored as it is the base for brand authenticity. Then, brand authenticity as a concept is investigated, followed by a paragraph about brand equity and brand image, to get an understanding of the consumer side of brand authenticity. Finally, the topic of brand extensions is considered and related to the previously described research areas.

2.1   Brand identity

2.1.1 What are brands?

Despite a plethora of varying perspectives on the definition of a brand, some 'core' elements can be identified. It can be agreed that a brand is an intangible asset that, if managed, over time can provide a significant level of value and competitive advantage to the firm, and possibly its stakeholders (Nandan, 2005; Kapferer 2008). Furthermore, as Urde (2013) states, a brand can be seen as a symbol to create and capture meaning, thus signifying that the management of such is through managing the meanings of these signs. Keller (1998) agrees and has a similar view, stating that brands consist not only as mere symbols but of any source of information that can identify or label unique competitive value to the brand. This value derives from the various perceived mental associations from consumers to the brand and its ability to provide various meanings as a result (Keller, 1998). Lastly, it can be argued that brands act as strategic assets or hubs (Melin & Urde, 1990; Urde, Baumgarth & Merrilees, 2013; Craciun & Barbu, 2014). This observes brands as strategic platforms that can impact and be integrated within the general strategic direction of a firm and its many intricate departments or areas of operation (Craciun & Barbu, 2014). In this research context, the thesis emphasizes the concept of iconic brands and cultural branding, as introduced by Holt (2004). The focus on the categorization of brands being considered as iconic and cultural and why such a categorization is made is further explained in the following section(s).

2.1.2 Brand identity: Core concepts and elements

Brand identity is an essential aspect of brand management theory as it helps to distinguish a firm and its unique, coherent values from other competitor brands (Kapferer, 2008). Aaker & Joachimsthaler (2000) define brand identity as a set of brand associations that the brand and its managers strive to maintain, emphasizing the external-internal marketing orientation and viewpoint of brands (Urde et al. 2011). Simply put, brand identity is how the brand projects themselves or how they would like themselves to be seen or perceived, whilst brand image is based on how consumers view this projection. Various key attributes that make up a brand's identity were identified by Harris & De Chernatony (2001), such as; values, vision, culture, positioning, and personality. Furthermore, one of the most cited theoretical models surrounding brand identity literature is the so-called Brand Identity Prism, as introduced by Kapferer (2008)

in his book 'The New Strategic Brand Management'. The Brand Identity Prism is well regarded as an effective tool to help build strong brands for businesses. Kapferer (2008), identifies the key (interrelated) factors that differentiate a brand's identity. He identifies personality, culture, and self-image as internal factors of identity, and physique, relationship, and reflection as the external side. These attributes, along with other related aspects will be observed in later sections. Moreover, Kapferer (2008) depicts the interrelation between these facets by considering their position between the business (sender) and client (recipient), as well as their position as internal or external to the company. If all these various factors are carefully considered as a whole, brands can convey their strong identity continuously and transparently, in turn possibly creating the foundation for positive brand associations, perceptions, and overall image.

- **Physique:** Physical features and characteristics of the brand and how it is manifested in products for example.
- **Personality:** Brand traits or character and how their 'human' characteristics are expressed or conveyed.
- **Culture:** Internal values of the organization/firm
- **Self-image:** How consumers associate themselves with the brand or identify themselves as through brand choice and relations.
- **Reflection:** How the brand perceives its customers to be.
- **Relationship**: Intangible and tangible aspects of building a relationship between brand and consumer. There are different ways to express this relationship, according to personality and brand values/identity.

Figure 2. The Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008)
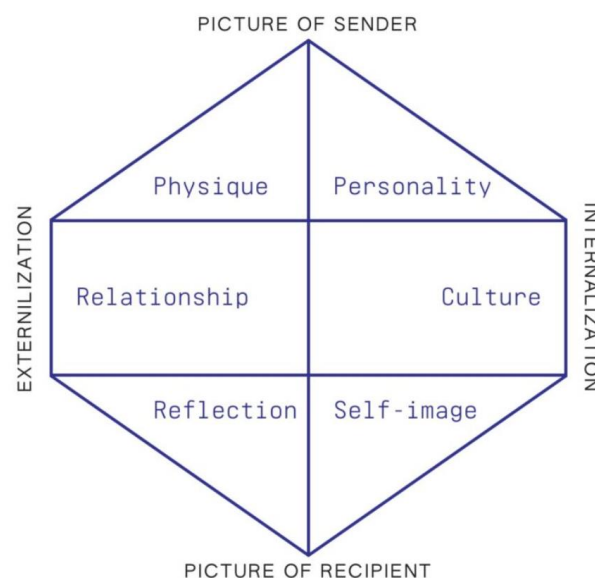
As seen in the Brand Identity Prism framework, Kapferer (2008) distinguishes internalization and externalization between the various labeled dimensions. Additionally, Urde et al. (2013) and Urde (2013), take inspiration and build from this development, viewing brand identity as a three leveled structure; (1) the internal 'organizational identity' (culture, vision, values), (2)

core values and purpose that guides and is reflected in all other elements (personality and expression), and (3) the external 'customer identity' (image of self and firm, relationships). Within this three-level structure, brand-oriented approaches from corporate companies take an 'inside-out' approach, whilst a market-oriented approach takes an 'outside-in' approach. Both these company methods reflect the core values and promise regardless of brand direction (Urde et al. 2013). This conceptualization also takes inspiration from Collins & Porras (1996) and the importance of articulating a vision.

2.1.3 Corporate brand identity

Although Kapferer's (2008) Brand Identity Prism is widely used for business practices for brand building, the phenomenon of corporate branding delves further within standard 'company' branding theories such as that of Kapferer (2008) and differs significantly from product brands. To this day, many researchers fail to realize that product branding frameworks and conceptual theories do not always properly apply to corporate branding theories (Urde, 2013). Over several eras of marketing and branding literature, the evolution of corporate brands and their identity has dramatically changed and increased as a result (Balmer, 1995). The 'corporate' environment in practicality has also shifted dramatically, with branding pioneers such as Procter and Gamble moving from product brand focus towards becoming a house of brands with the corporate identity-image being the centerpiece (Balmer, 1995). This change in environment is characterized by increasing confusion, complexity, and competition between brands, leading towards more 'dynamic market contexts', where the need to stretch or expand brands has grown more prominent (i.e. brand extensions) and more well suited for corporate brands (Aaker, 2004). Corporate brands are crucial in this context by their ability to create synergy and clarity as a 'master brand', or on the other hand by creating credibility, differentiated opportunities, or emotional attachment by representing the name of the 'endorser brand' (Aaker, 2004). Here, corporate brands act as a strong recognizable entity standing behind the offering, possibly transferring core values from corporate brand to extension (Aaker, 2004). Some additional key benefits of corporate brands are their ability to dictate what the organization stands for and to build trust over time through this through one clear corporate entity (Brand Orientation, 2020).

The external and internal interaction that resides within corporate brands has been discussed to a great extent in the existing literature. The approach of Aaker (2004) recognizes that corporate brands typically start with operating around stakeholder perception, and consequently, these corporate firms tend to transfer those perceptions and 'aspirational' associations towards a shared brand identity. Alternatively, Chernatony (1999) argues for the importance of internal brand building within corporate branding. Here, internal brand resources such as employees and culture are important. Employees should synergize their values with those of the corporate firms and align a relevant corporate culture strategy by acknowledging artifacts, internal behavior, and underlying assumptions (Chernatony, 1999). If these factors are met, Chernatony (1999) states that this internally developed brand identity should then be able to be presented to the firm's various stakeholders externally. Corporate core values are shown to bridge both approaches and are seen as "overarching concepts rooted in and distilled from the organizational values and resonating with the customers' perceived values" (Balmer, Greyser

& Urde, 2009, p. 621). 'True' core values match this mutual relation and form solid continuity and trust over time (Urde et al. 2009). Nevertheless, the end goal of corporate brand identity management is to construct a favorable reputation among these stakeholders (Riel and Balmer, 1997). Reputation is depicted countless times as a seamless alternative for brand image perceptions, as it is more suited for corporate brands by being more stable over time and more long term oriented, representing the past, through track records (Urde et al. 2009). The 'Corporate Brand Identity Matrix' as created by Urde (2013) represents the discussed 'outside-in' and 'inside-out' approach, alongside the brand core values and promises central position projected or reflected across all other identity aspects, as seen in the 'Brand Orientation Framework' by Urde et al. (2013). As mentioned before, this framework differs from others as it is built for corporate brands, from a managerial perspective. This managerial perspective is beneficial to the case study approach used in the thesis. As is visualized, many core elements that were discussed surrounding both brand identity and corporate brand identity are present.
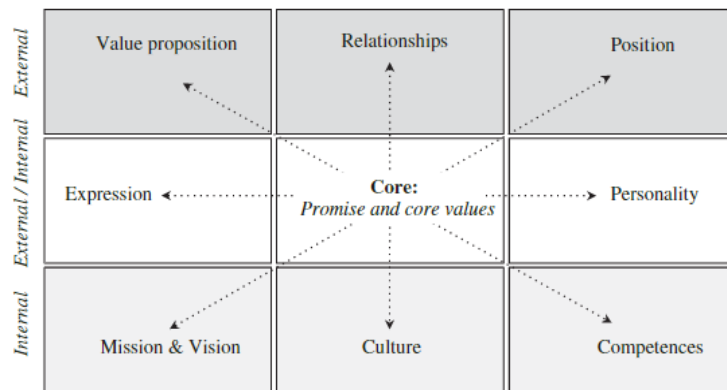
Figure 3. The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (Urde, 2013)

2.1.4 Managing brand identity, authenticity, and extension

Kapferer (2008), as a forefather of brand identity and purpose, deduces that identity is seen as a means of being true to oneself, with the help of strong values and a clear shared purpose and vision, that is resistant to dramatic change. By being resistant to this change, firms can create and preserve a more robust identity and avoid an 'identity crisis' when change is too prominent (Kapferer, 2008). However, this philosophy can be extended through the brand's ability to manage continuity and change. This is done by consciously being able to 'preserve the core while stimulating progress', through selecting the components that should or should not be changed (Collins & Porras, 1996). This is especially important when accommodating brand identity practices within an ever so demanding and competitive landscape for brands to set new and innovative standards, struggling to keep up with others through times of constant change (Kapferer, 2008), with brand extensions acting as potential practices of this struggle to keep up. Another essential element to creating and maintaining a brand identity over time is by being able to 'articulate a vision', establishing a meaningful purpose within this process (Collins & Porras, 1996). To articulate a vision, one must create coherence between the firm's core ideology and envisioned future. The core ideology consists of core values and a purpose, seen as a reason for existing/being, whilst an envisioned future involves bold missions or BHAGS, aided by vivid descriptions of what it will be like to achieve the said mission (Collins & Porras, 1996). Consequently, what these two elements have in common is the presence of an internal

perspective of the brand and a need to consider continuity throughout change. On one side, managers must naturally discover and identify their core ideology from within, without any commercial or external interference, whilst on the other side, the ultimate vision must be clear, reachable, and unified internally as well (Collins & Porras, 1996).

2.1.5 Iconic brands and cultural branding

As indicated previously, iconic and cultural brands emerge as a well-suited categorization to illustrate the above-mentioned brand identity dimensions and elements. Iconic brands are considered to be cultural icons that certain people strongly identify with and they rely on the brand's representative symbols, such as the name and markers (Holt, 2004). These icons act as points of reference to meaning and symbolism, impacting consumer day to day life as a result (Holt, 2004). Besides, said brands can create a story and provide meaning around a certain 'identity myth' grounded in the needs, wants and beliefs of both society and consumers, these myths or stories can be interpreted, reinforced and deemed authentic through the collective perception of the brand (Holt, 2004). Consequently, iconic brands can positively highlight other attributes or aspects of their brand or company to the perception of these consumers, such as brand image (Holt, 2004). In summary, iconic brands contain essential components of a well-grounded brand identity, having the capacity to both influence internal brand or company attributes and external perceptions thereof. It can be argued that iconic brands could create these identity myths from both a brand-oriented or market-oriented approach (hybrid), as made clear by (Urde et al. 2011). Also, having a meaningful purpose to guide and influence consumers, supported by storytelling (Collins & Porras, 1996) is strongly related to the key concept of brands holding a meaningful purpose, reinforced and visualized by vivid descriptions from an inner brand perspective.

2.2   Brand authenticity

2.2.1 Authenticity

There is no clear consensus among scholars about the definition of 'brand authenticity'. Authenticity, more specifically the word authentic, stems from the Latin and Greek words *authenticus* and *authentikos*, respectively. These can be translated as "worthy of acceptance, authoritative, trustworthy, not imaginary, false or imitation, conforming to an original", and synonyms include words as genuine, sincere, and unique (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004). The concept has also been described as "being true to oneself" (Beverland, 2005). Authenticity as a concept has been researched in multiple fields, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, with different meanings throughout the literature (Fritz, Schoenmueller & Bruhn, 2017). We will focus on the definition of authenticity from a marketing perspective, where it is explained as an attribute of an object (Fritz et al. 2017) and it has been called 'brand authenticity'. Grayson and Martinec (2004) argue that authenticity can have two meanings. They argue that in different contexts, authenticity can mean different things, for different consumers. For example, some consumers might say that Swedish meatballs are only authentic when they are made by a Swedish cook with Swedish meat. However, another consumer can argue that Swedish meatballs are authentic when they have the same structure or taste.

Therefore, Grayson and Martinec (2004) have distinguished between *indexical* authenticity and *iconic* authenticity.

2.2.2 Types of authenticity
With indexical authenticity, it is meant that objects have a factual or spatio-temporal link with something else, so the 'authenticity' of that object can be verified. Therefore, indexicality also determines whether something is "the real thing" (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). For something (a product, a brand) to be indexical authentic, the consumer must have some certification or information that helps believe that the factual or spatio-temporal link exists. For example, when a consumer wants to judge whether a bottle of wine is an indexically authentic 73-year-old bottle of French Burgundy wine, he must have some verification that the bottle was produced in France, 73 years ago.

On the other hand, authenticity is also used to describe products that have a resemblance to an indexically authentic product (Grayson & Martinec, 2014). This is called iconic authenticity, and it "constitutes a projection of the consumer's beliefs about how a brand or product ought to look" (Fritz et al. 2017, p.327). So, going back to the example of Swedish meatballs, the meatballs are indexically authentic when there is a factual or spatio-temporal link (the meatballs are made by a Swedish cook and made from Swedish meat - facts), but can also be deemed by consumers as iconically authentic (the meatballs look and taste the same as the indexically authentic ones). These two concepts are not mutually exclusive, as argued by Grayson and Martinec (2004). Moreover, they argue that there are no objective criteria that can determine whether a product or brand is indexically or iconically authentic. More so, these clues are made up of personal and individual perceptions of products and brands, which is in line with the concept of 'symbolic interactionism'. First explained by Herbert Mead (1934), this concept tells us that meaning (to objects, or concepts) is created through interaction and behavior of individuals, thereby creating a shared understanding and meaning of things, which can also change over time. Beverland (2005) argues that his definition ('the search for what is real') also accepts that authenticity is "subjective, socially constructed, dynamic, and possibly created, imagined, and invented."

2.2.3 Brand authenticity
When talking about the authenticity of a brand ('brand authenticity'), we can thus say that this is created by consumers, and the brand must be, as stated before, 'the real thing'. Gilmore and Pine (2007) distinguish two meanings when relating authenticity to brands; internal and external consistency. Internal consistency is the extent to which the brand follows its core values and stays true to itself, and external consistency refers to whether a brand really is what they seem to be, not fake or copied (Spiggle et al. 2012). Therefore, internal consistency deals with the fundamental nature of a brand, whereas external consistency evaluates advertising, specific products, and whether they live up to what the brand tells consumers it is (Spiggle et al.). Fritz et al. (2017) define brand authenticity as "the perceived consistency of a brand's behavior that reflects its core values and norms, according to which it is perceived as being true to itself, not undermining brand essence or substantive nature, whereby the perceptual process involves two types of authenticity". With these two types, they refer back to the indexical and

iconic authenticity, as explained before. When we break this definition down, 'a brand's behavior that reflects its core values and norms', can be described as a brand's identity. Moreover, the definition captures some kind of continuity or consistency: 'to which it is perceived as being true to itself'. Therefore, brand authenticity could be seen as the consistency with which a brand portrays (brand image) its brand identity. This definition is mostly in line with internal consistency, so it is also argued by Spiggle et al. (2012).

It is also important to explain where brand authenticity is among the various concepts in branding. From the above, it is evident that there is a close relationship between brand identity and brand authenticity. More specifically, an authentic brand inherently has a strong brand identity and can portray this identity consistently over time. Concerning brand image, Bruhn, Schoenmuller, Schäfer, and Heinrich (2012) state that brand authenticity could be an element of it, and can contribute to the overall image of a brand. However, it is not the same as brand image. Therefore, brand authenticity as a concept can be seen as a component of both brand identity and brand image and has certain overlaps with both the concepts, but has a standalone conceptualization.

2.2.4 Dimensions of brand authenticity
Researchers have found various attributes, factors, or antecedents that adhere to 'authentic brands' or brand authenticity. Bruhn et al. (2012) developed a measurement scale that reflects consumers' perceptions of brand authenticity. They identified four dimensions of brand authenticity; continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. The first two concepts are more related to internal consistency, whereas the latter two can be regarded as external consistency. Continuity means that a brand stays true to itself, and is consistent over time, as earlier explained by Fritz et al. (2017) in their definition of brand authenticity. Originality means that a brand is different from other brands, that it has some kind of uniqueness. Reliability then focuses on that the brand lives up to what it promises, and naturalness is related to the brand being genuine, or not fake or counterfeit.

Morhart et al. (2015) introduce the Perceived Brand Authenticity (PBA) framework, including continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism as four dimensions of brand authenticity. Morhart et al. (2015) explain the continuity dimension as brands that have a history and can use this historicity to be a timeless and trend-surviving brand. The credibility dimension means that brands have to be credible, in other words, to live up to the promises it makes and therefore not betraying the consumer. The integrity dimension comprises that authentic brands have certain moral values and principles, and therefore truly caring about their customers. Finally, the symbolism dimension means that consumers have to be able to identify with an authentic brand, reflecting values that are important for consumers and adding meaning to their lives.

Finally, Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, and Farrelly (2014) found that three main factors contribute to brands having more brand authenticity; quality commitment, sincerity, and heritage. From these three factors, especially heritage is a well-researched and distinct concept that is important for the construct of authenticity, and therefore we will elaborate on this in the next section. The different concepts and measurement scales are evaluated by Fritz et al.

(2017), who argue that the operationalizations show significant similarities, and conclude that all dimensions of authenticity involve some kind of consistency, honesty, and genuineness.

2.2.5 Brand heritage

Brand heritage is defined by Urde, Greyser, and Balmer (2007) as 'a dimension of a brand's identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in an organizational belief that its history is important'. They explain that a 'heritage brand' is a brand that bases its positioning and brand identity mainly on its heritage, which makes it differentiates it from a 'brand with a heritage', that does not make their heritage part of their value proposition. Urde et al. (2007) identified five elements of brand heritage, most of which are closely related to brand authenticity. The model can be found in Figure 4.
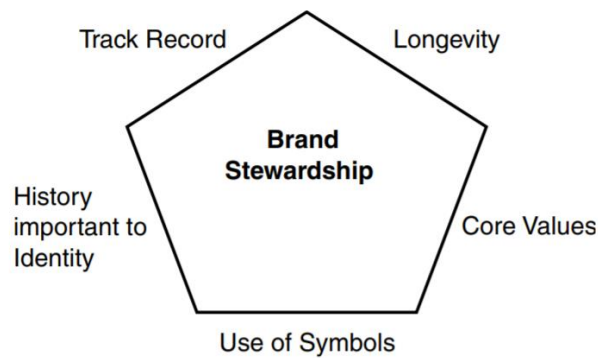
Figure 4. Elements of brand heritage (Urde et al. 2007)

First of all, a track record means that a brand has lived up to its values and promises for over a long time, therefore, this could be perceived as some kind of quality commitment or trust in the brand (Urde et al. 2007). With longevity, it is meant that a brand consistently portrays some heritage elements in their brands (Urde et al. 2007), which is thus closely related to a sense of consistency or continuity, which is an important factor for brand authenticity. This also comes back in the heritage-attribute of continuous core values, which through their consistency define the corporate strategy and become a part of the corporate strategy. Then, heritage brands often use symbols to express their heritage, and finally, the history is very important for the company, and more specifically to its identity.

2.3   Brand Equity & Brand Image

2.3.1 Brand equity

The notion around defining and perceiving brand equity in current literature is very extensive, consisting of many various perspectives and factors. The vast majority of studies (Ailawadi et al. 2003; Farquhar, 1989; Keller, 1993), have agreed on Aaker's (1991) general definition of brand equity, as a set of assets that can potentially provide added value on top of the value of products or services due to marketing efforts (this impact can also create negative outcomes to the brand). More specifically, the difference in outcomes that exist from comparing the same product with and without a brand name (Aaker, 1991). Although the brand name is the most common indicator to analyze brand equity, the use of logos, symbols, and many other elements can also prove to create this difference (Kapferer, 2008). Through theoretical observation, it can be seen that most existing studies on brand equity can be categorized into three unique perspectives or areas of expertise. These are the consumer, organizationally (product), or financially oriented studies that have been done (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Farquhar (1989), for the most part, shares this categorization and states that the added value or equity that the brand creates can be observed through the consumer or firm, but also adds that this can be viewed through a 'trade' perspective, meaning the potential that a brand can have in increasing their brand leverage in the market and the benefits that derive from such a change, such as price and distribution power.

2.3.2 Measuring brand equity

Much research has also been done regarding the diverse set of methods used to measure the effects of brand equity. Again, it can be seen that some authors propose measurement scales to assess financial or firm outcomes regarding areas around brand valuation by observing the incremental discounted future cash flow from brand names (Simon & Sullivan, 1990), M&A value analysis (Mahajan, Rao and Srivastava, 1991), and many others, whilst other authors attempt to develop ways to measure customer-based brand equity (Keller 1993; Aaker 1991; Aaker, 1996), through aspects such as awareness, attitude, knowledge, associations, and loyalty. To expand on the contribution of Aaker (1991), Aaker (1996) managed to systematically identify and categorize ten unique measures of brand equity into five distinct categories, more commonly known as the 'brand equity of ten'. The dimensions and measurements are the following: loyalty (price premium & satisfaction/loyalty), perceived quality/leadership, associations and differentiation (perceived value, brand personality, and organizational associations), brand awareness, and finally, market behavior (market share & price/distribution indices). It is important to mention that the first four dimensions relate directly to customer perceptions, thus leading to the following section.

2.3.3 Customer-oriented brand equity

As this thesis places emphasis on the consumer responses of authentic brand extensions, it is important to elaborate on this consumer-oriented perspective of brand equity measures and valuation. Keller (1993), a well-cited author on customer-based brand equity, argues that brand knowledge is a crucial factor relating to consumer response (in the form of brand equity)

towards marketing stimuli. Keller (1993), goes on to state that this form of brand equity occurs "when the consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in memory." As a result, Keller (1993), visualizes brand knowledge as a product of two elements, brand awareness (recall, recognition, etc.) and brand image, defined as a representative of these mental associations. Nandan (2005), agrees that brand image is consumer-constructed and builds upon the previous concept by stating that brand images are the 'subjective perceptions of a set of associations about a brand'. This is done by appointing a persona or image to that particular brand.

2.3.4 Brand image
To narrow down the scope of the thesis analysis, brand image perceptions are to be solely observed in more detail and not added factors such as brand knowledge as introduced by Keller (1993) for example. Brand image can be defined as the particular consumer perceptions of a brand's performance across various indicators, such as functional, symbolic, and experiential factors. These factors are relayed through the consumer's mental image of the brand, consequently affecting subsequent consumer or purchase behavior (Patterson, 1999; Zhang, 2015). Additionally, Nandan (2005) recognizes that such perceptions are subject to the decoding process of consumers on the created identity of a certain brand. That being said, it can be deduced from the aforementioned observations that brand associations and brand image are considered to be interchangeable. On this account, the already introduced 'brand equity ten' framework by Aaker (1996), can be used to deepen the understanding of (mental) brand associations. These associations of the brand can be seen in three distinct ways, (1) the brand as a product, (2) the brand as a person, and (3) the brand as an organization. It can be seen that the brand equity classification of Keller & Lehmann (2006) shares some commonalities with that of Aaker (1996). The brand as a product signifies the value proposition that the product can provide. This value is considered to be more about intangible value over functional-tangible product benefits. The brand as a person aspect signifies the brand personality, this provides access to a brand's emotional attachment and the self-expression of the brand alongside the users (consumers) image and identity reflection in a social setting.

Nandan (2005, p. 267) shares a similar perspective on brand personality and mentions that "consumers ascribe a persona or an image to the brand based on subjective perceptions of a set of associations that they have about the brand". Lastly is the brand as an organization, where organizational aspects such as the internal values and people or culture are central. This is especially the case when corporate brands are involved. Other elements that define these brands are the following: credible, trustworthy, long-term orientation, innovative mindset, and play a positive role in social/environmental situations. Aaker (1996) also argues that brand loyalty, or more specifically, price premium should be considered as a core measurement of success, through the evaluation of brand associations for their aptitude to affect the loyalty of consumers. However, during the thesis study, it is assumed that the 'consumers' observed are already seen as dedicated and loyal supporters of the respective authentic brands. According to Pitta and Katsanis (1995), another method to ensure the successful creation of a positive brand image is the notion that brand associations should meet the criteria of being unique, strong, and favorable. Unique brand associations have been classified into three major categories:

attributes, benefits, and attitudes (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). In summary, it can be deduced that this paper strives to highlight the specific brand equity outcomes of brand image perceptions in the minds of consumers.

2.3.5 Linking brand identity and brand image
Existing literature on the interdependencies between the three primary constructs of brand identity, extension, and authenticity with that of brand image theory can be observed. Janonis, Dovalienė and Virvilaitė (2007) establish a connection between brand image and brand identity, by conveying the needed mediating factor of brand positioning. A positive brand image that ensures a competitive advantage is built up when it conveys brand identity to consumers efficiently by employing particular strategies of positioning (Janonis et al. 2007). Positioning is seen as the needed active communication that creates a distinct 'position' in the consumer's mind and mental associations, distinguishing the brand from competitors (Janonis et al. 2007). Concerning corporate brands, establishing, proving, and keeping the promises the brand makes towards consumers is essential. Especially when creating trust is the desired outcome (Brand Orientation, 2020). The previously mentioned authors also go on to refer to the framework of the 'Modified process of brand image development', by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2003). Here, these three constructs are visualized as a step by step process, containing twelve categories of brand identity elements that are set forth through four purposes; brand as a good, a company (organization), personality and symbol. These categorizations are almost the equivalent of previous assortments such as Aaker (1996). Nandan (2005) implements a 'communications perspective', also recognizing that a strong link and coherence between brand identity and image can result in the development of strong brand loyalty, like Aaker (1996). However, Nandan (2005) points out that identity and image are separate constructs, meaning that a strong identity does not always translate into a strong image. In parallel to the input of positioning in the identity-image connection as created by Janonis et al. (2007), Nandan (2005) also emphasizes the need for efficient communication tools to establish a strong link between these two separate constructs.

2.3.6 Linking brand extensions with brand image
The association between brand extension and brand image has also been documented. To introduce the theoretical concept, it is important to distinguish and observe the difference between brand extensions of either functional oriented brand images or prestige-oriented images of product brands (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). Benefits of extensions across categories that relate to brand image can occur, such as name recognition and transfer of positive brand attribute associations (Farquhar, 1989). The work of Martinez and Chernatony (2004) was able to examine the potential change in brand image before and after the practice of brand extension. This was done especially through the analysis of the dilution effect of extensions on general brand image (GBI) or product brand image (PBI), showing that this dilution is more present in PBI after extension, where the level of fit (as discussed in brand extension theory) heavily influences PBI (Martinez & Chernatony, 2004), whilst brand knowledge, awareness, and familiarity affect GBI (Martinez & Chernatony, 2004; Low & Lamb, 2000). The phenomenon of brand extension dilution in correspondence to change in brand image is further expressed through the idea that introducing new beliefs and feelings related to the extension's attributes

will contrast to those of the parent brand, ultimately changing the associations in consumers' minds or adding different ones. This is especially the case when these new beliefs, brand attributes or associations are inconsistent with those of the parent brand. (Martinez & Chernatony 2004; Sharp, 1993; Loken & John, 1993). Additionally, it is a possible occurrence that negative associations or perceptions related to the extension may create favorable brand images of the parent brand (Pitta & Katsanis, 1995).

2.4   Brand extensions

2.4.1 Brand extensions

Brand extensions are a vital technique for companies that want to grow fast, and as a marketing strategy for introducing new products (Park, Milburg & Lawson, 1991). Therefore, it is specifically interesting to research how consumers perceive and react to brand extensions. Brand extensions can be categorized into two approaches; line extensions and brand extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990). A line extension means that a brand enters a new market segment, but in the same product category as it was before (e.g. Coke extending to Diet Coke). A brand extension on the other hand means that a brand name is transferred into a completely new product category (e.g. Apple extending from iPhones to Apple Watches). Aaker & Keller (1990) argue that brand extensions are key strategic mediums for brands, but also severely critical as they involve exploiting the possibly most important asset of a company, namely the brand name. They can enhance a brand, but also fail to do so, and even harm the brand name (Aaker, 1990). Consequently, there is a connection between brand extensions and brand equity, as brand extensions can be an effective way to leverage brand equity (Viot, 2011).

Different strategies for brand extensions have been identified by Kotler (1991, in Pitta & Katsanis, 1995). First, a brand can extend using individual brand names for the different products, with no ties between the product and company or between products. The second strategy, the so-called 'umbrella' strategy entails that all products carry the company brand name, which is also called 'family brands'. Finally, a sub-brand name strategy exists, where a new product both carries the company name and an individual product brand name. A company might choose a strategy depending on what the goal of the extension is.

2.4.2 Brand extension fit

The most important notion relating to brand extensions is 'fit'. In previous research, two main types of fit have been identified, the first of which is fit of similarity. Aaker and Keller (1990) explain this as the similarity between the parent brand product class and the brand extension product class. This is important since it will cause consumers to perceive the brand perceptions of the parent brand to the new brand extension, which can lead to an enhanced perceived quality of the brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Herr, Farquhar & Fazio, 1996; Spiggle et al. 2012). Similarity in product classes means that the two product classes fit together in some way, for example through common features, substitutability, or complementarity (Aaker & Keller, 1990; Spiggle et al. 2012). The second type of 'fit' is fit of relevance, which argues that brand-specific associations drive perceptions of fit, and not the perceptions shared with other products

in the same category (Spiggle et al. 2012). Those perceptions could be benefits from the brand, or brand concepts (Broniarczyk & Alba, 1994; Park, Milberg & Lawson, 1991).

2.4.3 Outcomes of brand extensions

Aaker (1990), in his article 'Brand Extensions: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly' examines a variety of outcomes of brand extensions. First, what Aaker calls 'the good', is when the parent brand name contributes to the brand extension, through brand or quality associations and the awareness and presence of a brand. Then Aaker (1990) explains by 'more good' that a brand extension can even enhance the core brand. A brand name can also fail to help a brand extension, however, or 'the bad' as explained by Aaker (1990). In that case, the core brand name does not add value to the new product category, it could stimulate negative associations, the name confuses consumers, or there was a poor fit between the brand extension and the core brand. Also, consumers can have poor quality perceptions or the brand extension relies too much on the brand name, therefore being not well-supported. Finally, Aaker (1990) introduces 'the ugly': when a brand extension damages the core brand. This could lead to the creation of undesired brand associations for the parent brand, damaging the perceived quality of the brand, or altering existing brand associations (Aaker, 1990).

2.4.4 Brand extensions and brand authenticity

Spiggle et al. (2012) introduce brand extension authenticity (BEA) as a construct for predicting consumer responses to brand extensions. They define BEA as 'a consumer's sense that a brand extension is a legitimate, culturally consistent extension of the parent brand'. Four dimensions that reflect authenticity in an extension were identified in their research: (1) maintaining brand styles and standards, (2) honoring brand heritage, (3) preserving brand essence, and (4) avoiding brand exploitation (Spiggle et al. 2012).

3 Methodology

In this chapter, we argue for the methodological choices for this thesis. First of all, the underlying research philosophy is presented and argued for. Then, the research strategy including the approach that has been taken is described, with the help of the methodological flowchart. After this, we argue for the research design and the cases that have been selected. Consequently, the online platforms and empirical material are selected in the data collection section. How this data is then analyzed is found in the data analysis section, followed by considerations about validity and reliability.

To find unique insights based on our three established research questions, we will need to develop a relevant and applicable methodology. To achieve this, we will follow the methodological 'four rings' process as introduced by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson (2018). The research philosophy, or outer ring, acts as the anchor in guiding how the other research areas take form. Secondly, the research methods and research approach suggest the overall methodological strategy. Lastly, the specific research methods and techniques will be explained in the research design section.
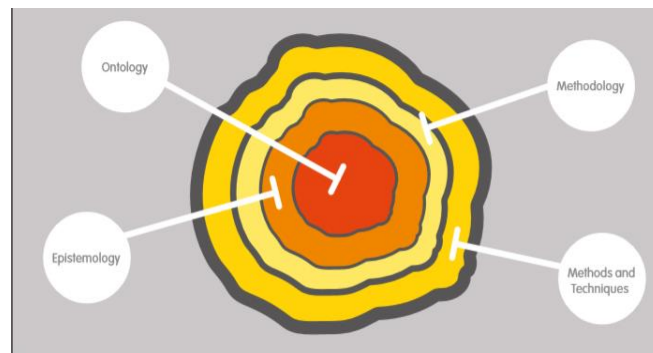
Figure 5. The Four Rings Model (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018)

3.1 Research Philosophy

Philosophy in a research context is depicted as the rigorous attitude of researchers to continuously establish, regulate, and improve knowledge creation (Chia, 2002). Furthermore, research philosophy is made up of a 'system of beliefs and assumptions' that surround this creation of knowledge (Saunders, 2009). Philosophy is crucial to develop, as it can organize (researcher) thoughts into a coherent and comprehensive 'worldview' and consequently illuminate, guide, and align the research process (Sefotho, 2015). Although other subsequent elements of the research process, such as the method, illustrate the question of how research is done, many types of research fail to identify the guiding principle of 'why research is done?', as can be explored through research philosophy (Holden & Lynch, 2004).

According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), to develop a respective philosophical perspective, certain 'core' assumptions regarding the (1) nature of society and the (2) nature of science must be fabricated in a 'social' context. In this thesis, a regulatory and modernistic view on society will be utilized, whilst the nature of science will be viewed through a subjective approach. A regularistic view depicts society as both 'unified and cohesive' and rationally evolving (Holden & Lynch, 2004; Burrel & Morgan, 1979). The aforementioned subjective approach is portrayed into more specific assumptions of ontology and epistemology.

Ontology can be described as the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality, while within this, epistemology is the way of inquiring into the nature of the world by studying theories of knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2018). It should also be mentioned that by researching eventual consumer perceptions, the 'social' aspect within ontology and epistemology needs to be highlighted. A 'social' ontological perspective, based on a subjectivity approach, believes that 'social reality is made from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors' (Saunders, 2009), or in the thesis context, depicted as consumers. This thesis will follow a relativist ontology, signifying the belief that there exist many various perspectives or truths, proving that there is not one single truth of reality. Relativism also acknowledges the fact that the viewpoint of the observer or researcher has an impact on their perspective of reality (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). In this case, the online comments and discussions between consumers portray each individual's argument and standpoint within the conversation, as such each post that is observed during the analysis takes both the user's background and experiences into account. Furthermore, these specific comments, that are to be selected for analysis, are subject to our subjective interpretations and predisposed viewpoints.

An epistemological perspective based on social studies similarly embraces the reasoning behind social psychology and symbolic interactionist theories, as introduced by Mead (1934). In essence, knowledge is seen as something that is for the most part socially and historically constructed. In social psychology, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals are observed within a social group context and the influence of such on behavior. Symbolic interactionism is seen as a frame of reference on how certain individuals create meaning, by shaping each other's behaviors and perceptions through social interaction and expressing this through language and symbols (Mead, 1934). These meanings are handled and adapted through an individual's interpretive process (Mead, 1934). Individuals thus behave based on meanings, these meanings occur between people in a social setting, and finally, these meanings are subject to adoption based on individual interpretation. Symbolic interactionism is an especially relevant paradigm due to the idea that authenticity as a theoretical construct is 'socially' shaped through such interactions. Symbolic interactionism theory strongly resembles that of social constructionism as an epistemological paradigm. Social constructionism as defined by Easterby-Smith et al. (2018), also sees the social world (as reality) to be determined mainly by people, Therefore, it is crucial to observe what both individuals and groups think and feel, based on their unique interpretive meanings and experiences, this can be collected through their non-verbal or verbal means of communication (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Since this research study will focus on analyzing said consumer perceptions through the means of netnography within case studies (see 3.3 - Research design), we can follow the categorization of Easterby-

Smith et al. (2018) in distinguishing engaged and detached social constructionism between observant and 'participant'. Here, we identify this thesis as applying a hermeneutic approach or strategy to answer the question of 'how we will acquire knowledge?' Hermeneutics is context-based observations of participants, by interpreting textual material (Gadamer, 1989 as cited in Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

To ensure that the degree of subjectivity and abstract does not hinder the eventual quality of research production, certain tools and approaches will be used to help overcome this. It is crucial that we, as researchers, develop a reflexive approach (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). This is characterized by the need to evaluate and reflect upon possible influences from the experiences, attitudes, and other contexts that might have an impact on methodological interpretation and selection. This approach can be seen through the choice of the previously mentioned philosophical assumptions. Relativism primarily recognizes this from an 'observant' standpoint, whilst hermeneutics does the same through a 'participant' standpoint'. Another practice to ensure increased research quality is by utilizing triangulation (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). Methodological triangulation will be used by combining a case-study approach and a netnographic analysis of consumers based on the selected cases.

3.2 Research Strategy

3.2.1 Qualitative research strategy

It is important to argue which research strategy is taken by the researchers to assure that the most relevant outcomes are reached. The most commonly used research strategies are qualitative and quantitative approaches. Because of its non-numeric and explorative nature, qualitative research is well suited for researching consumer perceptions (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). We argue that, regarding the data to be gathered, we need consumer interactions on the brand level, which therefore means that a qualitative research strategy is more suitable for this study than a quantitative strategy. A qualitative approach is thus taken to gain in-depth and rich data on consumer perceptions regarding brand extensions of authentic brands. Moreover, the above described epistemological and ontological perspectives also support the use of qualitative research.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) also stress the role of the researcher in qualitative research. Qualitative data often has to be created by the researcher itself, and the outcomes of research also depend on the researcher's interpretations. In this research, observational techniques are conducted, with the researchers taking the role of the 'complete observer', avoiding direct engagement with the research subjects but 'observing' from a distance (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). This aligns with the fact that complete observers often create observational records such as written records and the collection of secondary data, as will be done in this research (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). This confirms our beliefs about following a qualitative research strategy.

3.2.2 Research approach

When considering business - and in particular - marketing research, two different research approaches can be used for relating between the research and theory, which are commonly known as deductive and inductive (Bryman and Bell, 2015). A deductive approach is mostly concerned with testing the existing theory on the data, whereas an inductive approach involves generating new theory from the data following a 'bottom-up' approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As this research will approach to build theory from the data that will be rendered from the multiple case study, an inductive approach is usually more suitable (Eisenhardt, 1989).

However, there is also existing research using both of the approaches (cf. Urde & Greyser, 2015), as described as an option by Bryman and Bell (2015), advocating a constant iteration between the data (the empirical grounding, in our case the case studies) and the development of the theory (based on existing theory). We will adopt this approach to assure that we identify important aspects from the cases and can immediately relate these to and adopt in the development of a theoretical framework. Moreover, it will help us to switch constantly between the cases and the results of the netnography.
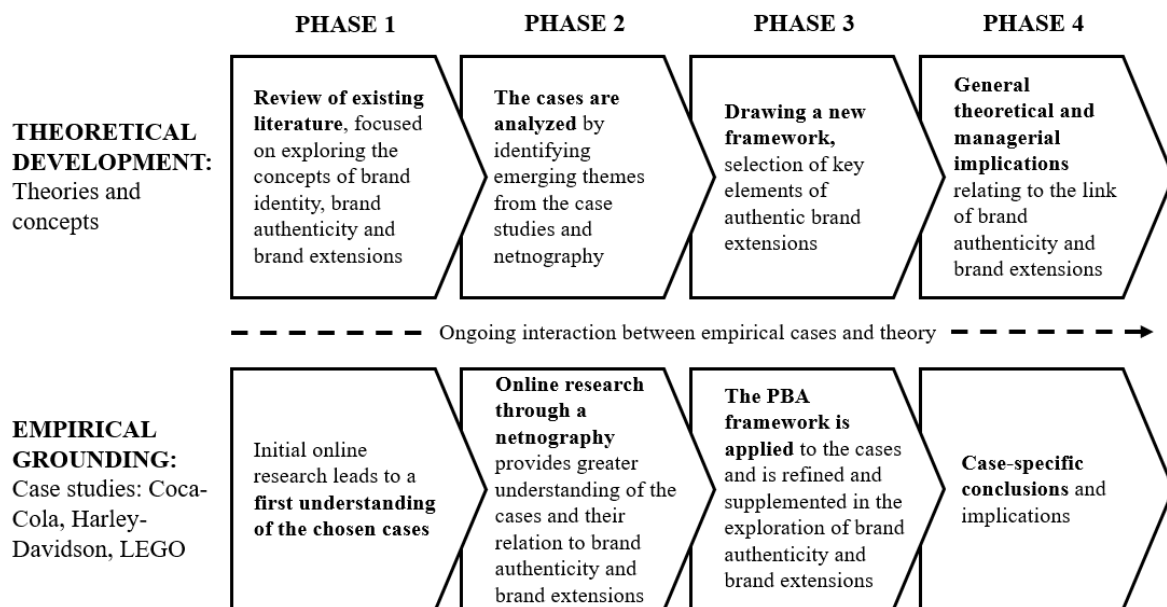
Figure 6. Methodological flowchart

3.3   Research Design

A research design is crucial in its capability to organize and answer four key questions of the research study: (1) What data will be gathered? (2) How will this data be gathered? (3) Wherefrom will this data be gathered? and finally (4) How will the data be analyzed? (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2018). These questions will help us eventually provide answers to the research question(s) and will be explained in the following subsections of this thesis. The main goal of this research will be to provide a novel contribution in the form of both theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, we aim to build theory in the form

of a broad conceptual framework. This framework will be constructed from both existing theoretical constructs in literature, alongside practical observations in data found by analyzing consumer perceptions of relevant business cases. This created framework also has the opportunity to test and verify those existing theoretical constructs linked around brand identity, image, extensions, and authenticity. In a managerial context, we aim to provide recommendations to managers of other 'authentic' corporate brands based on these observations, whilst allowing them to apply this newly created framework to their businesses.

As previously mentioned, we will collect the consumer perceptions of brand extensions conducted by authentic brands. The process goes as follows, firstly, on an 'organizational level', we will select multiple cases that are a relevant match to our selection criteria. Through the chosen cases, we will gather archival data in the form of consumer perceptions based on these cases. Consequently, we can identify the unit of analysis in this study as consumer perceptions in this context. The selection criteria for choosing the cases and the types of archival data will be further explained in the following sections.

The research study will examine the unit of analysis by using a case approach as a constructionist research design, to select the most representative organizational or practical examples of which to base the analysis on. Within this, a netnography will be used as a qualitative research method to capture those specific consumer perceptions of brand extensions performed by the cases and gain rich insights from those cases. Due to our willingness to provide managerial implications and the organizational relevance of the theoretical constructs, we will observe the data through multiple case-based contexts, meaning that the same phenomena will be compared through different organizational settings. More specifically, each case surrounding their respective brand extensions are categorized by 'the good, bad, and ugly' (Aaker, 1990). The importance of doing this can also be seen by Dooley (2002), stating that "because cases reflect real-life situations, cases must represent good and bad practices, failures as well as successes". The use of multiple cases provides the opportunity for researchers to explore a wider range of practical settings, thus increasing the overall quality and level of generalizability that cases provide, which are generally points of concern with case-based research and case studies (Yin, 2013). Analyzing multiple cases in a comparative approach can provide more 'replicable' and reliable conclusions and more detailed or accurate analysis by being able to understand differences and similarities within each situation and across various situations (Noor, 2008; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995).

Concerning the eventual goal of this research study, case-based research approaches are proven to be able to provide the opportunity to both build and test theory (Yin, 1994). Theory generation greatly depends on the continuous back and forth process between past literature constructs and empirical observations of data (Eisenhardt, 1989). Building theory can occur through finding contradicting results to prior theories in literature or even across cases. Embracing these results consequently increases our ability to reframe theory and create novel theory as a result, this can typically be in the form of a structured framework (Eisenhardt, 1989). On the other hand, 'emergent' theory can be tested through case-based research by observing similar phenomena in more than one situation, as seen in cases. By comparing these

circumstances, 'confirmation or disconfirmation will begin to take shape' (Dooley, 2002). Moreover, linking this emergent theory to existing literature or theories enhances the internal validity, generalizability, and theoretical level of theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Netnography is chosen as the main measuring method because it will allow us to capture genuine thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of users within online communities and websites. This also provides an opportunity to isolate the 'actively' engaged or loyal consumers or fans of each respective brand as can be seen from the case selection The reason behind the genuineness of these interactions is due to the high level of unobtrusiveness, as the environment of observation is not 'fabricated' by us as researchers (Kozinets, 2002). This unique and modern qualitative approach not only provides authentic observations on consumer interactions between like-minded peers, but it also allows us to gain deep insights into the symbolism and meanings that certain consumer groups in these online communities place in certain contexts (Kozinets, 2002). The interest of netnography from a marketer's perspective lies in its ability to influence consumer-based brand equity through consumer advocacy (Kozinets, 2002) or otherwise described as eWOM, meaning electronic word of mouth (Xun & Reynolds, 2009). The interest from a researchers point of view lies in online channels providing an accessible opportunity to bridge cultural or geographical gaps, thus providing many rich insights from multiple perspectives (socially, culturally, etc.) and backgrounds (Kozinets, Dolbec, & Earley, 2014), thus matching very well with our ontological and epistemological perspectives. Furthermore, Kozinets (2015) states that a particular benefit of collecting online social interactions is their ability to be automatically archived and shared easily and systematically, thus leaving a more continuous trace for researchers and more ease of access. Although there are many benefits to netnographic research, certain limitations are still present. The reliance on researcher interpretation skills and room for potential bias can change the eventual findings, this can potentially be reduced by maintaining a reflexive approach to research analysis. Another possible limitation is the lack of generalizability that netnography provides as a qualitative research method. In parallel to case research solutions, generalizability in findings can be increased through observing similarities or contrasts across data (Kozinets, 2002).

3.4 Selection of Cases

The selected brands with their extensions have to have an authentic brand identity. We operationalize that following the 'Perceived Brand Authenticity Framework', which consists of the concepts of continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism. Thus, the selected brands that have extended must show that they live up to these attributes of authentic brands. We have chosen this framework as it presents the various dimensions of brand authenticity for brands, giving a good overview of the authenticity of brands amongst the whole extent of the brand. Moreover, the brand extension must have been undertaken in the last 10 years, to ensure that the cases are relevant today and available through online channels to capture adequate data. To not only develop novel theory and insights but also test existing literature, it is required to compare similarities and contrasts between various cases. As seen through Aaker (1990), cases present 'real-life' situations, which can be categorized according to 'good, bad, and ugly'

examples of brand extensions. 'Good' extensions being ones that enhance the brand after it has extended, 'bad' where the extension itself does not take off but the brand itself is not damaged, and 'ugly' are cases where the extension harms the brand.

This has led to the selection of the following cases, which will be introduced and explained in detail in the next chapter:
- The LEGO Movie: The LEGO Movie is an extension into the movie industry of the brand LEGO, dating from 2014.
- Harley-Davidson LiveWire: The Harley LiveWire is an extension by the brand Harley-Davidson into the business of electric motorcycles.
- Coca-Cola Life: Coca-Cola Life is an extension by The Coca-Cola Company, focusing more on health-conscious drinks.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Selection of online platforms
The cases will be analyzed through online comments, discussions, and interactions, using a variety of platforms. For a netnography, different online platforms that have dissimilar purposes have been identified as suitable. Kozinets (2002) proposes several criteria for selecting platforms or online communities that fit a netnography. The community should have (1) a focused and research question-relevant topic; (2) high amount of posts; (3) a large number of people that post; (4) detailed and descriptively rich data; (5) between-member interactions. During the selection of the platforms, we have adhered to these criteria as much as possible to ensure we collect data that is as valid as possible. However, as we focus on individual perceptions of authentic brand extensions, the criteria of between-member interactions is not deemed as important, and therefore this criterion is not always adhered to during the collection.

For the different cases, we have chosen several platforms to extract the data from. The most used platform of our analysis is Reddit. Reddit was chosen since this platform allows its members to share their individual opinions and perceptions on brand-related topics, which is thus deemed suitable for our research. Reddit is an online network of communities based on people's interests. Users can discuss and react to 'threads' and posts about for example brands and product releases. Reddit is the largest internet community with about 1.56 billion users as of 2019. Reddit is chosen as a platform since we could find specific brand- or extension-related forum posts, with a large extent of individual reactions or comments. Because of the high amount and frequency of user posts on Reddit, it is a highly relevant community for extracting individual opinions and discussions regarding our chosen cases.

Moreover, for the case of The LEGO Movie, we decided to add two other forums, IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes. Since the case of The LEGO Movie entails the release of a blockbuster movie, it was deemed suitable to include movie forums such as IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes in the search for appropriate data collection. The movie forums allow users to post comments

on their favorite movies, which allows us to find detailed descriptions and individual perceptions of, in this case, The LEGO Movie.

3.5.2 Selection of empirical material

To answer our chosen research questions, we have to collect in-depth relevant data on each of the selected cases. With Reddit being chosen as the main source of data collection, and IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes in addition to this, it is important to select the most relevant comments and posts towards our cases. These forums allow us to capture extensive comments and opinions and was therefore preferred above methods such as capturing short individual answers in a survey. To ensure that the captured data is highly relevant to our research purpose, we have guided our selection of posts and comments by the following criteria:

- The posts or comments observed in the different platforms should concern the brand extensions of the authentic brands.
- The comments for each respective post should include text-based communications concerning the brand extensions.
- The 'consumers' involved should have an active role in the brand communities in any shape or form, preferably in the relevant context in which he/she is being observed.
  - This active role can be characterized as someone with a distinct amount of activity in the respective platforms. Metrics such as comments, upvotes, posts were analyzed for this reason.

There were several posts chosen that have been selected according to the mentioned criteria, which are explored in the netnographic analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

For this thesis, it is important to explain how the collected data and material are analyzed. First of all, during the case studies, we have assembled and analyzed the data according to the PBA framework by Morhart et al. (2015). We have assembled both the case and netnographic findings per case to be able to link information that follows from both sections together. Moreover, during the netnographic analysis, we have used the identification of themes to structure the data understandably and comprehensively. As the methodological flowchart described earlier, these two approaches allowed us to consider both within-case and between-case interactions and similarities or dissimilarities. Furthermore, by constantly going back and forth between the case studies, the netnographic material, and existing theories and literature, we have been able to see whether these existing theories needed refinement, expansion, or were not suitable for our research at all.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

3.7.1 Validity

Many possible procedures can be implemented to ensure a sufficient level of validity and reliability of the research study, with a select few of these being mentioned in previous sections

of the thesis. Validity in qualitative research can be defined as the integrity and appropriateness of tools and methods where the findings accurately match the data, whereas reliability refers to the transparency and consistency of analysis. Validity starts with the synergy that the ontological and epistemological perspectives have in relation to the eventual method methods to be chosen as it takes into account the context that findings occur in (Leung, 2015).

In our research, we believe that concepts like authenticity or brand perceptions are heavily influenced by social constructs, experiences, and interactions, hence the choice of a netnography to capture those authentic interactions with peers with little-to-no observant influence. Moreover, the aim of validity in constructionist research is to allow for multiple perspectives to be used (Easterby-Smith et al. 2018). In this thesis, we attempt to gather multiple perspectives, both contrasting and similar perceptions or opinions of consumers each having their background and experiences therewith. Easterby-Smith et al. (2018) utilized the work of Locker, Wallshaw & McMillan (1999) to highlight the criteria of valid constructionist research design. These are the following; (1) Authenticity as the researcher deeply understands the organization to be researched and selects the appropriate and representative people as participants in an honest manner (Connelly, 2016), (2) Plausibility as the relevance and necessity this research has on current literature and potential gaps, and (3) Criticality involves the awareness of researcher pre-assumptions and consequently requires the offering of novel contributions. Authenticity as a criterion in this thesis can be reached by carefully selecting cases based on the selection criteria and their level of representativeness provided in the analysis, we do not only examine successful cases but also provide failures within a wide range of industries. Also, authenticity can be met by the selection criteria of platforms and empirical material, online communities and forums from well-respected members or posts will provide an accurate representation of authentic perceptions of genuine loyal or admiring consumers of the respective brand cases. Plausibility criteria can be solved by the increasing importance of authenticity and brand extension success in organizational research alongside the gap in theories that can be tackled between brand identity and authenticity. Criticality within validity theory can also be seen as 'truth value' (Noble, 2015), recognizing the different perspectives related to ontology/epistemology and the consequences of researcher bias as a result. As mentioned before, reflexivity in research and reflection of analysis and data collection can be a solution to that critique. By solely observing re-traceable archival data in a public setting and interactive context, we can limit potential misinterpretation during the analysis phase.

3.7.2 Validity in a netnography

Kozinets (2002) proposes the following steps to ensure validity specifically in netnographic research methods: entrée, data collection, data analysis, ethics, and member checks. For entrée, Kozinets (2002) argues that researchers must have a specific marketing question, and they will have to find types of online forums that will help them provide data for answering these questions. The specific marketing question in this paper is the research question. For data collection, several criteria for selecting empirical data in section 3.5.3 make sure we will not experience information overload and to assure that the data will cohere to the research question of this paper (Kozinets, 2002). The data will be collected directly from the computer-based online communities. Due to time restrictions, data is not fully collected continuously until there

is a saturation of data (Kozinets, 2002), but archivally during a time frame of a month. Furthermore, concerning data analysis, we are aware of the fact that we study online communications and that this may give rise to certain limitations of the study, in terms of generalizability and the completeness of observed acts. By following conventional netnography methods and setting certain guidelines for analyzing data, we hope to keep these limitations to a minimum. Regarding ethics, the community users will remain anonymous and we make sure that all comments used are publically available. Lastly, member checks will not be conducted since the scope of this study does not allow this.

3.7.3 Reliability

The end goal of constructionist research in becoming considered as reliable is to ensure that other researchers in the field can provide and have access to similar observations. As mentioned previously, the use of archival data in a public setting is easily accessible to all researchers. In addition, direct quotes are provided during the analysis of the study, thus providing transparency and accessibility in that regard. Although the cases chosen are very specific, the help of a conceptual framework that can both test existing theory and contribute towards new insights can be used by researchers to apply this framework in other cases and scenarios.

4 Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings for each of the cases, as well as the netnographic findings per case in the form of online written comments. The chapter starts with The Coca-Cola Company, whereafter the Harley-Davidson and LEGO cases are considered. Each section first aims to get a deeper understanding of the company and extension backgrounds, before stating the empirical findings from the netnography.

4.1 The Coca-Cola Company

4.1.1 Case findings Coca-Cola

The Coca-Cola Company (TCCC) was founded in 1886 and began as a functional or medicinal beverage to cure headaches done by adding the unique cola syrup to carbonated water, starting gradually increasing sales in the U.S. This new invention took the world by storm and has exponentially increased its distribution and iconic value globally. Ever since, Coca-Cola has reigned as a brand leader in the carbonated drinks segment and soon after the non-alcoholic category of beverages, selling its products over 200+ countries (Coca-Cola, 2019a). Eventually, through strong communication/advertising campaigns and other core activities that positioned itself as a brand revolving around connectivity, sharing, and fun becoming influential and iconic in various areas of society. TCCC has continuously remained a top brand globally as can be seen in Interbrand's 2019 best global brands ranking, ranking 5th and within financial brand added value, TCCC has been estimated to have a brand value of 63,365 million dollars. This brand strength can also be seen that despite multiple shifts in the industry and many strategic hardships such as the introduction of 'new coke', TCCC has managed to remain continuously consistent and adaptively changeable in an authentic manner throughout history.

Recently, however, TCCC has shifted its corporate brand strategy from solely being identified through its flagship product that established the company's origin towards becoming a total beverage company, consisting of a 'family' of over five-hundred beverage brands targeted to all kinds of segments, thus going beyond soda. The main driver for this massive change in corporate direction was due to several related reasons and could be seen through the declining sales and consumption numbers in both the U.S and the world surrounding carbonated soda (sugary) drinks seeing the rise of interest shift to 'functional drinks' such as energy beverages, smoothies and bottled water for example (non-alcoholic ready to drink category). Consumers, governments, and scientists alike have become more conscious of health and lifestyle in consumption, having become one of the most prominent consumption trends globally. Therefore forcing a heavy blow on a corporate brand that was, and possibly still is, so defined and perceived as the producer of the infamous sugary and health-damaging drink.

Although TCCC is heavily diversifying its large portfolio of brands, more than half of all sales and revenue in all geographic areas derive from carbonated drinks, especially the Coca-Cola

brand (Coca-Cola, 2019a). The corporate brand's vision has realized this reliance and growing industry awareness and states that "Our vision is to craft the brands and a portfolio of beverages that people love. We're offering more choices with less sugar, reducing packaging sizes, and providing clear nutrition information" (Coca-Cola, 2019a). One eventual translation of this corporate vision was found in TCCC's decision to extend its flagship product in Coca-Cola to target those health-conscious and ecologically preferred consumers and other stakeholder interests. However, this will be explained in further sections.

Before delving into the detailed eventual analysis of this Coca-Cola extension, it is important to illustrate and understand what makes TCCC an authentic corporate brand and why it is chosen as a case to begin with. The criteria in which to assess each brand case as being perceived as authentic can be done through the use of the four distinct PBA dimensions as explained before; continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Morhart et al. 2015).

Continuity:
The Coca-Cola Company has certainly stood the test of time and has built its brand, spreading around the world for 134 years to date. A rich history of what started in the hands of a small local American pharmacist to being a leader and global distributor of soda and beyond. Throughout this long journey, TCCC has managed to create a strong and robust iconic identity by creating symbolic meaning in the lives of consumers and stakeholders alike through their unique ability of communicative storytelling (Lelis, 2017). Moreover, it can be seen that Coca-Cola has also maintained a strong heritage brand over this period as well, despite the many industry shifts and historic obstacles that the brand has been able to overcome. Some fierce obstacles, such as the sugary carbonated beverages segment being severely criticized for its harm in the obesity crisis and general harm in health, or the increasing consumer demand of sustainable and socially oriented practices in corporate decision making proved to be the source of eventual demise for the brand. However, TCCC proved its level of brand stewardship and more specifically its longevity by not only being resistant to change but also by finding the key innovative methods of their business to overcome these types of challenges. As Collins & Porras (1996) explain, truly visionary companies can 'preserve the core but stimulate progress', meaning that such brands have a set of 'timeless' core values and purpose, whilst being able to adapt and strive to progress to achieve this level of continuity. In this case, TCCC has embraced diversity, connectivity, accountability, and its representation of American culture to provide the opportunity to address these challenges. Diet Coke was the unique innovation of that time to address sugar level issues (Brujo, 2019), whilst incorporating various sustainable initiatives like ecological packaging, water stewardship and women empowerment initiatives (Gehani, 2016). Besides, although many Coca-Cola brand extensions have modified certain features or targeted other consumers, much of the original product and production has mostly stayed the same.

Credibility:
Building upon those innovations, The Coca-Cola Company has managed to direct its culture and actions in delivering its core promise to 'refresh the world and make a difference'. As can be seen throughout their communication and positioning, TCCC places itself as a more lifestyle

brand centered around providing brands that people love and base positive meanings behind, carefully innovating to improve those feelings. Furthermore, TCCC strives to make a difference by acting sustainably in all facets of the business (circular packaging, reducing sugar usage, eco sourcing) and increasing its impact on creating a better-shared value with communities and society (inclusion, support for locals and farmers). TCCC has also remained credible by their sincere openness and transparency towards failures. For example, one of the most notorious 'blunders' in marketing history was their decision to adopt the long-standing Coke taste and label it as the 'New Coke'. This daring and innovative approach forgetting the symbolic value of original Coca-Cola 'functional' attributes (that represents the American society so well), led to the outrage of consumers and stakeholders. With this, TCCC has frequently publicly and internally discussed what they have learned from that failure and how to improve in the future. It is that genuineness and openness to criticism that has created a stronger credible image.

Integrity:
According to Lelis (2017), The Coca-Cola Company has managed to portray the authentic core values of its Coca-Cola brand by communicating moral values in its advertisements. For example, in the advertisement 'The Pool Boy', Coca-Cola aims to 'refresh the world' (as their mission statement states), to create happiness in a social setting and to make a positive difference in the world. In doing so, TCCC shows integral morality here by featuring diverse people (showing inclusiveness) and genuine interactions (showing honesty). As a result, Coca-Cola can represent both moral and core values and aims to share these with others (Lelis, 2017). From a corporate standpoint, TCCC has been able to act upon these values of diversity, inclusiveness, and positive impactfulness through many actions and policies surrounding social responsibility and stakeholder interaction (Gehani, 2006). Most notably, the three primary corporate initiatives of TCCC; 'Women, Water, Wellbeing', and the many initiatives that have derived from those focus areas (Gehani, 2006).

Symbolism:
As previously mentioned, many various advertisements and communication methods were able to use storytelling and resonate certain meanings and values within the lives of not only TCCC's target market but also society as a whole (Lelis, 2017). Moreover, Coca-Cola can be depicted as a picture-perfect representation of American culture as can be seen through its values and heritage (Gehani, 2006). Other forms of iconic symbolism also originate from TCCC, such as the illustration and 'shaping' of Santa Claus as we know him in today's society through advertisements as well (Coca-Cola, 2019b). Lastly, the unique bottle design and style of Coca-Cola as a brand have survived and thrived throughout its existence, making the packaging recognizable around the world.

Coca-Cola Life
As mentioned previously, TCCC introduced a new extension of its coke brand in 2013, called Coca-Cola Life as a reaction to changing consumer preferences to healthier and more natural beverages. Coca-Cola Life uses an alternative for sugar in stevia extract and cane sugar, containing around 35% less sugar and calorie levels than that of normal Coca-Cola. As a result,

Coca-Cola Life was branded as an alternative cola that was aimed at more health-conscious consumers, thus meeting the changing lifestyle trends surrounding sugary beverages. In terms of branding and communication, Coca-Cola Life the iconic red packaging of Coca-Cola was substituted by a 'green look', further positioning it as a 'greener' alternative to classic Coca-Cola. Furthermore, many advertisements feature the bottle or can in natural settings, surrounded by green, giving the appearance of a more ecological or natural focus. In the commercials, "You don't know what life is" and "First Kiss", it is apparent that Coca-Cola Life strives to become a symbolic lifestyle and 'family' brand as well, becoming a key symbol during the memorable and genuine moments that people face in their lives, thus actively portraying a more authentic and natural meaning that this brand tries to create in the eyes of consumers.

Due to frequent and substantial investments in these types of promotions, Coca-Cola Life saw a significant rise in overall sales soon after its global launch, thus creating a 28.9 million pound business (in the U.K), and also increasing total TCCC sales by 4.9 percent a few months after launch (Marketing Week, 2017a). However, this increase was short-lived as global sales fell drastically over time to an average of 73% until 2017 (U.K statistics) (Marketing Week, 2017b), ultimately ending in several discontinuations of the brand around Europe. Despite these surprising declines, Coca-Cola Life spokespersons seem to still protect these occurrences by stating that the brand still attracts a 'small but loyal following' (Marketing Week, 2016). Although this might be true, Coca-Cola Life has succumbed to much criticism surrounding greenwashing and inauthentic communication, Despite efforts to move into a more positive light regarding consumer perceptions and an overall corporate strategic direction in a shifting industry and respective lifestyle trends, TCCC could have potentially impacted their corporate brand image in a harmful way, especially due to recent strategic interest to unite all brands under one brand identity. Possibly due to these miscommunications and claims, in more recent events, TCCC has rebranded 'Coca-Cola Life' into 'Coca-Cola with stevia', solely featuring stevia sweetener and no added sugar. This decision was further driven by TCCC's direction to unify the design and branding of all Coca-Cola products to fit the iconic red style of the original Coca-Cola, each providing specific features or symbolic value to each consumer preference.

Figure 7. Coca-Cola Life & Coca-Cola With Stevia Advertisements (HLN, 2015; Beverage Digest, 2019)

4.1.2 Netnographic findings Coca-Cola

As can be deduced, Coca-Cola Life seemed to be a logical step of TCCC in following or reacting to external trends and consumer preferences or, in certain aspects, demands. This can be further accentuated by corporate promises to reduce sugar in TCCC beverages. When a user asked for peers to explain the purpose of Coca-Cola Life, someone perceived this as the reason:

"Basically a giant jumping on the quasi health bandwagon. Green in brand normally symbolises Eco or health so that's a no brainer (...). Going pretty hard with it over here is Aus(tralia) since the health industry is booming (...)."
(Reddit, 2020a)

According to Bruhn et al. (2012), originality as a signifier of internal brand authenticity can be implemented here, proving that 'jumping on the bandwagon' or trend are not completely original actions. In addition, as Spiggle et al. (2012) conceptualize a key aspect in the perceptive authenticity of brand extensions is the brand's ability to avoid brand exploitation, meaning resistance to commercial opportunities that steer away from brand consistency and truths. Although TCCC promises for healthier development (reducing sugar and minimizing packaging) of its brands or products in the near future, or that Coca-Cola Life still resonates to Coca-Cola brand values, the intrinsic identity and image of the Coca-Cola brand do not equal to 'health' or 'life' as the established name suggests. Multiple different users exemplify this by stating that there is no link or association in their mind with regards to the brand and positioning surrounding this occurring trend of developing a healthy lifestyle. Even a post made by a user on a 'greenwashing' community on Reddit, linked to a satirical video of an acclaimed content creator that jokingly boils Coca-Cola Life, finding 'natural' vegetables appear as a result.

"'Healthy' and Coca-Cola don't belong in the same sentence."
(Reddit, 2020b)

"Nice try Coke, but no one bought that toxic green s*** was healthy for a second."
(Reddit, 2020c)

"Diabetes: The Coca-Cola Life."
(Reddit, 2020d)

"Coke Life is rather apropos... because it tastes like terrible lies"
(Reddit, 2020e)

Moreover, although TCCC has been adequately transparent on matters regarding sugar and calorie reduction in the new product, it seems that many users still acknowledge that only around a third of sugar/calorie levels compared to the notorious levels of the unhealthy image of original Coca-Cola, is not a strong enough claim to promote oneself as a healthier option. A user expresses this in his/her view on potential success or failure based on consumer targeting.

"Those who don't care about calories will opt for the "better" taste of Coke. If this fails it will be because it's targeting a minority market share more than anything else. I don't think giving it a distinct name would change that. (...) I just realized that Coke Life only has a third fewer calories, not half so that does muddy it a bit more. At half the calories, I could argue that it's somewhat in a distinct category but at a third less, I think that argument gets a bit thin."
(Reddit, 2020a)

Relating to this, a user implies the connection between commercial exploitation or monetary opportunity as damaging internal authenticity (Spiggle et al. 2012), with sugar level and calorie adaptation as a value proposition for consumers of Coca-Cola Life, as damaging to external authenticity.

"As seen in I think as a product it's kinda lame. "Coke life has half the sugar so it's ok to drink twice as much!" - Pretty much what they're getting at."
(Reddit, 2020a)

Brand authenticity can also be portrayed through their iconic value, as a projection of consumer expectations of a certain product (Fritz, Schoenmueller & Bruhn, 2017), especially if that brand has heritage and a long track record. As mentioned previously, the Coca-Cola brand has been an iconic and household name for a long time and can be significantly defined by the design of the bottle, labeling, and colors used. However, the branding of Coca-Cola Life defied those iconic features and implemented a green labeling style. As can be seen with perceived brand authenticity dimensions as conceptualized by Spiggle et al. (2012), maintaining brand styles and standards is essential, as can be seen, this is not particularly the case.

"But it seems so unappealing. If they needed a new colour, there are many others that are appealing. The green they use is awful. Nothing about it wants to make me try it. I'm just wondering if there is something I'm missing?"
(Reddit, 2020a)

In the same thread, someone replied with a subsequent link to greenwashing attempts by TCCC through the use of packaging and design.

"They made it green because they are trying to greenwash it and make it sound more appealing to the "natural, organic, healthy" crowd who don't want artificial sweeteners."
(Reddit, 2020a)

Other perspectives compared the lack of identification between the iconic 'Coke Red' with the new green design.

"Considering the amount of research that has gone into how people associate a product label (colors, fonts, etc.) with the flavor of the product, I have no doubt in my mind that Coke

intends for this product to fail miserably. (...) Coca-Cola should know better than anyone else, even. New Coke's failure was in part due to the new label they gave their product. (...) This product is absolutely intended to prove that customers don't like stevia. Try a blind taste test of the two sodas out of the classic red bottle. Then put regular Coke into the green bottle and Stevia Coke into the red bottle and watch people make nasty faces at the stuff in the green bottle. I guarantee it."
(Reddit, 2020f)

Eventually, TCCC responded to concerns by adapting the 'look' of Coca-Cola beverages in their attempt to follow the corporate vision to create a family brand of various beverages under the single Coca-Cola brand. Here, Coca-Cola Life was transformed into 'Coca-Cola With Stevia', containing the red label, adapted name, and even more reduced sugar. This change was also done in response to criticism of name placement and other arguments that have previously been highlighted. The following statement made by a user describes his/her reaction to this change.

I like the previous look better tbh. But no one had any idea it was a Coke product without the Coke red.
(Reddit, 2020g)

As previously mentioned, TCCC passionately strives internally to refresh the world and make a difference in external communities and nature. They do this by providing loved brands of various consumers, done sustainability, to better the shared future of communities. As proven by secondary research and public publications alongside methodological research through online comments (netnography), Coca-Cola Life may have been able to impact consumer perceptions of the authentic image of TCCC as a corporate brand. The corporate vision and direction towards the long terms contain sustainable and health-conscious practices for all beverages, proving that TCCC is internally purpose-driven to serve the external world around them in a genuine manner. However, netnographic research has shown that 'healthy' claims from an intrinsically unhealthy drink in Coca-Cola, have not been perceived well by the majority of consumers. Although TCCC has acted upon growing health concerns related to the Coca-Cola brand by reducing sugar in beverages or reducing package quantities, introducing a 'life' beverage that solely reduces a rather small portion of sugar compared to heavily criticized 'original' Coca-Cola does not equal to TCCC being true to oneself. Instead, it seems from multiple perspectives that this extension aims to remain relevant to changing consumer trends, thus creating immoral and unfaithful commercial opportunities that potentially damage other 'positive' intentions and initiatives that TCCC strives to achieve from a 'healthy lifestyle' perspective. The communicated message behind Coca-Cola Life in combination with the green style and labeling of the brand differs from that of Coca-Cola. Consequently, this difference creates contrasting symbolic meanings and feelings associated with Coca-Cola's iconic red symbol. As a result, unfamiliar meanings and messages between the two might dilute the image of TCCC as a corporate brand.

4.2 Harley-Davidson

4.2.1 Case findings Harley-Davidson

Harley-Davidson is an American motorcycle manufacturer, founded in 1903 by William S. Harley and his childhood friend Arthur Davidson. When older brother Walter Davidson joined, they began hiring employees and from 1907 the company started conquering the world. After only 20 years of operation, Harley-Davidson was the largest motorcycle company in the world, supplying motorcycles to over 60 countries. Today, Harley-Davidson is known as an iconic brand (especially in the United States), selling more than 200,000 motorcycles in total in over 100 countries, in 2019 (Harley-Davidson, 2020a). Harley-Davidson aims to unite people in a deep, passionate, and authentic way, through values of unity, rebellion, individuality, and personal freedom (Harley-Davidson, 2020a). That Harley-Davidson has a very strong brand is confirmed as they are ranked 99th in the Interbrand top 100 with a brand value of 4,793 million dollars (Interbrand, 2019).

Harley-Davidson is a brand with a very strong culture. For example, several official Harley-Davidson clubs exist with very committed members, who are known to take no critique of their brand at all. However, Harley-Davidson's is dealing with aging customers: in 1987, about 50% of Harley-Davidson customers were under 35 years old, whereas it was reported in 2008 that the average age of Harley-Davidson riders was about 48 years old (Bloomberg, 2006). While the corporate brand is most famous for Harley-Davidson motorcycles, they also sell Harley-Davidson clothes and accessories. Harley-Davidson is also known for some very interesting brand extensions they did in the past. For example, they have produced a Harley-Davidson cake decorating kit, and later they introduced a Harley-Davidson perfume. Both of these extensions have been very unsuccessful, which makes it clear that Harley's brand values are not easy to extend to just any product category. However, to stay relevant and adhere to the increasing demand for sustainable living and driving, Harley has recently extended its corporate brand again. In 2019 the electric motorcycle, the Harley LiveWire was introduced. Before researching this particular extension more in-depth, we will explain how Harley-Davidson as a corporate brand fits the name of an 'authentic brand', which they are according to the 'Authentic 100' (Authentic 100, 2017), given their 20th place.

Continuity:

Harley-Davidson is a brand that portrays continuity. As of today, the brand has been producing motorcycles as their core business for over 100 years. The brand has a rich history and heritage, playing a substantial role in both World War I and World War II, delivering about 20,000 and 60,000 motorcycles respectively for the U.S and Canadian army. The World War II motorcycle type came to be known as the 'Liberator' (Jackson, 2019). By being the biggest motorcycle brand of the world since the 1920s, Harley-Davidson has played its part in many cultural phenomena, such as the wars, but also racing. It has surely stood the test of time, surviving industry shifts but staying true to the brand that they have been from the start. This is shown, for example, by looking at the pictures below, where you can see that Harley-Davidson's motorcycle design has not changed a lot since 1928, which makes the brand easily

recognizable. Therefore, they maintain their brand styles and know how to honor their brand heritage as well (Spiggle et al. 2012). Heritage is a large part of Harley's brand identity, they are distinctly American. The USA always comes back in their marketing and they show their history in the USA continuously. Harley-Davidson has also been able to survive new trends since there have been a lot of different motorcycle trends and designs since the foundation of Harley-Davidson. For example, in the 1980s, Harley-Davidson had a difficult time since Japanese producers were able to produce motorcycles for a lower price, and Harley-Davidson had lost its assurance of producing high-quality motorcycles. By implementing better quality checks and setting up a Harley-Davidson member network to bond with its consumers, Harley-Davidson managed to become a high-quality brand once again.

Figure 8. Harley-Davidson Fatboy and Classic Harley-Davidson (Harley-Davidson, 2020b; Fine Art America, 2020)

Moreover, Harley-Davidson owns a corporate museum in Milwaukee, where it once again portrays its appeal and identity concerning its heritage and history.

Credibility:
Harley-Davidson has built its brand to be a trusted and credible brand all over the world, especially amongst its committed customers. The brand has lived up to its promises of quality (except for a few years in the 1980s), and more specifically its promises of identity. Harley-Davidson aims to give its customers personal freedom and a rebellious spirit, but also community and individuality (Harley-Davidson, 2020). Harley-Davidson is furthermore perceived as a brand that is transparent and honest towards its consumers: they know what they will buy, and they can rely on that, as this has been portrayed for many decades by the company. Therefore, Harley-Davidson can certainly be perceived as a credible brand.

Integrity:
While it is debatable whether Harley-Davidson has 'something behind the brand values', such as moral purity or responsibility (Morhart et al. 2015), it is clear that the company sincerely cares for their customers and their community. This can moreover be seen through the Harley-Davidson logo, which differs a little bit for every 'official' Harley dealership that exists. This shows that Harley cares about their community and strives to make people have a legitimate and authentic experience when using their motorcycle. Moreover, the brand acts according to their passion and values, staying loyal to these, which is something that is transferred to their consumers or fans (Morhart et al. 2015; Hodgson, 2018). So, while it can be argued that Harley-Davidson is missing a deep purpose that goes beyond the scope of the business, the company

is motivated by caring and being responsible for its customers and dealers, making Harley-Davidson an integer company for sure (Morhart et al. 2015).

Symbolism

Harley-Davidson is an example of a company that serves as a resource for identity construction for many people (Morhart et al. 2015). As discussed before, one obvious example of symbolism in the Harley-Davidson company is the use of the motorcycle during the World Wars and the naming it the 'Liberator'. Therefore the symbolic meaning of freedom, one of Harley's most important brand values, played a large role in consumers' perceptions about the brand early on. Moreover, the rebellious spirit of Harley also clearly comes back in this. Furthermore, Harley-Davidson has built an enormous culture around the brand, consisting of die-hard riders that meet in clans, and even people having tattoos of the logo on themselves. For most people, Harley-Davidson is way more than just a motorcycle brand, it is part of their identity and a large part of their life. This exemplifies that Harley-Davidson helps people define what they are and what they are not, and therefore it is evident that symbolism is an important part of Harley-Davidson's authenticity.

Harley-Davidson LiveWire

Harley-Davidson introduced an extension to its current portfolio of products in 2019, which was the Harley-Davidson LiveWire, an electric motorcycle. This was a radical extension for the brand, which is famous for its loud and heavy motorcycles. The brand made 44 percent of all bikes sold in the United States in 2013, showing the radicality of this extension (Carpenter, 2014). However, Harley-Davidson recognized the shifting trend towards electric vehicles and did not want to stay behind. Also, as Michelle Kumbier (vice-president of Harley-Davidson) said in 2014 during tests with the motorcycle: "The inspiration was really to grow and attract new, diverse folks into the brand in the future" (Carpenter, 2014). This, of course, was something Harley-Davidson needed to refresh their aging customer base. It can thus be argued that Harley-Davidson was trying to stay relevant, even for a younger target group.

Figure 9. Harley-Davidson LiveWire (Harley-Davidson, 2020c)

Moreover, it is argued that Harley-Davidson wanted to show their standards of innovation, the quality of an electric Harley and to make people enthusiastic about the future of electric motorcycles (Toll, 2020). However, other people argue that Harley-Davidson also wanted the new motorcycle to give themselves a boost in sales (Levin, 2020). So far, this sales increase

has not happened, causing the 26-year CEO Matthew Levatich to resign at the beginning of 2020. Reportedly, the LiveWire had a price that was too high (around $30,000), it had to deal with several manufacturing issues before being released, and it could only cover about 95 miles on a highway (Levin, 2020).

With the LiveWire design, Harley-Davidson has tried to develop a design for electric motorcycles that portrays an 'authentic Harley-Davidson design' (Harley-Davidson, 2019).

4.2.2 Netnographic findings Harley-Davidson

As pointed out, Harley-Davidson aimed to reach out to millennials, thereby rejuvenating and extending their current customer base. Moreover, the switch to producing electric vehicles had to show that Harley is an innovative company, that looks to a change in the future of motorcycles. This new direction of the company is something that has been valued by some of its customers, as shown below.

"Whatever the fate of this bike, gotta give Harley credit for trying something new."
(Reddit, 2020h)

"This could be a good thing for Harley but not necessarily for the typical Harley riders as they exist."
(Reddit, 2020h)

"If this gamble pays out expect HD to further divorce themselves from the archetype of Harley and into a niche novelty market."
(Reddit, 2020h)

While these comments reveal that the new direction is something that is perceived predominantly positively, the same comments show that this might not have been the most logical move for Harley. As the consumer in the second comment poses, this extension might not necessarily be a good thing for the typical Harley riders as they exist now. The third comment states the same thing, namely that Harley is moving away from their archetype. This means that Harley might not be respecting their origins or heritage and their brand identity, which is also evident from the comments below.

"But more importantly the phrase 'electric Harley' does not exactly conjure up visions of the outlaw riding hard and free across America's heartland. The market for this bike does not exist and at $30K a pop it's not gonna [magically] start. Huge mis-step on HD's part IMO. Pity because I'd like to see the bike succeed."
(Reddit, 2020i)

"The LiveWire is also missing the two biggest things about Harley to most riders I've talked to: the iconic design and sound."
(Reddit, 2020i)

The first comment poses that the Harley LiveWire does not match with Harley's brand values. This consumer argues that the visions of 'outlaw riding hard and free across America's heartland' cannot be found back in the Harley LiveWire. Therefore, the brand extension lacks these things that are vital for Harley-Davidson's authentic brand identity as it has been known for a long time. The second comment shows that next to missing the core values of the brand, the extension also lacks recognizability in terms of the classic and authentic brand styles (Spiggle et al. 2012). The brand extension misses the authentic Harley design that has been evident in its motorcycles. Also, since it is an electric bike, the iconic sound of the Harley motors is absent. For consumers, this results in a motorcycle that does not live up to the standards of a classic Harley motorcycle.

"Smh. The cycle continues. As a fan of Harley I'm genuinely worried about the direction. The "street" is kind of a dud as well. High price for what you get(which is almost none of the quintessential harley craftsmanship). I'm not saying you can't find good value in Harley...just have to hunt."
(Reddit, 2020h)

The above comment mentions something alike. The Harley LiveWire does not include the 'quintessential Harley craftsmanship', which is deemed an essential part of the brand standard (Spiggle et al. 2012). Moreover, this consumer is therefore concerned about the direction Harley-Davidson moves with this brand extension, moving away from the brand standards as they have been known for many years. The comments show that Harley-Davidson, with this extension, seems to forget about their fundamental values and is losing the uniqueness of the brand (Spiggle et al. 2012). Talking about 'existing Harley buyers', the first comment below exactly describes this problem. Harley buyers are looking for something 'unique and iconic', not for a motorcycle that has a completely new design and is electric. It can thus be argued that Harley is missing on what makes the brand authentic in this extension.

"So this is a new tack. The HD electric foray isn't for the existing Harley buyers. It's for people looking for something unique and iconic. Think Tesla Model S. It's for THAT crowd."
(Reddit, 2020h)

"Definitely like nothing I have ever rode. Instance torque, super crazy fast, and obviously, can hardly be called a "Harley" by the traditional sense"
(Reddit, 2020i)

The second comment above is in line with the first one, stating that the bike 'can hardly be called a Harley by the traditional sense'. As already seen above, the price of the Harley LiveWire is also something that many of the brand enthusiasts are stumbling over. The comments below show their concerns about the target group of the LiveWire and its pricing.

"$30,000 for a 100 mile range electric bike that was designed to gather millennial intrest in the brand. El oh fucking el."
(Reddit, 2020j)

"This was my worry about this bike and harley in general. "Let's make a bike the younger generation will appreciate." Okay. DONE. That bike looks good and I'm sure is an animal on the street. "Now let's price it the same as our bigger bikes that we already can't sell because the next generation is having trouble justifying $18-20k for a bike."
(Reddit, 2020h)

Harley-Davidson has tried to grow its customer target group by introducing this electric LiveWire, as they have stated themselves. However, the comments clarify that the price range for the LiveWire does not fit with this new target group of millennials at all. Even when some argue that the bike itself looks good and it might be a good ride, they still think the price does not match up with what the motorcycle offers. There is no problem with attracting a new target group, only Harley-Davidson has missed the boat by pricing it way too high. The same argument is found in the comment below.

"Shocker. If harley wants younger crowds to be into their bikes, they need to make them cheaper not more expensive."
(Reddit, 2020k)

"The current HD business model is a slow death. Outlined by the Buell abortion and the shuttering of factories, coupled with that weird Millennial reach-out about bike culture, the bottom line is what they're doing isn't working."
(Reddit, 2020h)

Finally, the comment above shows that there are consumers that cannot identify with the course that Harley-Davidson has set by producing the Harley LiveWire. While no one argues that the extension is a way to exploit the brand (Spiggle et al. 2012) in any way, the opinions just make clear that Harley-Davidson has taken a wrong step with approaching a younger target group in this particular way.

4.3 LEGO

4.3.1 Case findings LEGO

LEGO is a Danish toy company that originated in Billund, Denmark. The company was founded in 1932 starting with the production of wooden toys and parts to build with. Today, the company is famous for its plastic LEGO building blocks, which were first produced in 1947 in Denmark. The company name LEGO stands for 'leg godt', which is Danish for 'play well'. As LEGO (2020a) describes, it is both their name and their ideal. Interestingly enough, the company only later (in 1934) finds out that LEGO means 'i put together' in Latin (LEGO, 2020). The company grows and expands to different countries over the years. LEGO keeps

producing new variations of 'bricks' (as they call the building blocks) and different building sets. In 1968, LEGO was so established, both in and outside of Denmark, that the company decided to open its theme park in Billund. Also, multiple brand extensions are conducted, such as LEGO Duplo (for children under 5 years old), LEGO Technic (technical building sets), and LEGO movies, on which we will elaborate in our case study. The LEGO Company has grown to be the biggest toy company in the world by 2015, while today they are the second largest after Namco Bandai, with revenue totaling to about 5.16 billion euros (O'Connell, 2020). LEGO is known as a very authentic brand, noting its 8th place in the Authentic 100 (Authentic 100, 2017). This will be explained further in the sections below.

LEGO has had a very strong brand for years now, and they are typified by the mission and the values as portrayed below in the figure. The company wants to 'inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow', making values such as imagination, creativity, and learning very important. With these values, it is evident that LEGO as a toy company has been focussed on making products for children (under 18) for a long time. However, today the company also has a huge adult fanbase, targeting them with for example their LEGO Star Wars building sets, which are 'bigger, more challenging models with special attention to accuracy and details' (LEGO, 2020b).

Continuity:
LEGO has been able to remain a household name ever since its establishment in 1932. LEGO primarily targets children who enjoy playing and creating through LEGO products, but LEGO also continues to remain relevant in the lives of these target groups as they grow older through time by providing product lines such as LEGO architecture or by supporting creative freedom for project builders as well. By expanding the range of LEGO brands and product lines, LEGO has been able to stay true to the promises of creative freedom and the joy of building in multiple areas and multiple ways, especially, by licensing their products to other fanbases and brands, LEGO can associate themselves towards multiple consumer preferences. The combination of the essence of the LEGO 'brick' as an almost limitless building block, nurtures the symbolic value and meaning behind LEGO's identity as an enabler of creation, creativity, and fun. This aforementioned synergy between product and brand purpose allows for its timelessness throughout trends and time. As can be seen through their humble origins, LEGO has continued to learn from past mistakes and build upon those that could excel in the company's vision in the long term. This largely derived from the internal heritage and culture of LEGO in searching for continuous perfection and innovative ideas, as was predominately the main reason for LEGO's success throughout various obstacles the company faced.

Credibility:
As explained before, a brand's credibility is conceptualized as the brand's transparency and honesty towards the consumer (Morhart et al. 2015). LEGO has quality as one of its brand values and has four important promises: the play promise, the partner promise, the planet promise, and the people promise. The play promise is explained through giving people the joy of building and pride of creation (LEGO, 2014), and this is achieved by giving its customers emotional and functional benefits, as well as product truths. These are portrayed in the picture

below, seen from both a children's and an adult's perspective. Moreover, LEGO promises 'mutual value creation' in their partner promise. They execute this by their extent of partnerships throughout their history. Today, LEGO sells sets of bricks that are very relevant and authentic through partnering with for example famous movies and movie creators (such as Star Wars, Disney, and Harry Potter). LEGO's planet promise is reached through their sustainability plan, that aims to provide sustainable packaging and sustainable materials and to reduce $CO2$ emissions by 2030 the latest. Furthermore, LEGO has a partnership with WWF to promote global action on climate change and reduce their carbon emissions (LEGO, 2020c). Finally, the people promise is committed to upholding human rights as well as to provide safe and healthy working conditions for their employees. LEGO is known to live up to these promises and can, therefore, be perceived as an honest, sincere, and trustworthy company (Morhart et al. 2015).

Integrity:
The aforementioned 'play promise' is crucial as children and their development is the core of LEGO's brand purpose, as they are 'the leaders of tomorrow'. LEGO recognizes that being able to play, in general terms, is essential to the lives of children around the world, aiding in the development of learning, whilst having much-needed fun in their day-to-day lives. The LEGO foundation was created to ensure these values become a reality, through various initiatives surrounding early childhood education, humanitarian aid for children, research centers or idea conferences that support idea generation, and much more. One such example builds perfectly on these authentic and sincere values, the LEGO Group and the LEGO Foundation entered a three-year partnership with UNICEF in protecting children's rights and changing how children learn from problematic backgrounds and areas. LEGO also recognizes the importance of maintaining and nurturing a strong and coherent internal culture, more particularly the people within it. LEGO strives to build on an inclusive, diverse, and motivated workforce that coherently aims to passionately inspire children all over the world, from different backgrounds. To exemplify this, LEGO has been an active participant in Gay Pride events in 2019, formed family-friendly workplaces for the children of its employees and global partners, and hosted 'play day' events where colleagues could inspire each other and have fun together (LEGO, 2014).

Symbolism:
LEGO is a company with a strong symbolic aspect. Most of all, the brand sparks creativity and imagination, as do its brand values portray. While it is mostly young people that can identify with LEGO early on, also their adult users can have a real connection with the brand. For young users, it is LEGO's brand personality that can play a part in the children's development and imagination. LEGO (2014) displays its personality as a brand that has a vivid imagination and someone who is curious and likes to try out new things. Moreover, it brings people (families, parents/children) together and it cares for others. For older customers, LEGO is about staying young and never losing your inner child's imagination or creativity. Therefore, there are people, both young and old, that can identify with the brand very well. The fact that LEGO has building sets for all different kinds of users, whether it is Harry Potter or the Disney movie Frozen they like, helps to create distinct identities for different users. Moreover, LEGO creates rituals:

proudly showing the final model to your friends or parents after you finish building is something that sparks joy (LEGO, 2014). Finally, LEGO allows people to customize as much as they want. Customers can use their creativity to build whatever they want, whenever. Also, it is possible to create your own mini-figures, that can then play a role in your own story. This makes people feel connected to the brand and consequently holds the symbolic quality of LEGO (Morhart et al. 2015).

The LEGO Movie

In 2014, the LEGO Company came with a new brand extension, which was one that could be considered a lot more radical than the ones they did before. Earlier extensions had all been in the toy industry, but now LEGO was going to extend to a new industry: the movie industry. In 2014, The LEGO Movie was released, a computer-animated movie around a LEGO-mini-figure, living in a LEGO world. Although LEGO has introduced countless movies and animations to the public, the vast majority of these were focused primarily on featuring and promoting upcoming product lines of LEGO products. Besides, The LEGO Movie was the first of such films to penetrate the media and entertainment industry on a grand scale, resulting in an appeal towards a larger audience and considerably more media attention. After this first entrance, LEGO released multiple movies, such as The LEGO Batman Movie, The LEGO Ninjago Movie, and the sequel to the LEGO Movie, The LEGO Movie 2.

Figure 10. The LEGO Movie Poster (Bricks and Blocks, 2014)

For the majority of LEGO's track record, the company was financially strong, however in 1988 faced its first deficit to date, eventually resulting in a 26% net sales decrease by 2003 (Gibbs & Roth, 2016). Besides poor financial control and management, the primary reason behind this fall was LEGO's extensive diversification and expansion of its products to categories or industries with little relation to its core product, the 'brick'. This idea originated from external consultants advising the LEGO group to diversify due to predictions on how obsolete the unchanged and original LEGO brick would become. Certain examples of such extensions were LEGO's ventures into jewelry for girls, lego clothes, or video game developers (Davis, 2017). Even newly introduced product lines of LEGO products shifted from the original brick and featured unrecognizable and never before seen pieces that not only confused consumers but also the company from a logistical perspective (Feloni, 2017). As of 2004, considerable change was needed and was thus followed by internal management restructuring, resulting in a new

vision and goal for the company as a whole. In an interview with CNBC, Julia Goldin (Chief Marketing Officer at LEGO), perfectly encapsulates the corporate vision that would ultimately spark the interest to create the LEGO Movie and eventually turnaround the company from financial ruin in a positive way. *"Returning (back) to the belief about the power of the brick and focusing our energy on making the brick 'the essential'. Building off of this idea that's so enduring and continually renovating it, continually bringing new ways of introducing kids to it. (…) That enduring idea is still very much within the company, which is why we are able to go beyond the brick, but always come back to the brick — that always is the core."* (Gibbs & Roth, 2016). Consequently, LEGO has been able to look back and delve into its successful and iconic heritage, whilst maintaining the core traditions, values, and features, reinventing those in unique ways to progress into the future. The Lego Movie exemplified this turnaround and proved to be an immense success, managing to amount to $69 million in its opening weekend and command considerably positive reactions and reviews from critics and viewers alike, with a 96% approval rating on the popular review site Rotten Tomatoes (Rotten Tomatoes, 2020a). Instead of featuring or promoting certain lego lines or products, The Lego Movie resonated a deeper symbolic meaning behind the Lego Brand, accurately portraying the core values behind LEGO. This was done through original storytelling, uniting both iconic historical features and more modern constructs under one banner.

4.3.2 Netnographic findings LEGO

By extending to the movie industry from the physical products, LEGO was taking a risk, as previous attempts to diversify led the brand to move away from its core. However, the chief marketing officer at LEGO, Julia Goldin, argues that LEGO stays very close to their 'core' in releasing the movie (Gibbs & Roth, 2016). We find several consumers agreeing to this.

"The movie paid great attention to detail making everything appear as it would made from Lego, including the water and clouds, and the surfaces people walked on all had the circles sticking upwards a Lego piece would have. [...]. I was convinced action took place in the Lego Universe."
(IMDB, 2020a).

"I think they had a rule that everything has to have been a piece at some point or another.. every single thing in the movie was 'built' with real Lego pieces....15,080,330...lego pieces."
(Reddit, 2014l)

What is evident from the above comments is that the style of LEGO is very recognizable for the consumers when watching The LEGO Movie. The fact that LEGO used actual bricks to hand-craft the decor and shoot the movie, makes it distinctive and implies a realness of the brand, resulting in a perceived brand authenticity of the extension (Spiggle et al. 2012). This level of realness was inspired by original fan-made animations and movies, using their own LEGO creations. This shows that the brand indeed did not move too far away from what their core is, namely the LEGO brick. Even though the extension might seem quite radical, LEGO has thus done a very decent job of maintaining the authenticity of the brand in the movie. Moreover, the brand was able to portray their original brand values through the movie, as it

becomes evident through the comments below.

"But, the most important thing, the movie reminds us to be creative. Because sometimes, As we grow up, in some way, we stop being creative and just follow the rules and instruction."
(IMDB, 2020b).

"The film really emphasised everything LEGO represents."
(Reddit, 2014m).

"The idea that even though they are selling all these prepackaged lego sets with instructions, the real magic comes when you and your friends get together, take apart some stuff, and start building some crazy shit."
(Reddit, 2014n).

The above comments show that LEGO has done an excellent job of defining its essence and brand identity in the extension. As described earlier, some of LEGO's most important core values are imagination, creativity, and fun (LEGO, 2020), and these values have been transferred to the movie. The consumers that wrote the above comments get exactly those feelings from the movie, as LEGO aims to give through all their products. First of all, the creative and imaginative value of LEGO is laid out in the first comment. It shows that LEGO is all about stimulating creativity, not only amongst young consumers. The movie itself is an excellent example of how LEGO also encourages its adult consumers to still be imaginative and to think out of the box and beyond the rules. The second comment generally states that LEGO's brand essence can be recognized in the movie, which articulates that LEGO has been able to let their fundamental values be the base of their extension. The last quote resembles that a preserved brand essence can help a brand to provide connections to consumers' selves or identities (Spiggle et al. 2012). The notion of 'getting together and building some crazy shit' not only reflects the 'fun' as one of LEGO's values but also helps LEGO connect to their consumers.

Furthermore, LEGO has been able to honor their heritage and history in the extension. The quote below is an example of this.

"In The Lego Movie (2014) Benny the spaceman has a broken helmet. This used to happen to the original Lego pieces. Picture of my 80s spaceman to the right."
(Reddit, 2014o).

To clarify, Benny the Spaceman is a character in the movie that walks around with a broken helmet. He looks like one of the classic mini-figures from LEGO, and these used to break very quickly. The comment shows that this is something that would happen often to these and other LEGO pieces. As mentioned by Spiggle et al. (2012), the ability of a brand to establish a 'true' connection to past associations is paramount, especially in production and design. In this instance, this connection, although rather negative in essence, is thus positively acknowledged by community members. It can be seen that The LEGO Movie carefully observed the details

in production malfunctions of LEGO products in the past and was able to embrace these 'trials', thus authentically showcasing this resemblance through their brand extension. This also shows that LEGO managed to stay true to themselves as a brand, while not even emphasizing a real 'positive' aspect of their authenticity.

The majority of user comments that were observed and selected, expressed their fond memories and cultural/personal associations of their past experiences with this iconic LEGO piece, praising the film for their attention to detail. However, some members of the forum questioned whether this exposition towards past mistakes was a reasonable choice from a corporate standpoint.

"I wonder if the filmmakers had any resistance to this by Lego HQ. It's authentic since that thing did always break, but I can see a company never wanting a flaw in their product showcased."
(Reddit, 2014p)

"I'd be surprised if there weren't some intense meetings/discussions within Lego debating if showing a Lego 'failure' should be allowed. Even if it was from a 40 year old set. Pretty cool that they actually ran with it though, some companies stone cold refuse to show their warts."
(Reddit, 2014p)

As stated, even though the set is over 40 years old, resembling a different era of LEGO, the movie extension still captured the positive associations and memories of users from the past, making this detail relevant to users of today. The 'continuity' dimension created by Morhart et al. (2015), depicts this practice by demonstrating LEGO's brand timelessness and historicity. By 'showing their warts', LEGO has shown their sincere and honest brand personality, thus also representing the 'credibility' dimension (Morhart et al. 2015).

The following comment is another piece of evidence of how LEGO displayed their heritage in the brand extension.

"I think they had a rule that everything has to have been a piece at some point or another.."
(Reddit, 2020l)

By including only LEGO bricks and pieces that they have sold before, the brand was able to establish a connection with their origins (Spiggle et al. 2012; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Therefore, consumers recognized the production and design styles of the movie from the origins of the LEGO brand, causing a strong authentic connection. The bricks are the indexical cues as explained by Grayson and Martinec (2004) and create perceptions of the brand having a connection with the culture that grounds the brand's heritage (Spiggle et al. 2012).

Consumers perceive brand extensions that are thought of as externally driven and focused on commercial goals such as profit, often as inauthentic (Spiggle et al. 2012). This relates to what Morhart et al. (2015) state, namely that brands should emit integrity and credibility when it

comes to brand extensions. Different views of consumers have been found regarding The LEGO Movie:

"Ordinarily, a film which relies on product placement would be committing a cardinal sin of filmmaking. [...] the audience wants to see a movie, not a series of advertisements brainwashing us into product superiority [...]. While The Lego Movie is fundamentally a feature-length advert for their product, it has to be an exception to the rule since it presents itself in such an inventive way. [...] The brand is never actually mentioned- not once, during the running time."
(Rotten Tomatoes, 2020b).

"This is undoubtedly the greatest product placement in film. The Lego Movie was one I begrudgingly watched because of my dislike of product placement, and especially movies based on toys. I was so wrong to be hesitant."
(Rotten Tomatoes, 2020b).

As both comments show, consumers are not fond of brands that focus too heavily on product placement in a movie. However, as argued, LEGO has inventively made a movie that is about their brand, without emphasizing their brand or promoting it too much. Interestingly, it is the inventive or creative way that LEGO is famous for that also contributes to their credibility, in this sense. There are also negative perceptions of LEGO's product placement found, however:

"Having paid for my family around £10 each to watch what is basically an advert for Lego, I just feel cheated."
(IMDB, 2020c).

"To me, this is just a huge commercial from Lego, but that's just me."
(IMDB, 2020d).

"This film was like watching a 1h40 advert for Lego. I think the fundamental problem is that Lego is a great medium for telling other people's stories, to which the plethora of characters in the film allude [...] but is not really an interesting subject for a story in itself."
(IMDB, 2020e).

Some consumers did perceive the movie as a big LEGO advertisement, and in the case of the first comment, the consumer even feels 'cheated'. This consumer then would perceive LEGO as showing a lack of integrity or credibility concerning this extension, which ultimately damages the authenticity of the extension or even the brand (Morhart et al. 2015).

5 Data Analysis

This chapter defines and conceptualizes the framework that follows from the empirical data in combination with existing literature. After carefully analyzing the empirical data, the result is the authentic brand extension framework, consisting of six dimensions, namely symbolism, integrity, credibility, continuity, iconic features, and the alignment of authentic brand values. The chapter shortly presents the framework after which the six dimensions will be explored in detail.

During the analysis of the data, several patterns and similarities in the data have arisen, which have led to the development of our theoretical framework, the authentic brand extensions framework as can be found below in figure 11.

Symbolism
Can I identify with this extension as I can with the brand?

Alignment of Authentic Brand Values
Do I recognize similar authentic brand values of the brand in the extension?

Integrity
Do I believe that the brand and its extension genuinely adheres to moral and sincere values that it promises to me?

Authentic Brand Extensions

Iconic Features
Do I recognize the iconic features of the brand within the extension?

Credibility
Do I believe that this is an honest and transparent extension of the brand?

Continuity
Do I believe that this extension remains consistent to the brand's heritage?

Figure 11. Authentic Brand Extensions Framework

We have found that the four dimensions of the PBA framework are of importance in the researched consumer reactions. But next to these, we have identified two extra dimensions that consumers consider when looking at the extensions of authentic brands: the iconic features of the brand and the extent to which the customer can recognize the authentic brand values of the brand in the extension. From the consumer comments, we distilled six questions that you can expect consumers to ask when analyzing an extension. These questions have followed from the consumer comments in the netnography, and the six accompanying categories will be further explained in the analysis below.

5.1 Continuity

As explained before, continuity is about a brand having history, being timeless, and having the ability to survive trends (Morhart et al. 2015). We have identified from the analyzed comments that this course of continuity is considered by consumers when confronted with a brand extension. Morhart et al. (2015) also argue that continuity implies brands' ability to portray stability, even in the case of arising consumer trends. In the case of Coca-Cola however, the company felt it needed to 'jump on the quasi health bandwagon' as argued by a consumer. The same consumer is also arguing that 'the health industry is booming', which is a consumer trend that is recognized all across the world. It may thus be clear that Coca-Cola has tried to anticipate this trend, but thereby not respecting its heritage. Moreover, the taste of the new Coca-Cola Life has also been an issue in this regard. The classic Coke taste has been one of the main continuous aspects of the brands, and as Morhart et al. (2015) argue, consumers think a brand is authentic since it does not change over time. From the analyzed comments, we identify that consumers think there is a lack of the real Coca-Cola, which is not substituted well enough by a decrease in calories. Finally, the changed label and outlook of the product, which was green instead of red, caused the analyzed consumers to have problems with the look of the product and even recognizing that it was Coca-Cola selling the drink: 'but no one had any idea it was a Coke product without the Coke red'. The iconic red Coca-Cola label, which is an important aspect of Coca-Cola's heritage was hereby abandoned, resulting in the extension feeling as a discontinuous reflection of the original brand. The above aspects also influence parts of the brand stewardship model by Urde et al. (2007), specifically Coca-Cola's longevity (consistently portraying the brand's heritage elements) and their use of symbols, therefore emphasizing Cola's lack of continuity in this extension.

In the case of Harley-Davidson, several elements point to the continuity of the brand. Again, it is interesting to see that the reason for extending was the trend of driving more 'sustainable', thereby trying to reach out to a younger target group of consumers. One of the consumers recognized this by stating that Harley 'divorced themselves from the archetype of Harley'. This is similar to the Coca-Cola case in light of surviving and transcending trends as a continuous brand. This becomes even more striking in a comment that says that the Harley LiveWire 'does not exactly conjure up visions of the outlaw riding hard and free across America's heartland'. These visions are part of what makes Harley and how they are perceived by their customers. Through creating the LiveWire, Harley seems to abandon this identity, resulting in less continuity in the brand. As Urde et al. (2007) argue, consistency of core values is one of the key aspects of heritage, and Harley seems to be losing that here. Furthermore, the analyzed comments show that consumers have a hard time recognizing the brand in the extension. Comments as 'the HD electric foray isn't for existing Harley buyers' and 'can hardly be called a Harley by the traditional sense' also show that the company changed doing this extension, where it is argued that 'staying the same' is important for the authenticity of the brand (Morhart et al. 2015).

In The LEGO Movie case, we have found some contrasting views on what has been discussed above. By making The LEGO Movie, LEGO did not try to anticipate rising consumer trends, rather it tried to go back to its roots to be the heritage brand that it had been for a long time. We identify that some consumers recognize the continuity in The LEGO Movie, as they were 'convinced action took place in the Lego Universe' and notice that 'every single thing in the movie was built with real Lego pieces'. From this, it emerges that LEGO has been able to pay attention to its history and heritage. Moreover, the movie 'emphasizing everything LEGO represents' and 'reminding us to be creative' shows that the extension is in line with LEGO's core values as they have been known. Another example from the comments arises as follows: 'this used to happen to the original LEGO pieces'. Therefore, as opposed to Coca-Cola and Harley, LEGO can portray their heritage and consequently their continuity as a brand in the extension. The more positive comments regarding the LEGO case therefore also make it evident that continuity is a crucial element of authenticity in brand extensions.

5.2 Credibility

Another key dimension regarding the 'Perceived Brand Authenticity' framework as introduced by Morhart et al. (2015), is the credibility of the brand and its extension. As stated, credibility is the extent to which the brand and its extension can meet its claims or promises, whilst remaining sincere and transparent. We have also seen that this dimension has proven to be important to consider, regarding authentic brand extensions. The level of credibility varied between the various cases, Coca-Cola Life and Harley-Davidson LiveWire fail to completely fulfill their promise and purpose, whereas The LEGO Movie has remained sincere and transparent in portraying their brand through this cinematic piece.

The first case, Coca-Cola Life claimed to be a healthy alternative to the regular Coca-Cola beverage. Although Coca-Cola Life has been transparent in the sugar decrease and the ingredients used, alongside meeting their corporate promise of reducing sugar levels in its total beverage portfolio, claiming one's extension branded as a healthy lifestyle product does not translate into solely reducing 35% sugar to that of the already heavily criticized sugar levels of Coca-Cola Original. In conclusion, although transparency towards consumers is met, sincere and honest positioning does not meet the general claim of being a 'healthy alternative' as portrayed in Coca-Cola Life. Secondly, as seen in the case findings, Harley-Davidson LiveWire claims to target and resonate with the younger target market of millennial bikers, thus revitalizing the Harley-Davidson brand. In contrast to this, many consumer comments that were observed showed that the newly established high price of the LiveWire product fails to reflect the genuine situation this new target market finds itself in. This is also potentially a sign of commercial exploitation of the extension, resulting in dishonesty to the target market Harley-Davidson claims to build a relationship with. In addition, comments also mentioned that this established price is too high for what they receive in return. This is drastic as Harley-Davidson has continuously promised exceptional quality from their unique 'Harley' craftsmanship. The trust of consumers to rely on this craftsmanship has not been met to some with the build of the electric Harley-Davidson LiveWire. Lastly, The LEGO Movie proves to be exemplary in the

level of perceived credibility. The LEGO Movie aims to showcase the core values and intangible associations with the brand, proving itself and consumers alike that in its goal to go beyond product placement, thus moving away from commercial profit as the primary driver of the extension. Furthermore, The LEGO Movie remains honest and transparent in the way the movie 'shows their warts' and failures of the past, depicting a sincere approach that reflects their internal culture and personality even further.

5.3 Integrity

Integrity, as the third dimension to the 'Perceived Brand Authenticity' framework (Morhart et al. 2015), is when the brand reflects 'good' and morally right values and cares about the values it depicts to consumers. Coca-Cola Life received much criticism for having a lack of integrity, Harley-Davidson LiveWire shows a similar lack of true integrity in having 'deep meaning or purpose' behind the brand, whilst The LEGO Movie could not actively represent the many genuine initiatives that LEGO have supported surrounding diversity, inclusion and their well-established 'play promise' to children globally, but still strongly depicts some values centered around these concepts.

The first case, Coca-Cola Life, was heavily accused of greenwashing consumers through the use of the green labeling and design, alongside a false message centered around a 'healthy lifestyle' supported by ecologically friendly advertisements. Not only is greenwashing seen as an inherently immoral and unjust practice, but Coca-Cola is also accused by many observed comments and secondary sources of solely 'jumping on the health bandwagon' or external trend of health and lifestyle in consumers' lives. This can also be considered as disingenuous. These many inconsistencies can not only be seen within the previously discussed credibility dimension but also the misalignment of 'authentic brand values' dimension.

The second case, Harley-Davidson LiveWire, also reflects a lack of true moral values related to the brand and extension. Despite this, Harley-Davidson has shown true commitment and passion towards its community and partners. This is however less the case with regards to the LiveWire brand extension. Here, the already mentioned critique on the hefty sum required to purchase this product does not accurately translate into genuine understanding or care for potential community members that are interested in the extension. Lastly, The LEGO Movie, as previously stated, shows the intangible values of creative inspiration, freedom, and general inclusiveness as the vital drivers in LEGO's play promise. This Play promise transfers these core values of the movie into the moral values of LEGO's play promise initiatives. Although the majority of observed comments generally agree with this, a small number of consumers still see the movie extension as a 'big (brand) commercial', relating to accusations of brand exploitation.

5.4 Symbolism

Symbolism is described as a concept where a brand reflects its values so that it can help consumers construct who they are (Morhart et al. 2015). From the several cases, we have found different consumer comments that point to the connection between the brands and the self-authentication of the consumers with regard to the extension. Where customers would be able to identify with the Coca-Cola brand through its real American culture values, these are less recognizable in the extension due to the 'healthy' approach of Coca-Cola. This results in comments such as 'healthy and Coca-Cola don't belong in the same sentence' and 'Diabetes: The Coca-Cola Life'. Seen from these comments, there is a huge gap between the regular Coke brand and the extension. Normally, people would like to be seen with a Coke bottle with the iconic red label, but the comments portray that no one wants to be seen or identify with the Coca-Cola Life since it 'tastes like terrible lies'.

In the Harley case, we see something similar arising from the consumer comments. The most important comment in this regard is the 'visions of the outlaw riding hard and free across America's heartland'. This is part of the brand identity of Harley and is also what makes up most of its culture. It is this vision that made Harley enthusiasts come together and form motorcycle clubs. With this extension, certainly, old customers are not able to identify with this as the LiveWire does not even allow riders to travel further than 100 miles in one go. More striking, in the LEGO case, the consumers literally identify with the movie in the comments. The movie portraying that you come together with your friends and 'start building some crazy shit' and it reminding 'to be creative' is a perfect example of the symbolism of the brand being extended into The LEGO Movie. Based on the three cases and their differences we can thus conclude that the symbolism of the extension has far-reaching implications.

5.5 Iconic features

As one of the two newly identified dimensions for brand extensions of authentic brands that have arisen, iconic features are something that has come forward to be of essence when extending an authentic brand. With iconic features, we mean the features that have made the brand authentic and iconic before its extension, and these are external, i.e. are shown on the exterior of the product.

We find the importance of iconic features for authentic extensions in all three of the cases. For the Coca-Cola case, it is clear that the iconic red bottle label is essential for consumers. Several consumers express their concerns about this in comments about the new green label such as 'it seems so unappealing' and 'they made it green because they are trying to greenwash'. Moreover, even when the design was changed to 'Coca-Cola With Stevia' some consumers reacted to the look of the product, by saying they 'like the previous look better' and stating that 'no one had any idea it was a Coke product without the Coke red'. Therefore, it can be argued that the iconic red Coca-Cola label design is important for the recognition of the brands' new product, but also the appeal and even the taste of the product. One consumers' thoughts are that

when doing a blind test of the classic red Coca-Cola bottle and the green bottle, people will make nasty faces towards the green bottle, even if there would have been actual 'red' Coca-Cola in there.

The Harley case also portrays elements of iconic features of the brand. First of all, the design of the LiveWire. Since it is an electric bike, the classic Harley-Davidson design has been adapted, making the LiveWire look more futuristic and modern than the classic design. However, one consumer expresses his concern about the absence of this design in the eyes of Harley riders, which makes it less recognizable as a Harley-Davidson. The other iconic feature that is missing in the Harley LiveWire is the iconic sound of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Another consumer states that the LiveWire can 'hardly be called a Harley by the traditional sense' since the LiveWire misses out on several other iconic features of the brand. For example, the new LiveWire is 'super crazy fast', but on the other hand only has 'a 100-mile range', therefore not living up to the standards of the classic Harley-Davidson iconic features.

Finally, in the LEGO case, we see the opposite, where LEGO has been able to include some of the iconic features that LEGO represents. Consumers react that all the famous LEGO brand features, such as the spaceman with the broken helmet, are included in the movie, making it very recognizable. As stated before, LEGO also used actual bricks for hand-crafting the decor, resulting in consumers perceiving the movie as a good extension of LEGO. From the three cases can be seen that consumers find it important whether iconic features of the brands are included, and that LEGO, by including them, was more successful than Harley and Coca-Cola.

5.6 Authentic brand values

The second newly identified dimension for brand extensions of authentic brands, authentic brand values has become a crucial element to consider during such an extension, as seen within the three various cases that were observed. The authentic brand values dimension represents the alignment or potential misalignment between the original authentic core values of the parent brand and those of the extension. Both the Coca-Cola Life and Harley-Davidson LiveWire case represent perceived misalignments between the values and identities associated with the parent brand and their respective extensions. On the other hand, LEGO has been able to perfectly represent the core values that have been associated with the brand throughout its history.

Within the netnographic data collection, we can see that many users do not recognize or believe the labeling of Coca-Cola 'Life', aimed to establish associations of Coca-Cola as a healthy lifestyle or ecological brand and the already established negative image or association of Coca-Cola as essentially an unhealthy brand. Harley-Davidson LiveWire has been perceived through the observed comments that this extension is moving away from their archetype and authentic brand identity, something that has been built throughout its heritage and subsequent relationship with existing brand loyal consumers. As previously discussed, certain observed consumers do not associate an electric Harley with the authentic iconic values of freedom, individuality, and ruggedness that Harley-Davidson is associated with. Lastly, The LEGO

Movie exemplifies the words of Collins and Porras (1996), "Preserve the core while stimulating progress". The values that define the authentic brand identity of LEGO are well represented in the core message and purpose of the movie extension.

6 Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this thesis from the perspective of the existing literature on this topic. By delving into the meaning and importance of our results, we show the relations with the literature review. The authentic brand extensions framework is discussed more abstractly and is related to previous literature, placing our findings in a broader context.

After presenting the framework representing the six dimensions of authentic brand extensions, it is interesting to place the findings in a broader context. First of all, our framework is an extension of the Perceived Brand Authenticity framework introduced by Morhart et al. (2015). We have found that the four dimensions apply to not only authentic brands in general but also to extensions of authentic brands. We have however identified two extra dimensions to this framework: iconic features and alignment of authentic brand values. Therefore, we find that our framework also has linkages to other previous frameworks with regard to brand authenticity.

The iconic features dimension has a resemblance to one of the dimensions of the Brand Extension Authenticity framework by Spiggle et al. (2012). As they describe, 'maintaining brand styles and standards' is a principal component of authenticity in brand extensions. We have found similar cues, but while there are similarities, the difference here lies in the iconicity of the features, as we describe it. For the brands we researched, it is not so much about all brand styles and standards, as it is about the specific features of products that are iconic for the brands, such as the red Coca-Cola label or the sound of the Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Moreover, we think that the iconic features as we describe them can be of importance for brands to create an impact on the consumer's lives. We argue that it can be these features that can act as points of reference, that help to create a story and meaning around the brand (Holt, 2004). From a consumer viewpoint, the iconic features are essential in reflecting the consumer's identity or self-expression. The classic Harley-Davidson rider will not identify with the product without the iconic design or sound. To be perceived as an iconic brand, it is therefore of essence to portray the iconic features, which made the brand iconic or authentic, in the brand extension. Otherwise, brands will have a harder time continuing with their 'identity myth' (Holt, 2004).

Furthermore, the dimension of authentic brand values, as identified by us from the comments, shows a certain similarity with the 'preserving brand essence' dimension of the BEA framework (Spiggle et al. 2012). We have found that there can be a certain misalignment or alignment with a brand's original authentic brand values. This is in line with what Spiggle et al. (2012) have found, as they argue that by extending their brand, a brand can threaten its uniqueness by forgetting to be what it exactly represents through its core values or 'brand essence'. For example, the fact that consumers find that Harley-Davidson loses their values of freedom and individuality by creating an electric Harley. Moreover, the perceptions that consumers have of Coca-Cola being a sweet treat have misaligned with the extension being targeted as a healthy beverage. As Urde et al. (2013) and Urde (2013) focus on in their research, the core values of the brand should act as a guiding factor towards all aspects of the brand (both

internally and externally), when these core values fail to be recognized through extensions, original authentic perceptions of the brand can be lost in translation, as we have seen in the analysis of our cases.

Despite the two newly added dimensions based on our research study, the four original dimensions of 'Perceived Brand Authenticity' (Morhart et al. 2015) also relate to other theories of current literature that were observed, further strengthening our position that these dimensions are relevant to the purpose and contribution of this thesis. For example, the continuity dimension in the framework has strong aspects of brand heritage. Relating to the brand heritage framework by Urde et al. (2007) we see more connections to the framework we have drawn, such as the use of symbols, core values, and track record, which show similarities to our dimensions of symbolism, authentic brand values, and continuity. Therefore, it can be argued that brand heritage is an evident part of what brand authenticity comprises, especially when linked to brand extensions, where consumers deal with a new product of the brand and must be reminded of the brand's heritage.

In the search for certain lucrative commercial opportunities that arrive from extensions, certain brands convey dishonest intentions that do not align with the true authentic values they represent. This is in line with the findings of Spiggle et al. (2012), who found that exploitation of the brand by a drive that is only external and profit-focused, can lead to inauthentic perceptions of consumers. More so, this dishonest approach to extending one's brand has the potential to damage the strong relationship that has been continuously built with consumers. This relationship is also seen as a key aspect of defining a brand's identity (Kapferer, 2008), and also comes forward from our analysis as the dimension of integrity. Even in a successful extension such as The LEGO Movie, consumers might perceive the brand's intentions as commercialization and exploitation of the brand, which makes it an important aspect to consider.

Our research has shown that brands, in their extensions, must be consistent amongst the different dimensions, which is specifically crucial for the brand image. Consumers have a set of associations about the brand that will affect the consumer's behavior towards the brand (Nandan, 2005). If the positioning of the brand extension fails to adhere to the original and distinguishing mental associations that made the brand authentic in the first place, this might influence consumers' purchase intentions and overall image of the brand, as is also argued by Janonis et al. (2007). Moreover, authentic brands have established a trustful relationship in the past, and keeping these promises towards consumers is hereby essential. In the case of Coca-Cola, where Coca-Cola Life was not as healthy as promised, we have seen that not acting on promises such as these can lead to consumers not trusting the brand extension, resulting in an unsuccessful extension. This comes specifically forward in the credibility dimension of our framework.

Most consumers of the authentic brands in our cases are also very familiar with the brands and were holding favorable brand associations about these. This can lead to an added value in the extension by using brand styles and symbols, as argued by Keller (1993). We have seen this

happen in the LEGO case, as The LEGO Movie has activated the symbolic values of the brand. However, when the brand is not able to activate these (favorable) brand associations in the consumer's minds or do this in the wrong way, we have seen that by solely adding the brand name or logo to an extension will not lead to a successful outcome.

Finally, in line with Spiggle et al. (2012), we have found that it is important to consider authenticity and its dimensions when extending a brand, next to the more superficial concepts of fit as similarity and relevance. Both Coca-Cola and Harley-Davidson have done brand extensions that might be both similar and relevant in the sense of fit, not resulting in an excellent result. LEGO on the other hand extended to a product category that is not similar to previous products at all. However, by adhering to its authenticity the brand has been able to drive the right mental associations that result in a successful extension.

7   Conclusion

This final chapter summarizes and revisits the research questions as stated in the introduction. In addition to this, the theoretical and managerial implications of the thesis are given. Finally, some considerations for future research and the limitations of this study are drawn.

As stated in the introduction of this research, our purpose was to understand how authentic brands extend into other categories and to understand what the role of their brand authenticity is while extending their brands. The aim hereby was to develop novel insights in these theoretical fields, and the objective was to provide a theoretical framework through which brand extensions by authentic brands could be understood.

Through our research, the three research questions have been chosen within the scope of the methodological approach and choices that have been made. Each case analysis, primarily originating from secondary sources, has provided the reasoning behind why certain authentic brands extend into other categories. The specific netnographic research conducted within each respective case example has allowed us as researchers to gain an understanding of how certain online consumers of these brands perceive these extensions. Lastly, we have utilized the combination of both case analysis and netnographic research to delve into answering how these consumer perceptions influence the authenticity of said extension. By providing answers to these three questions, we have been able to develop certain contributions towards both the academic but also practical fields of knowledge within this area of interest.

RQ 1: *Why do authentic brands extend into other categories?*

Not only are brand extensions conducted due to a firm's willingness to grow and diversify by using its brand name recognition (Aaker & Keller, 1990), or to keep the brand relevant over time, but this research found that there also exists a deeper purpose behind the need to grow or diversify as stated. These drivers behind brand extensions of authentic brands can be categorized according to the external or internal reasoning of the brand to conduct such a category extension. The primary reason that was found to stimulate a brand extension from an internal perspective was the necessity to resonate oneself (back) towards their core values and heritage. In the case of LEGO, the well established and perceived purpose, values and heritage that defined the brand continuously over its history dwindled due to unnecessary over extension. As a result, The LEGO Movie was an internal reaction to take a step back and reflect these values that consumers have grown to love throughout time. This internal reflection can be useful to ensure success in other future extensions. As mentioned, drivers of such brand extensions can also be seen as externally oriented. Brands tend to naturally analyse and react to their relevant surroundings and competition. For example, constantly shifting consumer trends, preferences and standpoints towards brands and their offerings have a major impact on a brands reason to extend and diversify. However, when authentic brands prioritise potential lucrative opportunities in response to these external shifts, this can lead to untruthful and

misaligned associations that may not be considered well suited. Stimulating progress and change can be seen as good and authentic, as long as brands make the right choices in which aspects to adapt oneself in response to this external change (Collins & Porras, 1996).

RQ 2: *How do consumers perceive brand extensions of authentic brands?*

Although we are limited to the comments that were selected for this specific netnographic analysis, it can be seen that in general, consumers' perceptions can be largely classified within the focus of either functional aspects or symbolic associations with regards to the authentic brand. In functional terms, consumers would actively discuss universally external and 'tangible' aspects of the extension. Examples thereof are the labeling and design of Coca-Cola Life or the sound, craftsmanship, and price of Harley-Davidson motorcycles. However, the vast majority of perceptions and comments of these authentic brands focused more on the symbolic and intangible values, meanings, and associations that make up the extension. Examples thereof are the 'healthy' promises and associations portrayed through Coca-Cola Life's positioning and communication, the iconic archetypal image of freedom and ruggedness associated with Harley-Davidson, or the unique core values of creativity and fun that were expressed throughout The LEGO Movie extension.

Furthermore, consumers tend to actively discuss thoughts and feelings behind the reasoning of the extension and the effects these extensions have on their associations with the authentic parent brand. These brand extensions can either be seen as truly valuable and a good fit with the intentions of the authentic brand, or as just a commercial or brand exploitable opportunity, with no genuine 'backbone' to justify such an extension. It can also be seen that such discourse and expression can potentially encourage or discourage other consumers' original thoughts and feelings associated with the targeted brand.

RQ 3: *How do consumer perceptions influence the authenticity of the extension?*

It was found that the vast majority of these perceptions' potential effect on the authenticity of the extension could be categorized and analyzed according to the four dimensions of 'Brand Extension Authenticity'; continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Spiggle et al. 2012). Moreover, through the netnography, we have been able to identify that consumers have perceptions surrounding symbolic associations of (authentic) core values and iconic features as well. Through our analysis, these two dimensions have shown to have an impact on an extension's authenticity as well.

7.1 Theoretical Contributions

Providing a novel theoretical perspective within the current conversation by intersecting the three theoretical fields of (authentic) brand identity, brand image, and brand extensions.

This thesis identifies its position within prior research conversations within the intersection between the three main theoretical constructs of authentic brand identity, brand extension, and brand image. We were able to pinpoint the research gap and define this as, how the brand image of consumers towards brands with an authentic identity can potentially be influenced by brand extension practices. Although the theoretical contribution draws inspiration from prior research that combines authenticity with brand extensions such as that of 'Brand Extension Authenticity' (Spiggle et al. 2012) or authenticity with brand image in 'Perceived Brand Authenticity' (Morhart et al. 2015), we found that (authentic) brand identity theory, especially in combination with brand extensions, was lacking theoretical depth within this research discussion. As a result, our primary aim was to provide novel insights based on this 'triple intersection' in the form of a conceptual framework. This conceptual framework has also proven useful to this thesis by testing those prior theoretical influences in practice through a unique and relevant case approach.

Testing the applicability and strength of the Perceived Brand Authenticity dimensions towards relevant and diverse organizational examples, and developing this framework even further.

Through this case based netnographic analysis we managed to strengthen and test the applicability of the four 'Perceived Brand Authenticity' dimensions; continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism, as introduced by (Morhart et al. 2015). The case studies have shown that the framework is a relevant and good analytical framework for understanding authenticity and authentic brands. However, as we mentioned, our research has resulted in the implementation of two dimensions to add upon this framework; iconic features and alignment of authentic brand values. Iconic features focus on the external tangible aspects that define or are characteristic to the brand from a consumer perspective, based on the brand's authentic identity, whilst authentic brand values are based on the synergy between the core values and associations of those values between the original parent brand and its extension. As can be deduced, these two dimensions are inspired by the (authentic) brand identity theory that was implemented within the positioning of this research, to create a novel level of uniqueness and originality among existing frameworks and theoretical constructs.

Contribution to brand authenticity and brand extension research.

Our third contribution is to the existing field of research surrounding brand authenticity and brand extensions. As a concept that has not been clearly defined in earlier research, brand authenticity will still need more exploration. By further investigating the concept, however, we have added to the existing literature in this field. Moreover, by linking authentic brands and brand extensions, we have broadened the work of Spiggle et al. (2012), identifying two extra dimensions in our authentic brand extension framework. Also, we build on the Perceived Brand

Authenticity framework by Morhart et al. (2015), by adding the dimensions of iconic features and authentic brand values to the already existing dimensions of continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism.

7.2 Managerial Implications

From the analysis, several managerial implications have arisen regarding the framework that we have drawn. The findings are especially helpful for managers of authentic brands, and particularly authentic brands that want to extend their brand to stay relevant or grow as a company. The framework can be used by managers as it explains the thoughts of consumers when it comes to brand extensions of authentic brands. Therefore, the different dimensions should all be considered by a manager of an authentic brand when thinking about extending. For example, managers can consider the questions that consumers ask when making up their perceptions of authentic brand extensions, and they should even be bothered to ask these questions to themselves. The managerial implications of this study are therefore made up of the six questions that adhere to the dimensions of our theoretical framework, adjusted for managers, by replacing the 'I' in the questions by 'we'.

- *Do we believe that this extension remains consistent with the brand's heritage?*

Our findings and analysis have shown that consumers consider a brand's heritage and ability to be stable over time. First of all, consumers notice when a brand extends for the sake of adhering to existing consumer trends. Coca-Cola and Harley-Davidson have acted upon the consumer trends of healthy and sustainable lives, hereby throwing their heritage overboard. Contrarily, in the LEGO case, we have seen that consumers are positively influenced when LEGO portrayed some of its classic LEGO figures and gimmicks. A brand suddenly changing from what it has always been also negatively influenced perceptions of consumers on the brand. Therefore, company executives must ask themselves whether the extension is consistent with the brand's heritage and that it is not just another trend that they are trying to adhere to.

- *Do we believe that this is an honest and transparent extension of the brand?*

The cases have shown that when extending a brand, executives should still consider the credibility of their brand. Especially when providing a new product, managers must be aware to keep true to their promises. In our cases, we have seen that brands tend to make new promises with the new products they release. Managers must realize, therefore, that consumers will perceive the extensions as less authentic as soon as these promises are not lived up to.

- *Do we believe that the brand and its extension genuinely adhere to moral and sincere values that are promised to me?*

Managers must realize that consumers consider the underlying reasons for the extension, such as the morality of it. We have seen that even in the LEGO case, consumers accuse the brand of exploiting and commercializing through the extension. It is thus essential that the brand extension at least seems to be done for sincere, internal reasons for the brand, instead of focusing on increasing revenue.

- *Can we identify with this extension as I can with the brand?*

Company executives need to consider that brand enthusiasts might not be able to identify with the extension as they could with the brand before. A change in course of the brand also influences the existing target groups that might not want to be associated with the brand anymore because of the extension. Therefore, managers must contemplate the degree to which the extension will give opportunities for consumers to identify with it.

- *Do we recognize the iconic features of the brand within the extension?*

Managers that closely work with the design and features of the extension must take into consideration that there are certain iconic features of the brand that must be included in the extension. Features that are iconic for brands will enable consumers to have more recognition of the brand in the extension, therefore perceiving it as more real and authentic.

- *Do we recognize similar authentic brand values of the brand in the extension?*

Finally, executives in a company must be aware that the brand has to be able to portray their authentic core brand values in the extension. When consumers do not recognize the underlying values that the brand has had for a long time, the relationship with existing and loyal customers can be foregone.

These questions are crucial for managers to consider, as we have identified them as questions that consumers ask themselves. Moreover, the analyzed cases have shown evidence of how companies can fail in extending their authentic brand to another category. Along the lines of the identified dimensions, it thus shows managers examples of how not to take on an extension, as portrayed by the Coca-Cola and Harley-Davidson cases. On the other hand, the LEGO case is a good example of how to extend the brand along the six dimensions, and from this managers can consequently draw their conclusions and learn.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

As is with any research project or paper, there are certain limitations to consider. Consequently, if these limitations are properly reflected upon, such practices can provide potential opportunities for future research to add, criticize, or adapt to our thesis contributions. Multiple limitations result from implementing qualitative research, which are even more highlighted through the use of a case-based netnographic analysis. In general, a subjective approach can potentially lead to multiple possible interpretations of the empirical material, thus making our research analysis and conclusions not fully generalizable for other researchers. In a similar aspect, the selection of empirical material and data is also subject to the same potential lack of generalizable outcomes. In this case, the three selected cases of Coca-Cola Life, Harley-Davidson LiveWire, and The Lego Movie, although very unique and different in their way, only provide insights limited to those situations. Moreover, the observed comments from users on the specific platform of the Reddit community forums were carefully selected according to our own beliefs and intentions as researchers.

Due to a lack of accessibility, resources, and time to come into contact with the most representative individuals of each selected case, online methods proved appropriate for the current situation. On the other hand, triangulation that combined this online approach with selective interviews of these representative individuals, or other various quantitative data collection methods could have increased the generalizability and accuracy of conclusions. Consequently, we urge future researchers to consider alternate methodologies, primarily those on the quantitative area of management research. In addition, the plethora of other possible cases to analyze can potentially add towards the established conceptual framework that has been made as a result of our research parameters.

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