Article

A Conceptual Framework for Creating Brand Management Strategies

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Abstract: Branding has become a business priority over the past few decades due to the growing awareness that brands are one of the companies' most valuable intangible assets. Academics and practitioners have proposed models of components to simplify brands into a small number of parts, or dimensions. Nonetheless, there is a lack of specific approaches to brand management models that fit specific business scenarios. The objective of this study was to propose a general framework to create custom brand management strategies that fit specific business scenarios through a set of independent brand dimensions. The framework was applied to the specific case of SME alliance in a B2B export environment as an example of use. This study reviews the most cited brand management models in literature and classified them into 12 independent brand dimensions. The results suggest that regardless of the brand management model, all of them converge on the fact that creating a high-quality brand relationship with the customer is crucial for the branding process. Findings suggest non-evident relationships between dimensions. The findings also suggest that brand dimensions' and brand dimension relationships' importance in specific business scenarios shape brand management models in unique ways.

Keywords: branding; brand management; brand management strategy

1. Introduction

Branding has become a business priority over the past few decades due to the growing awareness that brands are one of the companies' most valuable intangible assets [1]. The importance of brand image is such that the most valuable brand in the world, Apple, was valued at around 408 billion US dollars in 2021 [2], this value is comparable to the GDP of Vietnam, estimated at around 409 billion US dollars in 2021, a Country that makes part of the top 40 economies of the world [3].

In practical terms, branding has been used to promote goods and services since its inception, but there are several approaches to branding today that go beyond commercial activity. Several branding approaches and their definition can be found in the literature, such as personal brand, corporate brand, investor brand, industry brand, NGO brand, government brand, local brand, and the national brand, among others [4,5].

There is no single definition for the brand concept. Kapferer [6] said: "there are as many brand definitions as there are experts working in the field of branding". Several authors have proposed the study of the brand based on different classification criteria. These criteria are chronological [7], functional [8,9], and semiotic [5,10], among others.

According to de Chernatony and Riley [11], academics and practitioners have proposed models of components to simplify brands into a small number of parts. These proposed models are based on different sets of elements, either tangible or intangible,

which extend functionality to the brand. The authors found these functionalities by analyzing the literature and by asking leading-edge brand consultants and discovered that functionalities differ according to the product categories targeted by the brands [11].

Subsequently, de Chernatony and Riley [9] studied these functionalities and stated that a brand is a multidimensional construct. To define the brand the authors proposed a series of themes to classify the unidimensional definitions of the brand in literature. These definitions were used by different authors to systematically design a brand [6,12,13]. The dimensions examined are: legal instrument, logo, company, shorthand, risk reducer, identity system, image, value system, personality, relationship, adding value, and evolving identity [9].

More than a decade later, Maurya and Mishra [8] analyzed the different schools of branding by using de Chernatony and Riley's themes. The authors proposed a thematic classification of brand definitions found in the literature along with representative authors [8]. The authors classified more than three dozen of authors, by analyzing and synthesizing each author's definition of brand. Their main objective was to propose a quick snapshot of the existing definitions for future research.

Yet current research points to the need to understand the influence of technological developments in consumer demand, product distribution and purchase, and the abundance of individual-level data, the need to build a relationship with the customer remains the same [7,14,15]. According to Oh et al. "new, exciting opportunities in brand research will continue to open up at the intersection of brands, technology and people" [7]. For Swaminathan et al. "success will likely depend on the degree to which a brand can leverage hyperconnectivity among networks of people and devices [14]. For Keller "successful brands are those able to skillfully employ all possible brand-building options and optimally identify and reconcile differences across consumers" [15].

On the one hand, it is easier to understand the nature of each research theme as a unidimensional concept. In the other hand, it is hard to understand the multidimensional nature of the brand concept. Therefore, future researchers will not be able to offer suitable multidimensional brand management models adapted to complex business scenarios.

In this spirit, the objective of this study is to develop a conceptual framework for creating custom brand management strategies depending on a specific business scenario, based on a multidimensional analysis and an eclectic study of the most cited brand management models in the literature. Although more recent brand management literature was reviewed for the purpose of this research, their levels of citation and h-index were significantly lower than the selected brand management models [4,5,10,16,17]. These criteria were selected to ensure the robustness of the proposed framework.

In addition, this conceptual framework will be applied to the specific case of an SME alliance in a B2B export environment as an example of use. With the intention of keeping consistent language, a brand will be considered as a concept, and the brand themes will be considered as dimensions.

2. Materials and Methods

To develop a conceptual framework for creating brand management strategies, a series of three steps will be applied according to Figure 1.
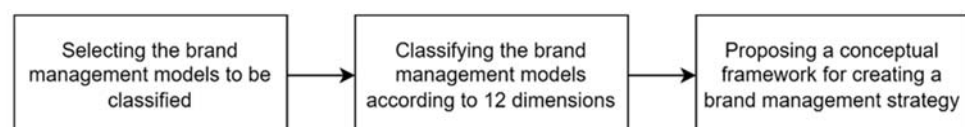

Figure 1. Methodology for proposing a conceptual framework for creating a brand management strategy.

These three steps are described hereafter.

Step 1. Selecting the models

The models considered were selected after a series of three levels of analysis. The first level of analysis was to perform a review of the literature by using the following keywords: brand management, brand model, branding model. Results were contrasted to the bibliographies included in two main reviews of brand research [7,8]. The second level of analysis was that the article or book had to include an explicit brand management model inside. The third level of analysis was to be cited at least 2000 times in Web of Science articles. The articles written by authors with a low h-index in Web of Science were not considered for this study. A low h-index is defined as 17 in this study. All the article indexes were taken from the Web of Science site in October 2021. By the nature of the selection criteria, the chosen texts were first published more than a decade ago, but there is no evidence that the digital or social media evolution has changed the basic premise of how brands are conceptualized [18].

Step 2. Classifying the brand management models

The classification model used in this study features a decomposition of each chosen brand management models in 12 dimensions. These 12 dimensions are: legal instrument, logo, company, shorthand, risk reducer, identity system, image, value system, personality, relationship, adding value, and evolving identity.

The procedure used was the following: (1) dimensions were defined and explained according to [9], (2) dimensions were looked up on each brand management model to identify how they are included, (3) citations that summarize each author's view on each dimension were gathered.

Step 3. Proposing a framework

The framework was defined by finding the relationships between the 12 dimensions. This was done by opposing the vision of the five different sources, as suggested by Patton [19]. This framework can be seen as a general brand management model that can be customized according to specific business scenarios.

3. Results and Discussion

The results are presented as follows: (1) the result of a dimensional analysis of the top five author's brand management models, (2) an interdimensional analysis to understand the relationships between the brand dimensions, and (3) a conceptual framework for creating custom brand management models. As an additional result, an example of the application of the framework is presented.

3.1. Dimensional Analysis of Top Brand Management Models

All five top brand management models were analyzed according to the 12 dimensions proposed by [9]. The results are presented as single paragraphs containing (1) the definition of each dimension and (2) the point of view of each author regarding each dimension. Additionally, the dimensions are summarized in Table 1.

3.1.1. Legal Instrument

Branding represents an investment and consequently, firms seek legal ownership of the title, as protection against imitators [9]. Protectability is one of the six criteria for choosing brand elements (memorability, meaningfulness, likeability, transferability, adaptability, and, protectability), according to Keller [13]. Keller [13] states that a brand should be legally and competitively protectable. The strength and breadth of a brand's legal trademark protection are critical to the brand's strength, according to Aaker [12]. Brand strength can be assessed by measuring five sources of risk: future market, sources of brand value, product, business, and potential, according to Kapferer [6]. The quality of trademarks and their registration are part of the risks associated with the sources of brand value [6]. Brands can be categorized following an eight-category typology: a sign of ownership, differentiating device, functional device, symbolic device, risk reducer, shorthand device,

legal device, and strategic device, according to De Chernatony [20]. As a legal device, a brand is considered as a legal protection, normally against counterfeit and lately against competition proposed by distributor's lookalike brands [20].

3.1.2. Logo

A logo is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors according to the AMA [21]. Logos and symbols play a critical role in building brand equity and especially brand awareness according to Keller [13]. Logos provide a means to indicate origin, ownership, or association [13]. Strong symbols can provide cohesion and structure to an identity and a way to gain recognition and recall according to Aaker [12]. Symbols can be more meaningful if they involve a metaphor, by representing a functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefit [12]. A logo can also become a shorthand device to communicate both corporate identity [6,20] and corporate objectives [20].

3.1.3. Company

When borrowing the equity accrued by the corporate name, product lines become an extension of the corporate personality. In this case, the CEO becomes responsible for the health of the corporate brand [9]. Companies would use their company brands to extend their brand equity to other products into new categories or sub-categories as part of their brand architecture model according to Keller [13]. A brand is usually the most powerful asset that a firm owns to create and leverage assets, as a recipe for strategic success according to Aaker [12]. The brand is the natural device for establishing a relationship between consumers and the existing companies forming brandscapes in a materialist society [22]. The brand identity should be a reservoir of the corporate identity, where the founder's values and ethics and the company focus, and culture are trespassed as values to the brand identity system according to Kapferer [6]. The brand and line extension effect as a brand equity sharing process, using the name as a key difference vs. competitors in the segment [6]. Through the launch of brand extensions, a company looks for an evolution of the brand for increasing brand equity and transferring the positive brand evaluation to other products [20].

3.1.4. Shorthand

For consumers, brands act as a shorthand device of functional and emotional characteristics, enabling rapid recall of information in memory and speedier purchase decisions [9]. Brands provide a shorthand device or means of simplification for their product decisions according to Keller [13]. The shorthand device provided for brands in Aaker's Graveyard model, where recall and recognition are plotted together to find out if the provided shorthand's reputation goes to a niche or the graveyard [12]. Fournier [22] states that the decision-making process is driven by the customers through the sort of relationship he holds with the brands and the way he manages their relationships personally. Brands are key decision-making factors for customers and make part of the brand assets to be considered in the valuation of the brand as one of the benefits that can be obtained by a company [6]. To overcome the problem of sifting through large amounts of information, brands are used as shorthand devices by consumers to recall from memory sufficient brand information to make a decision [20].

3.1.5. Risk Reducer

As consumers perceive risk when they buy products or services, a brand can be used by marketers to instill consumer confidence [9]. Perceptions of corporate credibility, in terms of the firm's expertise and trustworthiness, can be valuable associations in introducing brand extensions according to Keller [13]. Perceived risk can be reduced through credibility, and it facilitates the adoption of brand extensions, for example [13]. The brand is a source of

credibility, fostering organizational associations to provide a value proposition or enhance customer relationships [12]. A brand must convey certitude when trust is needed, but there are categories where brands are not even needed, stating that where there is no risk, there is no brand [6]. When buying, consumers develop risk-reducing strategies toward perceived risk. These are geared to either reduce the uncertainty in a purchase or to minimizing the chances of an unpleasant outcome by buying [20].

3.1.6. Identity System

A brand identity system is a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain [12]. The brand identity is the first stage of the process of brand development according to Keller [13]. Achieving the right brand identity means creating brand salience with customers, including brand awareness, recall, and recognition [13]. Aaker's brand identity system uses brand identity to provide a value proposition to customers or credibility to other brands [12]. The brand identity system is formed by 12 facets, grouped in an extended core of four groups of facets according to Aaker [12]. Brand identity is the facet of a brand's uniqueness and value [6]. Kapferer's identity model includes six facets: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image. These facets form an identity prism that offers four different angles of view: picture of the sender, a picture of the recipient, externalization, and internalization [6]. Enduring core values define the corporate brand identity and support the brand promise being made to the customer according to de Chernatony [20]. Corporate identity is a valuable asset that can contribute to brand success [20].

3.1.7. Image

The commercial importance of images relies on the fact that people do not react to reality, but to what they perceive as reality [9]. Creating a positive brand image takes marketing programs that link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the brand in memory. Brand associations may be either brand attributes or benefits according to Keller [13]. Brand image reflects current perceptions of a brand by a customer, according to Aaker [12]. Brand image is usually passive and looks to the past, and tends to be tactical [12]. Brand image is not the receiver's side according to Kapferer [6]. The image refers to the way in which certain groups decode all of the signals emanating from the products, services, and communication covered by the brand [6]. The brand image is the consumers' perceptions of who the brand is and what it stands for, i.e., it reflects the extent to which it satisfies consumers' functional and representational needs according to de Chernatony [20]. As sales rise, the brand's image needs to be protected against inferior, competitive, look-alikes [20].

3.1.8. Value System

The brand is a mental reference in a market in which it acts by relying on tangible and intangible values [5]. Brand values can be organized in a pyramid, similar to Maslow's hierarchy of needs according to Keller [13]. A list of 30 brand values can be classified into four different levels with functional values at the bottom of the pyramid, followed by emotional values, life-changing values, and finishing with social impact values at the top [13]. A brand's value proposition is a statement of the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered by the brand that provides value to the customer according to Aaker [12]. An effective value proposition should lead to a brand-customer relationship and drive purchase decisions [12]. Beyond functional and experiential rewards, brands must now also be aspirational according to Kapferer [6]. It is through the brand's intangible values that brands help consumers to forge their identities when inherited identities are weaker [6]. Identifying the values a consumer adheres to, helps in understanding their brand selections and can be used to develop brands according to de Chernatony [20]. Consumer choice behavior is influenced by five consumption values: functional, conductional, social, emotional, and epistemic [20].

3.1.9. Personality

Brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with a given brand [12]. Through consumer experience or marketing activities, brands may take on personality traits or human values and, like a person, appear to be modern, old-fashioned, lively, or exotic according to Keller [13]. Keller [13] proposes five components to describe brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness). Brand personality, like human personality, is both distinctive and enduring [12]. Brand personality is a useful construct as consumers show no difficulty in consistently assigning personality qualities to inanimate brand objects [12]. Consumers think about brands as if they were human characters in order to articulate their own relationship views with the brand according to Fournier [22]. As an example, behavioral loyalty programs create the conditions for deepening the customer–brand relationship and creating emotional connections between consumers and the brand [6]. Additionally, brand personality acts as a powerful metaphor to communicate the brand's values [20].

3.1.10. Relationship

A brand is an expression of a relationship between a customer and the company. A successful brand can be characterized as having a strong relationship between the customer and the company [9]. Converting brand responses to create brand resonance and an intense, active loyalty relationship between customers and the brand is the last stage of brand development according to Keller [13]. The development of a brand-customer relationship is the bottom line of the brand identity system according to Aaker [12]. The relationship between a brand and a person (analogous to that between two people) provides a different perspective on how brand personality might work [12]. Relationships provide structure and meanings in a psycho-social-cultural context according to Fournier [22]. The brand is a relationship partner due to the human need of anthropomorphizing objects in order to facilitate interactions with the non-material world [22]. Brand relationship quality is similar in spirit to brand loyalty: both constructs attempt to capture the strength of the connection formed between the consumer and the brand toward a prediction of relationship stability over time [22]. Brands are often at the crux of transactions and exchanges between people according to Kapferer [6]. This facet defines the mode of conduct that most identifies the brand [6]. Relationship has a number of implications for the way the brand acts, delivers services, relates to its customers [6]. Relationship marketing goes beyond traditional marketing, and focuses more on creating a pool of committed, profitable customers according to de Chernatony [20]. This is done by identifying a company's individual customers and creating mutually beneficial relationships that go beyond simple transactions [20]. A successful brand aims to develop a high-quality relationship in which customers feel a sense of commitment and belonging, even to the point almost of passion [20].

3.1.11. Adding Value

Added value can be defined as nonfunctional benefits over and beyond products' functional characteristics [9]. Differences in outcomes arise from the "added value" endowed to a product in part as a result of past marketing activity for the brand is the first basic principle of branding and brand equity according to Keller [13]. Brand equity is a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers according to Aaker [12]. A model on understanding brand equity, thus added value, is based on understanding brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets [12]. Variability in the temporal patterning of brand relationship development cycles suggests value in identifying factors that encourage strength across relationship forms as a useful diagnostic device according to Fournier [22]. The reputation of the brand is a source of demand and lasting attractiveness, the image of superior quality and added value justifies a premium price according to Kapferer [6]. Buyers perceive added value in a brand because they recognize certain clues that give

signals about the offer [20]. Added value is a multi-dimensional concept, which includes functional and emotional benefits as perceived by customers and which exist relative to the competition offerings that are primarily different because their emphasis on name distinctions satisfies consumers' core needs in a tightly defined sense [20].

3.1.12. Evolving Entity

Brands can be categorized according to their evolution in time, starting as an unbranded commodity, passing to a reference, developing into a personality, establishing as an icon, progressing into a company, and ending as a policy [9]. The brand development cycle can be described as a cycle of four phases: (1) new, unfocused, or unknown; (2) niche; (3) leadership; and (4) commodity or eroded according to Keller [13]. The ability of some range brands to extend further than many of their competitors is strongly related to the way in which their identity has been developed and allowed to evolve [12]. Relationships are constituted of a series of repeated exchanges between two parties known to each other; they evolve in response to these interactions and to fluctuations in the contextual environment [22]. Relationship evolution can be followed by a phased model, wherein each stage is one interval in a sequence of changes in type or level of intensity [22]. The product life cycle does exist, as historical evidence proves it according to Kapferer [6]. A brand is not a product, certainly, it is based on a product or service, but brands start from one product and then continue to grow from multiple products [6]. Brands follow a life cycle of four phases: development and launching, growth, maturity, and decline according to de Chernatony [20]. The returns from brands depend on where they are in their life cycle. Different types of marketing activities are needed according to whether the brand is new to the market or is a mature player in the market [20].

Table 1. Review of the 12 dimensions that define a brand according to Keller [13], Aaker [12], Fournier [22], Kapferer [6], and de Chernatony [20].

Variable\Model	Keller	Aaker	Fournier	Kapferer	De Chernatony
Legal Instrument	As a legal and competitivity protection	As a source of brand strength		As a source of brand value	As legal protection against counterfeit and competition
Logo	As a source for brand equity and brand awareness; can indicate origin, ownership, or association	As a source of cohesion and structure to brand identity; as a source of recognition and recall of functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefit		As a shorthand device to communicate corporate identity	As a shorthand device to communicate corporate objectives
Company	To extend brand equity to other products into new categories or subcategories	To create and leverage assets	To establish a relationship between consumers and the existing companies	To withhold corporate identity, values, ethics, focus, and culture	To evolve the brand, increase brand equity, and transfer positive brand evaluation to other products
Shorthand	As a simplification of product decision making	As a source of recall and recognition of reputation in a specific niche	As an expression of the relationship held by a customer and the way he manages his relationships	As decision-making factor and brand asset for the company	As decision-making factor to overcome the problem of sifting through large amount of information
Risk Reducer	As a firm's expertise and trustworthiness, a source of credibility	As a source of credibility to provide value proposition or enhance customer relationship		To convey certitude when trust is needed	To reduce uncertainty in a purchase or to minimize the chance of an unpleasant outcome

Table 1. *Cont.*

Variable\Model	Keller	Aaker	Fournier	Kapferer	De Chernatony
Identity System	As the first stage of the process of brand development	To provide a value proposition (B2C) or credibility (B2B)		To provide uniqueness and value	As an asset, as core values, as a support to the brand promise
Image	To link strong, favorable, and unique associations to the brand in memory	As the current perception from the customer		As the decodation of all the signals emanating from the products, services, and communications	As the customers' perceptions, in terms of satisfaction with functional and representational needs
Value System	To convey functional, emotional, life-changing, and social impact values	As a statement of functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered		To express functional, experiential, and aspirational rewards	to express functional, conductional, social, emotional, and epistemic values
Personality	To express sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness	To express a set of distinctive and enduring human characteristics associated with a brand	To articulate customer's relationship, view of observed behaviors enacted by the brand	To create emotional connections between consumers and the brand	To communicate the brand's values as if they were human values
Relationship	To create brand resonance and an intense, active loyalty relationship between customers and the brand	As the bottom line of the brand identity system	To facilitate interactions with the non-material world to provide structure and meanings	To express how a brand acts, delivers services, and relates to its customers	To create a pool of committed, profitable customers
Adding Value	As a result of past marketing activity for the brand	To increase brand equity assets and liabilities	as the result of creating a significant relationship with the customer	As the result of trust, pride, emotion, attachment to familiarity capital	As the result of clues that give signals about the offer
Evolving Identity	As a cycle: (1) new, (2) niche, (3) leadership, and (4) commodity	to extend further than competitors	As a phased model that changes depending on the evolution of the brand relationship	It evolves according to a product life cycle when attached to a product	As a cycle: (1) development and launching, (2) growth, (3) maturity, and (4) decline

3.2. Interdimensional Analysis to Understand Relationships between Brand Dimensions

A series of relationships between brand dimensions were found by exploring the results of the previous section. Relationships are understood as an influence from one dimension to another and are stated as a verb. Here, relationships are sorted and presented according to the influencing dimension in the same order as presented.

The legal instrument dimension, besides legally protecting against counterfeit and competition [13,20], acts as a source of brand strength and brand value, influencing the added-value dimension according to Aaker [12] and Kapferer [6] respectively.

The logo dimension may have multiple functions and influences according to the literature. It can work as a shorthand device to communicate corporate identity and objectives [6,20] influencing the company dimension. It can also work as a source of brand equity and brand awareness [13] influencing the adding-value dimension. Additionally, it can work as a source of cohesion and structure to brand identity [12] influencing the identity dimension. Furthermore, it can work as a source of recognition and recall of values [12] influencing values dimension.

The company dimension can help to establish a relationship between consumers and the existing companies [22] influencing the relationship dimensions, and can help to withhold corporate identity, values, ethics, focus, and culture [6] influencing both the identity and values dimensions.

The shorthand dimension can work as an expression of the relationship held by a customer and the way he manages his relationships [22] influencing the relationship dimension.

The risk reducer dimension can be a source of credibility [6,12,13,20] influencing the values dimension, and enhance customer relationships [12] influencing the relationship dimension.

The identity system dimension can help to provide a value proposition in a B2C environment or credibility in a B2B environment [12] influencing the adding-value dimension.

The image dimension is the current perception from the customer of a brand [12,20] influencing the customer and his relationship with the brand.

The value system dimension can work as a statement of functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered [6,12,13,20] influencing the adding-value dimension.

The personality dimension can communicate the brand's values as they were human values [6,12,13,20] and articulate customer relationships [22], and create emotional connections between consumers and the brand [6] to influence the relationship dimension.

The result of creating a significant relationship with the customer [6,12,13,20,22] influences the adding-value dimension of the brand.

The adding value dimension increases brand equity assets and liabilities [12] directly influencing the brand itself and all the brand dimensions.

The evolving entity dimension acts as a phased model that changes depending on the evolution of the brand relationship [6,13,20,22] influencing the identity dimension.

As seen in this section, not only brand dimensions are important to be analyzed deeply, but the relationships between them as well. Brand dimension relationships carry important information regarding additional functions and influences that may be useful to create a more robust custom brand strategy.

3.3. Proposing a Conceptual Framework for Creating Brand Management Strategies

The 12 brand dimensions can be delineated as the personhood of human beings. According to White [23], the personhood of human beings can be determined within two competing constructs. First, an existential construct, that personhood is a state of being inherent and essential to the human species. Second, a relational construct, that personhood is a conditional state of value defined by society. These competing constructs establish personhood in both individual and interpersonal contexts.

Brand dimensions can be represented in a one-way mirror model, where the existential construct lies facing the reflecting side of the mirror, or the brand's side, and the relational construct lies on the transparent side of the mirror, or the customer's side. Brand dimensions considered in the existential construct are an identity system, value system, personality, adding value, and evolving identity, as being the self-expressing side of the brand. Dimensions considered in the relational construct are the legal instrument, logo, company, shorthand, risk reducer, image, and relationship, as being the perceived side of the brand (Figure 2).

The representation of the brand dimensions in the one-way mirror model was chosen as a framework (Figure 3) representation by exposing the cross-dimensional relationship presented. To understand which brand dimension relationships must be taken into consideration once a set of brand dimensions are believed to be important to a specific business scenario. A custom brand management strategy can be proposed through the analysis of selected branding literature in a specific scenario or any other formal qualitative research method to identify what are the dimensions to be considered.
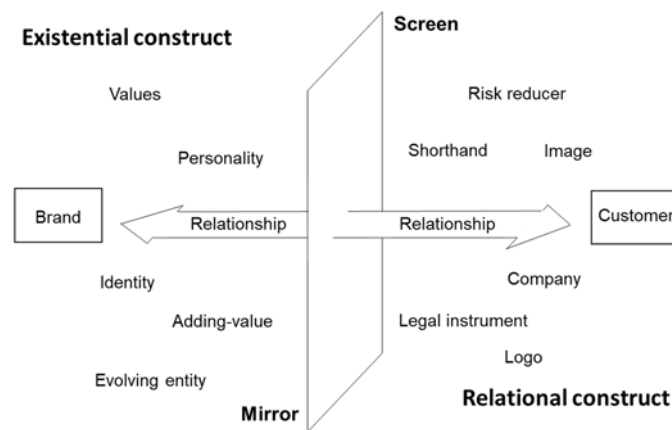
Figure 2. One-way mirror model for brand dimensions according to the personhood of human beings.
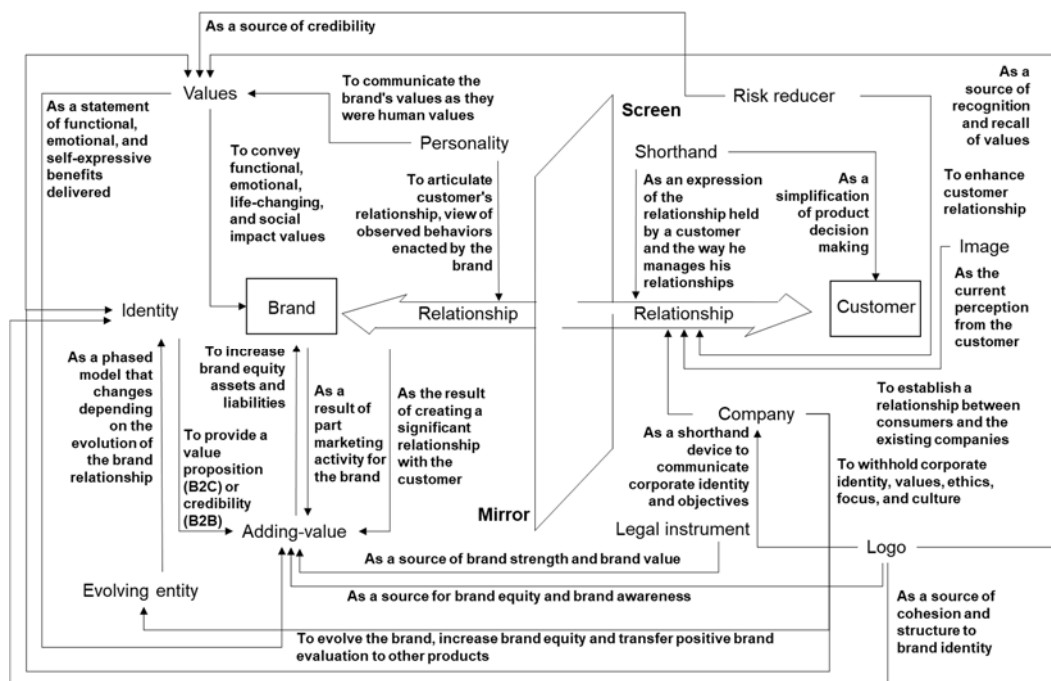

Figure 3. Brand dimension relationship diagram.

Figure 3 can be considered an extensive framework for exploring the top five brand management models. The usage of the 12 brand dimensions proposed by de Chernatony and Riley [9] explores a broader view of the brand itself and can be useful to identify which top-5 brand management model applies to a specific entity. This framework can also be used as a starting point to create a branding strategy by including all the brand dimensions and brand dimension relationships from the beginning, to subsequently explore the most suitable brand management models or a mix of them, to an entity in a specific business scenario.

3.4. Applying the Framework

Although brand management models analyzed tend to be general to fit a broad range of business scenarios, there is evidence that specific business scenarios dictate different requirements for brand management [24–26]. Due to this, the application of the framework to the specific business scenario of an SME alliance in a B2B export environment is presented. Figure 4 describes the method of application.
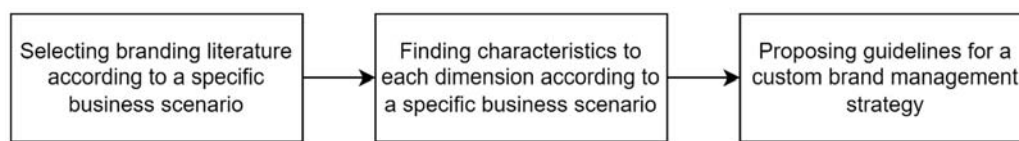
Figure 4. Example of application of the framework for proposing guidelines for a custom brand management strategy.

3.4.1. Selecting Branding Literature According to a Specific Business Scenario

Specific branding literature regarding Business-to-Business (B2B), Ingredient Brand, Country of Origin (COO), Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), and Brand Alliances was selected according to the pertinence with the subject, citations, and reputation of the authors. Literature chosen for B2B was Kotler et al. [27], ingredient branding was taken from Kotler and Pfoertsch [28], for COO marketing was Aichner [29], for SME branding was Centeno et al. [30], and for alliance, brands were He and Balmer [31].

3.4.2. Finding Characteristics of Each Dimension According to a Specific Business Scenario

The selected branding literature was classified according to the 12 dimensions to find specific applications of branding theory and practice to each specific business scenario. The classification method was the same one used for classifying the brand management models. Table 2 summarizes the review of the selected literature regarding B2B, ingredient, COO, SME, and alliance branding.

Table 2. Review of the 12 dimensions that define a brand according to B2B, Ingredient Brand, COO, SME, and Alliance literature.

	B2B	**InBrand**	**COO**	**SME**	**Alliance**
Legal Instrument	As legal protection against counterfeit and competition	As a source of added value	As a legal protection and a source of added value		As a legal protection
Logo	To communicate complex functional benefits through symbols	To communicate complex functional benefits through symbols	To communicate origin through symbols	To develop the brand identity	To create awareness and recognition, and as signs of assurance
Company	to express common and distinctive brand elements to the company	To express company values to end customers	To express national perceived values	To provide brand differentiation through a set of unique values	To provide common values to the alliance
Shorthand	To summarize a person's feelings toward a business or product	To reach customers with highly differentiated, performant, high-branded value, and complex ingredients	To benefit from the patriotism of domestic customers or from positive stereotypes that foreign customers assign to a product from a country		
Risk Reducer	To ensure and legitimate buying decisions	To ensure and legitimate buying decisions	To reduce the perceived risk of purchasing		
Identity System	To increase awareness and build businesses	To reduce the chances of substitution		As a product, as an organization, as a symbol, and as a person	To promote the vision, brand promise, brand values and to establish a strong visual identity
Image	As a decision-making criterion	To establish a recognizable reputation	As an opportunity or a constraint to be handled		As a source of added value

Table 2. *Cont.*

	B2B	InBrand	COO	SME	Alliance
Value System	To promote rational, social, and emotional values	As a transporter of all the values of a product		To promote overarching organizational values	To endorse alliance values to companies
Personality	To distinguish from the competition by engendering customer loyalty and growth	To enhance brand awareness and the image of the product		As a result of the owner personality	
Relationship	Brand messages can be transmitted more easily due to one-to-one relationships	To create loyal and profitable customer relationships when values are understood by the customer		Close personal relationships are key characteristics of SMEs	Relationships can be strong if the alliance shows consistency in its corporate branding pledge
Adding Value	Value added is highest for publicly visible products and services	Prominent and strong brands provide added value to products			
Evolving Identity	As a path to a success story through brand management	As a path from a B2B brand to an omnipresent ingredient		As a brand identity creation process	

3.4.3. Proposing a Custom Brand Management Strategy

The specific dimension characteristics presented in Table 2 were contrasted to the framework proposed in Figure 3 to propose a custom brand management strategy for the specific case of SMEs collaborating in a B2B export environment through theory triangulation as proposed by Patton [19] (Figure 5).
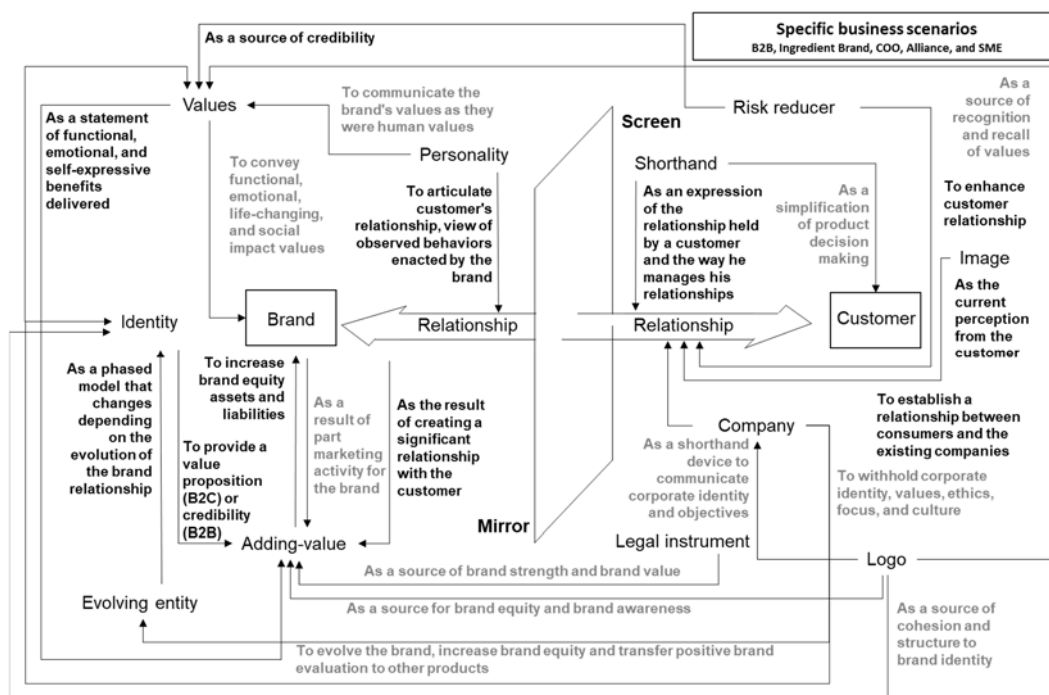

Figure 5. Guidelines for a custom brand management strategy for the B2B, ingredient brand, COO, alliance, and SME scenario.

The first observation is that dimensions such as (1) values, (2) adding value, (3) identity, (4) image, and (5) risk reducer are explicitly mentioned in every dimension analysis and

considered key variables for the full set of 12 dimensions and will be considered the core dimensions for this business scenario.

The second observation is that the relationship dimension is set to be the carrier of loyalty between the customer (business or end-consumer) [28,30,31] and the company and can play a significant role in business itself as the B2B relationship can help promote all the other brand dimensions [27].

The third observation is that other dimensions are not mentioned directly in the analysis but can play an important role in the brand strategy process if taken into consideration.

The evolving entity dimensions are set to be an important dimension as the brand identity creation process follows a path to become a powerful brand as seen in Figure 3, and it is still important in the B2B, ingredient brand, and SME environments [27,28,30].

The personality dimension can play a key role to articulate customer's relationship and as a view of observed behaviors enacted by the brand (Figure 3). The personality dimension can (1) help to distinguish from the competition by engendering customer loyalty and growth [27], (2) enhance brand awareness and the image of the product [28], and (3) can be a result of the owner's personality [30].

The shorthand dimension can be used as an expression of the relationship held by a customer and the way he manages his relationships (Figure 3). The shorthand dimension can (1) summarize a person's feelings towards a business or product [27], (2) help to reach customers with highly differentiated, performant, high-branded value and complex ingredients [28], and (3) benefit from patriotism or positive stereotypes [29] in this specific business scenario.

The company dimension can be used to establish a relationship between consumers and the existing companies (Figure 3) and may serve to express either brand elements [27,30], company values [28,30,31], and national values [29].

According to these observations, the brand management strategy should follow a model or a mix of models enhancing the dimensions and interactions as exposed in Figure 5. This figure creates a close, loyal, one-on-one, and consistent relationship that matters. This relationship is based on rational, social, and emotional organizational values, a strong reputation, prominent and visible products, and services, to ensure and legitimate buying decisions by reducing the perceived risk of purchase.

4. Discussion

While other authors propose brand management frameworks for specific business scenarios [32–35], recent research proposes that brand management will require in the future comprehensive, cohesive models and frameworks will enable marketers to integrate their classic brand strategies [15], which validates the objective of this research.

The brand relationship is explicitly the goal of the studied brand management authors. All other dimensions must function as facilitators of the brand-customer relationship, while the customer is a consumer or another business. Recent research proposes the fact that brands will still focus on building relationships with customers [7] with solutions that balance the multiplicity of brand dimensions and the heterogeneity of customers [15] in a Hyperconnected World [14]. Brand identity is at the core of Keller's, Aaker's, Kapferer's, and De Chernatony's models. Identity is at the first stage of the process of brand development [13], provides value [6,12], credibility [12], uniqueness [6], and support to the brand promise [20]. Brand identity is also subject to change [13,20], and its evolution depends on the brand's ability to adapt the way they manage relationships to change [22]. Finally, brand identity relies on its value system to convey functional, emotional [6,12,13,20], life-changing [13], social [13,20], and aspirational [6], among other families of values.

Brand personality is the delivery method for values and human characteristics [12,13, 20] to articulate relationships [6,22] through emotional connections between the brand and the customer [6].

Adding value is the result of past marketing activity for the brand [13,20] and the result of creating a significant relationship with the customer [6,22]. Adding value is supposed to increase brand equity assets and liabilities [12].

Brand image is at the core of the brand's relational dimension set [6]. Brand image resides in the mind of a customer, in the form of perceptions or associations [12,13], to either functional or representational needs [20].

The risk reducer dimension is intended to be a source of credibility [12,13] to convey certitude when trust is needed [6,20]. The risk reducer dimension could be based on a firm's expertise and trustworthiness [13] and it is meant to provide a value proposition, enhance the customer relationship [12], and minimize the chance of an unpleasant outcome [20].

The shorthand dimension can be seen as a decision-making factor for the customer [6, 13,20] and is an expression of the relationship held by a customer and the way he manages his relationships [22]. Brand as a shorthand is a source of recall and recognition of the reputation of the brand in a specific niche and a brand asset for the company [6,12].

Brand as a logo can be seen as a source of brand identity [6,12], as a source of brand equity and brand awareness [13], or as a device to communicate corporate objectives [20]. Brand as a logo can be used as a source of recognition and recall of values [12]. A logo can be a source of cohesion and structure to brand identity [12].

A brand can be a corporate asset that leverages other assets through its value [12,13,20]. The brand as a corporate can withhold corporate identity, values, ethics, focus, and culture [6], and can be used to establish a relationship with consumers [22].

The legal instrument dimension is a source of legal protection [13,20], competitivity and strength [12,13,20], and brand value [6].

5. Conclusions

This study suggests the following conclusions:

- Decomposing a brand management model into a set of dimensions it is easier to compare the similitudes and differences between different models.
- Decomposing specific business environments in single-sided business scenarios, allows a better understanding of how the brand management dimensions apply to the specific analyzed case.
- Regardless of the brand management models, all of them converge on the fact that by creating a high-quality brand relationship with the customer is crucial for the branding process.
- The brand personality is at the core of the brand management process, as if it is the entity that articulates the relationship with the customer through company values, benefits, and behaviors.
- Brand identity is important in the creation and reinvention processes of a brand as it expresses the promise of value promoted by the company.
- Brand image is important in the brand management process as it is the customer's perspective of brand identity or the real link between a customer's mind and a brand.
- Unavoidable brand functions should be adding value to increase brand equity and perceived value in the customer-brand relationship, reduce risk in transactions, and provide a shorthand or a source of recall and recognition for the customer.
- B2B and ingredient brand management models are well-defined for generic cases, but little is known for COO, SME, or alliance brand cases.
- COO brand management models have not been developed to date. The available literature is based on COO labeling, and labeling literature is mostly based on the agricultural field.
- SME branding literature is firm-centric; thus, it depends on the specific SME size, culture, and business environment among other variables.
- There is little information regarding alliance brand management. The literature explored points to the need of further development of research on the brand management phenomenon for alliance brands.

- This study contributes to theory by identifying nonevident relationships between brand dimensions.
- This study also contributes to theory by proposing a representation of brand dimensions as existential or relational constructs, aiming at the self-expressing and perceived sides of the brand.

The framework has the potential to propose custom brand management strategies for specific business scenarios due to its visual representation of brand dimensions and brand dimension relationships.

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