

REPERTOIRES OF THE CORPORATE PAST: EXPLANATION AND FRAMEWORK. INTRODUCING AN INTEGRATED AND DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose- The repertoires of the corporate past perspective is introduced and articulated and is placed with the corporate communications and corporate marketing domains. The framework consolidates and expands our comprehension of multifarious actualisations of the past as a corporate-level phenomenon.

Design/methodology/approach- A literature review, which draws on the extant corporate heritage literature within corporate marketing and corporate communications along with other salient perspectives within social sciences, is integrated into a conceptual framework of past-related corporate-level concepts.

Findings- Our article advances the extant literature by making a distinction between instrumental and foundational past-related corporate-level concepts. A framework is introduced and articulated detailing seven different modes of referencing the past of an organisation: corporate past, corporate memory, corporate history, corporate tradition, corporate heritage, corporate nostalgia and corporate provenance.

Research limitations/implications- The article clarifies the current state of this nascent field of corporate marketing and communication scholarship concerned with the historicity of corporate-level phenomena and advances our conceptual understanding of the multiple ways in which links with an organisation's past can be understood and scrutinised offering an integrated framework of seven conceptual lenses for future research.

Practical insights- Managers, by more fully comprehending the repertoires of the corporate past, are, we argue, better placed to discern whether the past is of material benefit to their organisations. If so, the repertoires of the corporate past perspective may enable managers to more effectively manage, maintain and capitalise on their organisation's past in multiple ways.

Originality value- This article is substantively informed by both the corporate heritage literature and the salient literature from the social sciences. The introduction of a repertoire of the corporate past framework, arguably, represents an important contribution to the domain.

Keywords: Corporate Communication, Corporate Branding, Corporate Identity, Corporate Past, Corporate History, Corporate Heritage, Corporate Memory, Corporate Nostalgia, Corporate Tradition, Corporate Provenance

Article Classification: Conceptual paper

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Introduction

The purpose of this article is to consolidate and expand our extant comprehension of the past within the corporate marketing and corporate communication domains so that the general discernment of the corporate past and its multifarious actualisations in the present can be of utility to scholars and practitioners alike.

This conceptual article is informed by the extant literatures on the past not only within corporate marketing and communication but also the salient literature within the social sciences. Our aim, to reiterate and to expand, is to provide a more comprehensive and, arguably, nuanced, mapping of the aforementioned terrains. The contributions of our article are as follows: (1) consolidating previously discussed conceptualisations *vis-à-vis* corporate heritage by differentiating them into two main categories of concepts referring to an organisation's past; and (2) expanding on the extant literature in this nascent field by introducing a sevenfold conceptual framework: the repertoires of the corporate past.

First, we found the past to be increasingly debated as a substantive, symbolic, and communicative resource for corporate marketing and communication, especially within the nascent area of corporate heritage scholarship (Balmer *et al.*, 2006; Urde *et al.*, 2007; Balmer, 2011b, 2011c, 2013). Drawing on previously published output – taking into account the four stages of conceptual development recently suggested by Balmer (2013) – we articulate a fifth stage of conceptual development in this article. Our article advances the extant literature by making a distinction between *instrumental* and *foundational past-related corporate-level concepts*.

Second, we expand on the aforementioned, partially drawing on earlier work by Balmer (2011c, 2013), by detailing seven *foundational past-related corporate-level concepts* of referring to an organisation's past in terms of core concepts of the past. All these different concepts have the potential to inform instrumental corporate marketing and communication concepts and policy, such as corporate heritage brands and corporate heritage identities (Balmer *et al.*, 2006; Urde *et al.*, 2007; Balmer, 2011b, 2011c, 2013). A conceptual framework detailing and delineating the seven foundational corporate-level concepts relating to the past is introduced. We call the framework and the integrative and dynamic perspective it represents “*Repertoires of the Corporate Past.*”

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In relation to the above, we argue that such a differentiated and dynamic view of the past in corporate-level contexts carries scholarly and pragmatic relevance. As such, the suggested conceptual framework is a development and expansion of earlier work. It is also broadly scoped and tentative, as befits such a nascent area. This allows for future amendments in the light of new empirical insights and conceptual reflections.

Approach

We reviewed the extant literature addressing temporal issues specifically within the domain of corporate marketing (for a discussion of corporate marketing see, for instance, Balmer, 1998, Balmer and Greyser, 2006; Balmer 2011a), while taking the dedicated corporate communication perspective initially introduced by Balmer (1995) and later expanded by Balmer and colleagues: Balmer and Gray (1999); Balmer (2001); Balmer and Greyser (2003); Illia and Balmer (2012). In addition, we broadened our disciplinary vista and selectively marshalled contributions within the social sciences and humanities in general, which is an approach that is consistent with recent conceptual work in the area (e.g., Balmer, 2013; Balmer and Hudson, 2013).

This review of the literature is multi-disciplinary in scope and, importantly, is informed by moderate constructionist convictions. In reflecting on the corporate marketing and communication literatures and those outside these areas, we detected sufficient conceptual overlap. This conceptual overlap between different concepts across disciplinary boundaries warrants the (at least metaphorical) importation of the most salient concepts into the domain of corporate marketing. Hence, in combining extant conceptualisations within corporate marketing – while explicitly drawing on the tentative conceptual discussions of Balmer (2011c, 2013) in particular – with the borrowed concepts from the wider discourses in the social sciences and humanities we articulated and derived at the seven different but dynamically interrelated foundational concepts of referring to the past in corporate-level marketing and communication contexts.

Structure

Our article is structured in the following way. First, we provide a short reflection of the territory *vis-à-vis* the corporate marketing and corporate communications perspectives; scrutinise the extant literature within the nascent area of corporate marketing from a total corporate communication perspective; note the conceptual and semantic ambiguity in the canon; and identify the lack of empirical work (*vis-à-vis* temporal modes) between the past, present, and future in corporate-level marketing contexts. Significantly, seven salient modes of the past are presented within a conceptual framework: detailing each regarded as foundational constructs. Finally, the theoretical and pragmatic implications of our differentiated view of the past and avenues for future scholarly work are outlined.

Initial reflections on the corporate marketing and communication perspective

Recently, corporate marketing (Balmer 2009; 2011a) and corporate communications scholars (Illia and Balmer 2012) and practitioners have begun to stress and explore the temporal dimension of organisations and its relevance for corporate marketing and communication. Illia and Balmer (2012) found that a degree of “temporal sensitivity” now – at least partially – characterises both domains (i.e., a growing number of scholars accord importance to research specifically concerned with the temporality and temporal relations of corporate-level phenomena and concepts). Balmer (2013) introduced the notion of total and corporate heritage communications, which he defined in terms of primary, secondary, tertiary, and legacy communications. Our review shows the past to be increasingly debated as a substantive, symbolic, and communicative resource for corporate marketing and communication.

For example, corporate marketing scholars identified a distinct category of corporate brand (corporate heritage brands) and articulated some key dimensions of the aforementioned (Balmer *et al.*, 2006) and the subsequent literature further explored the nature and significance of corporate heritage brands (Urde *et al.*, 2007; Balmer, 2011b; Hudson, 2011; Hudson and Balmer, 2013) and, more recently corporate heritage identities (Balmer, 2011c, 2013; Burghausen and Balmer, in press). Within the corporate communication canon practitioners have variously stressed the differentiating potential of ‘heritage communication’ (Bühler and Dürig, 2008); noted the importance of history and tradition for corporate brand communication (Herbrand and Röhrig, 2006), and identified ‘history marketing’ as an

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integral part of corporate communication and corporate marketing strategy *per se* (Schug, 2003). Moreover, the efficacy of historical references for corporate-level marketing and corporate communication as expounded by marketing and communications scholars have been noted (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009) in both general and in specific institutional contexts, with family businesses being notable (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2013) and corporate heritage in CSR communication contexts (Blombäck and Scandeliuss, 2013). All of the aforementioned developments indicate a heightened scholarly interest among corporate communications and corporate marketing scholars.

In addition, the academic attention accorded to nostalgia (Holbrook and Schindler, 2003; Muehling and Sprott, 2004; Loveland *et al.*, 2010), retro-branding (Brown, 2001; Brown *et al.*, 2003), or brand heritage (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b; Hakala *et al.*, 2011) is significant in consumer marketing and brand communication contexts. Also, hermeneutics and interpretative approaches (Hatch and Rubin, 2006) exemplify heightened cultural and linguistic sensitivities in consumer marketing (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Beyond corporate marketing and corporate communication there is growing recognition of the past's strategic and managerial pertinence and there have been frequent calls for a 'historical turn' within business and management studies in general (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Booth and Rowlinson, 2006).

Mindful of the considerable advances made within the canon to date – including significant work which has laid some important foundations to the domain – the field is embryonic in character. To date comparatively few scholars have written in the territory from a dedicated corporate marketing communication perspective. Consequently, the efficacy in providing even greater depth, clarity, and consistency in regard to the ways in which organisations links with an past can be understood and utilised.

Distinguishing instrumental vs. foundational past-related corporate-level concepts

A growing number of scholarly as well as more popular business writers (Schug, 2003; Carson and Carson, 2003; Herbrand and Röhrig, 2006; Bühler and Dürig, 2008; Balmer 2009; 2011b, 2011c; Delahaye *et al.*, 2009; Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009) accord importance to the past's instrumental value and practical utility for corporate-level marketing and communication purposes. This

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development is exemplified, for instance, by the growing number of communication and brand consultancies now offering specialised services in regard to corporate history (Carson and Carson, 2003; Delahaye *et al.*, 2009). It is also indicated by the increasing number of corporate museums (Nissley and Casey, 2002; Hollenbeck *et al.*, 2008) or the widespread use of history related sections on corporate websites (Delahaye *et al.*, 2009), to mention just a few. Thus, the corporate past is increasingly seen as an important strategic resource and an asset to be leveraged for the differentiation, authentication, and legitimation of corporate identities and corporate brands *vis-à-vis* internal and external stakeholders (Balmer 2009; Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009) contributing to their identification with a corporate identity or a corporate brand (Feldenkirchen, 2006; Bühler and Dürig, 2008). Further, the notion of corporate heritage brands and identities has generated increased scholarly interest recently (Balmer *et al.*, 2006, 2009; Urde *et al.*, 2007; Balmer, 2011b, 2011c; Hudson, 2011; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b; Hudson and Balmer, 2013).

However, these contributions – as one would expect with an embryonic area – largely focus on instrumental corporate marketing concepts such as corporate brands or activities such as corporate communication that draw on the past in different ways rather than the foundational concepts (e.g., history, heritage) that underpin them. Hence, there is already a well-established academic discourse concerning the instrumental impact and utility of the corporate past in general or corporate history and corporate heritage in particular. In this context, we also note the recent contributions differentiating various past-related instrumental marketing concepts such as (corporate) heritage brands and identities, retro-brands, iconic brands, heritage marketing, history marketing or heritage tourism (Urde *et al.*, 2007; Balmer, 2011c; Wiedmann *et al.*, 2011a, 2011b).

In contrast, there is still an understandable muteness, owing to the nascent character of the field, in regard to the underlying foundational concepts' specificities and likely differences between them, which is partially attributable to a general dearth of academic work in regard to the temporal and historical dimension of corporate marketing and communication phenomena in general (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009; Leitch and Davenport, 2011). Moreover, there appears to be a lack of appreciation for the differences between instrumental concepts and foundational basic concepts the former draw on.

Hence, whilst broad categorisations of the past have been detailed recently (Balmer 2011c; 2013) they remain underspecified in terms of their distinct roles as foundational concepts.

In view of the above, the past of an organisation is frequently being treated in the literature as an ‘unproblematic’ aspect – whether as a contingency factor or as a constitutive element – receiving little further conceptual elaboration. Thus, there appears to be little evidence within the corporate marketing and communication literature yet (apart from the literatures specifically concerned with business history and the history of marketing, communication *etc.*) that would indicate a heightened awareness for the ontological and epistemological limitations and ambiguities of the very notion of ‘the past’ itself. Therefore, there is not yet a discourse amongst the majority of corporate marketing and communication scholars similar to the theoretical and conceptual discussions that have increased the historical and temporal sensitivities in other fields of the social sciences and humanities (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006). This state of the field is not surprising though as the extant corporate marketing/corporate communications literature relating to the above is in its infancy and, to date, only a small number of scholars have written on the area. Moreover, corporate marketing/corporate communication scholarship is sensitive to the practical and instrumental concerns of an area/business phenomenon and then develops a body of theoretical work around a domain. In contrast, the applied and instrumental aspects of other management areas are quite often given little and sometimes no significance.

The above being noted, we found little conceptual clarity in terms of the differences between constructs such as history or heritage as dynamically interrelated but independent concepts, ‘independent’ in the sense that they warrant further empirical and conceptual scrutiny. Similar observations have been made in regard to management research and the use of the past in organisations in general (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Booth and Rowlinson, 2006; Brunninge, 2009).

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Balmer (2011c, 2013) more recently has elaborated some past-related concepts in an attempt to define corporate heritage more clearly. These and other more recent contributions (e.g., Hudson and Balmer, 2013) indicate a growing awareness of the subtle differences between various manifestations of an organisation’s temporality and historicity (i.e., temporal sensitivity). More importantly for the purpose of this article, these authors have looked beyond marketing, communication and management for inspiration.

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Further, Balmer (2013) recently identified four distinct stages in the conceptual development within this nascent field of corporate-level scholarship. Building on this we focus on the categorial distinctions between various concepts. To this end, our article consolidates the extant literature by differentiating extant conceptualisations into instrumental and foundational past-related corporate-level concepts with a focus on the latter. We argue that our article heralds a necessary fifth stage of conceptual development: consolidation and expansion. Table 1 details the different stages as suggested by Balmer (2013) by summarising the conceptual contributions of key works exemplifying each stage and how this article contributes to its further development (the Fifth stage).

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Repertoires of the corporate past perspective: seven modes of referring to the past

As with the above mentioned more recent articles (Balmer, 2013; Hudson and Balmer, 2013) we marshal insights from the wider social sciences and humanities literatures. Such an approach has the potential to expand on our knowledge and understanding of these constructs. Moreover, it reinforces extant work and thus provides an even stronger foundation on which to further advance conceptual and theoretical developments. In addition, it can aid future conceptual development, critical scholarly discourse, and empirical enquiry. With this general caveat in mind, our approach partially utilises as a point of departure the initial categorisations and explanations of past-related corporate-level constructs advanced by Balmer (2011c: see Table 2).

[INSERT TABLE 2]

From our reading of the extant literature we identified seven salient modes of referring to the past and we transpose them into seven corporate-level concepts: *corporate past*, *corporate memory*, *corporate history*, *corporate tradition*, *corporate nostalgia*, *corporate provenance*, and *corporate heritage*. All concepts are conceived as dynamically linked social categories that are constantly constructed and reconstructed in the light of contemporary purposes and concerns in the present.

Within the framework the *corporate past* represents the most basic category that underpins all the other concepts. *Corporate memory* constitutes a kind of conceptual ‘bridge’ between the corporate past as such and three interrelated primary modes (in instrumental terms) of referring to the past which are *corporate history*, *corporate tradition*, and *corporate heritage*. The latter concept (corporate heritage) is distinct from all the other concepts in terms of its temporal orientation by being transtemporal (concurrently retrospective and prospective) while the other modes are all retrospective in orientation. Finally, *corporate nostalgia* and *corporate provenance* represent secondary modes that are more or less relevant for the others. Table 3 summarises the different concepts. The table provides a succinct (i.e., adage-like), conceptual (i.e., indicating the main type of reference to the past) and pragmatic (i.e., action word describing the primary activity involved) explanation for each foundational concept. In addition, the table indicates the aforementioned main temporal orientation of the concepts (column: ‘temporal focus’ in the table) and categorises their role within the repertoires framework (column: ‘conceptual category’ in the table). The framework itself is introduced after our discussion of each foundational concept.

[INSERT TABLE 3]

Corporate past

The corporate past in our framework refers to ‘*all that ever happened*’ during the existence of a company following heritage scholars Graham *et al.* (2000) with this rather broad definition of ‘the past’. As such, it refers to all past events (including social actors and contextual circumstances involved) that had a direct bearing on the company or vice versa.

Yet, due to the past’s absence in the present (i.e., we cannot directly relive or witness past events) its ontological status is uncertain (see Koselleck, 2002; Ricoeur, 2006; White, 2010) and its epistemological accessibility is limited to *residual traces and sources* (Megill, 2007) in material and non-material form (with traces referring to all past remains and sources indicating already pre-interpreted records or documents about a company’s past) such as corporate buildings, documents, objects, traditions, orally transmitted anecdotes and so on (Megill, 2007). However, past remains do

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not constitute the past *per se* (i.e., in ontological terms) nor do they inherently ascertain any epistemological veracity in terms of a unitary version of the past, yet they provide the only available basis for our comprehension and interpretation of an organisation's past in the present, albeit a contestable and often multiple one (Megill, 2007) depending on how and by whom those traces and sources are appropriated in the present (the company, customer groups, local communities, NGOs etc.).

This limitation that poses a potential problem in academic historical research, we argue, provides pragmatic flexibility in the corporate domain. In particular, we argue that the different modes of representing the corporate past presented here may potentially draw on a wider historical context; a context where no or only scant direct residual traces of a company's involvement can be found. It provides the opportunity – within not yet specified limits – to temporally 'reposition' the company or to 'adopt' a past as corporate past that is more fiction than fact but has symbolic relevance for corporate-level marketing and communication in the present nonetheless. Therefore, the corporate past might be *discovered or rediscovered* as much as it may be an adopted past or an *invention* (see Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

As a cautious reminder, this epistemological limitation and flexibility also entails potential for contestation, cynicism, and conflict in a multi-stakeholder environment in regard to the veracity, authenticity, or ownership of a particular version of the corporate past. For example, German companies were publicly forced to acknowledge and come to terms with their complicity in the Nazi crimes; an episode of their past most of them had preferred previously to conveniently 'forget' with serious repercussions for corporate reputation, culture and identity (see Booth *et al.*, 2007). It has been argued that this development has partially contributed to the heightened awareness of the past's corporate marketing and communication relevance amongst practitioners in Germany (Schug, 2003).

The preceding discussion leads to the next concept that provides a conceptual bridge between the corporate past *per se* and the other modes of referring to the past, that of corporate memory.

Corporate memory

Given the preceding discussion and drawing on the interdisciplinary field of cultural and collective memory studies (see Misztal, 2003; Erll, 2010; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, 2011) corporate

memory is defined as the *remembered and forgotten past* of a company representing all forms of present knowledge (understanding and meaning)^[1] about an organisation's past that is constructed and reconstructed by processes and practices of remembering and forgetting at the individual, collective, and institutional level (it carries the notion of memory as '*all that is known*' in the present about a company's past).

As such, corporate memory is predicated on the discovered, rediscovered, invented, or adopted residual traces and sources that constitute the accessible corporate past (see previous section), which are meaningfully interpreted and reinterpreted in the present by successive generations of stakeholders inside and outside the organisation. However, these interpretations become only corporate memory in so far as they are manifested in cognitive, social, or cultural form. Consequently, corporate memories are socially constituted forms of an individually embodied corporate past (e.g., of an employee or the CEO) as well as refer to collectively shared, communicated, and enacted corporate pasts (e.g., oral stories and anecdotes, cognitive and habitual dispositions shared by organisational members or certain groups inside and outside the organisation such as consumer communities). Further, corporate memories manifest also as disembodied cultural forms of memory such as corporate documents, buildings, ceremonies or other cultural artifacts and practices that act as mnemonic devices for the former (Coser in Halbwachs, 1992; Assmann, 2010). Yet, not all residual traces and sources of the past are deliberately chosen (i.e., 'remembered') and some might willingly or inadvertently be discarded (i.e., 'forgotten') in the light of changing demands, conditions, or interests in the present (see Connerton, 1989; 2009). For example, Nissley and Casey (2002) have shown that corporate museums represent mnemonic sites for active remembering as well as forgetting that are strategically deployed in order to remember a particular version of the past that supports and facilitates the current identity of an organisation.

In light of the above, corporate memory represents a broad and multifarious category, which other forms of referring to an organisation's past, such as, corporate history, corporate tradition, corporate nostalgia, corporate provenance, and corporate heritage draw on. Concurrently, these different modes

^[1] Please note that this notion of 'knowledge' does not make any statement about its epistemological status, hence incorporates a notion of belief as well. This is consistent with the broad conception of history as the narrated past that also includes the notion of myths, legends, or sagas.

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of reference to the past can be understood as particular forms of corporate memory as well. Thus, corporate memory represents not only the aforementioned conceptual bridge but also a kind of perceptual ‘filter’ and discursive ‘scaffolding’ guiding the conceptual transition between the corporate past per se (as ‘all that ever happened’) and the different modes of referencing that past to be discussed next.

Corporate history

Corporate history is defined as the *narrated and storied past* or ‘*all that is told*’ about an organisation’s past. Thus, a corporate history provides an interpreted account of the historical trajectory and development of an organisation representing an attempt in the present to explain, celebrate, justify, or otherwise make sense of changes over time (see Ricoeur, 2006; White, 2010).

Following the argument recently advanced by Delahaye and colleagues (see Delahaye *et al.*, 2009), corporate history is understood as a particular genre or discourse that tells the past in a specific way predicated on present corporate concerns and purposes that is not confined to textual representations exhibiting its own set of formal (e.g., type of media used, the combination of textual and audio-visual materials, authorship) and thematic (e.g., type and content of narrative, characters and plotline used) features and instrumental purposes (Delahaye *et al.*, 2009). Corporate history understood as a particular narrative genre is, as such, always open to revision and reinterpretation in the light of changing circumstances, purposes, and interests in the present and varies in regard to its epistemological status. For instance, corporate histories may be written based on academic research by a business historian but might also represent mere corporate eulogies drafted by a PR agency. Either way, as organisations are increasingly understood as ‘storytelling organisations’ (Boje, 1995; Christensen and Cheney, 2000) in regard to identity construction and stakeholder identification, corporate histories understood as the narrated and storied past can be seen as an important element of identity and identification in corporate-level marketing and communication contexts.

This understanding of corporate history is consistent with extant discussions of the past’s relevance while concurrently expanding it beyond the earlier mentioned limits of a mere instrumental conceptual understanding. However, corporate history represents only one particular form of referring to the past.

Hence, another important concept that captures a different dimension is discussed next: corporate tradition.

Corporate tradition

Corporate tradition refers to the *enacted and embodied past* or ‘*all that is done*’ in reference to an organisation’s past (e.g., corporate celebrations, rituals, annual commemorations). Hence, corporate traditions represent all cultural practices that are predicated on a symbolic and/or substantial link to a company’s past (actual or invented) and carries the notion of intergenerational exchange (Shils, 1981) between past, present, and future that is also central to the conceptualisation of corporate heritage as will be shown shortly.

Within the canon, as so often happens, there are some differences. For example, it is possible to categorise customs in terms of being flexible and changing and traditions as fixed and invariable (cf. Balmer, 2011c) but this is dependent on how they are defined and thus different perspectives can emerge and different definitions advanced (Giddens, 1999; see Mizralski, 2003). The view is advanced here that corporate traditions are primarily legitimated by their substantive and/or symbolic link with an actual or invented past while customs are largely perpetuated on pragmatic grounds (Hobsbawm, 1983). However, corporate traditions can be more or less customary in terms of their pragmatic relevance as well (Giddens, 1999; see Mizralski, 2003). Thus, for the sake of expediency (and contrary to the well-known differentiation advanced by Hobsbawm, 1983), the concept of custom is incorporated within the category of corporate tradition but we are mindful and highly sensitive of the fact that others may wish to accord custom an important and distinct status.

Further, corporate traditions are not necessarily confined to the internal realm of a company but may also be enacted by external stakeholders (e.g., company specific rituals at annual general meetings, company sponsored festivals or activities, activities of brand communities). What they have in common is their reference to the company and its past as a source of legitimacy and identity for the company itself or the collective and individual identities of different stakeholders derived from it. In a similar vein, Balmer (2011b) recently argued that in the context of corporate-level marketing corporate

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traditions “can accord an institution a degree of distinctiveness, differentiation, and attraction” (Balmer, 2011b, p. 1384).

Corporate nostalgia

Corporate nostalgia is defined as ‘*all that is felt*’ in reference to a company’s past relative to the present representing a particular collectively shared, usually positively charged, emotional mentality (manifested in emotional and affective individual moods) amongst internal (e.g., organisational nostalgia) or external stakeholders (e.g., customer nostalgia) towards an organisation’s past predicated on socio-cultural or auto-biographical conditions in the present; a kind of affective retrospection in the present – an *emotive past* so to speak – that can provide a sense of belonging and emotional attachment with an organisation based on its past rather than its contemporary status.

Again, for the sake of expediency, we have not included melancholia – as identified by Balmer (2011c) – as a distinct construct in the repertoires of the corporate past perspective. For Balmer (2011c), nostalgia is of pertinence *vis-à-vis* “the happiness of the past” whereas melancholia is redolent of the “sadness of the past”. However, the perspective advanced in this article suggests that nostalgia – while characterising the emotive relevance of the past *per se* – does not qualify the directional motivation or emotional significance of that ‘longing’ for the past as such, which can be more or less melancholic in nature but still be preferred over the present.

Further, corporate nostalgia can overlap with different modes of referring to the past as well that are often, especially in corporate-marketing and communication contexts, positively charged. However, corporate nostalgia is not a necessary condition for a positively narrated corporate history or time-honoured corporate traditions as such. Thus, it is to some degree a secondary contingent mode in the context of the other forms of referencing the corporate past introduced here. Within the marketing and management canons, there are many significant articles on the domain (e.g., Gabriel, 1993; Goulding, 2001; Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Holbrook and Schindler, 2003). The broader social sciences literature is also significant (e.g., Davis, 1977; Strangleman, 1999; Pickering and Keightley, 2006). Our understanding advanced here draws on both literatures.

Corporate provenance

Corporate provenance refers to the historical origins of an organisation that represent a kind of spatio-temporally and culturally *situated past*. It is ‘*all that is rooted*’ in a particular version of the past that is relevant for contemporary purposes and concerns. Corporate provenance conflates temporal beginnings with cultural belonging, thus representing a recurrent theme in regard to identity and identification in corporate-level marketing contexts exemplified by the importance accorded to the corporate founder or the founding stages of an organisation (Blombäck and Brunninge, 2009).

Generally, the concept is predicated on the significance accorded to origins and primordial roots (Lowenthal, 1985; Lowenthal, 1998) within society in general that reflects the “special mnemonic status of beginnings” (Zerubavel, 2004, p. 101) and the importance of ‘origin myths’ and ‘founding ancestors’ for the constitution and legitimation of collective identities (Zerubavel, 2004). Our understanding of corporate provenance is partially informed by and relates to the corporate marketing and marketing literature on the importance of (corporate) brand origin (e.g., Thakor and Kohli, 1996; Wilson, 2005; Simms and Trott, 2006; Balmer, 2011c).

It is another secondary mode of referencing the past (similar to corporate nostalgia) that may inform (or is informed by) corporate history, corporate tradition, and collective memories as much as corporate heritage derived from a company’s origins ‘in a time and in a place’.

Corporate heritage

Arguably, drawing on the interdisciplinary field of heritage studies (see Lowenthal, 1998; Graham *et al.*, 2000; Howard, 2003; Smith, 2006; Bendix, 2009) corporate heritage as introduced and explicated within the canon (Balmer *et al* 2006; Balmer 2009; 2011b, 2011c, 2013) is defined as all the traits and aspects of an organisation that link its past, present, and future in a meaningful and relevant way. Thus, it refers to some aspect of an organisation’s past that is still deemed by current internal and/or external stakeholders to be relevant and meaningful for contemporary concerns and purposes but concurrently perceived as worth to be maintained and nurtured for future generations; it is the selectively *appropriated and valorised past* of a company or ‘*all that is (still) relevant*’ in the light of contemporary concerns and purposes.

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What distinguishes corporate heritage from the other modes of referencing the past is that the latter are all retrospective in nature, despite the important notion of being similarly constituted in the light of present concerns. Corporate heritage instead is appropriated and valorised not only because of its retrospective link between past and present (as an inherited legacy) but concurrently also because it is perceived as relevant for future generations whoever they may be (as a bequeathed legacy). Although, corporate traditions, for instance, are as well predicated on the notion of intergenerational exchange, their symbolic relevance and legitimacy in the present is solely based on their reference to the past. Corporate heritage, however, derives its legitimacy and relevance for the present retrospectively from its link with the past but at the same time from its prospective link to the future.

Hence, corporate heritage is transtemporal (Balmer *et al.*, 2006; Urde *et al.*, 2007; Balmer 2011c; 2013) in that it refers to the three organisational timeframes of past, present, and future at once and as such constitutes a different conceptual category altogether. Corporate heritage may draw on the other forms of referencing the past (e.g., corporate history or traditions being ‘ennobled’ as heritage, see Bendix, 2009), but it expands their temporal reach and relevance by valuing the past not only for its *contribution to the present* but also for its *role in the present* as well as its *potential role for the future* of an organisation. Consequently, corporate heritage is constantly imbued with new value (i.e., valorised). Further, due to its transtemporal qualities, the notion of corporate heritage is closely associated with questions of corporate identity and identification for which actual or perceived temporal continuity are a fundamental conceptual building block in general (Albert and Whetten, 1985; see Balmer and Greyser, 2003).

[INSERT FIGURE 1]

Having discussed the different basic concepts of referencing the corporate past figure 1 schematically depicts and synthesises the dynamic interrelationships between them (this is represented by the double arrows between the concepts in figure 1). Thus, the corporate past represents the broadest and most basic concept that provides the traces and sources that are (and need to be) appropriated in one way or another in order to be of relevance for corporate marketing and communication (depicted at

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the bottom of figure 1 as the 'base' for the other concepts). Corporate memory instead functions as a kind of 'filter' and as a conceptual 'bridge' in between the corporate past per se and the three interlinked primary ways in which the corporate past can be articulated for corporate marketing and communication purposes: as corporate history, as corporate tradition, and as corporate heritage.

While all three modes draw on corporate memories – which make the corporate past as such accessible – corporate history, corporate tradition, and corporate heritage are also mutually linked in a dynamic way in that they potentially reinforce or contradict each other. Corporate heritage has the additional advantage, in instrumental terms, of being at once not only retrospective (i.e., past-present link) but also prospective linking past, present and future in a meaningful way.

The remaining two concepts of corporate nostalgia and corporate provenance are secondary or contingent modes that more or less underpin the others (indicated by the dotted frame in figure 1). As such, corporate memories and their translations into corporate history, corporate tradition, or corporate heritage can have varying degrees of emotive import (i.e., corporate nostalgia) and can vary in regard to their temporal situatedness in cultural and spatial terms (i.e., corporate provenance).

The transition between the different concepts is characterised by interpretative processes (again indicated by the double arrows in figure 1) at the individual and collective level. These multiple interpretations and provide companies with a strategic opportunity to re-interpret aspects of their past in the light of contemporary concerns and purposes but potentially also impose strategic constraints in regard to the various interpretations amongst internal and external stakeholders that may lead to conflicting accounts of the corporate past. This is irrespective of whether the corporate past is constituted as corporate memory at large or in more specific terms as corporate history, as corporate tradition, or indeed as corporate heritage. Thus, we argue that a better understanding of these phenomena – individually and in conjunction – is conceptually and instrumentally warranted.

Theoretical contribution

This article makes several theoretical contributions to the nascent area of corporate-level marketing from a dedicated total corporate communication perspective, particularly in regard to its transtemporal orientation:

- i. Advances extant work which detailed the repertoire of concepts and noted their instrumental significance by further highlighting their foundational significance
- ii. Extends our comprehension of the multiple ways in which an organisation's past can be understood and scrutinised
- iii. Provides greater conceptual clarity, consistency and depth vis-à-vis the temporal dimensions of organisations in corporate marketing/communications contexts purposes
- iv. Introduces an enhanced conceptual lenses that highlight different aspects in which the past can be relevant in corporate marketing/communications purposes
- v. Details, confirms and advances the nature of corporate heritage as a foundational concept by virtue of its transtemporal orientation as indicated by Balmer et al. (2006); Urde et al. (2007) and Balmer (2011c; 2013) by clearly delineating it from the other solely retrospectively orientated foundational corporate-level constructs referring to an organisation's past.

Practical implications

The repertoires of the corporate past framework introduced here has potential practical relevance for practitioners in the following ways:

- i. Details how a company's past can be relevant to stakeholders
- ii. Explains the different ways in which the past can be communicated to them.
- iii. Explicates how the past is not a mere factually given but can be malleable for strategic and communication purposes
- iv. Reveals the past represents a resource that can variously be – discovered, rediscovered but also invented and appropriated.
- v. Shows how the past can be differentiated in terms of how it is known, told, performed, felt, and made relevant for and by stakeholders.

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- vi. Presents numerous instrumental opportunities since an organisation's past manifests in different forms.
- vii. Sensitises managers in terms of the emotive power of historical references such as nostalgia while corporate provenance indicates the important role of belonging.
- viii. Reveals the need for managers to go beyond narrated histories and written documents when trying to uncover and appropriate the corporate past and should marshal oral stories and anecdotes as much as rituals, customs etc.
- ix. Provides a concise and succinct framework that can guide corporate marketing/communication practice and consultancy work.

Future research

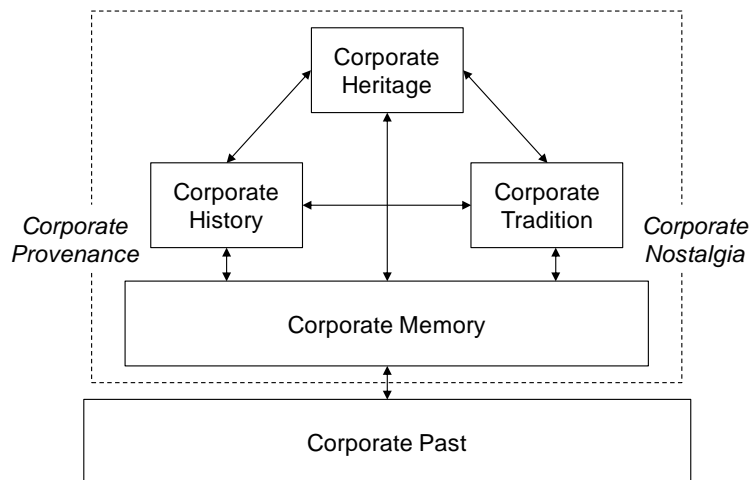
In terms of future research, the repertoires of the corporate past perspective, which substantially expands and elaborates extant conceptual insights (e.g., Balmer 2011c; 2013), can be further developed. The nascent character of the corporate heritage domain means that the potential for theoretical, conceptual, and instrumental advances on the territory is vast. Based on our framework of foundational concepts, different aspects and dimensions of an organisation's temporality and historicity can be more fully highlighted and scrutinised within the corporate marketing and corporate communications domains.

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Figure 1. The repertoires of the corporate past, schematic framework**Table 1.** Towards repertoires of the corporate past, development stages in the literature

| Developmental stage of concepts | Key conceptual contribution | Key article |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Stage 1: Recognition | Reflection on the strategic relevance of the past and identification of institutional heritage as an organisational/corporate phenomenon based on case-study work on monarchies as corporate brands | Balmer, Greyser and Urde (2006) |
| Stage 2: Introduction | Development of corporate heritage brands and brands with a heritage as distinct branding types; development of instrumental framework for their identification and management; differentiation between heritage and history | Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) |
| Stage 3: Synthesis | Identification of different aspects of the past as a corporate marketing and communication phenomenon; introducing the umbrella concept of historical references and developing propositions | Blombäck and Brunninge (2009) |
| Stage 4: Differentiation | Elaboration of corporate heritage and its delineation from other past-related corporate-level constructs; introduction of corporate heritage identities as distinct identity type | Balmer (2011c) |
| Stage 5: Consolidation & Expansion | Identification of different perspectives and developmental stages re the relevance of the past within corporate marketing and communication; differentiation between instrumental and foundational past-related corporate-level concepts; integration of latter within a comprehensive dynamic framework | This article |

Table 2. Balmer's (2011c, p. 1383) tentative categorisation of past-related corporate-level concepts

Figure/table omitted here for copyright reasons.

Table 3. The repertoires of the corporate past, foundational past-related corporate-level concepts

| Foundational Concept | Succinct explanation | Conceptual explanation | Pragmatic explanation | Temporal focus | Conceptual category |
|----------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| Corporate past | <i>"All that ever happened"</i> | discovered, rediscovered and invented past | Resourcing | Retrospective | base |
| Corporate memory | <i>"All that is known (accessible)"</i> | remembered and forgotten past | Knowing | Retrospective | bridge |
| Corporate history | <i>"All that is told"</i> | narrated and storied past | Telling | Retrospective | primary |
| Corporate tradition | <i>"All that is done"</i> | enacted and embodied past | Doing | Retrospective | primary |
| Corporate nostalgia | <i>"All that is felt"</i> | emotive past | Feeling | Retrospective | secondary |
| Corporate provenance | <i>"All that is rooted"</i> | situated past | Belonging | Retrospective | secondary |
| Corporate heritage | <i>"All that is (still) relevant"</i> | appropriated and valorised past | 'Relevancing' (making relevant) | Retrospective and Prospective | primary |