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Article

A Sectorial Validation and Application of a Conceptual Framework for Creating a Brand Management Strategy

Allan Cid ^{1,*} , Pierre Blanchet ¹ , François Robichaud ² and Nsimba Kinuani ³

¹ NSERC Industrial Research Chair on Eco-Responsible Wood Construction (CIRCERB), Department of Wood and Forest Sciences, Laval University, 2425 De La Terrasse Street, Quebec City, QC G1V 0A6, Canada; pierre.blanchet@sbf.ulaval.ca

² Forest Economic Advisors, LLC, 298 Great Road, Littleton, MA 01460, USA; frobichaud@getfea.com

³ FPInnovations, 1055 Peps Street, Quebec City, QC G1V 4C7, Canada; nsimba.kinuani@fpinnovations.ca

* Correspondence: allan.cid-olivares.1@ulaval.ca

Abstract: Brands can be one of a company's most valuable intangible assets and a lever to generate value. As a source of added value, a brand should be strategically built and managed. To fully take advantage of the benefits that the brand provides, it is necessary to propose a brand management strategy. A conceptual framework was developed by the authors as an alternative to propose a brand management strategy according to a specific business scenario. The objective of this study is to validate this conceptual framework and apply it to propose a brand management strategy in a specific business scenario. For this purpose, a sectorial cross-validation was developed by triangulating the application of the framework to two data collection methods: (1) interviews and (2) a literature review. The results suggested that decomposing a complex business scenario into single-dimensional business scenarios can help to propose, enhance, or reframe a brand strategy. The results also suggested that some brand dimensions can be used to lever other brand dimensions, such as brand relationship, which is at the top of CEO/CMO priorities in this field. This work contributes to theory by cross-validating the conceptual framework for creating brand management strategies through triangulation.

Keywords: branding; brand management; brand management strategy; Business-to-Business (B2B); ingredient branding; sectorial branding; export branding; alliance branding; construction branding; SME (Small and Medium Enterprise) branding



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1. Introduction

Brands can be one of a company's most valuable intangible assets [1]. Nowadays, the valuation of a strong brand, such as Apple [2], can be the same as the gross domestic product (GDP) of a country like Vietnam or Malaysia (34th and 35th biggest economies in the world) [3]. This happens because the functionality of a brand has evolved from being a promotional device for goods and services to enabling several new approaches that go beyond commercial activity [4]. A brand has also been designated to act as a lever to generate value [5]. As a source of added value, a brand should be strategically built and managed [6,7]. In other words, to fully take advantage of the benefits that the brand provides, it is necessary to propose a brand strategy [6].

Several branding approaches and their definitions can be found in the literature, such as the personal brand, corporate brand, investor brand, industry brand, NGO brand, government brand, local brand, and national brand, among others [5]. In this study, the brand is defined as a multidimensional construct [8] that links an object (product, service, institution, etc.) to a subject (customer, company, institution, etc.) [5,9]. It is important to understand that a brand is not a trademark, which is defined as "any word, name, symbol or device that identifies and distinguishes the source of the goods of one party from those

of others” [10]. In this study, a trademark is considered to be one of the dimensions of the brand [8].

As various branding approaches exist, myriad brand management models or frameworks are currently available to shape the strategy of brands [1,11–13]. Nonetheless, there is a limited number of models or frameworks that are consistently considered in the literature [9]. Additionally, most of these models or frameworks are based on general approaches (usually for corporate size) [5,14–17] or single-sided business scenarios [18–21]. In this study, a business scenario is defined as the outline of a set of circumstances that could occur within a business strategy [22].

A conceptual framework was developed to propose an analytical brand management strategy that considers the specific business scenario it will face (Figure 1) [9]. The aim of this study is to cross-validate this conceptual framework through theoretical and practical application and triangulation in a specific business scenario. This framework was chosen because (1) it is based on an analytical model defining the brand and its dimensions (or themes) [8], (2) it identifies non-evident relationships among these brand dimensions, and (3) it proposes an unbiased algorithm to analyze a business scenario.

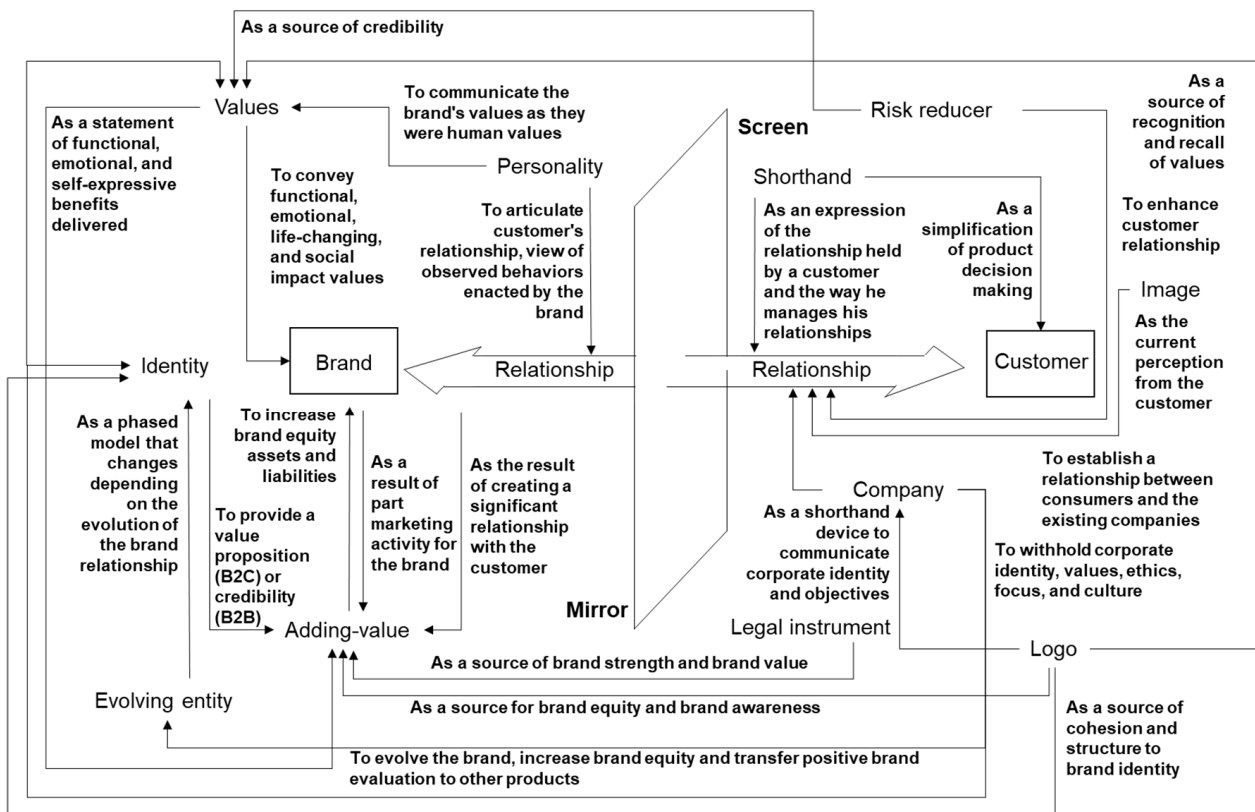


Figure 1. Brand dimension relationship diagram [9].

The specific business scenario chosen for this study was the wooden prefabricated construction industry of Quebec. Quebec and Canada have been promoting wooden prefabricated building construction through private and public programs [23,24]. However, neither Quebec’s nor Canada’s wooden prefabricated industry has stated a clear position regarding their positioning approach in export markets, and there is a latent opportunity to address these markets and position Canada or Quebec as a world leader in this matter [25]. Therefore, Quebec’s prefabricated wooden construction industry aims to develop a sector brand strategy to take advantage of the benefits of branding and address export markets [25].

The use of prefabricated building construction worldwide has been significantly growing in the last decade and seems to be keeping this pace into the upcoming years [26].

The current accelerated population growth [27] and the rural-to-urban migration phenomenon [28–30] are possible factors that may influence the increase in the usage of prefabricated building construction. Combining this with a growing middle-class demand for affordable construction, demand in construction rose to a maximum unseen in history [31,32]. There are several advantages of using prefabricated building construction methods, such as the possibility of achieving better construction quality, higher customer satisfaction, or even improved technical precision [33].

To take advantage of these benefits, Quebec’s prefabricated wooden construction industry stated the intention to develop a sector brand strategy in 2019, but no strategy has been developed since then [25,34]. The main research question of this study can be expressed as follows: Is it possible to profit from the advantages that the brand provides to increase the exports of wooden prefabricated construction companies by considering their current business scenario?

2. Materials and Methods

The conceptual framework for creating brand strategies was used to determine the importance of (1) 12 different brand-specific dimensions and (2) the relationships among these 12 different brand-specific dimensions by considering a specific business scenario. This framework was used to explicitly describe the researcher’s lens as a means to ensure confirmability [35,36].

The conceptual framework was validated in the construction sector through the triangulation of two data collection methods (interview and literature review).

2.1. Sampling

Parent population: The Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) or Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) of wooden prefabricated construction SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) in Quebec from two distinct groups: modular prefabricated construction (5) and prefabricated structures (6).

Sample: The CEOs or CMOs of wooden prefabricated construction SMEs in Quebec as listed in the industrial information bank of the Industrial Research Center of Quebec (CRIQ) that:

- figure under NAICS codes 321215 (Engineered Wood Member Manufacturing) and 321992 (Prefabricated Wood Building Manufacturing), which are the most frequent codes for wooden prefabricated building construction firms;
- claim to export or be willing to export outside Canada, as this study focuses on companies willing to export outside Canada;
- declare sales figures between CAD 10 (Canadian dollars) million and CAD 100 million, as this study focuses on PMEs with a higher degree of industrialization and that are ready to export without struggling with additional demand.

No agreements or payments were made to the participants; all institutional ethical standards were met under the Laval University ethical certificate no 2022-464.

Sample size and data collection: 10 interviews over a population of 11 companies fitting the selection criteria. This was performed to reach a high level of representativeness and reach data saturation [37,38]. Interviews were recorded for further analysis.

2.2. Research Design

To validate that the chosen companies satisfied the selection criteria, a screening pre-interview was performed. Respondents were eager to reply and provide interesting information to build the business scenarios these companies face. These questions were intended to corroborate the companies’ sizes, the usage of ingredient brands in their products, if the companies exported their products, if the companies promoted their country of origin in export markets, if the companies were part of any alliance, and if the companies operated in a B2B business scenario.

As a first step, the conceptual framework for creating brand strategies was applied empirically to (1) find the singularities that condition the prefabricated building sector, and (2) find the relationships among the 12 different brand-specific themes. This was accomplished by (1) conducting semi-structured interviews with CEOs or CMOs of companies working in the wooden prefabricated building business sector in the Province of Quebec, (2) analyzing each brand dimension, and (3) unveiling relationships among these brand dimensions. Interviews were performed between 27 January 2023 and 22 February 2023, and the entire set of questions is shown in Appendix A. This step and the sampling process were designed to ensure transferability according to Shenton's questions for transferability [36]. Additionally, this step ensured credibility through data saturation [39].

As a second step, the conceptual framework for creating brand strategies was applied theoretically to find the relationships among the 12 different brand-specific themes in the available literature as follows: (1) Scientific articles were selected according to the singularities that condition the prefabricated building sector, and (2) these articles were analyzed to find the relationships among the 12 different brand-specific themes. The articles used for this analysis were selected from searches including a combination of the keywords: brand and branding with the keywords: construction, prefabricated construction, and offsite construction.

As a third step, the results of the empirical and theoretical approaches were compared to find commonalities and divergences between both application paths and work as a triangulation method [40] to ensure credibility [39]. Other researchers and all the authors also reviewed the results to verify the interpretation and offer other interpretations of the results to ensure credibility [39] and dependability [35,39].

Additionally, the analysis of the scientific literature regarding Business-to-Business (B2B), Ingredient (InBrand), Country-of-Origin (COO), Small and Medium Enterprise (SME), Alliance, and Construction branding was presented as a guideline for the development of a tailored sectorial brand.

3. Results

The results are presented as follows: (1) Company categorization according to the validation pre-interview, (2) preliminary notions of the brand and its perceived importance for the companies, (3) a unidimensional triangulation of the interviews and literature showing convergence, divergence, and contradiction (when possible) among the sources to preserve the respondent's anonymity and strategic information, (4) an interdimensional analysis of the unidimensional triangulation to discover the relationships among the brand dimensions in the interview process and literature.

3.1. Company Categorization

Companies were able to sell between CAD 10 and 100 million. Companies claimed between 50 and 500 employees.

Companies claimed to buy branded materials, such as Tyvek. Most of the companies exported to the United States northeastern region because of transportation costs and proximity. Only one company claimed to export in Europe, Latin America, and Africa. The joint market reach varied among single-family, multifamily, commercial, and agricultural. Companies declared that between 5% and 25% of their total sales came from international trade.

Companies declared that price and knowing the local building codes were primary in the American market. Companies declared COO important in the market, as initiatives such as Buy America and Buy American fostered intranational transactions in low-demand periods. Companies declared that branding could be important if it sold at higher prices or provided another economic advantage.

Companies claimed to be part or willing to be part of an export alliance to foster their sales figures. Companies already taking part in international trade alliances pointed to adopting a common quality control process performed by a third party to increase

credibility abroad, similar to the results observed in [41]. Some companies remarked on the need to cherry-pick international buyers and sellers according to the trade missions, thus proposing to meet companies willing to innovate or take the risk of importing. One company declared that they were willing to be part of an export alliance that only included territories in which they do not operate.

Prefabricated structure companies claimed to perform only B2B interactions abroad. Modular prefabricated construction companies claimed to perform B2B and B2C interactions, where B2C interactions were specific to single-family housing.

3.2. *The Brand and Its Importance*

According to the literature review, there is no consensus on the definition of a brand [11]. “There are as many brand definitions as there are experts working in the field of branding” [17]. In this work, a brand is defined as a multidimensional construct, and it is composed as a series of themes, or dimensions, as proposed by De Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley [8].

To the interviewees, a brand is the client’s first thought when in contact with the product/service: what is its activity and reputation. A brand makes you known, recognized, notorious. A brand is “who we are and what we do,” as one interviewee declared. A strong brand must be durable. A strong brand is fragile and must be built and maintained. A brand takes a long time and effort to be built, and no time to be destroyed. As a brand is expensive to build and easy to destroy, it must be the endeavor of the CEO and their team.

The brand is pertinent to the CEO/CMO role. The brand can be an asset to the company when it is developed and a weakness when it is not. The interviewees declared themselves willing to develop their own brands or even the sectorial brand but unable to do it. The whole industry lacks branding development as a sector and as separate companies. The brand is seen as an important carrier of a message: to be recognized and associated with values like quality and reliability. A brand must provide continuity of the promise and the mission of the company over time; if not, customers will become confused. A brand and a company’s history are linked and must cohere. The brand can position a company in the market and is able to open the doors to established and new clients and other stakeholders. A brand can help a company maintain a sense of belonging within the company, and it works as a tool to recruit people.

Brands are important anywhere, according to the interviewees. Some companies expressed that brand development requires accountability and is not taken charge of within the company or sector. Other companies took responsibility for developing their brands in a B2B or B2C approach, but more as an employee recruitment tool, as the construction sector is changing itself because of the lack of labor. According to one interviewee, the sector looks to define its own brand identity, as the industry itself is less developed than other industrial sectors, such as the car industry. The brand can suffer from a bad reputation from the past. B2B brand development is important in the industrial and multifamily sector as it proved to sell projects inland or abroad. American customers generally appreciate rapidity in quoting, questions, support, sales, and delivery. Quebec companies know this and focus their sales experience on quickly replying to American clients, even faster than local ones.

3.3. *Unidimensional Analysis*

All interviews and articles were analyzed according to the 12 dimensions proposed by De Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley [8]. The results of this analysis are presented below in separate paragraphs that synthesize the points of view of the interviewees and the literature regarding each dimension. These results are summarized in Table 1. For the definition of each dimension refer to [8,9].

Table 1. Review of the 12 dimensions that define a brand in a construction business scenario according to the interview process and literature review.

Dimension	Interview Process	Literature
Legal Instrument	Not specified	Not specified
Logo	To express the name, heritage, origin, and nature of products	As a recognition and awareness element, such as the name, logo, and origin in the customer's mind
Company	To develop brand recognition and brand relationship	To strengthen existing relationships, improve brand loyalty and brand equity
Shorthand	To remind functional characteristics such as cost, skill, quality, speed of response, support, and delivery, and emotional characteristics such as trustworthiness and peace of mind	As a recall of a good or bad experience, influencing word of mouth (WoM)
Risk Reducer	To express trustworthiness as a key value	As a driver for decision making: a customer tends to repeat the transaction when satisfaction is experienced
Identity System	To express a company's core elements and values, such as trustworthiness and longevity	To express the organization's claims about itself and as a source of competitiveness
Image	Known to express brand identity and leverage brand relationships, but unused	As the result of the direct experience with the construction brands
Value System	To embrace what current customers expect and to express the owners' values	As a source of the likelihood of commitment when values are shared by the company and the customer
Personality	To express competence and accountability	To make customers emotionally attached to the brand
Relationship	To ensure the company's longevity through a long-term relationship with the customer	To develop a long-term relationship with the customer
Adding Value	As the effect of dealing with customers and their projects	To deliver value and build mutually profitable relationships with customers
Evolving Entity	As a self-definition experience to ensure the company's longevity	Socially mature companies define their role in society by incorporating social responsibility principles in business conduct

3.3.1. Legal Instrument

Brands were not considered as a legal instruments in the sector. Even legal instruments were not widely considered in the sector as a competitive advantage. Legal aspects of the business were mostly used to agree on how to manage each project and were based on a good understanding of the parts.

The literature review regarding this dimension found neither specific nor non-specific information.

3.3.2. Logo

Brand as a logo was used as a recognition and brand awareness element by all the companies. The logo dimension was usually represented as a mix of the name and the symbols representing the company, its products, its origin, or the family that developed it. Most of the companies explained that they developed a rebranding process regarding the redesign of the logo, the colors, and their names. None of them mentioned developing the strategic part of the branding process, but they recognized the importance of it.

In the literature, the logo dimension is defined as a recognition and awareness element, so that the consumer can associate the logo, the name, and similar connotations (to the brand's perceived image) in their mind [42]. As a connotation, country of origin is important regarding low-quality perceived origins in construction [43].

3.3.3. Company

The interviews mentioned national company recognition as the most developed facet of the brand as a company dimension. Company recognition was perceived to grow in time, decrease with distance, and increase with relationships and sales volume. Company recognition was married also to reputation, a variable commonly named as the main goal of the company. One interviewee mentioned that there is a trade-off between growing the

brand recognition through a working relationship and promoting it, as the first is usually seen as slower and the second one can damage the brand. All companies agreed that company recognition is better harvested through business relationships through projects.

In the literature, brand as a company means its offerings and promise of a certain quality level for customers [44,45]. The enhanced service capabilities and delivery of companies strengthen existing relationships [46] and improve brand loyalty [42,46] and brand equity [43].

3.3.4. Shorthand

The brand as a shorthand of functional characteristics normally referred to cost, skill at developing complex projects, quality of products, speed of response, speed of support and delivery. The brand referred to levels of trustworthiness and the peace of mind of the client, either B2B or B2C. All interviewees adhered to the fact that the purchase decision in B2B clients referred to trustworthiness and cost.

Only one of the studied articles referred indirectly to brand as a shorthand. Boroumand [46] stated that the brand acts as a shorthand for a good or bad experience and is reflected as a good or bad word of mouth.

3.3.5. Risk Reducer

Trustworthiness was the key value that companies wanted to express in the field. The brand worked as a risk reducer as it recalls how trustworthy a company is. Having a history of consistent quality was a key to developing trustworthiness, according to all interviewees, and most of them expressed it as a personal and company value. Ways of development trustworthiness varied from company to company, but all of them insisted that its development takes time and a joint effort with customers.

In the literature, a brand as a risk reducer works when customers tend to repeat the transaction when satisfaction is experienced [46,47] and when used as a decision-making driver [48,49]. A brand can also be a risk increaser, depending on the materials used during construction [44].

3.3.6. Identity

Brand identity was seen, perceived, and conceived as a synonym of the company identity. Companies focused on developing their personal signature in terms of core elements, and most of them mirrored what they thought should be the best deliverable values within the market. Some companies took brand identity to the next level and planned it according to their mission and vision, strategically setting stepping stones toward long-term durability and longevity.

In the literature, brand identity is seen in a myriad of divergent options. For Subram, brand identity is the organization's claims about itself [43]. For Boroumand, brand identity comes from customer satisfaction, which results from doing the work correctly and competently [46]. For Aigbabvoa et al., the construction firms lack a brand identity system [49]. Cizmeci et al. explored brand identity in digital media and concluded that the website holds the most reliable content about brand identity [42]. For Kinnunen, identity is a source of competitiveness for company leaders [50].

3.3.7. Image

Brand identity was a primary duty for companies within the sector. Nonetheless, the interviewees commonly admitted a lack of energy and focus put into deciphering brand image in customers' minds. Only one company claimed to invest in gathering the customer's perspective of brand image as a usual activity. The common feeling was that the perceived brand image is coherent with the brand identity conveyed, as B2B relationships tend to be close and frank in this field.

In the literature, brand image is the result and expectation of the direct experience with construction brands [43,46,48] and is the benefit of collaboration relationships [44].

Regarding prefabricated construction as a sector, the initial image remains and needs to be changed, according to Aigbavboa et al. [49]. Brand image is also seen as the goal and result of the communication strategy in construction [42,45]. Another finding is that brand image can increase owing to investing in green practices [50,51].

3.3.8. Value System

Brand values were strategically set as (1) a mirror of what companies think the market expects, and (2) a projection of the owner's personal values. Values such as trustworthiness, accountability, quality, integrity, reliability, respect, sincerity, and honesty were the most repetitive values. Values specific to companies included service, seriousness, security, engagement, passion, societal contribution, proximity, loyalty, excellence, agility, cohesion, and innovation. The most expected values in international markets were trustworthiness, accountability, and sincerity.

In the literature, brand as a value system provides a rational set of values to construction firms [49]. The values of a firm tend to be consistent with the values of the society in which it functions [51], and top management can extend their values to the company [50]. In construction, values are contextual: they change according to the qualities of the user [42,44]. Common values between the customer and service provider increase the likelihood of commitment [46]. Social values may strengthen the brand after expectations of quality, usefulness, and timeliness are met [45].

3.3.9. Personality

Although brand personality was recognized as important in B2B relationships, it was an unexploited dimension of brand within the sector. Brand personality was usually described as a caricatured form of the company owners and tended to be unintended and inherited rather than strategically planned. The personalities described were different for each company, but competence and accountability remained as common elements for all of them.

In the literature, brand personality can make customers emotionally attached and loyal to the company [45]. In construction, personality facets such as communication skills, customer orientation, and response to complaints offer customer satisfaction [46].

3.3.10. Relationship

Brand relationship was unanimously recognized as the core brand dimension in the sector. Although important, brand relationships were managed in many ways, just as human beings managed their relationships [16]. Customers' attitudes toward the brands varied from promiscuity to blind loyalty, depending on the company's perspective of B2B relationships. The most common answer was that brand relationship management was conducted as a partnership looking for common success and future business together, when possible. Although many companies claimed to segment clients regarding the likelihood of continuing to work together, one claimed to inform clients about the segment they occupied in their ranking, letting clients manage their relationship as a fruit of their merits. The brand acted as the carrier of the company's relationship within the sector, not only with the clients, but with the whole ecosystem, including workers, competitors, R&D institutions, providers, and lawmakers.

In the literature, one article pointed to the fact that the construction sector is characterized by one-off contracts and a failure to develop longer-term relationships between the stakeholders [51]. Despite this, there is a common opinion that the brand's goal is to develop a valuable long-term relationship with the customer [43,44,46,49]. Brand awareness level can define the customer's relationship with the brand [42]. Long-term relationships are made through customer satisfaction, collaboration [46], and enhanced communication [44].

3.3.11. Adding Value

Added value was seen as an effect of dealing with customers and projects and specific characteristics among the personnel. These characteristics were listening to the client, assisting the project at every stage, being flexible, and providing a professional service. Most of the interviewees aimed to deliver a peace of mind experience, which they stated as their brand-adding value. Some companies aimed to have a brand strong enough to charge more. Only one claimed to charge what they decided to charge as a fair price to permit their company development and their customers.

In the literature, brand is set to deliver value and build mutually profitable relationships with the customer [43] as a source of differentiation [46]. Cost, construction time, and quality are appreciated drivers that deliver value [49], provide differentiation, and enhance competitiveness [44].

3.3.12. Evolving Entity

All companies declared themselves to be in an evolutive process and be conscious of it. This process was driven by a self-definition experience, where companies took responsibility for their actual evolutive state. Some companies have been working around this concept and rerouted their evolutive path strategically. One company claimed to be in a constant evolution, declaring that this movement happens because of being one step ahead of everyone and keeping their positioning as their leitmotif.

In the literature, socially mature companies lead the way in defining their role in society by incorporating social responsibility principles into business conduct [45].

3.4. Multidimensional Analysis

First, the dimension characteristics presented in Table 1 were compared to the framework represented in Figure 1 to propose a detailed view of how brand management strategies are driven in the wooden prefabricated construction industry through theory triangulation as proposed by Patton [40] and Mathison [52] (Figure 2).

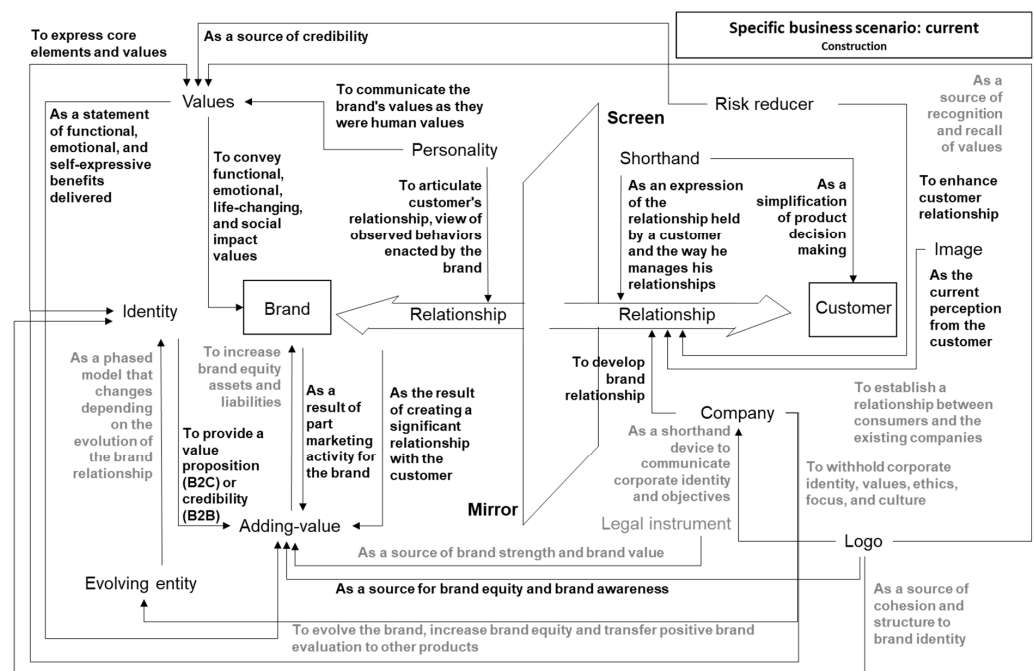


Figure 2. Result of the application of the framework for creating brand management strategies to the triangulated data between the interview process and literature analysis in construction [9].

Even though the companies within the sector were not currently exploiting the legal instrument dimension of the brand, it can be exploited to support the adding-value dimen-

sion by creating a legal barrier or refocusing the niche, for example. According to all the interviewees, the way wooden prefabricated building projects are developed is simple and known by all the actors. Despite this, one interviewee explained that the industry actors acknowledged this flaw. To mitigate this flaw, a construction quality seal delivered by a third party is under development by a group of companies. Another interviewee commented that his company takes advantage of the legal instrument dimension of the brand in a different market niche. The company developed a series of patented products that are commercialized in home improvement retail stores. Both solutions, divergent in nature, converge upon the main function of the brand as a legal instrument, which is to serve as a source of brand strength and brand value, supporting the adding-value dimension.

The company interviewees focused on the visible facet of the logo, which conveys their name, location, activity, and heritage, among others. Companies were missing the opportunity to express subtle facets that may lever important brand dimensions such as identity, the value system, or the brand as a company.

The brand as a company dimension is important in the construction sector, especially when used to develop and maintain the brand–customer relationship and to express core elements and values. Interviewees frequently stated that their company’s name and reputation were their most important assets to maintain the longevity of their company. One interviewee even declared that their company’s name would help them to employ or propose new technologies in different stages of the production process.

As a company dimension, the brand as a shorthand proved to be an important lever for the relationship dimension. The shorthand dimension offers a simplification of the decision-making process for the customer. This is based on the functional characteristics of the brand, the former experience with the brand, and the way the customer manages his relationships. All the interviewees claimed to promote their functional characteristics, such as their lead time, skill, product quality, and active listening, among others, in an effort to be known by these characteristics. All interviewees declared the will to keep working with customers that valued their relationship and even to avoid problematic customers.

Brand as a risk reducer was another dimension that was completely understood and used in the sector. As a lever of both the value system and the relationship with the customer, it offers a source of credibility and a tool for customers willing to repeat a positive experience with a known brand. The interviewees acknowledged that repetitive positive experiences helped to enhance the brand relationship with the customer, so the relationship itself worked as a risk reduction. An interviewee claimed to work with customers that relied on their relationship and ordered without asking for a bid price.

In construction, the brand identity dimension works as lever for the adding-value and value-system dimensions. This happens because brand identity provides credibility in B2B environments and expresses the core elements and values of the brand. Brand identity was seen, perceived, and conceived as the company identity. Interviewees defined their companies’ brand identity through distinctive values, such as lead time, quality, punctuality, accountability, and business longevity.

Unanimously, brand image was understood and seen as the current perception of the brand identity through the brand–customer relationship dimension. In construction, the brand image dimension is widely acknowledged as a driver for customer expectations, and as the goal and result of investment in promotion strategies. Nonetheless, the sector does not exploit the brand image’s capacity to establish a relationship between consumers and the existing companies. Few companies claimed to try to study and understand their brand image, and this seems to be a general flaw in the sector.

The value-system dimension works as a lever of the adding-value dimension by stating the functional and emotional benefits delivered. Interviewees claimed to state, promote, and demonstrate their values actively, claiming to encompass what values were expected by customers. Three interviewees also claimed to follow self-expressive values related to social accountability as another driver for their actions.

The personality dimension leverages the value system and relationship dimension in construction. This is achieved by communicating the brand's values as human values and articulating the relationship with the customer. Interviewees claimed to manage their brands as they naturally managed their relationships. According to the interviewees, they did not follow a strategic definition of this dimension, missing the opportunity to harness the relationship with the customer or observe the expression of strategically enacted behaviors in the customer. Only one interviewee claimed to unidirectionally harness the power of managing the company's relationships with customers and observe behaviors inspired by the brand personality.

The brand relationship with the customer itself works as a lever of the adding-value dimension when the customer values this relationship. A recurrent consequence of building significant relationships between the brand and the customer was to ensure the company's longevity. Interviewees declared that working closely, honorably, and flexibly are resources for adding value and building the brand relationship. Loyalty and reciprocity were also considered to build mutually profitable relationships after cost, lead time, and quality expectations were met.

The adding-value dimension was recognized and mentioned as the result of six interactions mentioned before in this section. However, little was mentioned about the function of increasing brand equity assets or liabilities on purpose. An interesting fact was that four interviewees claimed to be in position of charging more for their products but decided to provide fair pricing motivated by their sense of loyalty.

The importance of self-definition in the evolving entity dimension was acknowledged in construction. This dimension's strategic definition and exploitation was not consensual in the sector. An interviewee claimed to work continuously in this process as a strategic action to keep their dominance in the sector.

4. Discussion

This study showed that brand relationship was recognized as the core brand dimension in theory and practice. While the literature focused on the process of developing a long-term relationship with the customer as a crucial step, the interviewees emphasized the functionality of this dimension (a long-term relationship with the customer serves to ensure the company's longevity). Current literature reviews validated this finding. Past research aimed to understand how brands affect a firm's performance through the relationship with the customer and its influence on the customer's attitudes and behaviors [12,53].

This study also showed that interdimensional relationships can be used to leverage their impact on the brand relationship. Other authors acknowledged the value of these interdimensional relationships and proposed a myriad of brand management models [5,14,15,17] that encompassed the leverage between brand dimensions. Brand dimension relationships can be used to define business strategies or even to explore different niches or approaches to taking advantage of a brand dimension.

Exploring additional business scenarios can help to understand the development of other niches within the same market. The decomposition in single-sided business scenarios was explored in [9]. This approach provides an accurate description of the functions and relationships among brand dimensions for each business scenario, proposing different alternatives for nurturing the brand management strategy. The trend in past research usually provided (1) a single-sided view of business scenarios regarding a set of arbitrary brand dimensions [20,21,47,48,50,51,54,55], or (2) a complete analysis of brand dimensions for a general business scenario [8,56].

Unexpected results came across during the analysis of interview data. First, national company recognition was mentioned as the most developed facet of the brand as a company dimension. Second, a better understanding of the market and values expected by export market customers would enhance business relationships, thus the export experience and WOM promotion. Third, having a history of consistent quality is key to developing trustworthiness. Fourth, providing common levels of quality, warranty, and customer

support before, during, and after construction would help build a coherent alliance brand by promoting accountability for its promise and increasing credibility. Fifth, expected value was highly important according to the nature of commercial activity experienced in construction projects.

This study found a fragmented answer to the main research question of this article (Is it possible to profit from the advantages that the brand provides to increase the exports of wooden prefabricated construction companies?). According to the results of this research project, the interviewees claimed (1) to be willing to develop their brands or even the sectorial brand but were unable to do it, and (2) some interviewees expressed that brand development requires accountability, and it is not taken within the company or sector. In this case, any brand management strategy adopted should be developed by a competent organization and an accountability process proposed that will mitigate the effects of the current state.

A combined brand management strategy for Quebec's wooden prefabricated construction industry can lever each brand dimension through the relationships offered by the different business scenarios. For example, the ingredient brand, country-of-origin, and alliance approaches may help to lever some brand dimensions that are not currently exploited in the construction business scenario, which in the case of the studied companies, is proposes in both B2B and SME business scenarios.

A series of recommendations for developing a brand management strategy for the wooden prefabricated construction companies in Quebec is summarized in Table 2 as an example of use. These recommendations were developed by (1) decomposing the business scenario into six single-sided business scenarios: B2B, InBrand, COO, SME, Alliance, and Construction; (2) selecting scientific articles related to these fields for the literature review; and (3) analyzing these business scenarios within the conceptual framework.

Table 2. Review of the 12 dimensions that define a brand in a B2B, InBrand, COO, SME, Alliance, and Construction business scenario according to the literature review.

Dimension	Literature Review
Legal Instrument	To add value if taking advantage (InBrand and COO)
	To act as a legal protection against counterfeiting and competition (B2B)
Logo	To communicate complex functional benefits through symbols (B2B, InBrand)
	To communicate origin through symbols (COO, Construction)
	To develop the brand identity (SME)
	To create awareness, recognition, and assurance (Alliance)
Company	As an indicator of quality (Construction)
	To express common and distinctive brand elements to the company (B2B, SME, Construction)
	To express company values to end-customers (InBrand, SME, Alliance)
	To express national perceived values (COO)
Shorthand	To establish brand loyalty and long-term relationships (Construction)
	To summarize a person's feelings toward a business or product (B2B)
	To reach customers with highly differentiated, performant, high-branded value and complex ingredients (InBrand)
	To benefit from the patriotism of domestic customers or from positive stereotypes that foreign customers assign to a product from a country (COO)
Risk Reducer	To develop loyal recurrent customers that promote through word of mouth (WOM) (Construction)
	To ensure legitimate buying decisions (B2B, InBrand, Construction)
Identity System	To reduce the perceived risk of purchasing (COO, Construction)
	To increase awareness and build businesses (B2B, Construction)
	To reduce the chances of substitution (InBrand)
	As a product, as an organization, as a symbol and as a person (SME)
Image	To promote the vision, brand promise, and brand values and to establish a strong visual identity (Alliance)
	As a decision-making criterion (B2B)
	To establish a recognizable reputation (InBrand)
	As an opportunity or a constraint to be handled (COO)
	As a source of added value (Alliance)

Table 2. Cont.

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

The limitations of this study also include the lack of literature on specific business scenarios, such as the Alliance, COO, SME, and Construction brand management scenarios, separately or jointly. Increasing the literature on specific business scenarios will help nourish and question this framework and its applicability.

Future development should focus on increasing the amount of information in the literature and questioning the interviewed companies about value in transactions, communications, and/or other interactions between the brand and the customer.

5. Conclusions

Applying the conceptual framework for creating brand management strategies proved to offer out-of-the-box guidelines to propose, enhance, or reframe a brand strategy by decomposing a complex business scenario into single-dimensioned business scenarios when comparing the empirical and theoretical approaches.

The conceptual framework accurately described the brand dimensions and their relationships in this specific business scenario. Moreover, the framework helped to unveil the importance of these dimensions and their relationships to leverage the brand relationship dimension, which is at the top of CEO/CMO priorities.

Deepening brand strategy development through already applied business scenarios, such as the B2B, SME and Construction, would help leverage undeveloped brand dimensions. For example, including unexplored business scenarios in the brand strategy, such as InBrand, COO, and Alliance, could help to convey a more complex message more simply to a broader audience while endorsing values, awareness, and recognition to the members of the alliance.

Although the interview scheme was designed to understand how brand dimensions were seen by the CEOs/CMOs, other information, such as strategic uncovered needs regarding the branding process, were highlighted during the interview process. The first one was that the interviewees declared the will to strategically develop their own brands/sectorial brands but were unable to do it. The second one was that some companies expressed that brand development takes accountability and was not taken charge of within their companies or the sector.

This work contributes to theory in two ways: first, by cross-validating the conceptual framework for creating brand management strategies through method triangulation, and second, by proposing a custom brand management strategy for the specific business scenario studied.

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Appendix A

This is an English translation of the original interview scheme.

Interview Outline

Project name: Deployment of the industrialized construction sector by increasing the export market and brand image.

- **Introduction**

Presentation of the researcher. Introduction to the project. Presentation of the interviewee.

0. Hello, I am Allan Cid, doctoral candidate at Université Laval. I am here to interview as part of my doctoral project, which is based on the brand concept.

Any information we will discuss will be treated as confidential. In addition, I would like to ask you if this interview could be recorded for a more refined analysis of the data.

I want to start by knowing a little about you, your background and what led you to work in the wooden prefabricated construction industry.

- **Brand Questions**

From now on, we will discuss the concept of branding and how it applies to your area of business.

1. How would you define the brand concept?
2. How important is the brand to you in your role? And for your business?
3. Is the brand of industrialized building companies important in the markets to which you export? If yes, which ones? If not, which ones?
4. How does your company's trademark(s) provide legal protection or ownership of your products against your competitors?
5. How do the name, words, signs, symbols, designs, or a combination thereof serve to identify the goods or services offered by your company to customers? How are these dimensions used to differentiate themselves from competitors regarding customers?
6. How recognized is your company in the markets you serve? From whom? How do you take advantage of this recognition?
7. Does your brand serve as an abbreviated form of certain functional and/or emotional characteristics of your products/services? If so, why? How does the brand serve to quickly recall information from the consumer's memory to accelerate the purchase decision?

8. Does your brand serve to increase customer confidence in your products/services? Does your company have a consistent quality history in the field? Could we say that your brand serves as a tacit guarantee of quality to customers or as a risk reducer?
9. Does your brand have an identity? What will be the essential strategic elements of your brand identity?
10. How do you believe your customers perceive your brand regarding functional and psychological/emotional attributes? Do you think there is consistency between your brand's designed identity and your brand's image in your customer's mind?
11. What personal and cultural values are you seeking to promote through the brand? What personal and cultural values are most typical/sought after in your export markets?
12. How would you describe your brand personality? What authentic elements does it profess? Is the personality expressed by your brand important in your field?
13. Is your brand personality well respected by your customers? How do you perceive the attitude of customers toward your brand? How does your brand manage its relationship with customers? How do your customers manage their relationship with you? Do you feel that the brand intervenes in your relationships with your customers?
14. What level of differentiation in the market do you feel your brand offers you? What non-functional benefits does your brand have concerning your competitors, i.e., the added value of the brand? Can you charge more for your products just by putting your brand on them?
15. If your brand was an evolving entity, what stage do you think it is at? Your brand right now is more like a commodity (stationery), a personality (Jaguar), a reference (Levi's), a company (Virgin), or a policy (The Body Shop)?
16. Thank you very much for your time and help. Do you have any questions for me?

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