

BRAND DELETION DECISION. THE EFFECT OF IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS ON THE DELETION OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Brand deletion (BD) is a topic which is gaining prominence in companies' strategic decision making. In the last decades, as consequence to the need to make decisions on their companies' brand portfolio to align their strategy to the current market-driven low-cost strategy and, at the same time, to compete with valuable brands in the market, managers have been confronted with the need to make BD decisions. However, in spite of its importance, BD is an extremely under-researched subject. In this study, based on strategic management theory, we consider that the process of implementation of the BD decision determines the BD success. In particular, underpinning on organizational literature on implementation, we propose two groups of variables -structural (formalization and decentralization) and interpersonal behavior (consensus and communication)- as antecedents of BD outcomes. To gather information enabling us to test our model, we have obtained a sample of 155 cases of BD provided by 111 respondent firms. Results point out to direct positive relations of both structure and interpersonal behavior variables on BD success. Specifically, formalization favors BD adherence to schedule, decentralization and consensus impacts on the contribution of BD to firm's economic performance and decentralization on acceptance of BD by stakeholders. Meanwhile, communication is the most influential variable since it favors all dimensions of BD outcomes.

Keywords:

Brand deletion, strategic implementation, formalization, decentralization, consensus, communication, brand deletion success.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, managers have been confronted by the need to make decisions on brand portfolio, to align their strategy to the current context-driven low-cost strategy and at the same time, to compete with valuable brands in the market to reach a sustainable competitive advantage. This paradox has led managers to implement a *brand deletion* (BD) decision to re-allocate resources to brands with a better performance, and thus enhance efficiency in their portfolios. For example, Unilever's Path to Growth strategy launched in 1999 and P&G's Brand Consolidation program developed in 2015, are examples of BD decisions taken under the contextual circumstances mentioned above. Unilever opted to focus its efforts on personal care brands, removing 1200 brands from its brand portfolio, whereas P&G fostered a brand portfolio comprised of leading brands within their corresponding segment-markets, eliminating up to 100 brands in a year.

In spite of its importance, BD decision is an extremely under-researched topic. In fact, very little is known about the drivers of BD success. The paucity of literature on BD is reflected in the low number of publications identified. We have found only four theoretical studies. Kumar (2003) adopts a normative approach and outlines a set of recommendations guiding managers during the process of BD. The three other theoretical works, are geared toward identifying the explanatory factors underlying the brand deletion adoption propensity, either in general (Shah, 2015; Varadarajan et al., 2006) or in multinationals (Ketkar and Podoshen, 2015). Empirical papers are also very few. Three of those identified deal with the effects on performance of BD, either considering consumer evaluations as performance measure (Mao et al., 2009), or analyzing the impact on the firm's value looking at the stock market reactions after the announcement of a brand disposal (Depecik et al., 2014; Wiles et al., 2012). Remarkable is Shah (2013)'s work which addresses several questions about the meaning, attributes, and multiple facets of BD, such as form, fit, stakeholders, and implementation of BD. In this research, we embrace this research approach and, between the multiples aspects of BD that it could be interesting to study, we have chosen to analyze the BD implementation.

A key factor of any strategy success is related to its implementation stage, since failing to properly implement a strategy may lead to wasting all kind of resources in planning and in the decision-making stage of strategy (MacLennan, 2010). Leonardi (2015) concluded that a strategy, if not executed, equals to its nonexistence. In addition, organizations fail to implement more than 70 percent of their new strategic initiatives (Miller, 2001). Specifically in elimination literature, the implementation stage is considered critical since it is in this stage that customers will have to deal with the inconvenience resulting from discontinuing products or services (Argouslidis, 2008) and thus, companies have to focus on subsequent internal adjustments and maneuvers to lowering this disruption, trying to find a balance between its own interest to eliminate a product or service and their responsibility to the current customers using it (Argouslidis and McLean, 2004; Harness and Marr, 2001). Previous studies consider that elimination implementation is a complex issue for companies (Avlonitis, 1983) due to its strategic nature and thus, it must be placed in firm's overall marketing strategy given its potential to positively impact firm performance (Gounaris et al., 2006). In line with the literature that highlights the importance of the implementation, in this work we intend to offer empirical evidence about the influence of BD implementation process on BD outcomes.

In particular, underpinning the organizational literature on implementation, we propose two groups of variables –structure and interpersonal behavior– as key components of the BD implementation process. Some authors have approached implementation studying the structure group of variables, without taking account of interpersonal behavior factors, and vice-versa (Skivington and Daft, 1991). This analysis in isolation is affected by a flaw of panoramic perspective, receiving a large number of criticisms based on the lack of study of

effects of the key variables from both views, hindering a proper knowledge of the success or failure of strategy implementation.

In our study, the variables of structure group comprise the *formalization* of the implementation, understood as systematic behavior guided by standardized or normalized procedures, assignment of responsibilities, process monitoring (e.g. setting up deadlines or milestones) and documentation (e.g. an action plan)(Argouslidis and Baltas, 2007; Vorhies and Morgan, 2003), and *decentralization* defined as the delegation of authority from top managers to management levels below (Cristie et al. 2001, Olson et al., 2005). The interpersonal behavior group includes other two variables:*consensus* as the shared understanding of strategic priorities among managers at the top, middle, and/or operational levels of the organization (Kellermanns et al., 2005), and *communication* of the strategy, as dissemination of information related to the strategy, both internally and externally(Christensen et al., 2008).

Related to BD outcomes, the authors are not aware of specific literature, so it may be useful to consider performance aspects based on similarities with product elimination as well as strategic implementation literature. The BD outcomes considered are time related issues, market related outcomes, financial performance and stakeholders reactions to the deletion of the brand.

In summary, in this research we propose to analyze the effect of structural and interpersonal behavior implementation variables of the BD decision on BD outcomes. As stated before, in spite of the importance that BD is gaining in the last decades, this field suffers from a severe lack of attention by scholars and practitioners. Since a strategy (i.e. BD) not adequately implemented may be burdensome to produce the expected strategic results (i.e. BD success), we intend to shed light in this issue adopting an interdisciplinary view and linking a specific stream of strategic implementation research with the product elimination literature to expand the knowledge on the strategy of BD.

2. Theoretical framework

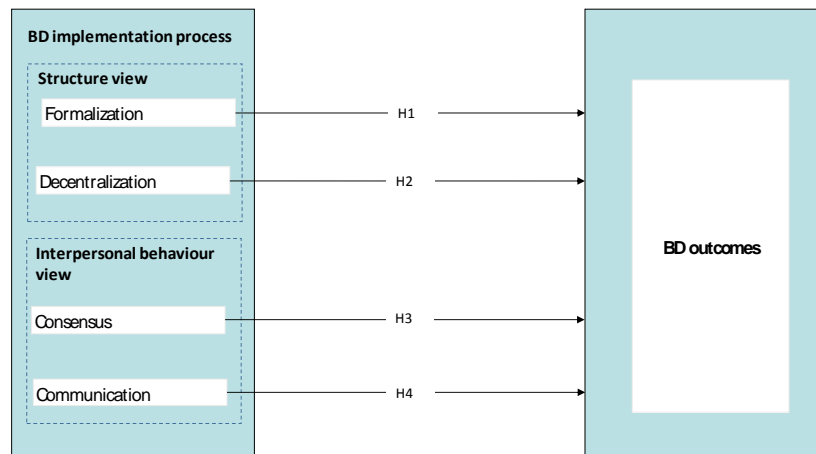
The organizational literature on strategic implementation is eclectic, prevailing two streams, the structural (formal) approach and the behavioral process (informal) approach. On an organizational structural approach, structure is a key factor for strategic implementation (Okumus, 2003; Pertusa-Ortega et al., 2010), meanwhile on a behavioural process approach, Frankwick et al. (1994) and Workman (1993) state that implementation is based on its interpersonal and behavioural factors, having a significant impact on strategic implementation performance.

Over the past years, scholars have pointed out the need to go beyond an isolated, either structural or behavioural formulation of implementation given the flaws detected when conducting previous research, such as the stress of the rational aspect of implementation, setting aside the interaction of the member's behaviour and company's capabilities (Hart, 1992; Pfeffer, 1992). In order to address this need, a number of studies on drivers of strategy implementation success have proposed combining both structure and interpersonal behaviour views to better understand the implementation factors (Bonoma and Crittenden, 1988; Noble, 1999; Noble and Mokwa, 1999; Piercy, 1998; Skivington and Daft, 1991). Both Bonoma and Crittenden (1988) and Piercy (1998) discussed the dual nature of marketing implementation, proposing that both structure and processes issues in implementation are key factors when implementing and strategy, e.g. a BD strategy.

The basic organizing framework for this research on BD implementation is inspired by the structural and interpersonal behaviour views as important general dimensions of strategy implementation (Noble, 1999; Olson et al., 2005; Skivington and Daft, 1991). That is, our work is attached to bringing together both approaches. In particular, to operationalize these two dimensions, we use formalization and decentralization as structural view constructs, and consensus and communication as constructs of the interpersonal behavioural view, establishing a direct relationship between the four constructs and BD outcomes, as seen in

Figure 1.

FIGURE 1.
Conceptual model



Formalization is considered as a key factor for implementation, since it contributes to dispel the uncertainty in the process, to enable a proper coordination of activities by the members involved in, to provide a logical framework to measure the accountability of individuals responsible of implementation and to rationally respond to unexpected circumstances that it may arise (Keller and Lehmann, 2006; Kleinschmidt et al., 2007; McDonald, 1992; Piercy and Morgan, 1994; Simkin, 1996). In line with this stream, the meagerproduct elimination implementation literature has focused on formalization activities within the elimination process, avoiding any other structural and behavioural aspect of the process (Argouslidis, 2008; Harness and Marr, 2004; Avlonitis, 1987; Gounaris et al., 2006). Other researchers have studied the importance of decentralization in strategy, pointing out that delegating authority when implementing a strategy enhance the capacity of managers to provide important data to top managers about the implementation process and also to react accordingly in a more flexible manner. Moreover, the transfer of knowledge in a collaborative internal environment would increase the overall quality of the process (Challagalla et al., 2014; Lin and Germain, 2003; Papadakis and Barwise, 2002). On a behavioural process approach, implementation is based on human interactions such as *strategic consensus*, which it has been considered as a major construct to study since it contributes to increase the motivation during the implementation, a catalyst for the process. When member's proposals and concerns in a strategic process are taken into account, then they are much more likely to actively participate in implementing it. Using consensus as a decision rule means taking the time to find unity on how to proceed before moving forward. It is a synthesizing process which integrates the wisdom of more people, often better than the wisdom of a single member of the group (Bressen, 2007; Eden and Ackermann, 2010; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Markoczy, 2001; Surowiecki, 2004). Also *communication* has been considered as a key construct in the implementation process. Communication leads to strengthening managers' involvement in implementation activities, since they better understand what is expected from them and also they get answered the questions that it may arise. It makes members involved to feel that the organization counts on them for such major task as implementing a strategy and it also sheds light in change processes, getting to properly understand the reasons behind the implementation of a certain strategy, and enhancing commitment and loyalty throughout the process (Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2014; Tourish et al., 2004; Welch and Jackson, 2007).

3. Hypotheses

Effects of formalization on BD outcomes

There is a certain controversy about the value of formalization during the implementation of an elimination strategy. Some studies support the notion that

formalization leads to positive firm outcomes, since the existence of a formal infrastructure could foster rationality and effectiveness, leading to more customer friendly routes to actual product removal (Argouslidis, 2008; Argouslidis and Baltas, 2007; Gounaris et al., 2006). Meanwhile, other studies showed that formality doesn't result in better elimination processes, since it can add complexity and thus difficulties in the implementation process (Argouslidis and McLean, 2001; Gronroos, 1990; Rothe, 1970). In the meta-analysis carried out by Avlonitis and Argouslidis (2012) regarding the theory on product elimination, they concluded that even though the elimination implementation process should be less formalized under specific conditions (e.g., high rates of the turbulence), it seems that overall its positive impact on effectiveness and performance has been proven. In line with this statement, in product portfolio literature, we have found several researches supporting the positive and significant relationship between formality of the implementation process and performance (Cooper, 2008; Kleinschmidt et al., 2007).

The authors are not aware of any study that examines the effect of formalization of BD implementation on BD outcomes. Shah (2013) stated that brand elimination planning process, including implementation, is informal probably due to the infrequent nature of brand deletion, but it was not further researched the degree of formality that underlies the BD execution process and their impact on performance. Although all doubts and the complexity concerning the debate around formalization, we consider that formally scheduling the implementation process, allows managers to properly control strategic milestones during the implementation process, adhering to the timing set up, and thus gaining competitive advantage derived from executing the BD efficiently and effectively. Also internally, formalization would contribute to control expenditures incurred in the BD implementation process (planned and due to contingencies), positively impacting financial performance. Moreover, formalization would contribute to enhance a favorable environment within the organization, due to having an implementation plan which favors the flow of information both horizontal and vertically, reducing uncertainty over the members involved in the BD implementation. Externally, a central question when facing a brand deletion implementation is the role of the customers. It seems that BD strategy arises from the need to improve the efficiency within the company, setting aside the role of the clients as mere spectators. Formalizing the BD implementation process, might allow the company to foresee customer reactions, deploy measures to mitigate potential negative reactions, improving the market performance throughout the process. Therefore, we posit that:

H1: The formalization of BD implementation process has a positive effect on BD outcomes.

Effects of decentralization on BD outcomes

We are not aware of any research about the impact on performance of the inclusion of managers at all levels of the hierarchy in BD process. However, in strategic planning a decentralization approach has proven that it enhances positive relations on organizational outcome, since it increases the organization's ability to renew its competencies and resources to adapt itself to external change (Collier et al., 2004) and it can also enhance positive reinforcement cycles on managers, increasing their trust and attachment on top management, as well as increasing the transparency so it is easier for managers to fully understand the implementation of a specific strategy such as deleting a brand (Chapman and Kihn, 2009; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). Moreover, engaged managers may tend to believe the BD process is more rational and adaptive, and this belief inclines them to behave accordingly. They may feel top management take into account their insights, fostering the feeling of involvement, and thus they would less likely engage in blocking maneuvers, delaying tactics, information filtering, and bargaining activities to hinder the BD implementation process. Decentralization would also bring more managerial capabilities to the execution stage of BD. Since organizations have seen how their brand portfolios have been filled out with more and more brands in the past, teams are more often used as their basic units to work on these brands (e.g. brand managers), and these teams are closer to the market than top managers, we

expect that decentralization would contribute to integrate experiences and insights from internal and external agents (e.g. customers, brand managers) through concrete and meaningful ways to implement wisely the BD, and thus not wasting unnecessary resources throughout the process. Thus, we state that:

H2: The decentralization of BD implementation process has a positive effect on BD outcomes.

Effects of consensus on BD outcomes

Consensus may contribute to bring quality aspects to the implementation stage, since it increases the range of vision so that optimal choices are not missed (Eden and Ackermann, 2010). Consensus has been found subsequently and positively to influence the adherence to schedule in both decision making and action (Amason and Sapienza, 1997; Argouslidis et al., 2015). In the latter, it has also been shown to be important for shared commitment within management teams when executing the strategy (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992; Markoczy, 2001; Schwenk and Shrader, 1993). Moreover, where consensus is utilized, team members will feel that they are part of the strategy building and execution process (West and Meyer, 1998), and thus they are more likely to participate in improving organizational performance (Amason and Sapienza, 1997).

Deleting a brand as part of a strategic process, implies a change in the company (Eden and Ackermann, 2010), and the benefits of the change may not be clear for some managers, especially those directly involved with the brand to be deleted. It may take time in a previous stage (decision-making) to reach consensus, however we consider that in the implementation stage it may contribute to soften the process, favouring the adherence to schedule and improving its execution, since it may increase the overall knowledge of the process, overcoming obstructive positions. It would foster cognitive diversity and thus may help to eliminate bias and errors of judgment throughout the process, as well as it enhances collaboration during the implementation, which leads to better quality implementation, and thus to optimal use of resources. It also seems plausible to expect that under consensus approach, members involved will commit to BD implementation because it builds a shared ownership of the implementation process and thus, they would be more favourably predisposed. Member involved in the process would also be motivated to solve issues that customers may have regarding the implementation of BD, contributing to increase their positive reaction to BD and thus improving market outcomes. Therefore, we expect:

H3: The consensus on BD implementation process has a positive effect on BD outcomes.

Effects of communication on BD outcomes

When a company starts a new strategy, it is necessary to communicate it both internally and externally. On one hand, we frame BD decisions at a strategic level within internal communication, which contributes to avoid uncertainty in change processes (Jimmieson et al., 2004), to promote effective committed employees and thus loyalty (Argenti and Forman, 2002; Saks, 2006), and to explain environmental change and how it impacts organizational decisions (Welch and Jackson, 2007). On the other hand, in BD literature Mao et al. (2009) found out that consumers may not properly understand the BD strategy under certain circumstances, i.e. when removing a strong brand from the portfolio, thus companies should make an effort in communicating properly the BD decision to dispel any doubt it may arise by consumers.

In our research we frame the impact of communication during BD implementation process, based on the perceptions over primary external and internal stakeholders of the company: customers and employees. Thus, we consider that communicating BD decisions helps consumers to make positive attributions, given that they can better understand the cause they cannot purchase a certain brand anymore and the alternatives provided by the company. In addition, employees may be engaged being aware of the reasons which led to delete a brand, not making necessary to speculate about the reasons behind the removal of a

brand, not leading to misinterpretations and reducing the employees' feelings of uncertainty and threats caused by the BD decision. Moreover, communication during BD implementation would contribute to enhance a favorable environment within the organization, due to the improvement of information flows both horizontal and vertically, and thus providing solutions to problems and conflicts that may happen during the process, which may lead to a better quality implementation in terms of resources consumption. Thus, we expect that:

H4:The communication on BD implementation process has a positive effect on BD outcomes.

4. Methodology

Sample and data collection

To gather information which allows us to contrast our proposed model, we proceeded as follows. Firstly, because a complete list of Spanish companies which have made the decision to delete a brand does not exist, we searched using the Amadeus database for qualified Spanish companies with at least one brand registered in the Spanish Patent and Trademark Office (SPTO) and with over 50 employees. Aiming to cover all range of both manufacturing and service industries, 4075 firms were identified. From this prior screening, approximately 1/3 (i.e., 1362 firms) were randomly selected to be contacted by telephone and email to inform them about our research and to solicit their participation in the case at least one brand had been recently deleted from their company's brand portfolio. In this first contact, 232 companies expressed their wish to participate. 792 firms were excluded because they either had not deleted any brand or because they belonged to a group and the parent company was already included in the sample. 338 refused to participate because, despite we guaranteed confidentiality, they did not want to disclose any information on this type of decision or managers were too busy to comply with our request.

As a means for exploring manager's point of view about the relevance of the variables identified in our literature review on BD decision-making, we conducted 8 in-depth interviews with executives, five of which working in firms operating in service industries, and the other three working in the manufacturing industry. Concerning size, three of the interviewees were top managers in medium-sized companies and five in large companies. These interviews also served to refine and pre-test the questionnaire designed to gather the data for the empirical analysis.

The final version of the questionnaire, in which the unit of analysis is a case of BD recently carried out by the respondent firm, was sent to the 232 companies which agreed to participate, along two letters of support by Interbrand and the Leading Brands of Spain Forum and a letter thanking them for participating in our research, and explaining the benefits of joining our research in terms of attendance to a professional seminar on marketing strategy and full access to the results of the research. After a follow-up by telephone and personal visits to their offices, we obtained 155 complete questionnaires, provided by 111 respondent firms, yielding an effective response rate of 27%. 40 of the valid questionnaires were filled up during personal interviews, 19 during phone interviews, 73 were filled online, 13 were filled up on paper and emailed, and 10 by postal mail. Informants were heads of department (85.20%), CEOs (9.7%) or members of the administration board (5.2%).

Table 1 shows the sample characteristics.

TABLE 1
Sample characteristics

Brand characteristics		
Deleted brand	N	% of total
Created	108	69.70
Acquired	47	30.30
Type of brand deletion	N	% of total

Brand killed or sold	71	45.80
Brand name changed or cessation of use	84	54.20
Geographical scope	N	% of total
Local/Regional	23	14.80
National	95	61.30
International	37	23.90
TOTAL	155	100%
Prior deletion	Mean (S.D.)	
Deletion Year	2011	
Years Marketed	21.17 (30.69)	
Brand turnover	20.91 (30.07)	
Firm characteristics		
Industry	N	% of total
Manufacture	56	36.10
Service	99	63.90
Family business	N	% of total
Yes	75	67.60
No	36	32.40
Market targeted	N	
Consumer	55.70%	
Industrial	44.30%	
Number of employees (2014)	N	% of total
<50	5	3.60%
<250	32	28.83%
>251	71	63.96%
N.A.	3	2.70%
Turnover (2014)	N	% of total
<= 10	6	2.70%
<= 50	26	23.42%
>50	67	60.36%
N.A.	12	10.81%
TOTAL	111	100%

Sample representativeness was assessed as follows. First, following the recommendation of Armstrong and Overton (1977), we examined the potential influence of non-response bias by comparing early (33%) and late respondents (33%) via a t-test. No significant differences were found between the two groups regarding the constructs examined in this study at $p < 0.05$. In addition, we conducted a proportion test between the companies in the sample and in the population using the industry as strata variable. The results in table 2, shows that the wholesale and retail trade sector is slightly underrepresented in the sample, while the information and communication sector is slightly overrepresented. For the former, the reason might be that distribution companies deal with a great number of national brands, not being allowed to participate in research regarding third parties brands due to legal restraints. This restriction seems to have trickled down to their own private labels brands, so their policy is not participating in research about any brands having the upper hand the most restrictive approach to avoid leaking information from national brands. On the contrary, in the information and communication sector, the participation of *Atresmedia* in our research resulted in a snowball effect, boosting other companies within the sector to participate. This very same effect occurred in the financial sector, although to a minor extent.

To assess the quality of the information obtained, we compared the correlation between the data on sales and employees extracted from the AMADEUS database, and the data on sales and employees extracted from the respondents. The correlation for sales is 0.889, and the correlation for employees is 0.876, which provides an indication of the reliability of the

answers given by informants. We also used Harman’s one-factor test to check whether common method bias exists. Results from the exploratory factor analysis showed six factors in the unrotated factor structure explaining 74.4% of the total variance, accounting the first factor only for 22.0%. The confirmatory approach to Harman’s test also confirmed the multifactorial structure of the data.

TABLE 2
Population and sample distribution by industry: Proportion test

NACE Code	Population		Sample	
	N	% of total	N	% of total
10,11,12,13,14,15. Manufacture of food, tobacco and wearing apparel.	82	14.39%	19	17.12%
20,21,22,23,24,25. Manufacture of chemical, pharmaceutical, plastic and metal products.	68	11.93%	12	10.81%
26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33. Manufacture of electronic and optical products and machinery and furniture.	23	4.04%	5	4.50%
35,36,38,41 Electricity supply, water collection and waste management.	6	1.05%	2	1.80%
45,46,47. Wholesale and retail trade	190	33.33%*	24	21.62%*
49,52,53,55,56. Transportation, storage and housing services.	18	3.16%	3	2.70%
58,59,60,61,62,63. Information and communication.	19	3.33%*	12	10.81%*
64,65,66,69,70 Financial, insurance and professional activities.	129	22.63%	24	21.62%
71,73,74,77,79,81,82,85,86 Scientific, technical support education and health activities.	35	6.14%	10	9.01%
TOTAL	570	100%	111	100%

* Significant differences: $p < 0.05$

Measures

The exploratory factor analysis mentioned above enabled us to uncover the multidimensional nature of the multiple BD outcomes considered in our study. Consequently, and according to the recommendation by Katsikeas et al. (2016) “to avoid (implicitly or explicitly) conceptualizing and operationalizing performance as a global latent construct” (p.13), we have run a principal component analysis to identify the different aspects of performance or types of BD outcomes. The KMO value (0.578) and the Bartlett’s sphericity test ($\chi^2=326.718$) suggest the appropriateness of this procedure (Hair et al., 2014). Following Jolliffe (2002), we examined the scree plot and found an “elbow” between the third and the fourth eigenvalues. Thus, we selected the solution with the first three principal components. Although the third component shows an eigenvalue of 0.91, we decided to keep it because the percentage of variance explained by two components is 68.73%, turning to 83.50% by three components, substantially increasing the level of explanatory power.

As shown in Table 3, the first component is termed *BD adherence to schedule*, understood as the time-efficient execution of the implementation. Time is a scarce resource for companies and thus managers favor temporal efficiency (Angwin, 2004). The major discussion in the last decades over time issues as an outcome, emphasizes the difference between efficiency -doing it right- (Lee and Puranam, 2015) and effectiveness -doing the right thing (Drucker, 1974). In line with this debate, Rämö (2002) proposes to focus on the dual nature of time, on one hand, the linear sequence of activities leading to efficiency and the “strategic” aspect of time-related to the precise moment to implement a decision, leading to effectiveness. Specifically, in product elimination implementation, Avlonitis (1985), Argouslidis (2008) and Argouslidis et al. (2015) has studied the efficiency dimension of time, concluding that lengthy delays lead to inefficiencies. The second component of the BD outcomes is the *contribution of the BD to the firm’s economic performance*. In product elimination literature Avlonitis (1986), Harness et al. (1998) and Mateja (1987) found that

the concentration of efforts and the reduction of risk and cost from the elimination leads to improve profitability through both a more efficient financial structure and an increase of sales effectiveness. The third component reflects the *acceptance of the BD by the stakeholders*, defined by the attitudes and reactions by internal and external stakeholders to the BD implementation. Weiner (1995) attribution theory posit that when a company starts the implementation of a strategy, such as deleting a brand, stakeholders make attributions about the possible causes. In BD literature, Kumar (2003), Shah (2013) and Varadarajan et al. (2006) posit that companies should take into account the reaction of internal and external stakeholders throughout the BD process to overcome rejection and boost positive reactions towards the elimination.

TABLE 3
Principal component analysis on BD outcomes

Component	Items	Factorial loading	Eigenvalue (% of explained variance)
1: <i>BD adherence to schedule</i>	The implementation process of the deletion was executed in a time-efficient manner.	0.94	2.32 (38.73)
	The implementation of the deletion did not extend beyond what it was necessary.	0.94	
2: <i>Contribution of BD to firm's economic performance</i>	<i>Our financial performance (margins, profits...):</i> Worsened due to the elimination. / Improved due to the elimination.	0.90	1.78 (68.73)
	<i>Our market performance (number of customers, sales, market share...):</i> Worsened due to the elimination. / Improved due to the elimination.	0.88	
3: <i>Acceptance of BD by stakeholders</i>	<i>The deletion produced on the part of the company's stakeholders:</i> Very adverse reactions. / It was welcomed.	0.90	0.91 (83.50)
	<i>The deletion has...</i> ...weakened the image of the company and its brands. / ...strengthened the image of the company and its brands.	0.80	

Given the pioneering nature of the current research, we havenot found established measures on the variables of our BD implementation model and thus we have had to adapt scales from product elimination and organizational literature. We have also used our own self-created scales for this research.

Formalization was operationalized using five items regarding to normalized procedure, the design of an action plan, deadlines set up, responsibilities accounted and monitoring the process, adapted from Argouslidis (2008), Argouslidis and Baltas (2007) and Collier et al. (2004). For decentralization, we adapted a single item scale from Papadakis and Barwise (2002) and Argouslidis et al. (2015). Consensus was measured with a three items scale adapted from Flood et al. (2000) and for communication we developed a new scale.

We incorporated the firm's prior economic situation as a control variable as this can affect the greater or lower urgency to accomplish the BD as well as the reactions and perceptions on the impact of such a deletion on company performance. We operationalized this control variable using a three-item scale adapted from Moorman and Rust (1999) and Verhoef and Leeflang (2009). We also controlled for the effects of having previous experience in similar strategies. A single-item scale was developed to measure the experience in BDs.

TABLE 4
Constructs definition and measures

Construct name	Construct measurement	Mean (S.D.)	Loadings
BD implementation: structure variables			
Formalization* ($\alpha=0.94$, CR=0.96, AVE=0.82)	A standardized or normalized procedure was used to execute the brand deletion.	4.98 (1.83)	0.81
	An action plan was elaborated to guide the deletion process.	5.38 (1.79)	0.90
	Milestones or deadlines that had to be met were set up.	5.38 (1.72)	0.93
	The responsibilities of the members involved in the deletion were pinned down.	5.32 (1.81)	0.93
	The evolution of the deletion process was regularly monitored.	5.34 (1.75)	0.94
Decentralization**	Indicate at what hierarchy level the deletion decision was made: Only the senior management level / All management levels.	3.10 (2.31)	1.00
BD implementation: interpersonal process variables			
Consensus* ($\alpha=0.88$, CR=0.93, AVE=0.81)	The senior management believed that it was worth to take more time to reach consensus in the deletion decision.	4.28 (1.83)	0.90
	The firm's management team worked hard to reach an agreement when making this decision.	4.07 (1.93)	0.92
	The decision was not made until the majority of members involved deemed it was acceptable for them.	4.11 (1.85)	0.87
Communication* ($\alpha=0.86$, CR=0.92, AVE=0.78)	The decision was properly communicated to external stakeholders	5.36 (1.67)	0.89
	The decision was properly communicated to internal stakeholders	5.64 (1.49)	0.90
	The company made a special effort to explain the reasons for deleting this brand.	4.85 (1.78)	0.87
BD outcomes			
BD adherence to schedule* ($r=0.77$, CR=0.94, AVE=0.89)	The implementation process of the deletion was executed in a time-efficient manner.	5.75 (1.29)	0.95
	The implementation of the deletion did not extend beyond what it was necessary.	5.55 (1.57)	0.93
Contribution of BD to firm's economic performance** ($r=0.67$, CR=0.91, AVE=0.84)	Our financial performance (margins, profits...): Worsened due to the elimination. / Improved due to the elimination.	5.02 (1.47)	0.90
	Our market performance (number of customers, sales, market share...): Worsened due to the elimination. / Improved due to the elimination.	4.95 (1.44)	0.92
Acceptance of BD by stakeholders** ($r=0.53$, CR=0.85, AVE=0.75)	The deletion produced on the part of the company's stakeholders: Very adverse reactions./ It was welcomed.	4.68 (1.66)	0.76
	The deletion has... ...weakened the image of the company and its brands. / ...strengthened the image of the company and its brands.	5.16 (1.49)	0.95
Control variables			
Experience in BDs***	Very low. / Very high.	5.69 (2.54)	1.00
Firm's prior economic	Our market performance was satisfactory.	4.97 (1.60)	0.94

situation* ($\alpha=0.93$, CR=0.96, AVE=0.89)	The company was producing good financial performance.	4.98 (1.65)	0.96
	The company was experiencing a great growth.	4.58 (1.84)	0.93

Notes: * 7-point Likert scales (1: Disagree, 7: Agree); ** 7-point semantic differential scales (1: statement before the slash, 7: statement after the slash); *** (10-point semantic differential scale).

α =Cronbach's alpha, CR=Composite reliability, AVE= Average variance extracted

5. Analysis and results

Model estimation

PLS was used for this research (Hair et al., 2012), given that this method does not require multivariate normal data, places minimum requirements on measurement levels, is more suitable for small samples and in the stages of early theory development.

We estimated our model using SmartPLS v.3.2.4 (Ringle et al., 2015). Structural model evaluation was conducted by examining the size and significance of the path coefficients and the R^2 values of the dependent variables. Bootstrapping with 5000 sub-samples randomly generated was used to determine the significance of the estimated parameters. Previously, we assessed the instrument's reliability by verifying that Cronbach- α and composite reliability (CR) values were all above 0.7 and that average variance extracted (AVE) exceeded the recommended minimum of 0.5 (Bagozzi et al., 1991). Standardized item loadings for all constructs were all significant ($p < 0.01$) and greater than 0.7. We applied Fornell and Larcker (1981)'s procedure to assess discriminant validity and, as shown in Table 5, verified for every construct that the square root of its AVE is greater than its correlation with any other construct. The cross-loadings matrix was also examined and no problems of lack of discriminant validity were found. Nevertheless, Henseler et al. (2015) consider that Fornell and Larcker (1981)'s criterion and cross loadings may not be sufficiently sensitive to detect problems with discriminant validity and have recently proposed new criteria based on the HTMT (heterotrait-monotrait) ratio, that is, the level of correlations of the indicators of a construct with other indicators measuring different phenomena compared to the level of correlations among the indicators of the same construct. As shown in Table 5, all the HTMT ratios are below the threshold of 0.85, and it was also checked that none of the 90% normal bootstrap confidence interval of the HTMT criterion with a Bonferroni adjustment includes the value one.

TABLE 5
Correlation matrix and discriminant validity

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Formalization	0.90	0.11	0.33	0.58	0.55	0.07	0.08	0.20	0.13
2. Decentralization	0.11	1.00	0.34	0.04	0.02	0.21	0.18	0.24	0.08
3. Consensus	0.30**	0.32**	0.90	0.22	0.17	0.32	0.23	0.05	0.22
4. Communication	0.52**	-0.04	0.19*	0.88	0.53	0.21	0.23	0.23	0.08
5. BD adherence to schedule	0.50**	0.01	0.16*	0.47**	0.94	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.06
6. Contribution of BD to performance	0.06	0.19*	0.28**	0.18*	-0.01	0.91	0.59	0.12	0.12
7. Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.07	0.15	0.21**	0.21**	0.06	0.46**	0.86	0.07	0.25
8. Experience in BDs	0.19*	-0.24**	0.03	0.21**	0.05	0.11	0.07	1.00	0.04
9. Firm's prior economic situation	-0.13**	0.08	0.20*	0.03	0.05	0.11	0.21**	-0.04	0.94

Note: The diagonal elements (in bold) are the values of the square root of the AVE. The values below the diagonal are the zero-order correlation coefficients. The elements above the diagonal (in grey) are the values of HTMT ratio.

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Results

In order to refine our model, and since we have found three BD outcomes after running the exploratory factorial analysis, we examine relationships between formalization, decentralization, consensus and communications, as independent variables, and BD adherence to schedule, contribution of BD to firm's economic performance and acceptance of BD by stakeholders, as dependent variables. Thus, H1 is broken down in H1a, H1b and H1c, being "a" related to positive effect on BD adherence to schedule, "b" to a positive effect on BD's economic performance and "c" to a positive effect on BD stakeholders' positive reactions, and so on in H2, H3 and H4.

According to data, formalization during implementation facilitates time efficiency; reflected in the the construct BD adherence to schedule ($\beta=0.395$, $p < 0.01$) and thus H1a is supported. Conversely, it does not significantly affect neither the contribution of BD to the firm's economic performance nor the acceptance of the BD by stakeholders. H1b and H1c are thus not supported.

Decentralization positively influences the contribution of BD to firm performance ($\beta=0.171$, $p < 0.05$) and also enhances acceptance of BD by stakeholders ($\beta=0.135$, $p < 0.05$), therefore H2b and H2c are accepted. It also shows a non-significant direct impact on BD adherence to schedule, thus H2a is not supported.

Results provide support to the positive effect of consensus on the contribution of BD to the market and financial performance of the company ($\beta=0.271$, $p < 0.01$), and thus H3b is accepted. However, the effects of consensus on BD adherence to schedule and on acceptance of BD by stakeholders are not significant, even though the latter is on the edge to be significant.

Data supports the direct and positive effects of communication on BD adherence to schedule ($\beta=0.287$, $p < 0.01$), contribution of BD to firm's economic performance ($\beta=0.135$, $p < 0.05$) and acceptance of BD by stakeholders ($\beta=0.221$, $p < 0.01$), being communication the factor with a major contribution in the latter. H4a, H4b and H4c are thus accepted.

Concerning the the control variables, the PLS results indicate that the only significant relationship found is the positive effect of the firm's prior economic situation on the level of acceptance of the BD by stakeholders.

TABLE 6
Path analysis: standardized parameter estimates and significance

Hypothesized relationships		
Formalization-> BD adherence to schedule	0.40**	H1a accepted
Formalization->Contribution of BD to firm performance	-0.15	H1b not accepted
Formalization->Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	-0.09	H1c not accepted
Decentralization -> BD adherence to schedule	-0.04	H2a not accepted
Decentralization ->Contribution of BD to firm performance	0,17*	H2b accepted
Decentralization ->Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.14*	H2c accepted
Consensus -> BD adherence to schedule	-0.02	H3a not accepted
Consensus ->Contribution of BD to firm performance	0.22**	H3b accepted
Consensus ->Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.12	H3c not accepted
Communication-> BD adherence to schedule	0.29**	H4a accepted
Communication-> Contribution of BD to firm performance	0.19*	H4b accepted
Communication->Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.22**	H4c accepted
Control relationships		
Experience in BDs -> BD adherence to schedule	-0.09	
Experience in BDs ->Contribution of BD to firm performance	0.09	
Experience in BDs ->Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.07	
Firm´s prior economic situation -> BD adherence to schedule	0.10	
Firm´s prior economic situation ->Contribution of BD to firm performance	0.04	
Firm´s prior economic situation ->Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.16*	
R ² BD adherence to schedule	0.33	
R ² Contribution of BD to firm performance	0.14	
R ² Acceptance of BD by stakeholders	0.12	

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

6. Discussion

Supporting on theories of strategic implementation, our study tested for the first time a framework for structure and interpersonal process view variables on BD outcomes among manufacturers and service providers. Therefore, we respond to calls for research on the extremely scarce literature on BD. Since the core of this research is on BD implementation, we also contribute to enrich the empirical evidence on strategic implementation literature, presenting a model underpinned in the eclectic roots of strategy implementation literature. Our results indicate that both structure aspects and interpersonal process factors have an effect on BD outcomes.

In relation to formalization, we have shed some light to the current debate on its contribution during the implementation process of elimination. We have found that the value of formalization in the context of BD implementation is mainly in terms of adherence to schedule, that is, in terms of time efficiency. Top management would be able to account the performance of those managers responsible of the implementation throughout all the process as well as fixing potential flaws. Also, it may help to reduce uncertainty in the process, making the execution clear and understandable for all managerial levels involved. Even though the findings of previous research on BD implementation pointed out that this is an informal process (Shah, 2013), we recommended an important degree of formality in the implementation process mainly to delete the brand on time. On the contrary, not evidence of effects on contribution of BD to firm´s economic performance and on acceptance of BD by stakeholders has been found for this factor.

It seems clear that decentralization has no impact on BD adherence to schedule. In line with Argouslidis et al. (2015), we confirm that as in the context of product elimination,

decentralized decision power structure does not affect implementation time factor (Argouslidis 2015). This could be given that decentralization may halt the process and increase internal restrictions when facing a BD implementation as a reminiscence of an enabling bureaucracy (Adler and Borys, 1996). Also, employees might not get any immediate benefit from having to take charge in a BD implementation due to BD is beyond the formal role requirements of the workplace (Li et al., 2015). On the contrary, decentralization shows to have a positive impact on contribution of BD to firm's economic performance, possibly due to involving members closer to the market may have contributed with their knowledge to increase the efficiency in terms of finance and marketing, by introducing quality in the deletion process and avoiding unnecessary operational costs. Decentralization is also related to acceptance of BD by stakeholders. We consider that bringing brand managers and other managers to BD implementation may contribute to integrate past experiences and insights, through concrete and meaningful ways to reach a common understanding to implement the BD decision, from all individuals who can affect or be affected by the BD implementation, leading to positive effects to firm's stakeholders.

Regarding consensus, our findings suggest that a certain degree of agreement in BD implementation would enhance the contribution of BD to firm's economic performance, since members involved will commit in the common objective and the uncertainty around the BD implementation would be faded out. The effect of consensus on BD adherence to schedule and on acceptance of BD by stakeholders is not significant, even though the latter is at the edge of significance. Results show that this relationship is close to being significant and thus, we can reject its influence before a more profound study about this.

Communication is the most influential variable of our model. As we expected, communication contribute to enhance acceptance of BD by stakeholders. Consumers tend to make positive attributions to a BD strategy when they can understand the cause. Also, internal communication through BD implementation process would avoid misinterpretations among members involved, and thus they will tend to react positively. Related to the positive relationship with BD adherence to schedule, we found that communication avoids speculations about the reasons behind the decision, leading to act immediately on potential flaws which may arise during the process, thus increasing time efficiency throughout it. Vertical and horizontal communication (Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst, 2006) contribute to reduce the employees' feelings of uncertainty and threats caused by the BD decision. In light of results, it seems that also slightly enhances employees' engagement, i.e. employees' psychological attachment towards the organization, driving them to contribute to organizational goals, and thus it may lead to contribution of BD to firm's economic performance (Rousseau, 1998). The economic reason behind the BD implementation may not be so clear for members involved in the BD implementation, since they do not have access to all the data which had driven the BD decision. This might lower the sense of belonging, as well as the awareness about the changing environment which led to the BD decision. Not being fully informed could impact in employee's efficiency throughout the process, contributing to a lesser extent to economic performance of the firm when implementing the BD.

Limitations and future research

Given the diversity of brands and sectors included in our study, it seems inappropriate (as well as difficult) to use real figures for the research variables, since objective measures (e.g. brand turnover or market share) can only be interpreted in a particular sector and for a specific brand typology. Due to this, we have used subjective measures based on the perceptions of participating managers. Undoubtedly, these kinds of measures can be subject to bias, and consequently our findings must be interpreted with caution. However, we have checked the representativeness of the sample, the non-response bias and the reliability and validity of the scales, and found no important problems associated to the measurement.

Apart from the necessary improvements in the measurement process, some other lines of further research can be suggested. For instance, an interesting extension would be to complete our analysis including the interrelations between the variables comprises in the structural view group and the variables comprises in the interpersonal behavior view group. These analyses could help to shed some more light in the integrative approach of implementation as well as improve the explanation of the contribution of BD to firm's economic performance and acceptance of BD by stakeholders, constructs whose variation is poorly explained by the implementation variables contemplated in this work.

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