TO BE OR NOT TO BE A BRAND: THE AUTHOR NAME

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine whether or not the author name is of the same nature as a brand name in readers' eyes, in order to understand whether there is a limit, a bound to the scope of the branding concept. The case of the literary fiction writer is especially interesting since literature is on the boundary between commerce and the arts, and accordingly on the boundary of the profane and the sacred, given the sacralization process from which the arts have benefited since the sixteenth century. To this end, a qualitative study was conducted among 18 regular readers in France. The findings of the study show that, although the author name (the signature) plays the role of a brand name, the author (the writer) is not a brand for consumers, who develop diverse strategies to cope with the commercial aspects of the book industry. The results help to formulate recommendations for authors and publishers, but also for brand managers.

Key words: brand, writer, author name, publishing industry, brand equity.

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1. Introduction

Are author names like Miguel de Cervantes, Charles Dickens, Paulo Coelho, J.K. Rowling, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, J.R.R. Tolkien, Agatha Christie, Cao Xueqin or Lewis Carroll – to list just a few of the world's bestselling authors – brand names? The recent phenomenon of "best-sellerization", i.e. the concentration of sales on ever fewer authors raises questions for writers, publishers, and critics alike (Hecht, 2011). It also places marketing at the heart of an interesting conceptual debate. On the one hand, writers are perceived as artists and are "set apart" from other producers (Michel & Borraz, 2015). Considering them as a brand is "blasphemous" (Bourgeon-Renault & Gombault, 2009). On the other hand, like any other brand, an author's name commands a certain level of awareness and conveys a certain image (Busson & Evrard, 2013). Levin, Levin, and Heath (1997) even show that authors' names confer added value or have brand equity in consumers' eyes.

This debate opposing "art" and "business" is especially fierce for books, which are products of the cultural and creative industries belonging to the field of the arts but not of the fine arts and are therefore on the borderline between commerce and the arts (Busson & Evrard, 2013). The debate is all the more fierce because publishing is a sizeable industry and still the leading cultural industry in many countries. For example, with €2.65 billion in turnover in 2014, books are still the best-selling cultural goods in France, and literature the best-selling editorial category (SNE, 2015). In addition, the sector is very dynamic in terms of production. The International Publishers Association (IPA) reports that in 2015 China published 470,000 new titles, followed by the USA (339,000), the UK (173,000), and France (107,000). However, the debate rapidly becomes highly emotional mainly because publishing is not only an economic issue but also has important political, legal, sociological, ideological, and ultimately cultural consequences, with the issue of cultural diversity being prominent (Peltier, 2011).

The objective of the current research is to ascertain whether the author name is a brand like any other in the eyes of consumers and especially like any other brand of consumer goods since they are the archetype of brands. The first modern brands were created in this sector by whiskey distillers (Farquhar, 1990). Here an author will be understood to be a writer of literary fiction, i.e. a novelist. The answer to the question is important from a conceptual but also practical point of view. If the author name is a brand like any other for consumers, as was demonstrated for services for instance (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Reiley, 1999), it means that the management principles established in the field of consumer goods are also applicable in the cultural field, with of course the necessary adaptations to the characteristics of the sector. It also means that there are no boundaries to the "scope of brands" (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998), that "anything is a brand today" (Kapferer, 2013) from a triumphant neo-liberal perspective. This would also call copyright into question, when it is already challenged by the Internet with the practices of peer-to-peer sharing, the claim that the copyright system is at its end, the increase in self-production (e.g. fanfictions), and the development of open and collaborative writing (Busson & Evrard, 2013). If the answer is negative, it will illustrate that the claim that "anything is a brand today" is either just another "manifestation of marketing myopia and of its tendency to reduce the world to its economic dimension" (O'Reilly, 2006), or a new demonstration of the never-ending ability of capitalism to integrate even the factors that challenge it (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991).

To the best of our knowledge, this question has not yet been addressed. While research has provided insights into how consumers choose books (D'Astous, Colbert, & Mbarek, 2006; Kamphuis, 1991; Leemans & Stockmans, 1991, 1992), how artists use brands in their work (Kerrigan et al., 2011; Michel & Boraz, 2015; Schroeder, 2005) or market their name (Brown, 2011, 2015; Muniz, Norris & Fine, 2014; Schroeder, 2006, 2010), the marketing literature on how consumers use or consider the artist's name is relatively limited (Dion & Arnould, 2015; Moulard et al., 2014, 2015). Celebrities (athletes, TV presenters, singers, actors, etc.) have been the subject of many studies (Carson & Donovan, 2013; Huang, Lin, & Phau, 2015; Loroz & Braig, 2015; Randrianosolo & Sala, 2016; Thomson, 2006), but the situation is not the same. When celebrities or artists use the awareness and image they have built up in a field (sport, music, etc.) to endorse a product, there is no doubt that they are brands. For example, David Beckham has registered his name as a trademark for clothes, Tom Clancy has done the same for video games, and Picasso is registered for cars. But when artists are creating artworks, when they are working in their own field, can they really be regarded as "brands"? Is there "brand" a metonym (the real thing) or an analogy (an image)?

To answer this question, after reviewing the movement of desacralization of artists that is at work in contemporary society and the conceptual framework of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), the methodology and main findings of a qualitative study will be presented. This study was conducted among 18 regular readers in order to understand the true nature of the author name. The findings have several notable implications; thus, the paper closes with a discussion and evokes some limitations and areas for further research.

2. Background: the desacralization of the artist and PKM

The question of whether the author name is a brand "like others" is all the more pertinent today because of the phenomenon of desacralization of the artist that has been at work for around a century. Sacralization is a social, collective construction, a process of separation of the object or the person that is perceived as conveying a transcendent, supernatural, superhuman force from the profane, i.e. the banal, the familiar, the everyday. The separation is protected by law (Wunenburger, 2009). Traditionally, commerce and brands are associated with the profane while arts and authors are associated with the sacred (Edelman, 2004; Michel & Borraz, 2015). However, as explained by Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry (1989), nothing is sacred in itself, and sacredness is in large part an investment process. What has been done can be undone.

Indeed, the process of sacralization of authors has taken centuries beginning in the Renaissance (Edelman, 2004) and culminating in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the conjunction of legal recognition (copyright), institutional recognition (multiplication of literary prizes), and social recognition (the stereotype of the starving genius). In the romantic stereotype, the writer is perceived as a being who is devoted entirely to the creative process, living not in the here and now of everyday life, but in the vaster space and time of literary history, a creator totally detached from worldly values, and especially material profits (Heinich, 2000). Three recent studies show that the idealized image of the writer – and more generally the artist – has not disappeared yet. In her study of a book fair in 2010, Clerc finds that 80% of the interviewees chosen at random idealize the writer. In their work on the representation of the "chef de haute cuisine", Dion and Arnould (2015) show that the stereotypical image of the chef (an alchemist, an artist generating admiration and even fascination) is deeply embodied in the imagination of consumers. And Moulard et al. (2014) show that the perceived authenticity of artists, their artistic integrity, remains at the heart of what makes their value. In an additional study, Moulard et al. (2015) identify the six

antecedents of authenticity: talent (special skills), discretion (limited exposure), originality (independent, creative thinking), consistency (stability over time), candidness (straightforward personality), and morality (strong values).

But this sacred conception of art has been shaken by contemporary artists and their transgression of codes. Duchamp with his "Fountain" urinal caused a scandal in 1917. If a common object can become a piece of art just by the adjunction of a signature, what does art stand for? (Heinich, 2008) Other artists like Picasso and Andy Warhol also contributed to the commodification of the arts. Picasso managed his career and his name as a brand (Muniz, Norris, & Fine, 2014). Andy Warhol included celebrities and brands in his artworks, blurring the lines between consumer culture and art (Kerrigan et al., 2011; Schroeder, 2005). Regarding writers specifically, Brown (2015) shows that T.S. Eliot was also an adroit "authorpreneur" who knew how to exploit his name and was not reluctant to do so. The confusion is also increased by the fact that some authors claim to be artisans and not artists (e.g. Guillaume Musso, the best-selling author in France), while others use their name as a franchise (e.g. Tom Clancy, who signs video games). The desacralization of authors also comes from transformations in the publishing industry. This industry has not escaped the global trends observed for around 20 years now, with increased competition, consolidation of publishers, concentration of distribution channels, and the striking development of the celebration of celebrity (Brown, 2006). And the marketing techniques used by publishers (promotions, sampling, end-of-aisles, etc.) are the same as for consumer goods. As explained by Brown (2006), this commodification of books is not a new phenomenon as the book industry has always been customer-oriented and subject to marketing imperatives. No "pre-lapsarian era of aboriginal authenticity" ever existed (p. 43), and the concept of authenticity itself was not built without commercial intent (Dettmar & Watt, 1996; Jensen, 1994). The phenomenon is just more perceptible by consumers today with the increased sales of bookstore chains and supermarkets. But does it mean that the author name is nowadays a "brand"?

The most common definition of a brand is the following one: "a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller and to differentiate it from those of competitors" (American Marketing Association). This definition shows that the three basic purposes of branding are identifying, authenticating, and differentiating. Indeed, as explained by Kapferer (2008), because the quality of most products cannot be assessed visually, each purchase represents a risk, and the brand's main reason-for-being is to be a risk reducer by building consumer trust. According to the results of the Ipsos study (2017) and of previous research (D'Astous, Colbert, & Mbarek, 2006; Kamphuis, 1991; Leemans & Stockmans, 1991, 1992), the author name seems to be a "trust contract". But is that the end of the story? Research on persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994) has shown that people have personal knowledge about persuasion tactics and process information used to persuade them. While the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) was developed with advertising in mind, it is applicable to brands: they also work to persuade consumers. Indeed, consumers are not passive receivers of information: they interact with brands (Kornberger, 2010). In the same way, people develop beliefs about an author name (Clerc, 2010). It is important to take into account the fact that the author – as the brand – is a concept that is socially constructed and embedded in a cultural context (Hartmann & Ösberg, 2013). Consumers, by their practices and discourses, co-construct author and brand meaning (O'Reilly, 2006). Experts and brand managers are not the only stakeholders in the brand and consumers may have a different point of view.

3. Study

The objective of the study is to determine whether the author name is a brand in consumers' eyes. And, if the answer is positive/negative, to understand why. For this, a qualitative, inductive study with 18 regular readers of novels was conducted in France. This focus on regular readers is motivated by the fact that they are at the heart of market development (Ipsos, 2017). Adopting a qualitative approach means that the reasons behind consumers' attitudes can be thoroughly investigated. And the case of France is particularly interesting because it is the country where the sacralization of authors has been carried the furthest, with the addition of non-transferable and inalienable moral rights to Anglo-Saxon copyright (Edelman, 2004).

The study consisted of conducting semi-structured individual interviews with regular readers of various ages, socio-demographic characteristics, and reading frequencies, in order to obtain richness of content, depth, diversity, and quality (Evrard, Pras, & Roux, 2000). This convenience sample of 18 respondents is not representative of readership in the statistical sense of the term, but its main characteristics are in line with the typical profile of the French regular reader (Ipsos, 2017): female (67%), middle-aged (50% of 35–64 years), rather wealthy (66% middle and higher managerial). A telephone recruitment procedure asked potential respondents to "speak about the novels and authors they like" and relied on personal networks and snowball sampling techniques. The interviews took place at the respondents' home and began with a question about the last purchase made: "What was the last novel you bought for yourself? Did you like it? Why?" This put them at ease and established trust. Then, the guided interview began, with a progressive approach to the topic. It included five open-ended questions (1) Can you tell me about your reading habits (genre, frequency, etc.)? (2) What are your motivations and your barriers for reading? (3) How do you proceed when you buy a book? (4) Who are the authors you like? Why? (5) Finally, do you think that the author name is a brand name? Why? Except for follow-up questions used by the interviewers to clarify and elicit more details from the respondents, no further questions were asked. This minimal prompt enabled each interviewee to talk about the topic any way they chose. The interviews were carried out until semantic saturation was obtained (Huberman & Miles, 1991). They lasted between 20 minutes and 75 minutes and were fully recorded and transcribed for analysis. The themes used for template analysis came from the interviews. Then, the emergent themes were grouped into homogeneous, exhausted, exclusive, objective, and relevant categories (Evrard, Pras, & Roux, 2000) in order to structure the presentation of the results.

4. Findings

4.1. To be or not to be a brand

When they are asked directly if the author name is a brand, most respondents answer that the author name (the signature) plays the role of a brand, and is therefore like a brand, or even is a brand. Indeed, it fulfills the two basic purposes of branding, identifying and reducing risk, thanks to awareness of it and image (Kapferer, 2008). This role of risk reducer is all the more important because readers feel overwhelmed by the superabundant offer, the "tsunami of new books" that characterizes the publishing industry (Brown, 2006). It is also all the more important because reading books is a time consuming activity (Bourgeon-Renault & Gombault, 2009). The cover of a book plays the same role as the packaging of a consumer good (Leemans & Stockmans, 1991, 1992). And satisfaction generates greater consumer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Aurore, a secretary, summarizes this point of view: "*An author name is not that different from a brand. If I had not heard of Musso, if he was not famous, I might not have bought it. And there would be no*

loyalty either. In addition, the aesthetics of the cover is not so different either. The book has to have a beautiful cover that attracts readers ... so the difference isn't that great!" As explained by Philippe, a computer scientist, the best proof that the author name is a brand is the fact that writers need to change their pseudonym when they want to change genre. And, to his eyes, it is clear that some writers behave like brands: *"They appears on as many TV or radio shows as possible".*

But immediately after the respondents acknowledge they use author names as brand names or that author names are brands, they clearly and vehemently add that the author (the writer) is not a brand or, at least, that the "true" writer is not a brand. To be precise, the interviewees do not really distinguish between the "author name" (the signature) and "the author" (the writer). This is a reconstruction made by the researchers for analysis. For consumers, the name on the book and the person who wrote it are the same; they cannot be separated, which is normal in a regime of singularity (Heinich, 2000). This is probably why most respondents say that the very idea of saying that the author may be a brand shocks them, is "horrible" to use the words of Aurore or "awful" (Chantal) or "not normal" (Nawal). Even the consumers who manifest a very positive attitude towards brands (reliable, trustworthy, of good quality) consider that the writer is not a brand. Globally, respondents fall into two groups: the "idealists" who consider that the writer is never a brand, whatever his/her genre, style, etc. and the "elitists" who consider that the "true" author is not a brand, even if there are some "commercial" authors who are.

4.2. The "idealists" and the cultural exception

These respondents believe that it is extremely simplistic to consider the author as a brand for two reasons: the freedom of the author and the extraordinary aspect of the reading experience. The first argument interviewees give against the idea that the writer could be considered as a brand is the fact that he/she is a human being, a living creature, and not the signature of an organization on an object, whether a good or a service. Therefore, he/she is much more unpredictable. As Chantal says: *"No, the author is not an object. He is not a brand because he evolves. He renews his work, surprises readers, he is not fixed. He has the right to take the reader unawares. He is alive whereas a brand is frozen in a representation. Seeing the author as a brand is extremely reductive. Certainly, there are authors who turn out a book a year like Amélie Nothomb. But they are not brands for all that. A book always brings something new, alive, and rich".* For Jimmy, considering authors as brands locks them up, deprives them of their freedom, and ultimately reduces them to slavery. And a world in which the writer is a brand would be dull, sad, and boring. For those readers, a writer is much more than just a brand.

The second argument respondents use to explain why the writer is not a brand is the fact that the reading experience is totally different from consumption of other products. First, it requires a high level of involvement from the reader. For Nawal, reading is in reality a co-creation of the writer and the reader. Unlike a consumer product or a movie, the book is not a given, the reader has to participate in building it. He/she must imagine the places, the characters, the scenes. But the counterpart of this personal work is a feeling of freedom, as the reader may imagine things anyway he/she wants: *"Images are imposed on you, words leave you free".* Second, literature has an emotional and transformative power that consumer products do not. Anne explains: *"Reading involves the whole person, body and soul, in a way consumer goods cannot. A pair of jeans will not transform my personality; a writer can."*

The *verbatim* of the interviewees show that the archetype of the author remains deeply embedded in the consumer's imagination (Clerc, 2010; Heinich, 2000). The writer is perceived as a recluse and an eccentric genius, working alone with a pen or computer. Marion, a 23 year-old student, summarizes this point of view: "*For me, an author is often someone who has initially nothing but his imagination. I find it incredible, that there are people capable of transporting us like that, and that it all comes from up there, from their neuronal connections. I also see them as somewhat reclusive people. I find it fascinating to think that these people have nothing materially but, with paper or a computer, they bring us something awesome! They are magicians and also a little crazy, eccentric, a little warped. Often they are not very happy in their lives and they write their dream life, like Jane Austen for example.*"

This special ability of writers generates admiration, as explained by Solène: "*I admire them. I think they are doing something I cannot do. You might hit upon an idea for a good novel. But between the vague idea that you can have, and actually putting it into words, there is a difference! Creating the characters, filling out a text to make it interesting, it's a real quality, it's no easy thing to do. It's not the same as writing a professional report!*" Stéphanie specifies that nowadays, it is easier to meet authors, and that writers have lost part of their magical aura. It is easier to realize that they are people like the others, that they are not superhuman. But the admiration remains (Lejeune, 1986). For Nawal, this feeling of admiration is even one of the things that makes the writer different from a brand. For her, it is impossible to admire a brand in the way you admire a person. In the case of Apple, in reality, people admire Steve Jobs, not the company.

But, as a counterpart to this idealized image, the publisher is described in a rather negative way. As Marcel explains, a publisher is out to sell, and there is nothing wrong with that. A publisher has the same constraints as any other company and has to advertise. It is normal therefore that it treats the author like a brand and encourages him/her to make as many media appearances as possible. But, the author "*must not sell his/her soul to the publisher*". His/her best interest in not necessarily the same as the publisher's. For Marcel, there is an objective alliance between, on the one hand, the publishers and the chain bookstores and, on the other hand, the authors and the independent librarians. The goal of the first is to sell the maximum, while the others have more freedom. Of course, they have to sell a minimum to live, but it is not their main objective. Their main goal is to express themselves, to make their voice heard. Chantal shares the same idea: "*It's the publisher who forces the author to make his/her show. Moreover, some writers refuse. Or they accept, but not wholeheartedly.*" Through all these discourses, it appears that, to cope with the fact that the writer has to sell his/her novels, the "idealist" readers make up a story in which the author plays the role of the hero, and the publisher is in the role of the villain. The cooperative character of artwork is denied in favor of the traditional romantic vision of the artist (Becker, 1982).

4.3. The "elitists" and the register of authenticity

These respondents make a distinction between "authentic" authors and "commercial" authors. The first write to satisfy an inner necessity, while the second exercise their talent to meet with the expectations of others, to become famous, or to make money (Heinich, 2000; Moulard et al. 2014, 2015). The analysis of the *verbatim* of the interviewees shows that they use five criteria to evaluate the degree to which an author is "authentic" or not.

The first indicator is the individual or collective dimension of the work. For the interviewees, the author should work alone. The novel should be their own personal creation,

not the result of a collective collaboration. This is why the practices of collective writing under the same pseudonym, the resumption of a series by another writer (like the *Millennium* series), or the association of a well-known author with a designated successor (like Mary Higgins-Clark and her daughter) are not appreciated. Olivier testifies to his disappointment when he discovered that Caroline Quine, the author of the famous Alice series (Nancy Drew in the US), was in fact a collective of authors recruited by competition.

The second criterion is the ability to surprise and/or renew. The writing of the author should not be standardized and predictable. Solène mocks the stereotyped writing of the Harlequin novels: "*You have automatic literature tricks. You cast a character, then another, and you throw the dice to define their personality traits! At the end of x pages, you make the rival appear etc. And there, watch out! You're going to innovate because this time, the rival will be a homosexual! But don't worry, he will not be unemployed! He will be rich!*" The analogy with the fashion industry is frequently made to describe the degree of expected renewal by an author. The general idea is that writers should keep their style but change the frame, pattern, or at minimum the storyline. Solène explains: "*In fashion, you cannot offer the same thing every year. It must be renewed, challenged, not copied and pasted. It must be astonishing, surprising. You also expect that from an artist.*"

Another important signal of non-standardization is irregular output. Regularity of output (like one book a year) casts doubts on the talent of the writer as inspiration cannot be controlled. For Chantal: "*An author is not a robot. One cannot write on command, at least not a real novel. Inspiration does not come on command. Moreover, all the writers know the anguish of the blank page*". As illustrated by Manon: "*What shocks me is the regularity of publication of certain authors. It does not make them appear to be artists; it's business, money, it's not artistic. It ruins their image. So, it does not make me want to read them. Artists must take their time; they cannot produce books with the regularity of a pendulum*".

The fourth criterion is discretion, rarity. The authentic author should not appear too much in the media but let his/work speak for him/her. The interviewees insist on the fact that a writer is not a star, and should not be mistaken for an actor, or a musician. He/she is not a performer. The equivalent of the actors are the characters in the book, not the writer. Manon synthetizes the ideas and the discourses of many readers: "*I am shocked by the fact that some authors are on television. Even the fact that there is the photo of the author on the back of some books shocks me. The author should not put himself forward. For me, writers are not stars. They must not be stars. The star is glamor, it's superficial, it's surf. The author is not like that, so he has nothing to do with the stars. Writing is an area that has nothing to do with show business; it must remain apart. An author should not be highly publicized because it places a doubt on his artistic value or on the quality of his book.*"

The fifth indicator is the degree of commercial success. Even if some interviewees admit that commercial success can be the legitimate reward for talent, many think that the more successful writers are, the less authentic they are because they are then suspected of writing for money, and not pleasure. As a consequence, their work is viewed as less valuable. For Anne, "*since he has become a brand, Eric Emmanuel Schmitt has become disappointing while 20 years ago what he wrote was much more exciting. Nowadays, as soon as he releases a new book, he is displayed in the metro. The author may have a commercial purpose, but not only a commercial purpose*". However, they tend to excuse the authors they like by saying that they have been overwhelmed by success.

5. Discussion

The findings of the research have a certain number of theoretical and managerial implications. First, from a theoretical point of view, they illustrate that there can be a big gap between the perception of a concept by professionals (either researchers or managers) and consumers. For professionals, author names are clearly brand names, but not for consumers. In France, consumers seem to remain totally insensitive to the desacralization of the artist observed by researchers (Brown, 2015; Kerrigan et al., 2011; Muniz, Norris, & Fine, 2014; Schroeder, 2005). They stick to the stereotype of the authentic artist despite the facts. For example, they sing the praises of disinterestedness while buying more and more of the same writers (in France, in 2014, 10 writers accounted for 26% of the sales of fiction - SNC, 2015). They say that regularity of output casts doubts on the writer's talent but they rush to buy the latest (annual) book by Guillaume Musso. They claim to appreciate discretion but Amélie Nothomb is still one of the best-selling writers in France despite her overwhelming presence in the media at each new book release. These contradictions could be explained by the choice of a non-representative sample for the study, but the portrait of the writer drawn by readers has all the characteristics of a collective belief (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Indeed, all the interviewees shared the same image of the writer, and the only respondent who did consider the novelist as a brand was somehow an "ultra-elitist". For him, novels are necessarily consumer-oriented, and only poetry is "artistic" since it is really impossible to make a living from poetry these days. In fact, it seems that consumers do everything they can to preserve their idealized image of the author. There are many explanations which can explain such a resistance to reality. First, literature – like the arts in general – is a game of hide and seek which must make the calculations and artifices that underpin it invisible (Kerrigan et al., 2011). Then, humankind's deep-seated love for narrative, its clear preference for fiction over fact, can be advanced (Brown, 2011). The findings of the study can then be seen as a new illustration of the fact that consumers prefer myth to reality. Or it can be an aspiration to reenchant the world by reintegrating a part of what is sacred in this over-rationalized world (Belk et al., 1989). Whatever the reason, the present research suggests that, although the concept of authenticity was not built without commercial intent (Brown, 2006; Dettmar & Watt, 1996; Jensen, 1994), it was not built without symbolic intent either, and that intent seems to be to preserve a "sacred area" in the life of consumers.

Second, although there is a wide gap between what professionals and consumers think about authors, there also seems to be a large discrepancy between what they think about brands. Professionals usually adopt functional definitions of the brand: the brand is a trust contract (Kapferer, 2008), a signal of social status (Lipovetsky & Roux, 2009; Sicard, 2007), a "friend" who generates feelings of commitment, trust, and attachment (Fournier, 1998), or even a "magician" who reenchants the world (Brown et al., 2003; Kornberger, 2010). But, all these approaches share in common the fact that they forget about the past, the history of the brand. By explaining why the author name is not a brand, consumers develop in counterpoint their own conception of branding. For them, "the brand is the name of an industrialized and standardized product, highly advertised in the mass media, and largely distributed to be as accessible as possible, to allow a company to make as much money as possible". This perception is not unfounded given the common practices observed over the past 20 years regarding brand management: rationalization of brand portfolio, capitalization on "mega-brands", killing off of many beloved local "small brands" (Collange & Bonache, 2015; Schuiling & Kapferer, 2004). The present research highlights the point that brands are not only individual "tools" for achieving various personal goals, but are socially constructed. The context in which they evolve is taken into account by consumers in the perception of what a brand stands for.

From a managerial point of view, the recommendation will be to be cautious in the management of an author name and to avoid indiscriminately importing the marketing practices of consumer products (rationalization of portfolio, heavy media exposure, price rebates, etc.), even if it is very tempting in the short term in a sector where global sales are stagnant and the average profitability very low (SNE, 2015). Because, if the author name is a brand, it is not only a brand, and readers measure its value in terms of its "authenticity", manifested by a (1) personal, (2) creative, (3) irregular production, and (4) discretion in marketing. If the writer is perceived as "too industrial" or "too commercial", he/she will lose in prestige in the long term, which can be problematic for a professional novelist. This is not really a problem for the publisher, who has a portfolio of author names and can offset the decline in sales of one writer by the rise in sales of another. But the professional novelist has no other asset than his/her name (even if he/she can also develop a portfolio of pseudonyms to balance risks). To cultivate the value of his/her name, the first recommendation is to dare to renew his/her writing in order to continue to surprise, to amaze readers. Very often, publishers tend to urge their writers to "do the same again", to repeat their key success factor, in order to limit business risk. But this strategy may be counterproductive in the long run by creating the feeling that the writer is no longer an "artist" but just a "skilled craftsman". In order to endure, authors must not be afraid to innovate, to take the readers out of their comfort zone, to be audacious. But at the same time, they must not betray their readers and still respect the "basic contract" that binds them. We can observe that the best-selling (and long-lasting) writers in France have the ability to do that. Marc Levy changes genre with each new book, alternating comedy, thriller, or mystery, but there is always a love story. Guillaume Musso always has a new "What if?" idea, but his style remains the same. However, when we see authors like Gilles Legardinier writing the same "feel good" story for the fifth time in a row, we can fear that, when the fashion of the "feel good" books is over, he will have trouble bouncing back. For a writer, diversifying style, genre, themes, etc. is a way of managing risk in the way financial investors do. The second recommendation for writers is to maintain a degree of mystery in order to foster curiosity. In the era of the Internet and social networks where transparency is the key word, maintaining a certain opacity around oneself and intriguing people is the best way to maintain prestige. Even Warhol, as mediatized as he was, was careful to maintain a degree of mystery about his person (Muniz et al., 2014). The writer must remain the magician who reenchants the world with his/her words.

And instead of importing the marketing practices of consumer goods into the publishing sector, a second recommendation is, on the contrary, to import the marketing practices of the publishing industry into the consumer goods market, i.e. to make brands extraordinary again. Indeed, in the beginning, branding was a way to make a product "sacred", to set it apart from "ordinary" products. Brands are proper names, not common nouns, and naming is an act that imparts an extraordinary and unique destiny to a person or an object (Armengaud, 1990). A certain type of brand management (rationalization, standardization, and imitation) has made brands fall back into the profane world from which they had been extricated. This type of management seems to have forgotten that the initial vocation of brands is to bring some magic into the world (Kornberger, 2010). The recommendation would therefore be that they resume their original purpose and show consumers that they do have a human, emotional, and cultural value beyond their economic value (Civanyan, 2008). There are many ways to proceed, such as telling the story of the brand, showing that the people working for the brand (managers, blue collar workers, engineers, etc.) are closely involved, inviting artists to participate in some of the brand projects, creating a brand museum, creating the position of "creativity manager" within the company to help employees generating new ideas, or adopting more original ways to advertise the brand ("breaking the rules").

6. Conclusion

The main purpose of the research was to achieve a better understanding of whether or not the author name is just another brand, or a brand of a different nature than the others. The findings of the study show that the representation of the writer is still grounded in the stereotypical representation of the authentic artist, i.e. a human being who is (1) disinterested, (2) discreet, (3) free, and (4) creative (Clerc, 2010; Heinich, 2000; Moulard et al., 2015). Despite the fact that readers admit that they use it as a brand when choosing a book, the author name is nevertheless not a brand in their eyes. Indeed, since the writer is not a brand, and since it is impossible to separate the writer from his/her name, the author name does not ultimately appear as a brand. For French readers, the author name is a brand of a different kind rather than just another brand. It is a signature of another nature. This conclusion is exactly the opposite of that of De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley (1999) about the service brand. In the case of services, the service brand appears to be of the same nature as a brand of consumer goods, even if it must be managed differently because of the specificities of services. In the case of novels, the author name appears to be of a different nature from a brand of consumer goods, even if it is managed in the same way (end-of-aisles, promotion).

A striking finding of the study is that this refusal to consider the author name as a brand seems to be deliberate. Through all their discourses, it appears that readers draw a line between art (the writer) and commerce (the publisher) or between art (the "true" writer) and entertainment (the "commercial" writer). In the first case, the boundary is "objective" and clearly delimited by the traditional definition of what belongs to art (literature, painting, sculpture, music, etc.) and what does not, while in the second, the boundary is "subjective" and depends on consumer taste (what is "artistic" for one reader may be regarded as "commercial" by another). But, whatever the case, consumers clearly draw a dividing line between two worlds. Moreover, the findings of the study suggest that the representation of the writer is in fact built against the representation of the brand. The author (brand) name is the signature of an individual (organization) on an artisanal (industrial) product created to express oneself (earn money). This dual construction cannot be a coincidence and manifests a clear willingness to set art apart from ordinary life (commerce and/or entertainment).

7. Limitations and future research

This study provides a better understanding of the nature and specificities of author names but it also has a number of limitations. First, it has focused exclusively on readers, while the question of whether or not the author name is a brand name also concerns authors, publishers, booksellers, literary agents, and critics (Bourgeon-Renault & Gombault, 2009; Busson & Evrard, 2013). Second, the research has been restricted to writers and has omitted many other kinds of creators (painters, film directors, photographers, etc.). Third, and it is an important limitation, the study was conducted in France, a country in which writers enjoy a special status for historical, political, social, and legal reasons. It would therefore be worth broadening the scope of the research to publishing industry professionals, to other creators, and to other countries (especially Anglo-Saxon countries because of their specific conception of copyright). And, more globally, even if an author name is not of the same nature as a brand name on consumer goods or services, the analogy between the two, and the use of the literature on brands and brand management can be fruitful in terms of research and of great help for authors and publishers in answering questions such as: To what extent can an author change genre without having to use a pseudonym (brand extension)? To what extent can one author replace another in writing a serial with a recurring character (brand substitution)? In the case of recurring characters, are readers more attached to the character or to the author (brand attachment)? What are the relative weights of author's name and publisher's name in

book purchasing decisions (co-branding)? Is Internet piracy likely to erode an author's value in readers' eyes (brand value)? There look to be many promising research themes.

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