# Monarchs as heritage brand identities: exploring their attributes in seven European Monarchies

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the figure of the monarch as a heritage brand—an individual brand within the broader corporate brand of the monarchy, itself understood as a corporate heritage brand. Drawing on a survey of law and political science experts in seven European parliamentary monarchies (Spain, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden), the research identifies and evaluates seven key dimensions associated with the monarch's image. Using the theoretical frameworks of corporate heritage branding and brand hierarchy, the study investigates how these dimensions of the monarch relate to the monarchy's overall reputation and to levels of satisfaction with the institution.

The findings are expected to provide deeper insights into the role not only of the monarch—the most representative member—but also of other members of the royal family in shaping the monarchy's reputation. This will allow for a more nuanced assessment of their reputational legitimacy from an institutional marketing perspective.

Keywords:

Heritage brand, Monarch, Branding

## 1. Introduction.

Although European parliamentary monarchies no longer exercise effective political or executive power, they continue to hold significant symbolic and functional visibility. Economically, this visibility generates considerable value through tourism and endorsed products, as their visual and verbal associations convert prestige and image into cultural capital that produces tangible economic benefits (Greyser et al., 2006). In this context, managing institutional identity and reputation— together with communication strategies that position monarchs as symbolic representatives and personified embodiments of the brand—becomes essential to maintaining a delicate balance between tradition and modernity. Consequently, monarchies have evolved into complex, living brands for which communication is not optional but imperative (Garrido et al.,

2024).

Despite this relevance, research on monarchy as a corporate heritage brand remains limited (see Balmer and colleagues). While comparative analyses across European monarchies exist, they largely approach these institutions from political or historical perspectives (Hazell & Morris, 2020). Similarly, scholarship on monarchs often focuses on constitutional functions (Tridimas, 2021), rather than conceiving them as personal brands whose symbolic performance is constantly subject to public scrutiny (Gorbatov et al., 2018). A recent contribution by Garrido et al. (2024), drawing on Balmer et al.'s (2011) conceptual framework, examined the monarch as the personal brand of the institution, but restricted the analysis to attributes of the Spanish monarchy.

In the broader context of European parliamentary monarchies, contemporary monarchs embody strategic attributes of the institutional brand "Monarchy." Acting as brand ambassadors, their public image directly shapes perceptions of legitimacy, relevance, and continuity in the collective imagination (Balmer, 2011; Urde, Greyser & Balmer, 2007). The notion of the corporate heritage brand is particularly pertinent here: monarchies are not only institutions with a deep historical legacy, but also cultural symbols that actively manage their narratives through the personal visibility of individual representatives (Balmer, 2013).

This exploratory study therefore examines the institutional figure of the monarch from a marketing perspective, acknowledging that the monarch's personal image directly affects the monarchy's brand equity (e.g., personal scandals may diminish citizens' support). Such dynamics justify the strategic management of the monarch's role in line with theories of personal branding and brand equity. To advance this understanding, the ongoing research draws on data from seven European monarchies to compare public perceptions of monarchs' image dimensions and their contribution—alongside other royal family members—to the reputation of the monarchy as an institution.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Monarchy as a Corporate Brand

Within the literature on organizational identity, monarchies represent a distinctive paradigm of institutional branding that extends beyond traditional corporate conceptualizations. They function as sophisticated, dynamic brand entities with complex strategic dimensions (Greyser et al., 2006). Balmer and colleagues (Balmer et al., 2006; Balmer, 2008; Balmer, 2011) have categorized them as corporate heritage brands. Similar to long-standing family businesses that emphasize tradition, authenticity, and exclusivity by remaining under the

stewardship of heirs (e.g., Hermès), monarchies also transmit these values. Yet, they go further by preserving a symbolic identity passed across generations. Unlike corporations, their extraordinary longevity—spanning centuries or even millennia—constitutes a unique institutional asset. Heritage identities are powerful precisely because they not only encapsulate tradition but also provide identity to stakeholders (Balmer, 2011).

The success of such brands depends on their ability to leverage distinctive features and associated symbolic meanings. This perspective aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV, Barney, 1991), as monarchies can exploit resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organized. Figure 1 (see Appendix) outlines the defining elements of heritage brands. However, as Urde et al. (2007, p.10) caution, "having a heritage does not in itself create value, but rather the opportunity to do so".

Bulding on this, Balmer (2008) proposed a model identifying five pillars of monarchy, the so-called 5Rs (Regal, Royal, Relevant, Responsive, and Respected). Two of these pertain to the internal brand dimension (Regal and Royal), while the other three relate to the external dimension of the institution (Relevant, Responsive, and Respected).

## 2.2. The Symbolic Attributes of the Monarch as Monarchy's Brand Equity

Brand architecture provides a useful analogy for understanding the relationship between the monarchy and its members: the monarchy functions as the parent brand, while its members act as endorsed brands. As Balmer et al. (2006) argue,
historical and cultural contexts shape public expectations not only toward the crown as an institution but also toward its individual representatives. To date, however, no comparative study has examined European monarchs in terms of their impact on the parent brand, namely the Monarchy itself. Moreover, Balmer's 5Rs framework (Balmer, 2008), although valuable, does not capture all dimensions potentially relevant to the monarch as a public figure.
To evaluate the monarch as both an institutional and symbolic actor, and building on branding and institutional marketing literature, we identify a set of attributes that may drive the monarch's reputation and brand equity. Drawing from the stereotype content model (SCM), competence and warmth are included as universal dimensions of social perception (Fiske et al., 2007). Citizens are likely to rely on these attributes when assessing a monarch. In addition, considering the monarch's public role and the importance of emotional identification and trust for sustaining brand value (Urde et al., 2007), we also include charisma, integrity, empathy, leadership, and political role.

Collectively, these attributes appear central to understanding the symbolic power of the monarch within the broader monarchy brand.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample Design

To assess the attributes of current monarchs, we collected data from a sample of experts (Cadogan et al., 2001). In the first phase, the research team defined experts as university professors in political science and law from the seven European countries with parliamentary monarchies (i.e., Spain, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden). A database of institutional emails was compiled from the official websites of leading universities in the seven countries, yielding a total of 2901 contacts.

Based on the literature review seven elements of the monarch image were identified. Competence was measured with 4 items and Warmth with 2 items from Fiske et al. (2002). Charisma was measured with 2 items from Ingenhoff y Klein, (2018) and Avolio and Bass (1995). Leadership used 3 items from Conger and Kanungo (1994) and Ingenhoff y Klein (2018). Integrity was measured with 3 items (Craig and Gustafson, 1998). Empathy was measured with 1 item from Coger y Kanungo (1994). And Political role two items adapted from Martínez Sospedra (2021). In addition to the Monarch image, reputation of the consort and the heir (2 items each), Royal Family reputation (4 items) and other control variables were included in the questionnaire.

Data was collected between February and May 2025 using a survey platform from the authors' university. The average response rate was 16,37%.

## 4. Results.

Preliminary analyses revealed cross-country (see Figure 2) and gender differences in evaluations of the seven monarchs (see Figure 3). Men consistently rated lower than women on dimensions associated with traditionally masculine attributes, such as competence, charisma, and leadership.

**Figure 2.** Monarch evaluations by country and dimension
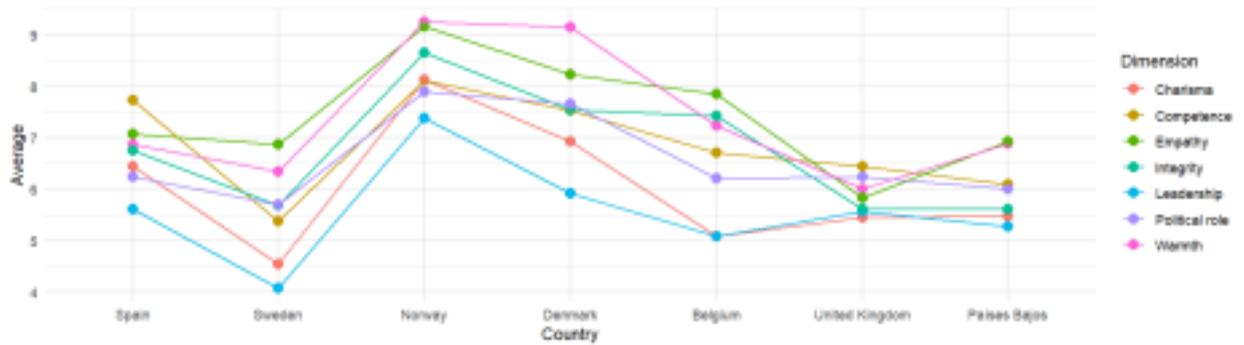
Stepwise regression analyses were conducted to predict monarchy reputation. The final model retained three monarch-related dimensions—competence (t=3.39, p<0.001), political role (t=4.24, p<0.001), and warmth (t=1.83, p<0.10)—as well as royal family reputation (positive reputation: t=3.96, p<0.001; scandals: t=-2.57, p<0.05), heir reputation (t=4.09, p<0.001), and country as a control variable. Together, these factors explained 66% of the variance in monarchy reputation (R²=0.66).

**Figure 3.** Monarch evaluations by gender and dimension
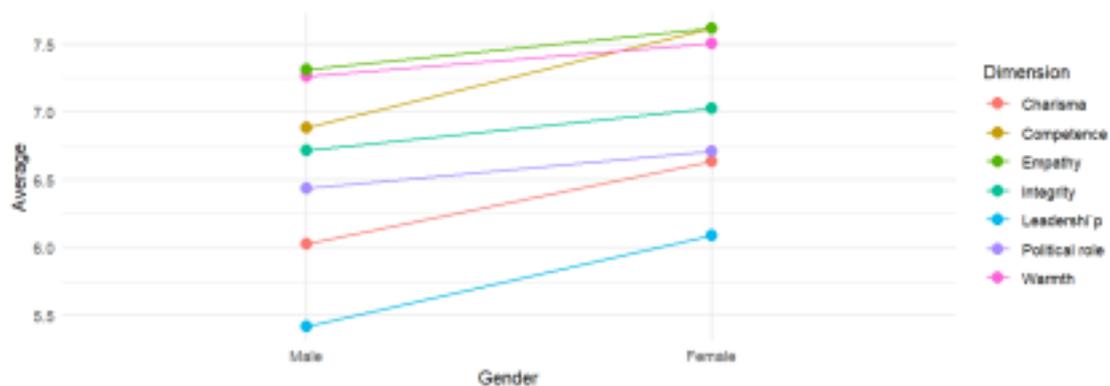


## 5. Conclusions.

This study is part of an ongoing project with data collection now with citizens currently underway across seven countries. The preliminary findings reported here provide initial insights into cross-national and gender differences in the evaluation of monarchs and their role in shaping monarchy reputation. Additional data will allow us to further test and refine these results, and the full comparative analysis across all countries will be presented at the conference.

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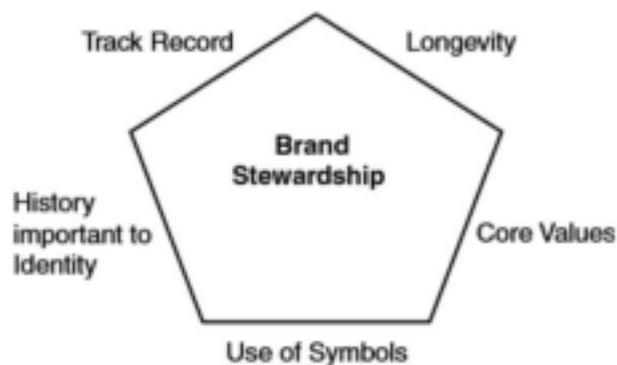
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**Appendix.**

**Figure 1.** The elements of brand heritage

Source: Urde et al. 2007.