

LACASA: A success case in brand and product management

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ABSTRACT This article makes reference to the company LACASA, a leader in the Spanish chocolate market, to illustrate the importance of brand management and product launch as a goal to consolidate and attain corporate excellence. Through several group activities and an experiment, the need to undertake sub-brand strategies and to use brand characters for supplementing other marketing strategies implemented by the company has been confirmed.

KEYWORDS brand management, LACASA, product launch, brand character, brand identity.

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LACASA: un caso de éxito en la gestión de marcas y productos

RESUMEN Este artículo toma como referencia a la empresa LACASA, líder en el mercado español del chocolate, para ilustrar la importancia de la gestión de marcas y el lanzamiento de nuevos productos como meta para la consolidación y la consecución de la excelencia empresarial. A través de la realización de varias dinámicas de grupo y un experimento, se ha podido constatar la necesidad de acometer adecuadas estrategias de submarcas y de la utilización de personajes de marca como complemento a otras estrategias de marketing implementadas por la empresa.

PALABRAS CLAVE gestión de marcas, LACASA, lanzamiento de nuevos productos, personajes de marca, personalidad de marca.

LACASA: um caso de sucesso na gestão de marcas e produtos

RESUMO Este artigo toma como referência a empresa LACASA, líder no mercado do chocolate da Espanha, para ilustrar a importância da gestão de marcas e do lançamento de novos produtos como meta para a consolidação e a consecução da excelência empresarial. Por meio da realização de várias dinâmicas de grupo e de um experimento, pôde-se constatar a necessidade de empreender adequadas estratégias de submarcas e da utilização de personagens de marca como complemento a outras estratégias de marketing implantadas pela empresa.

PALAVRAS CHAVE gestão de marcas, LACASA, lançamento de novos produtos, personagens de marca, personalidade de marca.

Introduction

Food companies are bound to strive for excellence, not only for the highly competitive and saturated context wherein they currently work, but also because consumers increasingly demand more safety and quality-level food every time. When excellence and commitment to innovation are based on a strategy with a well-reputed brand image, that is when consumers rely on the products made by a company. Each of the products launched by companies under this strategy achieve greater or lesser success if the proper brand is chosen, and if the brand is adjusted in line with the overall brand image of the company.

In this vein, brand image is critical to business success, both for launching new products and the consolidation of active, mature products. In the first case, success rates tend to be small - 80% of the products often fail in the first three months of launch - so a proper brand strategy can be critical (Lindstrom, 2010). In addition, to maintain the position reached, it is necessary to maintain a constant adaptation to changing consumer needs; this may require a renewal of the brand name, logo and other elements that make up the brand image (Keller, 2013). This paper undertakes to analyze the sub-brand introduction strategy (Milberg, Park & McCarthy, 1997; Boisvert & Burton, 2011), as well as the use of brand characters (Keller, 2008; Cayla, 2013; Delgado Fernandez & Honrubia, 2013). These latter elements - brand characters - can be very useful in differentiating products of competitors, in sectors such as the food sector (De Iulio, 2010).

To study the implementation of brand strategies in the context of product launch and consolidation, we chose the case of Spanish company LACASA, which is a good example of an innovative company with established brands. The leadership gained by LACASA in the Spanish chocolate market (Irisdata, 2013) lies on the fact that its brands represent symbols of warranty and confidence for consumers, and a potential differentiator from its competitors. In particular, we sought to analyze two real cases: the success of a sub-brand strategy for the launch of a new product - *Fruitis by Lacasitos*, and the influence of the modernization process conducted on the brand character on the flagship signs of this company: the *Conguitos*.

For the first aspect - sub-strategy analysis, the results are displayed using a qualitative technique, i.e. focus group, whereas we present the results of

an experiment in the case of the brand characters. Both studies shall provide insight on consumer perceptions about the brands and characters used by one of the leading companies in Spain, and can also provide guidance for other companies when defining their product and brand strategies.

The following section describes the objectives of this study. We present LACASA Group, providing details about its history and current situation. Subsequently, we present the methodology and results achieved, to end with a series of reflections and management implications likely to be applied in companies with similar characteristics.

Objectives of the study and theoretical foundations

As indicated in the introduction, and as shown in Table 1, this work has a twofold purpose. Said objectives are presented below, along with the most relevant literature, in order to understand the concepts addressed in the research proposal.

GRAPH 1. Research objectives

OBJECTIVE	BRAND
1. To assess the use of a sub-brand strategy in a new product launch	Fruitis by Lacasitos
2. To assess the influence of a change in the character on the brand's image and personality	Conguitos

Source: Prepared by the authors

With regard to the first objective, one of the critical decisions in the introduction of any innovation is the brand choice. This decision has traditionally been defined as a tactic, but it has a number of strategic implications. In the case of food products, this decision would be more important - if possible. Consumers do not spend a lot of time choosing these products and rely on a few key elements including brand, which allows to evaluate overall quality (Jones & Morgan, 1994; Ozretic-Dosen, Skare & Krupka, 2007; Li, Boyd & Pai, 2011) and safety (Manning, 2007; Chrysochou, 2010). In addition, it is possible to assess issues such as organoleptic characteristics or packaging (Vranesevic & Stancec, 2003).

In cases where a company has a brand that has achieved a certain notoriety in the market, the most reasonable policy is to use either a direct extension strategy, where the same name is used in

the new product, or a mixed sub-brand strategy wherein a new name is proposed and accompanied by the “mother brand” (Milberg et al., 1997; Boisvert & Burton, 2011). In the latter case, the visibility of a name or another depend respectively on the desire to leverage existing brand associations or the new category (Keller, 2013). Generally, whenever an existing name is associated to a new product, perceptions and feelings generated by each of these two elements are exchanged, thereby creating a feedback effect (Czellar, 2003). Logically, the leverage of associations is lower when the mother brand loses visibility.

LACASA has been innovating and launching new products for 150 years. They have also been utilizing the sub-brand strategy in its flagship products, such as *Lacacitos* and *Conguitos* (see Figure 1). The packaging of both products shows LACASA as a prominent figure, albeit in the first case the association with the parent brand is reinforced by the name itself. This leverage on the parent brand is logical and advisable, considering that both products use the main ingredient associated with LACASA – chocolate. In *ceteris paribus* conditions, a high degree of adjustment or coherence between the brand and its products will improve consumer attitudes, especially when it comes to a brand that offers quality products. However, in the case of products whose attributes are inconsistent or do not match the associated main brand, distancing from the principal name may be advisable to avoid dilution of brand associations (Milberg et

al., 1997). One of the motivations of this paper is to analyze the consistency in the use of the mother brand for a new product marketed by LACASA, which does not share the main association of chocolate: *Fruitis* by *Lacacitos*, button-shaped jelly candies with caramel. In addition to assessing the brand name, we undertook to analyze the perceptions, attitudes and purchase intentions towards this product.

In regards to the second objective, many companies have – while in the process of construction and positioning of their brand image – devised brand characters or pets that accompany the logo or communication campaigns. For example, Michelin’s Bibendum, McDonald’s clown, the Duracell Bunny or the tonic water Schweppes man, have become famous visual icons of their respective brands. According to Keller (2008), brand characters are a special type of symbol mark that takes on human characteristics, thereby facilitating brand recognition and strengthening the associations linked to the brand personality. This strategy has been considered very effective to advertise food products aimed at children, and as such has been in use since the mid-twentieth century in countries like Italy, Germany and France (De Iulio, 2010).

One of the reasons for the success of these icons is that individuals like to attribute human characteristics to objects, a process known as “anthropomorphism”, and generates an emotional response to products regardless of their other

FIGURE 1. LACASA product logos



attributes (Delbaere, McQuarrie & Phillips, 2011; Landwehr, McGill & Herrmann, 2011). Moreover, the associations evoked by the brand character tend to transcend to the image that individuals have of the product (Keller, 2008; De Iulio, 2010). Said associations also have an impact on the emotional and sensory experiences of consumers (Delgado et al, 2013) and even generate feelings of community amongst the members of an organization (Cayla, 2013). At any rate, the first impact of an attractive character will be on brand image – a concept that includes all the associations attributed by the consumer to the brand, and which reflects both functional and emotional attributes (Keller, 2013). The affective component – the most relevant component for purposes of differentiation – represents the emotions that arise from the personality of the brand and its ability to interact with consumers (Aaker, 1996; Fournier, 1998). As in the case of humans, brands can appropriate personality traits, such as honesty, competence or even gender, providing consumer benefits of self-expression (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, Benet-Martínez & Garolera, 2001; Schlesinger & Cervera, 2008).

One of the visual icons that have accompanied the Conguitos brand since its introduction in the 1860s, is a native Congolese course. To do away with any racial stereotypes and renew their brand, LACASA has modernized this character in recent years. Elements such as the “spear” that the aboriginal character used to hold – as well as the and excessively thick lips – have been eliminated and now there lives a whole “Conguitos community” that brings modernity to their logo (see Figure 2). However, all this change in the scenery of Conguitos is likely to influence the image that consumers perceive about the brand, both by children and young adults who have been or are

still consumers and brand specifiers. Therefore, in relation to this point there is a need to know whether the image and personality of the Conguitos vary depending on the brand character used.

LACASA: Over 150 years of passion for excellence and an innovation-based future

LACASA Group is consolidated as one of the first Spanish producers of chocolates, children’s sweets, candies, chocolates and caramel candies (see Graph 1). Below we present the company, its historical development and current situation in the chocolate market. To this effect, we took information obtained from the website (www.LACASA.es), internal reports and interviews with officials from their Marketing Division.

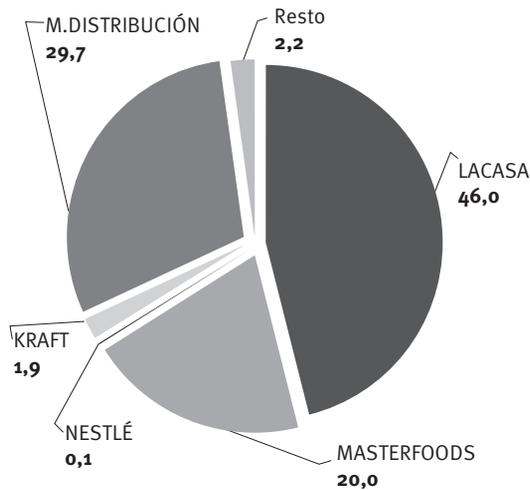
The story of a consolidated project

The Group’s history begins in 1852, and they specialized in the production of chocolate and coffee at the end of the century. Midway through the twentieth century, the company sought new business solutions, such as nougat for patisseries, chocolates and handmade nougat chocolate with almonds (the latter achieved great success) and moved from the regional to the national level with the acquisition of small companies . In the following three decades, the company continued the policy of acquiring other companies in the sector, complementing the offer of LACASA products while entering other markets with a brand that was already established (Mauri and Barcelona - segment leader in the candies market; Bombonera Vallisoletana, with the range of

FIGURE 2. Product packaging with the current characters



Source: Prepared by the authors

GRAPH 1. Spanish market share, expressed by value per manufacturer

Source: Irisdata, Sep.-Dic. 2013

FIGURE 3. Image of the first factory founded by Antonio LACASA in 1852

Source: www.lacasa.es

high quality chocolates, brands and Chocolates La Cibeles, Oviedo, to increase production capacity, among others).

In addition, the company began its international expansion in 1998 with the creation of Chocolates LACASA Portugal, in order to enter the market of the neighboring country. In 2000, a homonymous company was established in Argentina. In 2003, LACASA strengthened its presence in the European market with the acquisition of a majority stake in Confiseries Paul Marcel and 100% of another French company, Suca, S.A. At present, the company exports its products to 40 countries in five continents, aiming to consolidate its presence in these markets.

LACASA Group was the first company Spanish company in the industry which became certified under ISO 9002, awarded by Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance Ltd., in 1994. Today, the Group is certified under ISO 9001: 2008 quality management, as well as BRC and IFS certificates in quality and food safety. With the aim of developing new products, varieties and presentations, LACASA devotes part of its budget to carry out R&D projects. Also, in recognition of its management, the company has received several awards (Gold Medal for Quality of the Aragonese Exhibition, 1885, Commendation of the Order of Merit for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Gold Medal for Labor Merit by the Ministry of Labor, 2003). Table 1 shows the most relevant facts and figures are summarized.

The Conguitos Brand: the flagship mascot in the Spanish chocolate market

Within the LACASA Group product portfolio, Conguitos stands out as a brand with great recognition and reputation in the market (see Figure 2), which has maintained its essence for over 50 years of history. Regarding the product, LACASA preserves quality peanut and chocolate ingredients, and in terms of image, the logo, the mascot, the orange color and the jingle ("we are the Conguitos...") are the unmistakable hallmarks.

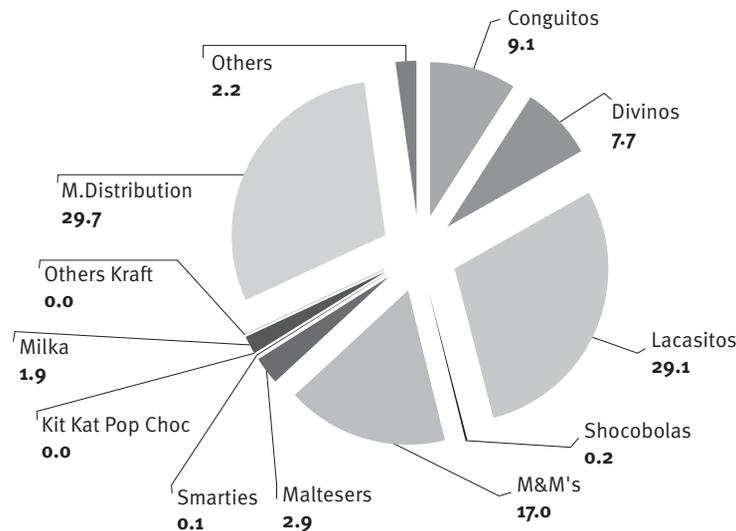
While the market where the Conguitos brand competes is very broad – since it encompasses any mostly sweet product capable of being consumed by impulse (candy, jelly beans, etc.) – it can be located within the chocolate market, where it competes with any bar chocolate or candy bar. But you can also include in the segment of button-shaped candies, competing with products such as M&M's, Maltesers and a number of imitators with brands that have less recognition. In addition, they also compete with "sibling" products, such as Lacasitos.

The Conguitos mascot is essentially inspired by peanut and chocolate. Conguito is a nice character who has been conferred a number of positive values that symbolize friendship and sympathy. In morphological and psychological terms, the character's raised thumb is a sign of optimism; his large, rounded eyes signify warmth and tenderness, and his big mouth denotes an extrovert attitude.

TABLE 1. LACASA Company

YEAR AND PLACE OF FOUNDATION	1852 Jaca (Spain)
PRODUCTS AND BRANDS	Lacasitos, Conguitos, Divinos, LACASA hard candy, LACASA chocolates, Uña candies, Mauri candies and caramels, Mentolín caramels
AVERAGE STAFF	500 people (700 in full season)
NUMBER OF FACTORIES	4 (2 in Zaragoza, 1 in Quintanar de la Orden and 1 in Oviedo, in Spain) 2 affiliated commercial companies in Lisbon and Buenos Aires (productive center)
FY2012 SALES	€109 million (13% increase vis-à-vis 2011)
COUNTRIES OF OPERATION	40 countries in 5 continents – the most relevant are Canada, Nordic countries, the UK, France, Portugal, Mexico, Colombia, Mercosur countries, China, Saudi Arabia and Dubai

Source: Prepared by the authors from data provided by the company (www.LACASA.es)

GRAPH 2. Spanish market share in value, per brand

Source: Irisdata, Sep.-Dic. 2013

Since its launch in 1961, the mascot has undergone subtle changes. After an initial positioning with an advertisement wherein we would see the Conguitos singing the jingle in the jungle of Congo – this fact that marked the history of the brand throughout its history – its image has evolved into a Conguito who is more tailored to modern times and away from any controversies (racial elements like the spear and fleshy lips are eliminated). Thus, the product is currently marketed with six different characters (original, soccer player, singer, skier, skater girl and *jotero* dancer), as can be seen in Figure 2 above.

Empirical Study I. Evaluation of a new product

Methodology Study I

In order to meet the first objective, the evaluation of the use of a sub-strategy in launching a new product – Fruitis by Lacasitos – we held a series of focus groups or group dynamics. This technique is considered appropriate to assess the acceptance of new products on the market, as well as the marketing strategy, providing valuable information that comes from the interaction with the participants (Rabadán & Alto, 2003).

Eight focus group sessions were held, wherein a total of 90 undergraduate business program students partook. Participants' average age was 20 - 57.8% of them were women. Following general recommendations for the development of this technique, the participants formed groups of about ten people in a secluded room, in order to facilitate their interaction. The role of the moderator was played by an individual with communication skills and empathy, who had previously been instructed on the case.

Prior to the discussion, the participants received physical samples of the new product (Figure 4) that had to try it and assess it with a questionnaire. The first four groups assessed only Fruititis, while the remaining four groups compared Fruititis with a product regarded as its main competitor. A questionnaire commonly used by LACASA for this type of testing was used, adding a last general assessment question on a 7-choice Likert scale (1 = I do not like it at all, 7 = I like a lot). Once the survey was completed, there started a debate in order to obtain qualitative information on a number of general research topics such as perceptions on the product, packaging, brand, price and purchase intent.

Results of Study I

The analysis of the data obtained in the four groups that compared both products revealed that most individuals (71.4%) preferred the product that competed against Fruititis, and this difference grew after tasting both types of candy (85.7%). These percentages and the results of the hypothesis comparison are shown in Table 2. The hypothesis comparison exercise allows to demonstrate that – regardless of whether or not the product is pleasant to taste – the individuals' initial preference exerts a statistically significant influence on the final choice ($\chi^2 = 4.75$, $p = 0.03$).

FIGURE 4. Envase del producto valorado en las dinámicas



Fuente: www.lacasa.es

As shown in Graph 3, the main reason argued by the participants who chose the competitor's candy was greater trust in the brand (60%), followed by its flavor (61%). Those who chose Fruititis were influenced by the external shape and appearance of the product before the test (72.7%), and subsequently by its texture (80%).

On the other hand, 72.3% of the participants in the previous focus group where only Fruititis is tasted said they liked this new candy. Of this, 62.1% justified their decision based on taste percentage, being significantly higher than other options such as texture (10.3%) or originality (13.8%). This weight of the flavor component is due precisely the absence of a comparison with the "strongest rival" in said attribute. In addition, it was found in these previous focus group sessions that the texture of the new product is an attribute wherein a clear discrepancy arises: half of the sample (53.2%) was satisfied with the texture, 17% thought the caramels should be softer and 29.8% thought just the opposite.

Finally, in Table 3, shows a summary of the comments that appeared in the eight focus

TABLE 2. Percentage of choice for Fruititis and the competing product

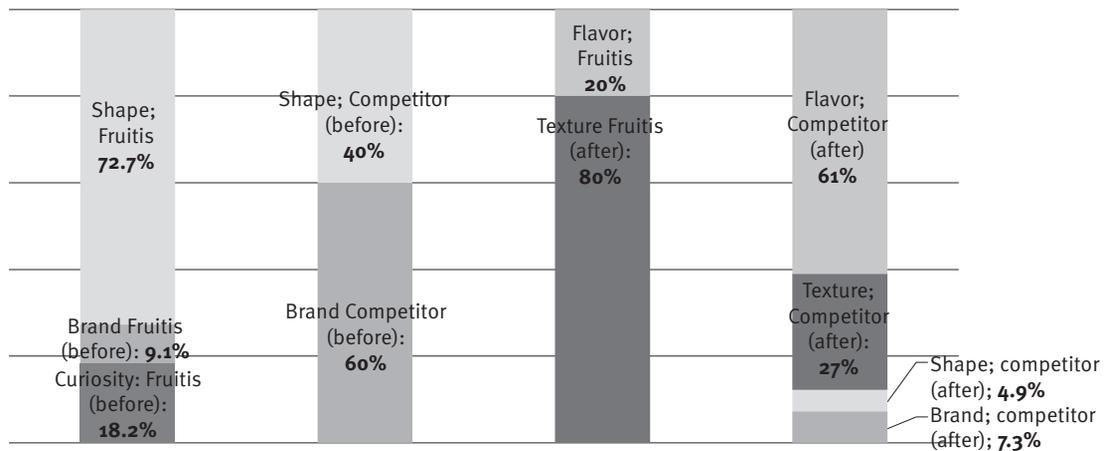
	INITIAL (PRE) PREFERENCE	FINAL (POST) PREFERENCE	FINAL ASSESSMENT (1-7)
FRUITIS	28.6%	14.3%	3.7
COMPETITOR	71.4%	85.7%	5.7
TOTAL	100%	100%	-
TEST (PRE → POST)	$\chi^2 = 4.75$ *** $P = 0.03$		

Source: Prepared by the authors

groups. Information has been grouped according to the various issues that were addressed, and references are made mainly to the type of product, organoleptic properties (taste, texture, etc.) and marketing strategy. It is noteworthy that, although no differences were found between sexes in the questionnaire analysis, qualitative analysis of the responses did evince a more favorable attitude towards the new product by the female participants.

It is also worth mentioning the debate which emerged about the adequacy of the brand strategy and the packaging of the new product, due to the different associations evoked by consumers by the stimuli used. Although the overall sub-brand strategy was considered appropriate, the participants discussed whether the parent brand should have a greater presence in the new product, given its association with quality, despite being linked to chocolate products too.

GRAPH 3. Reasons for choosing products before and after tasting them



Source: Prepared by the authors

TABLE 3. Assessment of the new product in the focus group sessions

CATEGORY	Fruit-flavored caramel (strawberry, lemon, orange, apple, surprise)
SHAPE	Size bigger than similar products
ASPECT	Colorful and attractive
TEXTURE	Discrepancy between hard and soft
GENERAL FLAVOR	Too sweet. Can be improved
FLAVOR CHOICE	The strawberry and lemon flavors are right on cue. The "surprise" flavor is attractive, but it's not pleasant upon tasting it. New flavors are suggested: Coca-Cola, blackberry, pineapple, chocolate
COMPETITORS IDENTIFIED	Both manufacturer and distributor brands. Difficulty in differentiation.
TARGET POPULATION	Children, preferably. The packaging may influence segmentation.
BRAND	Little distinctiveness in the name.
PACKAGING	Large, Not very innovative. Proposal: auto-closing feature to facilitate preservation. Proposal for new packaging (plastic tube, bulk). Proposal: individual wrapping for caramels
PRICE	Between € 0.80 and €2 Lower than the price of the product regarded as the main competitor.
PURCHASE INTENTION	Low amongst the participants, except for purchasing the product for other consumers. More favorable predisposition amongst women

Empirical Study II. Changing the character and the brand image

Study Methodology II

The objective of this second study was to measure the influence of the six Conguitos characters in the perception of the image and personality of the brand by consumers. To this end, we conducted an experiment selecting six groups of students and isolating them from one another, so that they would not be influenced by the experimental conditions of the other groups (whose existence they did not know about), thus avoiding negative role play effects. Each group was exposed to a different treatment (character), thereby obtaining a total of 161 responses.

Firstly, the character assigned was observed out of context (i.e., without seeing the brand or the package) and then the answered the following prompts: "Say 3 words this image suggest you" and then "And what if we talk about food? Say 3 words this image evokes in you". Subsequently, a few control questions were made so as to ensure the homogeneity of the groups (although the distribution of students in the groups is determined by their last name, which would initially guarantee it). Thus, the respondents were asked: i) their preference regarding chocolate on a scale from 1 to 5, ii) if they knew the Conguitos brand, iii) if they had previously eaten them. The results indicate that all the groups had a high preference for chocolate (all averages exceed the value of 4 and the ANOVA test detected no mean difference - $p = 0.67$), and knowledge and consumption ranged between 90% and 100% in all cases.

To evaluate the influence of character on the personality and image of the product, we showed each group of respondents an image of a Conguitos package (Figure 2) with the same character they had previously seen out of context, and were asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about the brand. The items relating to personality were extracted and adapted from the work of Aaker et al. (2001) and Schlesinger & Cervera (2008), who use scales tested in Spain (see Table 4). There is a total of 30 factors that can be grouped into four dimensions, in line with the proposals of these authors: honesty, competence, excitement and sophistication. We also researched the gender with which the brand identified, using a scale of 1

(= male) to 5 (=female). Regarding the overall brand image, we used a scale based on Martínez & Pina (2009) and Schlesinger & Cervera (2008), also applied to the Spanish case, to measure its different components (functional image, affective image, reputation).

Results of Study II

Overall Performance

The results of the total sample (see Table 4) indicate a high image evaluation for Conguitos regarding reputation (4.0), especially since it is considered *well established* (4.2). Similarly, the emotional dimension of the image has a high value (3.9), especially because it *causes sympathy* (4.3), has a differentiated personality (3.9) and *does not disappoint one* (3.9). Regarding the functional image, the character has a slightly lower rating (3.5), albeit it is considered *high quality* (3.7).

The brand personality is defined as *successful, traditional and reliable*, in the dimension of competition, and *fun and happy* with regard to issues relating to emotions (all values greater than 4). By contrast, the character has a low valuation on components of personality associated with sophistication (*glamorous, elegant, elitist, classy*), except when considered as *having a good appearance* (4.0). Regarding the dimension of sincerity, Conguitos is regarded as a *friendly, authentic and close brand* (values between 3.9 and 4.0). Several desirable attributes were also highly valued (between 3 and 4) such as *familiar, leader, respectful, young, unique*, and on the other hand the attribute *healthy* has a rating under 3.

Given the high rate of preference for chocolate, we analyzed whether brand perceptions varied according to this variable. Thus, we recalculated the assessment of brand attributes excluding individuals who were less enthusiastic about chocolate (values ≤ 2), and the most enthusiastic ones (value = 5). In neither case did we observe noteworthy changes in assessments from those previously obtained with the total sample.

These latter results are consistent with the analysis of variance performed in order to determine the influence of the preference for chocolate in the perception of brand image and personality, as there were no significant differences - except in the variables *traditional* and *well established*. Specifically, the greater the preference

for chocolate, the more *traditional* and *well consolidated* the brand is perceived.

It was also observed that the respondents' sex also has a statistically significant influence on the preference for chocolate (women 4.5 and men 4.0, $p = 0.003$). Therefore, it was pondered whether the respondents' sex determined a different assessment of the attributes, concluding that in most cases it cannot be said that there are differences between men and women. The attributes that do exist (*traditional, successful, elitist, good looking, high quality*) women always give a higher valuation.

Influence of the character

As for the objective of the experiment – measuring the influence of the character seen in the image and personality of brand – it has been found that there is no significant effect in general. The ANOVA test showed only a probability of error of less than 10%, when stating that the character influences the *traditional* and

differentiated personality items. Furthermore, the means (Scheffé) tests which analyze 2-2 differences gave significant results in both cases when the character observed was the soccer player in the first test (compared against the singer, considered to be the less *traditional*), and the second test (compared against the skier, regarded as the most *distinctive personality*). Also, this reduced influence of the character was maintained when the sample was restricted to individuals favorable to chocolate (preference ≥ 3), and even upon eliminating the most enthusiastic ones (preference = 5).

A significant influence of the character was observed in regards to brand gender (where 1 = male and 5 = female). As expected, the singer and the skater are more female (3.3 and 3.0, respectively) and the soccer player is the male (2.2). In fact, the Scheffe test shows that the latter is the character with the most gender differences against the others.

Given the differences in preference for chocolate based on gender noted in the previous

TABLE 4. Measurement scales used and test results

		Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statement (from 1 to 5): Conguitos is a brand that is...										
PERSONALITY	Sincerity	Friendly	4.01	Competency	Successful	4.25 ++	Emotion	Fun	4.12	Sophistication	Good appearance	4.02***
		Authentic	3.99		Traditional	4.01** HHH		Happy	4.09		Original	3.71
		Close	3.91		Trustworthy	3.99		Imaginative	3.58		Unique	3.44
		Lovable	3.80		Safe	3.73		Young	3.46		Classy	2.88
		Familiar	3.70		Leader	3.63 ^H		Daring	2.96		Glamorous	2.51
		Respectful	3.49		Innovative	2.96		Modern	2.95		Elitist	2.40
		Honest	3.40		Healthy	2.63		Independent	2.93			2.34 ++
		Sincere	3.35					Sentimental	2.73			
		What gender do you associate the brand Conguitos with? 1 – Masculine... 5 – Feminine										Gender 2,83*** ++ HMM
IMAGEN	Functional	Conguitos are high quality									3.74 ++	
		... they have features other brands lack									3.33	
	Affective	Conguitos is a brand that awakens sympathy									4.28	
		... it is a brand that does not disappoint its customers									3.86	
		... conveys a personality which differentiates it from competing brands									3.94***MM	
		The personality conveyed by the Conguitos brand influences my decision to choose it above the others									3.38	
	Reputation	Conguitos is one of the best brands in the sector									3.78	
... it is a well consolidated brand in the market									4.21 ^{HHM}			

* Significant difference at 10%/** 5%/*** 1% depending on the character observed.

+ Significant difference at 10%/++ 5%/+++ 1% based on the sex of the respondent.

H Significant difference at 10%/HH 5% depending on the character, for the sample of men.

M Significant difference 10%/MM 5% depending on the character, for the sample of women

section, we decided to analyze the influence of the characters in the opinions of men and women separately. The results were similar for both sexes: observing one or another character just led them to a different perception of the brand. Thus, men valued the brand differently in terms of the *traditional* attribute (a higher evaluation of the soccer player and a lower evaluation than the original one), *leader* (higher: skater, lower, original), *sincere* (higher: singer, lower, soccer player and the original character); and women in term of *distinctive personality* (higher: skier, lower: soccer player). For both sexes, watching a character or another influenced the consideration of Conguitos as being *well established* (in women; higher: jotoero dancer and the original character; lower: singer and skier. Men: higher: singer, soccer player; lower: the original character).

Below is an analysis of the two open questions (Table 5). As mentioned, these questions were to be answered by watching the selected character, but without observing the packaging or the Conguitos brand.

In general, all dimensions of personality were evoked. Emotion was the predominant dimension, especially in the case of the jotoero dancer (56%) and the soccer player (52%). Thus, many participants mentioned attributes such as *fun, joyful* and *happy*. The jotoero dancer was also the character which raised the most attributes related to honesty (25%), as opposed to the skater girl, for which no attributes were mentioned. As for competition, the soccer player stood out with attributes such as *healthy* and *energy*; this dimension did not appear in three of the characters (original, skier and jotoero dancer). The female characters had the most outstanding attributes in terms of sophistication, although many of the superlatives were negative. Finally, gender was evoked only in two female characters.

As for the attributes mentioned in the second question, wherein the term food is introduced, we grouped the terms by organoleptic, functional or image-related features. In relation to the latter, the jotoero character is the most *sweet, tasty, good* and *crispy* in the participants' opinion – nearing 90%. As for functionality, all the characters have been identified as possible *desserts, snacks, appetizers* or *snacks*; and with respect to image-related features, in addition to mentioning positive aspects as *energy, calories* or *diet*, or even *good* and *healthy* in the case of the soccer player, we found some negative characteristics such as *fat* or

plump, in the case of the singer and the skater girl characters.

In relation to the identification of the brand and product type, it was found that a high percentage of participants associated the images shown with *Conguitos* and *chocolate*. In this vein, the classic character reached almost 70% recognition for the brand and almost

100% for the product category. On the contrary, the soccer player character was the least related to chocolate. Finally, it is interesting to note that most of the characters evoked children-related or racial terms (Africa, black), except for the skier and the skater girl, wherein the predominant attributes were related to the character's activities.

Conclusions

In this time and age, product innovation is an obligation rather than a choice. Thus, that the development and launch of new products conditions both business performance and the competitive position achieved (Carbonell Rodríguez & Munuera, 2004; Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2012). In addition, given the increase in the share of store brands, introducing innovations can also be an effective weapon in the hands of manufacturers (Gielens, 2012). However, innovation is not only launching new products, but may be limited to extrinsic aspects of the product such as packaging, logo or brand character. At any rate, when assessing the success of innovation it is also necessary to analyze the effects on consumer perceptions.

This paper sought to analyze the most appropriate brand strategies to launch new products and strengthen the position of products that are already consolidated in the market, respectively. In the first case, many companies may find themselves in the dilemma of exploiting the prestige of their flagship brand, with the risk that the failure of the new product may hinder the image of the entire company, or to bet on a new, independent, brand to which it is possible to imprint a personality of its own. In the second case it may be necessary (to maintain the success achieved in the past) to update the elements associated with the brand (e.g. the character), so as to suit the prevailing tastes and aesthetics prevailing in the society.

The results of this paper allow to advance a number of implications and recommendations for brand management and new product launches. As

TABLE 5. Qualitative analysis results

						
	ORIGINAL	SOCCER PLAYER	SINGER	SKIER	SKATER GIRL	JOTERO DANCER
PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES (Q1: "NAME 3 WORDS THAT THIS IMAGE EVOKES IN YOU.")						
Sincerity	5% Pleasant	9% comradeship, integration	7% Friendly, original	3% Sympathy	0%	25% Sympathy, Peace, Love
Competence	0%	13% healthy, energy	4% Leisure	0%	3% Dynamic	0%
Emotion	14% Fun, joyful, humorous	52% fun, joy, young, happy, freedom	40% Fun, young, joyful, modern, happiness, relaxed, motivated	28% Happy, fun, joyful, graceful	23% Happy, fun, young	56% Fun, happy, joyful, illusion, young
Sophistication	5% fat	0%	11% Attractive, plump, hair dyed	0%	20% fashion, presumptuous, posh	6% bald
Gender	0%	0%	4%	0%	24%	0%
NUTRITION ATTRIBUTES (Q2: " AND WHAT IF WE TALK ABOUT FOOD? NAME 3 WORDS THAT THIS IMAGE EVOKES IN YOU.")						
Organoleptic and sensorial attributes	54% Sweet, good, tasty, crunchy, rich	39% Sweet, good, exquisite	68% Sweet, good, tasty, crunchy, cloying	16% Sweet	60% Sweet, good, rich, tasty, crunchy	88% Sweet, rich, good, tasty, crunchy
Functional characteristics	18% Snack, dessert,	17% snack, yummy	21% dessert, entrée, delicacy	9% Snack, entrée	8% entrée, yummy	38% Dessert, entrée, snack
Image-related characteristics	0%	9% gold, healthy	11% energy, fattening, plump	3% calories	8% diet, fattening, plump	6% recommendable
Product type	9% snacks, caramels	0%	4% caramels	9% Caramels, candies, bollos	8% Candies, bollos	25% caramels, candies, gummy bears
Other ingredients	23%	13%	25%	22%	20%	6%
Other ingredients	5% almond	0%	25% Sugar, milk, hazelnut, almond	9% Milk, cereals	13% Almond, cereals, hazelnut	0%
PRODUCT IDENTIFICATION (% ANSWERS TO Q1 / % ANSWERS TO Q2)						
Conguitos	64% / 68%	48% / 70%	46% / 57%	44% / 75%	60% / 73%	56% / 63%
Lacasitos	5% / 5%	4% / 13%	0% / 4%	0% / 9%	3% / 5%	0% / 6%
Chocolate	68% / 95%	4% / 70%	39% / 96%	22% / 84%	43% / 90%	44% / 88%

* The percentage represents the number of times the category described is mentioned, vis-à-vis the total number of individuals.

Bold: attributes which have been mentioned more than 3 times.
Italicized: attributes which might have negative connotations

for the success of a sub-brand strategy (Objective 1), this work has confirmed that brands like LACASA convey confidence to try new food products. In this sense, the results of the focus group sessions show that brand trust is the main reason of choice before trying a new product. However, when it comes to products whose main ingredients do not match the products normally associated with the brand (Fruitis vs. Conguitos), a sub-brand strategy may be more appropriate than relying solely on the name of the parent brand. Moreover, as noted in Study I, marketing the product only with the main mark (direct label extension) could cause confusion as to the characteristics of the product prior to testing, and consequently the main brand's image (LACASA) could be affected in a negative fashion.

As for the influence of modernization of the character (objective 2), the experiment shows that perception of the brand (through the attributes of personality and image) has few variations, both in terms of the character used and the characteristics of people who evaluate it (sex or preference for chocolate). Therefore, it can be concluded that the personality of the Conguitos brand prevails over the characters. Consequently, a good strategy to modernize brand image could be to introduce small variations of the primeval character, keeping their personality traits, so that consumers and prescribers can continue to identify with the product and perpetuate their loyalty despite the passage of time. As has been shown, when a brand intends to carry out a modernization strategy, the strength of the brand image must remain with its flagship character (the one consumers ultimately relate to), so the influence obtained with the changes introduced in the character can be slightly perceived.

Thirdly, in line with the work of Delgado et al. (2013), the results show the need to manage sensory and emotional associations that brand characters generate, as a way to achieve success in the market. In the case of Conguitos, consumers identify the brand as being traditional, with a distinct, sincere and well established personality. These attributes reflect a range of feelings and emotions that can influence brand loyalty, in recommendations to other consumers and positive word-of-mouth. That is, the weight of the parent brand is what determines loyalty to a product, even with the passage of time.

Finally, this study reveals that some characters can help strengthen brand awareness across dimensions such as sincerity, competition and emotion. On the contrary, feminine characters are seemingly best suited to change perceptions of sophistication and gender. Thus, this paper shows that brand characters can help brand position in the long term, and they are used to supplement other marketing strategies developed by the company. At any rate, it should be noted that any changes in the business environment can bring along a change in the type and strength of the associations that make up the brand image (Boisvert & Burton, 2011).

Finally, in light of generalization of results in other contexts, it is necessary to consider some limitations of this study. Thus, it should be taken into consideration that the data has been collected from a single company – a leading stakeholder in its sector – and focused on the manufacture of chocolate. Therefore, it would be interesting to replicate the study for companies engaged in other activities – even within the food sector – as well as for brands with less notoriety. Also, whilst LACASA believes that the sample under this study (college students) is part of their primary target audience, the results could be replicated by expanding the sample range in terms of age, education and professional activity.

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