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The name of the corporate brand. A taxonomy of the names of family business in Spain

Alberto Pinillos Laffón [[CV](#)] Universidad de Alicante, alberto.pinillos@ua.es

Fernando Olivares Delgado [[CV](#)] Universidad de Alicante, f.olivares@ua.es

Daniel Rodríguez Valero [[CV](#)] Universidad de Alicante, daniel.rodriguez@ua.es

Abstract

Introduction: In this work we carry out a critical review of the literature on brand name. We examine the most frequent criteria for brand naming and we put forward a new taxonomy based on the patronym. **Methodology:** We propose new denominative categories by combining the already existing ones. For this we start from a sample of business names of Spanish family firms, with the approach of variables and sub-variables which refer to denominative criteria and distinctive traits of the company. **Results:** An original taxonomy of patronyms, from the analysis of the business names of family firms, which is a step forward in academic and applied research processes on corporate naming.

Keywords

Corporate name; brand name; patronymic; family business; naming.

Contents

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Translated by F. Abad

1. Introduction

One of the themes in brand studies is that of naming (Pinillos, 2014). The name is the first feature of the brand identity, whether it refers to brands of products or services, or to corporate or business identity (Olivares, 2011). As Costa (2004) claims, the verbal name or brand is the most repeated message of business communication: brands are requested and are remembered by their names. In the same way, Keller (2008) believes that names can be abbreviated but extremely effective ways of communicating. Likewise, Costa (2004) highlights the key role of the verbal sign in brand building when he states that the brand starts with the name. The name is for Aaker (1991) a crucial and central sign of the brand.

On the other hand, the importance of the brand name from a business perspective is justified by the following aspects:

- It is the element of the brand that is created first. According to Healey (2009), prior to any other features –such as logo, colour range, packaging (roughly, a creative package in marketing sense) or advertising in general-, a brand needs a name. It is only when the name is already registered that we think of and design a graphic image or logo (Costa 2004).
- It is the most used and repeated element of the brand (Costa, 1987; Kollmann & Suckow, 2007; Petty, 2008), given that consumers, employees and other audiences use it daily to refer to, describe, or ask about the product, service or company.
- It is the most stable and lasting component and the least (if ever) modified throughout the life of the company. The name is maintained despite changes in the business activity, the business strategy or the corporate identity of the company. Costa (2004) includes this as one of the key ingredients of identity.

However, the name is not an element of concern only for the marketing or for the branding of products and services. The name leaves room today for a strategic and corporate outlook beside an interest in the corporate brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). For this reason, we advocate for a truly strategic and management role for the company name, and for the whole naming ecosystem of the company, or indeed for other elements of verbal identity.

One of the most recurrent aspects of research on naming (creation of a brand name) is that of the introduction of taxonomies, categories or criteria for creating a brand name. This paper focuses precisely on this issue. Previously, we critically review the literature on naming in order to examine the taxonomies on the standard criteria to create a brand name.

This paper has then a twofold objective:

- To highlight that taxonomies on naming are drawn from (mutually) exclusive denominative criteria, when they are actually presented in a hybrid form.
- To determine the specificity of the company name, against the name of products/services. Regarding this, our aim is to adapt the taxonomy to the denominative reality of the company, where the proper name or patronym of the founder stands as the most frequent referent (Pinillos, 2014).

With regard to our first aim, which refers to the taxonomies or categories put forward by researchers on brand naming, we claim that these categories have been traditionally considered as mutually exclusive: patronym or short form (abbreviation or acronym)? new creation or toponym? Abbreviation or description?

And when the patronym is present in the company name through abbreviation or acronym, is it no longer a patronym –and becomes an acronym instead– when the company is created from the initials of the full name and of the surname, for instance? We believe that this is not the case. And this is one of the issues we argue about in this research.

Our aim is therefore to reformulate the traditional categories used to classify brand names, with a view to broadening and enriching existing classifications on this subject. In our critical review of the literature, we establish this research gap and we put forward a new taxonomy that extends the traditional proposals of scholars of naming or branding.

As regards our second aim, our review of the literature also reveals that, with very few exceptions, contributions to brand naming often address products or services. At most these works merely equate the ideas of the naming of products and/or services with corporate naming, while their nature and features are notably different. Studies on names of business brands to date –from a linguistic perspective– do not distinguish between corporate names (denomination of the company) and names of products and services. This is precisely the focus of the present study.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Between onomastics and branding

A great deal of research on naming is often carried out through the lens of linguistics, morphology or semantics (Klink, 2000, 2011; Chang & Huang, 2001; González del Río et al., 2011). In fact, onomastics or anthroponomy is a branch of lexicography that studies proper names. Thus, linguist Roman Jakobson gives proper names a specific value within the linguistic code.

González del Río (2011) considers that linguistics can contribute decidedly to the creation and design of a brand name because, if we attend to the characteristics of a good brand name – this author says – , we see that many of them have to do with linguistic features: good sound and pronunciation (phonetics), brevity and simplicity (morphology), and positive connotations (semantics). Indeed, as González del Río points out, this kind of analysis can be an aid to the teams in charge of creating brand names, and also to those companies that wish to evaluate the degree of adequacy of their brand names to their corporate reality.

What kind of word is a brand? asks Herrero Ingelmo (2013): “The grammatical status of this sort of names is complex. They are not proper names (like company names, for instance; although they are usually written in capitals), and they are not appellative names either (although some, as we have said, are often included in this class of generic names)” (original in Spanish).

Psychological (Lowrey et al., 2013) or marketing (Aaker, 1991; 1996; 2004) approaches to naming are also common, and they mostly deal with memory, attitude or evaluation of the brand names of products.

Thus, as Rodrigues (2005) states,

“Naming a brand is a complex task, especially when launching a new product or company. The name is undoubtedly one of most important contact points of a brand and a positive contribution in the construction of their identity. It is a sort of “activation” of the symbolic associations of a company or product. When visually or aurally perceived, it has the power to arouse thoughts, impressions and experiences that the brand triggers in the minds of the audiences.” (Original in Spanish)

Costa (2004) suggests that naming is an act of intercommunication and that naming is necessary to refer to something. He adds:

“What has no name does not exist. And the brand name makes possible its own calling, which is communicative and transactional at the same time. All that we see and know about is characterised by a form tied to a name. And so is the brand in its status as a signal.”

2.2. The corporate name in the literature

There are significant and substantial differences between the functions and essential qualities of the company name and the name of the product. The company name or name of the corporate brand has scarcely been studied. Only Muzellec (2006), Pinillos (2014) and Olivares et al. (2015) have gained insights into this specificity. Muzellec (2006) suggests the differences between these two types of names – products and companies – but lacks empirical evidence. However, Pinillos (2014) and Olivares et al. (2015) have investigated empirically on corporate naming from both functional and strategic perspectives.

Muzellec (2006) highlights the differences between brand names and corporate names. His is an important contribution to the field of corporate naming. He distinguishes two types of studies on naming:

- The most abundant are those studies that stress the commercial purpose of the company name: the main conception of the name focuses on its link with the external public. These studies go deeply into the impact of business relations and of brand name selling (King 1991; Aaker 1991, 2004; Kotler, 1992; Keller, 2000). According to Brown & Dacin (1997) and Dacin & Brown (2002), a corporate name is a vehicle for communicating corporate associations to the clients. Among other authors, Robertson (1989) notices the economic dimension of name choice and remarks that the name is an investment with economic rewards, given that the most successful it is, the less advertising costs for the company.
- The least frequent studies suggest a corporate and strategic function of the company name in its global link with the organisation or the internal promotion of values, together with its

engagement with the stakeholders (who are or might be affected by business activity) or other aspects of the business identity. Some of these works include Hatch & Schultz (1997; 2003), Ind (1998; 2003), Balmer (2001), Balmer & Gray (2003), Kollmann & Suckow (2007), Urde (2003), Olivares (2011) and Olivares, Benloch & Pinillos (2015). Dowling (1996) and Balmer (2001) point out that an inadequate administration of the name has a negative impact on the whole organisation.

FRAMEWORK	Name of PRODUCT brand	Name of COMPANY brand
School of thought	Brand	Corporate identity
Importance in mix communication	Central	Secondary
Primary audience	Clients	<i>Stakeholders</i> (employees, clients, shareholders, public administration, providers, media, etc.).
Level of distinctive character	High: Capacity to grab attention	Low: Capacity to be accepted by a majority
Semantics	Generate positive feelings in the market	Show the “inner” identity or the culture
Management	Active and dynamic management	Hereditary and static factors (not managed)

Table 1: Differences between brand names and corporate names (adapted from Muzellec, 2006).

From the most descriptive	----->	----->	----->	----->	To the most abstract
Descriptive names	Geographical names	Patronyms	Acronyms	Associative names	Independent names

Table 2: Types of corporate brand names (adapted from Muzellec, 2006).

Olivares (2011) states that the use of the founding or family name or surname in the name of the company is perhaps the most recurrent naming resource in family firms. This author stresses the strategic significance of the company name, especially the patronyms, in this type of organisations:

“For the better and for the worse there is bi-directionality in the association of values. If the founder possesses positive and socially recognised values, these will probably

increase the reputation of the company (if other factors remain unchanged). However, if the founder or any other member of the family is involved in murky business like crisis of honour, tax evasion, an affair, or any other criminal offence, and these are made public by media, the “good reputation” of the company will be directly damaged, given the connection between the family name and the business name. Regardless of whether the surname and the name company coincide, the connection between the family and the business systems is still present, given that today’s newsworthiness, visibility and access to information allow us to learn about the history and the intricacies of all companies. The business family is a media object of great interest; if this is due to positive aspects of the family business, the habitual space is the business press; however, if this is due to negative personal issues as those mentioned above, the place is often the yellow press.” (Original in Spanish)

Kashmiri & Mahajan (2010) carry out extensive and relevant research on the name of family firms from 2002 to 2006. Among others, they draw the following conclusions:

- Family-named firms pay greater attention to consumers’ opinions than non-family-named firms. This is also due to the fact that they often have a chief marketing officer among their staff.
- Family-named firms put more strategic emphasis on the creation of added value through advertising, an option that stems from taking care of the reputation of the company. Non-family-named firms put more emphasis on R+D (research and development).
- Family-named firms possess higher corporate social responsibility in the sense that they have fewer social weaknesses.

Kashmiri & Mahajan (2010) showed that those family-named firms achieve higher return of investment than non-family-named firms:

“It is often discussed if family-named firms must keep the founder’s name, or if it is more appropriate to replace it by a more professional-sounding corporate name. This study confirms that the proper or patronymic name in a family firm emanates a crucial form of trust, the name then guarantees reputation.”

Olivares, Benlloch & Pinillos (2015) talk about the reputational function of the corporate name, in particular of the use of the founder’s name or the family surname as the name of the brand-company.

H1: The patronym is the category with more denominative variables in the name of Spanish family firms

2.3. Taxonomies on criteria for the brand name

Scholarly research on brands often presents very similar results when referring to the resources to create a brand name. Most authors (Kenneth, 2002; Kohli & Labahn, 1997; Kohli & Suri, 2000; Mollerup 1998; Room, 1987; Swystun 2008; Fontvila, 2013; Olins, 2014) consider at least

patronyms or people names (or references to the place), descriptive names (normally of the activity or sector), creative names (evocative, suggestive, etc.), with some variants (abstract, symbolic, etc.) and abbreviated or acronyms (contracted or short forms of the ones above). In this article we consider the patronym as the denominative resource that incorporates – totally or partially, directly or indirectly (abbreviations or acronyms) – the proper name of the founder(s), of a relevant personality for them or of any of the family surnames to name the company (either in the firm name or in the commercial name of the corporate brand or in the name of products and services). We introduce the term *matronym* [1] when the firm name contains the name of the female founder or relative or of a female relevant personality.

The toponym is the naming method that uses the name of a place or its people to name the firm, often the place of origin or geographical area of natural influence of the firm. The description of the firm activity is the naming device that uses the core business to name the firm. The creative resource constructs the firm brand name in an original, arbitrary, made-up, suggestive or evocative way. All of these are often part of the brand name either in full form/directly or in short form/indirectly (by means of abbreviations or acronyms).

With a few exceptions, as said above, the majority of the contributions on the brand name are of conceptual or taxonomic kind. There is scant research on estimating the effects of naming on stakeholders.

We review below some of the most relevant classifications established by scholars in order to comprise and categorise brand naming criteria, with the purpose of, as stated by Rodrigues (2005), facilitating “understanding of the methodological processes of the names of research and development projects for companies, organisations and products” (original in Spanish).

AUTHOR	Taxonomies and BRAND NAME CATEGORIES
Mollerup (1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equity • descriptive • metaphorical • found • artificial • abbreviations
Chaves (1990)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • descriptive • symbolic • surnames • names of places • contracted forms
Room (1987)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name-of-person-based names • toponym-based names • scientific names • names of status • names of positive association

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • artificial names and • descriptive names
Olins (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • descriptive names • evocative names • abstract names
Swystun (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • descriptive names • Evocative names • Abstract names • Coined names • Complex names • Real-world names
Navarro (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ingenious names • Abbreviated names or acronyms • Legal or notarial names • Scientific names • Foreign names • Sonorous names
Fontvila (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patronymic names • Toponymical names • Descriptive names • Evocative names • Acronyms and short forms • Abstract names
Keller (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Names of people • Place-based names • Names evoking animals or birds • Names with product-based meaning • Names that suggest benefits of the product • Made-up names
Landor Associated (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive • Suggestive • Complex • Classical • Arbitrary • Capricious
González Solas (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proper • Descriptive • Metaphorical • Chance • Artificial
Valls (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toponym • Contracted • Symbolic • Patronym
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Table 3: Authors, taxonomies and categories regarding the brand name.

According to our previous analysis of taxonomies in the extant literature, one of the conclusions is that no typology takes account of the fact that creativity is often not the only factor when creating a name; various criteria can in fact coexist in a single name. In other words, the reviewed taxonomies act as exclusive categories, without regard to the inherent mixture in most brand names. Against this backdrop, our empirical analysis aims to put forward a more accurate taxonomy which truly reflects the existing hybridization in the great majority of firm names in Spain, although this may be applicable to most countries.

H2: The denominative category in the name of Spanish family firms is presented as non-exclusive or hybrid in relation to other categories.

H3: The patronym as a denominative category in the name of Spanish family firms is presented in a direct/indirect or full/contracted way.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data source

One of the main problems of researching on family firms is that no database includes a variable that identifies them as such. Thus, we decided to work with the data gathered in the list of firms of the *Iberian Balance Sheet Analysis System* (SABI, in its acronym in Spanish), from 2013, after identifying their nature and condition of family firms. We selected a sample made up of firms with registered offices in ten Spanish autonomous regions, with the legal form of limited liability companies or limited partnerships, and with an annual turnover higher than €2 million and more than 10 employees. Once identified, we recorded the variable business or firm name of the firms and then their trade name.

3.2. Data extraction from the SABI

We extracted some data of the firms in the SABI which are registered in any of the 11 regional associations of the Spanish family firms studied, in accordance with the following criteria:

- Tax residence in Spain
- Operating in 2013
- To have the structure of a trading company (Plc, Ltd.)
- Minimum size: an annual turnover of €2 million or 10 or more employees (this criterion applied in the year 2013).

- Not to include freelance workers in the analysis
- To work only with individual companies, not with business groups of which these can be members.

Table 4: Requisites for the family firms of the study

3.3. Identification of the family status of the companies in the sample

- Step 1. To be a member of the family firm (FF) associations. Due to time scope limitations, we have used 11 of the 17 existing regional associations of family firms. Although not all FF are members of the associations, those which are members are actually FF.
- Step 2. To explicitly recognise their status of family firms. Nonetheless, in order to filter those doubtful cases, we have verified their status as family firms by means of primary (personal check or phone call) or secondary (web site, other corporate communications) sources.
- Step 3. FF tax scheme. In addition to the two mentioned specifications, we have also verified their status by using one of the requisites of the state regulations which gives access to the tax scheme of family firms in property and inheritance taxes: shareholding. According to this requisite, the shareholder, a natural person, must own a 5% of the capital individually (or a 20% with the family, up to the second degree of family firm).

3.4. Determination of simple size and representativeness

The total of family firms which are members of the 17 regional associations of Spanish family firms is 1,100 (at the date of this research). The sample size for this study is 566 Spanish family firms, which constitutes the 51.45% of the universe considered; hence its representativeness.

Universe	Spanish firms (registered in the SABI), identified as family firms through primary and secondary sources; members of the regional associations of Spanish family firms
Geographical scope	11 autonomous regions
Sample size	566 family firms; 51.45% of the total of family firms in regional associations.
Sample error	2%
Reliability	95%
Sample design	Non-probabilistic, convenience sampling
Field research	May 2013

Table 5. Technical details of the study

3.5. Measurement of the variables

For the empirical study we have used three large groups of variables: naming criterion, general (or control) variables of the firm and the variable of family generation. Here we show the results of the first variable.

With regard to the variables used to operationalise the naming criterion of the sample of family firms, we consider 5 variables which are present in the majority of the typologies reviewed and proposed by scholars and experts: patronym (or matronym), toponym, name describing the activity, short form (abbreviations and acronyms) and creative name. We establish 17 variables, based on our previous research, with a set of new sub-variables for each of the conventional variables.

As general (or control) variables we consider firm size, measured by the number of employees, which classifies family firms in small, medium and large. The activity sector is another of these sub-variables, which groups firms as agricultural businesses (primary sector), industrial businesses (secondary sector) or services (tertiary sector). We also include an additional typology of 20 sub-sectors, which clearly enriches the conclusions of the study. We also take into account the variable ‘region of origin’ of the family firm, taking the location of the company headquarters as a point of reference. One further variable includes the generation of the family who runs the firm. For obvious reasons, the results obtained from other variables analysed will be shown in future publications (see table):

NAMING VARIABLE	SUB- VARIABLE AND DEFINITION	RESEARCH
Patronyms (matronyms) and proper names	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strict patronym: this variable takes value 1 if the patronym in the name of the family firm coincides with the definition in the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE, in its acronym in Spanish). - Proper name: This variable takes value 2 when the company name adopts the proper name of a person (often the founder). - Patronym of kinship: This variable takes value 3 if the patronym in the name of the family firm includes references to kinship: <i>Widow of, Sons of, Heirs of, Siblings of...</i> - Patronym and/or hidden proper name: This variable takes value 4 when the patronym is abbreviated using the initials of the name or surname of founders or relatives. 	While the patronym criterion is proposed by Costa (2005); Chaves (1990); Room (1987); Olins (2014); Swystun (2008); Fontvila (2013); Muzellec (2006), the formulation of the variables of 4 patronyms (or matronyms) is ours.

	<p>- Patronym and/or hybrid proper name: This variable takes value 5 when the name shows other denominative criteria beside the (full or contracted) patronym.</p>	
<p>Toponyms (or Demonyms) [2]</p>	<p>- Strict toponym: This variable takes value 1 if the name of the family firm includes the name of a place (of origin or influence).</p> <p>- Topo-demonym: This variable takes variable 2 if the name of the family firm includes a demonym or name of local people.</p> <p>- Hidden toponym: This variable takes value 3 if the place name is hidden or abbreviated in the name of the family firm.</p> <p>- Hybrid toponym: This variable takes value 4 when the name shows other denominative criteria beside the toponym.</p>	<p>While the toponym criterion is proposed by Costa (2005); Chaves (1990); Room (1987); Olins (2014); Swystun (2008); Fontvila (2013); Muzellec (2006), the formulation of four variables of toponyms is ours.</p>
<p>names describing the activity</p>	<p>- This variable takes value 1 if the name of the family firm includes a description of the business activity.</p> <p>- Hybrid descriptive name: This variable takes value 2 when the name shows other denominative criteria beside the description of the business activity.</p>	<p>Costa (2005); Chaves (1990); Room (1987); Olins (2014); Swystun (2008); Fontvila (2013); Muzellec (2006)</p> <p>The formulation of the four variables of names describing the activity is ours.</p>
<p>Abbreviations</p>	<p>- This variable takes value 1 if the name of the family firm is built on an abbreviation or acronym.</p> <p>- Hybrid abbreviation/acronym: This variable takes value 2 if the name shows other denominative criteria beside abbreviations/acronyms.</p>	<p>Costa (2005); Chaves (1990); Room (1987); Olins (2014); Swystun (2008); Fontvila (2013); Muzellec (2006)</p> <p>The formulation of the 4 abbrev./acronym variables is ours.</p>
<p>Acronyms</p>	<p>- This variable takes value 1 is the name of the family firm is built on acronyms or</p>	<p>Costa (2005); Chaves (1990); Room (1987); Olins (2014); Swystun</p>

	<p>syllable shortenings.</p> <p>- Hybrid acronyms: This variable takes value 2 when the name shows other criteria beside the acronym criterion.</p>	<p>(2008); Fontvila (2013); Muzellec (2006)</p> <p>The formulation of 2 acronym variables is ours.</p>
Creative	<p>- This variable takes value 1 if the name of the family firm is built <i>ex novo</i>.</p> <p>- Hybrid creative: This variable takes value 2 if the name shows other denominative criteria beside the creative criterion.</p>	<p>Costa (2005); Chaves (1990); Room (1987); Olins (2014); Swystun (2008); Fontvila (2013); Muzellec (2006)</p> <p>The formulation of the two variables of creative criteria is ours.</p>
General variables on family firms		
Year of foundation	SUB-VARIABLES	STUDIES
Size	<p>Large (≥ 250 employees)</p> <p>Medium ($50 < 250$ employees)</p> <p>Small ($10 < 50$ employees)</p>	Classification of the European Commission since January 1 2005
Sector	<p>Industrial</p> <p>Services</p> <p>Agricultural</p>	National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE-2009), approved by Royal Decree Act 475/2007, of April 13.
Products	<p>Food</p> <p>Car</p> <p>Architecture and urban planning</p> <p>Beverage</p> <p>Beauty, hygiene and health, culture, education y media</p> <p>Leisure</p> <p>Distribution</p> <p>Energy</p> <p>Finance and Insurance</p> <p>Home</p> <p>Industrial, work equipment</p> <p>Cleaning services</p> <p>Personal items</p> <p>Office, commerce and telecommunications</p> <p>Public services</p>	Classification of the Spanish Association of Advertising Companies

	Tobacco Textile and clothing Catering services Others	
Regions	Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, Baleares, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla La Mancha, Castilla y León, Cataluña, Ceuta, Comunidad Valenciana, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid, Melilla, Murcia, Navarra, Alicante	Autonomous regions and provinces
<i>Family variable</i>		
Generation in the firm	First generation Second generation Third generation Other generations	Kellermanns & Eddleston (2007); Kellermanns, Eddleston, Sarathy & Murphy (2012)

Table 6. Description of the variables of the empirical study

As a method, we combine the general data of the family firms with the denominative categories. The “patronym” category is of special interest for us, for the reasons stated in the theoretical framework. This justified our focus on the use of the patronym and its variants more than on the rest of denominative criteria.

4. Data analysis and results

We build our taxonomy based on the 566 names of family firms subject to study, on the proposed variables and sub-variables and on the 186 resulting patronyms.

4.1. Taxonomy of categories of patronym-based firm names

We establish at least ten categories around the patronym. We use a fictitious example [3] to illustrate the resulting variants of the company name:

1. Honorary proper name or patronym (or matronym).
2. Patronym (or matronym) of kinship.
3. Hidden or corporate patronym (or matronym) [4].
4. Descriptive patronym or matronym.
5. Patro (or matro)-toponym (demonym).
6. Patrotopodescriptive (or matrotopodescriptive), patrodemondescriptive (or matrodemondescriptive).
7. Hypocorism (the diminutive, shortened or modified name, with affective purposes), from the proper name or the patronym.
8. Alphanumeric patronym (or matronym).
9. Pseudo-patronym (or pseudo-matronym).

10. Creative patronym (or matronym).

Order	Frequency	Categories of patronym-based names of family firms	Definition	Example
1	44%	<i>Honorary proper name or patronym (or matronym)</i>	When the firm name includes the proper name or surname of the founders, or of their families. We talk about strict honorary patronyms or matronyms when their surnames end in –EZ.	Juan Delgado Ltd.
3	20%	<i>Hidden or corporate patronym (or matronym)</i>	When the name of the firm includes the proper name or surname of the founders, or of their families, in a hidden or shortened form (abbreviations or acronyms) and it also includes the type of trading company.	JUDELSA (JUAN DELgado SA)* * SA = PLC
6	8%	<i>Patrotopodescriptive (or matrotopodescriptive), patrodemonstrative (or matrodemonstrative)</i>	When the name of the company includes the proper name or surname of the founders, or of their families, in full or short form; and it incorporates full or short reference to a geographical place (often of origin or location), or to the name of the inhabitants (demonym) and it includes full or short reference to the activity sector.	QUESOS JUAN EL MANCHEGO
2	6%	<i>Patronym (or matronym) of kinship</i>	When the firm name includes reference to kinship (sons of, widow of, heirs of, etc.) with the founders.	Widow of Juan Delgado Heirs of Juan Delgado Sons of Juan Delgado Successors of

				Juan Delgado
5	6%	<i>Patro (or matro)-toponym (demonym)</i>	When the name of the company includes the proper name or surname of the founders, or of their families, in full or short form; and it incorporates full or short reference to a geographical place (often of origin or location), or to the name of the inhabitants (demonym).	JUAN EL MANCHEGO
7	6%	<i>Hypocorism, from the proper name or the patronym</i>	When the firm name includes affective or informal derivative forms of the proper name or surname of the founders, in full or short form, and it includes full or hidden reference to the activity sector.	Quesos JUANILLO
4	5%	<i>Descriptive patronym or matronym.</i>	When the name of the firm includes the proper name or surname of the founders, or of their families, in full or short form; and it incorporates reference to the activity sector, in full or short form.	DEL QUESO (Delgado QUESO)
8	2%	<i>Alphanumeric patronym (or matronym)</i>	When the name of the firm includes the proper name or surname of the founders, of their families, in full or short form, and a number.	QUESOS JUAN 10
9	2%	<i>Pseudo-patronym (or pseudo-matronym)</i>	When the name of the firm includes the proper name or surname of a person who does not actually exist, in full or short form.	Massimo LATTO
10	1%	<i>Creative patronym (or</i>	When the name of the firm is based on the proper name or	DELGADUM

		<i>matronym</i>)	surname of the founders, or of their families, but it admits creative variation.	
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Table 7: Hybrid patronym-based categories for (family) firm names.

If we go deeper into the analysis and distinguish, for instance, the proper name from the patronym, the following categories emerge:

	NAME CATEGORY 1	NAME CATEGORY 2	NAME CATEGORY 3	RESULTING BRAND NAME
1	Proper name and patronym			JUAN DELGADO
2	Patronym			DELGADO
3	Proper name and patronym	Abbreviation		JUAN D
4	Proper name and patronym	Acronym		JUDEL
5	Proper name and patronym	Acronym	Corporate	JUDELSA
6	Proper name and patronym	Acronym and abbreviation		JUD
7	Proper name and patronym	Abbreviation		JD
8	Proper name and patronym	Activity		Juan Delgado Quesos
9	Patronym	Activity		Delgado Quesos
10	Proper name and patronym	Abbreviation	Activity	Juan D Quesos
11	Proper name and patronym	Acronym	Activity	Judel Quesos
12	Proper name and patronym	Acronym and abbreviation	Activity	JUD Quesos
13	Proper name and patronym	Abbreviation	Activity	JD Quesos
14	Proper name and patronym		Demonym	Juan Delgado Queso Manchego
15	Patronym	Activity	Demonym	Delgado Queso Manchego
16	Proper name and patronym	Activity	Toponym	Juan Delgado Quesos de la Mancha
17	Patronym	Activity	Toponym	Delgado Quesos de la Mancha
18	Proper name and patronym in	Activity	Toponym	Judel Quesos de la Mancha

	acronym			
19	Proper name in acronym form and patronym in abbreviation	Activity	Demonym	JUD Quesos Manchegos
20	Proper name and patronym in abbreviation	Activity	Demonym	JD Quesos Manchegos
21	Proper name in acronym	Activity in acronym	Demonym in acronym	JUQUEMAN
22	Patronym in acronym	Activity in acronym	Demonym in acronym	DELQUEMAN
23	Patronym	Activity	Creative	DELGADUM QUESOS
24	Proper name in hypocorism	Activity	Demonym	Quesos Juanito el Manchego

Table 8: Hybrid name- or patronym-based categories for (family) firm names.

4.2. Taxonomy of toponym-based firm names

If we go deeply into the toponym (or demonym), we can distinguish at least 5 potential variants:

- Strict toponym (or demonym)
- Toponym (or demonym) in abbreviation or acronym
- Topo-descriptive
- Alphanumeric toponym (or demonym)
- Topo-creative

	Toponym-based firm names	Proposed definition	Example
1	<i>Strict toponym (or demonym) [5]</i>	When the firm name includes the name of a geographical location or the name of its inhabitants (demonym).	Albaceteño SL* (SL = Ltd).
2	<i>Toponym (or demonym) in abbreviation or acronym</i>	When the firm name includes the name of a geographical location or its demonym in full or short form.	ALBAC [company located in ALBACete]

3	<i>Topo-descriptive</i>	When the firm name includes totally or partially the name of a geographical place or its demonym, in full or short form; and it also incorporates reference to a place, in full or short form.	QUESARMAN [QUESos ARtesanos de la MANcha)
4	<i>Alphanumeric toponym (or demonym)</i>	When the firm name includes totally or partially the name of a geographical location or its demonym, in full or short form; and it also includes a number.	MANCHEGO 10
5	<i>Topo-creative</i>	When the firm name includes a creative allusion to the name of a geographical location or its demonym, in full or short form.	MANCHESS MANCHIC MANCHEGUM

Table 9: Toponym-based sub-categories for (family) firm names.

4.3. Other denominative categories in the name of family firms

Our proposal of categories is not complete. We are sure that there are still other denominative possibilities for the companies. The creative criterion (which we also call *invented*, *artificial*, *fantasy*, *capricious* or *evocative*), when applied to the names of family firms, also adopts multiple variants and sub-categories that will be developed in further research. For instance, descriptive-creative: when the name of the firm includes a more or less creative allusion to a feeling or benefit associated with the product, and with a more or less creative allusion to the activity (e.g. VitalQes or Lactocrem).

In light of the above, our empirical analysis seems to confirm our three initial hypotheses. In the first place, we corroborate our first hypothesis: the patronym is the most frequent category in the name of Spanish family firms. In the second place, we confirm that this patronym can appear in direct/indirect, full/short form. And in the third place, we verify that the firm name is hybrid and non-exclusive with regard to other categories.

5. Conclusions and implications

We conclude that the name of the company is a subject that must be investigated and studied more thoroughly and rigorously, from cross-disciplinary perspectives and especially from corporate branding. In this regard, we hope that our proposal will favour new empirical studies on firm naming and its contribution to the corporate brand. In our critical review of the literature, we have shown that most studies on brand name only cover products. However, we have also found an avenue of research opened by some authors (Muzellec, 2006; Kashmiri & Mahajan, 2010; Pinillos 2014; Olivares, Benlloch et al., 2015), where they show the strategic importance of the company name at different levels: internal and external, operating and strategic, commercial and corporate. The

company name is an intangible asset of great interest for business management, given its influence and impact on all stakeholders (Olivares, Benlloch *et al.*, 2015).

Besides, from the point of view of categories, we have been able to confirm in our review of the literature that the proposals of typologies and taxonomies of brand names:

- are quite homogeneous as regards the possible denominative categories suggested by most authors.
- are especially oriented towards the brand names of products and services.
- are all regarded as exclusive categories, ignoring the hybridisation of criteria that happens *de facto*, as we have shown.

With our empirical work on the denominative criteria present in the names of Spanish family firms, we have demonstrated that new categories emerge from the hybridisation of the traditional categories. Broadly, we have contributed up to 10 possible patronym-based categories (24, if we further distinguish between the founder's proper name and patronym –or matronym– or family surnames) and 5 toponym-based categories.

We have also shown that the patronym and the proper name are the most frequent categories in family businesses. We emphasise that there are different ways of combining the reference to the founder(s) with other criteria, which also allow to harmonise the intrinsic operational and reputational functions of the patronym in the family firm (Olivares, Benlloch *et al.*, 2015). The resulting taxonomy may serve as a reference to determine the most suitable name for a family business.

We have been able to confirm our initial hypotheses. The denominative category in the name of Spanish family firms can occur in a non-exclusive, hybrid way with other categories. Also, this denominative category is also presented as direct or indirect, full or contracted; and the patronym is the category with more naming variants in the name of Spanish family companies.

Through an inductive process in our work, we draw general conclusions from specific premises. Through in-depth analysis of the denominative criteria present in 566 names of Spanish family firms we have built the resulting taxonomy. This classification can be further extended by means of new empirical evidence, which will contribute to finding out, in the first place, the reason(s) why (family) businesses choose their names; and, in the second place, if the brand name of a given company is suitable and is in line with the direction of the company at all levels. On dealing with corporate name issues in a cross-disciplinary way, we are bringing together, even closer, linguistic, psychological, communication, branding and management knowledge.

We might say that the vast majority of firm names have been created by their founders. In contrast, the names of the remaining companies – probably the most 'orthodox' ones from the point of view of naming and branding – have been created with the support of a team of professional experts in these fields.

In other words, the main ‘namers’ of Spanish companies – and we dare to state that of the whole world – are the founders and their families. They turn the process of naming a company into a more or less playful ritual, but full of meaning and logic: founders and, where appropriate, their families agree on and commit to a name that represents them (as family and also as shareholders). For this, we are also interested in investigating the (more logical than creative) variables that shape the founders’ mental processes in determining the proposal of a permanent name.

Business owners have the audacity to build the name of their companies without the required turn-key knowledge and methods to create the ideal and most suitable names that experts in branding and naming possess. These professionals, in turn, do not have a background in business (nor in family business, in particular). Given our knowledge of the profile of teams of namers, we note that many of them possess marked philological, poetic or advertising profiles, with little in-depth knowledge of corporate reality. Today we need a more interdisciplinary profile, and namers with greater knowledge of business administration and management (financial, human and technical aspects), and of corporate intangibles: history and business history, values, culture, philosophy and reputation. These intangible assets are the distinguishing mark of family firms.

For all these reasons, we establish that the company name is a sign, and indication from which we can infer attributes such as permeability, the degree of openness of the family firm and its predisposition to take an orientation towards corporate branding. This would imply, for instance, that creativity will pervade in a company and even in its corporate values if they choose creativity as a denominative criterion.

6. Limitations of the study and proposals for further research

Further research could be carried out on the comparison between family firms with patronyms or proper names in their business name and those with other denominative criteria (toponyms, descriptive, creative and short forms, mainly).

Likewise, it might be interesting to appraise the presence of patronyms and of proper names in the company name (or their name in the Registry of Companies) and in the (commercial) name of the company.

It would also be appropriate to compare the denominative reality of family firms with that of non-family firms. We are sure that there are notable and significant differences between these two types of companies.

Finally, further research might also pursue to determine the number of product brand names that include part of the founder’s proper name or patronym, thus opening a debate with those who claim that the surname is not a suitable denominative resource for product brands.

7. Notes

[1] As regards matronyms, it is important to highlight that in some countries, like in the US, women take their husbands’ surnames when they marry. In the business and corporate context, this is a huge challenge for women entrepreneurs who have founded companies, and sometimes very important

ones, as for instance Estée Lauder. In this case, the original name of the founder is Josephine Esther Mentzer (a surname of Austrian-Hungarian origin). Estée Lauder, today as a global brand, is also the parent brand or corporate denomination and the sub-brand of a product line.

[2] These are the corporate names that include a demonym. According to the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy, the demonym is a variant of toponyms or names of places in the sense that they refer to a territory. We have confirmed that FFs stand as a recursive resource in specific sectors in the field of brand names: transport and food, among others. For instance, in our own context, the autonomous region of Valencia counts on corporate names like La Ibense, La Jijonenca, or Levantina. In other autonomous regions we find names like La Madrileña, La Melillense, La Conquense, etc.

[3] To illustrate our proposal we will use a fictional case. A hypothetical entrepreneur founder, Juan Delgado, from Albacete, a traditional artisan of cheese from La Mancha, can choose the patronym as a strategic criterion to name his family firm, thus taking advantage of his good name and reputation throughout the country, where he is well known for his good work and good practices in the field of sheep's cheese. And leave the legacy of a company, with reputed name and surnames, to his siblings. Juan Delgado has at least 23 possible options without compromising in any of them the use of the patronym or proper name. Meaning is quite different in its diverse variants. Name creation and creativity must harmonise with the strategy: more familiar and traditional? More distant? For our name, shall we take advantage of the prestige of the brand in the territory? Is it a personal or a family merit? Shall we opt for internationalisation? Shall we address a select or a more popular audience? Is there any similar company name in our own sector or county? etc.

[4] The real case of the name of the family firm Atianmar S.L. can serve to illustrate the potential taxonomies of corporate names in the FFs that we study. This trading name (TN) is made up of acronyms – which we have classified as derivative names –, and it uses very basic naming strategies in their search for simplicity, brevity and a hypothetical higher level of memory in their clients and audiences. However, its commercial name (CN) is actually *Talleres de chapa y pintura ATiliano y AloNso*, which is name more typical of a registry of companies. In this case, *Mar* is an abbreviation of the surname *Martínez*. It seems that roles and functionalities have been reversed.

[5] According to DRAE (the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy), Toponym. 1. Masc. Name of a place. Donym. Relational adjective. 1. Masc. Gram. An adjective that denotes the geographical origin of people or their nationalities; e.g. *castellano, madrileño, andaluz, peruano, bonaerense*. (Original in Spanish).

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