



Institute of Inner-City Learning, London Campus

Bold Reinvention or Heritage Dilution? A Qualitative Analysis of Jaguar's 2024 Rebrand and the Perceived Risk of Brand Heritage Equity Erosion

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AI Use Acknowledgement

Generative AI was used in a limited supporting role to summarise selected publicly accessible source material and suggest occasional sentence structures to improve fluency. Every source was checked by the author, and all interpretations and final wording were carefully reviewed before inclusion. The author remains responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the proposal.

1. Introduction

Heritage luxury brands increasingly need to modernise across markets while preserving the values, symbols and relationships that make their histories strategically valuable. Jaguar provides a timely empirical context for this international-business problem. In November 2024, it introduced a new visual identity shaped by the founder-linked principle "Copy Nothing" and a creative philosophy called "Exuberant Modernism" (Jaguar, 2024a). The Type 00 design vision connected this direction to an electric future and Jaguar's provenance (Jaguar, 2024b). JLR situated the change within its Reimagine strategy and intended return to a more exclusive luxury position (JLR, 2025).

This renewal creates a broader strategic problem. Heritage can differentiate an established luxury brand, yet inherited meanings may also constrain attempts to reach new markets and respond to technological change. Radical rebranding can support strategic transformation, but it can also create perceived risk when authenticity, transparency, trust, local meaning or stakeholder recognition appear weakened. Commentary surrounding Jaguar illustrates competing interpretations, not commercial failure: some observers saw necessary renewal, while others saw a break with recognised British and automotive heritage (Associated Press, 2024; Innes, 2024; Ritson, 2024).

The research problem is consequently not whether Jaguar's brand equity has objectively declined. That question would require longitudinal consumer, sales or financial evidence that is not yet available and is outside this dissertation's design. Instead, the study examines the **perceived risk of heritage equity erosion**: public claims that the rebrand may weaken, confuse or disconnect historically valuable associations, symbols, authenticity or stakeholder recognition. This distinction makes the project feasible and prevents public opinion from being misrepresented as a measured business outcome.

The aim is **to examine how a heritage luxury brand balances radical strategic reinvention with heritage preservation, authenticity, transparency and stakeholder trust during international repositioning, using Jaguar's 2024 rebrand as an empirical context.**

The objectives are:

1. To critically synthesise how heritage brand management, authenticity, transparency, trust, luxury repositioning and global branding explain the tensions of radical brand transformation.
2. To analyse how Jaguar/JLR's 2024 communication frames strategic reinvention, authenticity, heritage preservation and international modernisation.
3. To compare how UK-based and international public source groups interpret the relationship between rebranding, heritage continuity and perceived brand-equity risk.
4. To develop conditional theoretical and managerial insights for multinational heritage luxury firms undertaking radical repositioning.

The corresponding research questions are:

1. What tensions emerge between strategic reinvention and heritage preservation when a heritage luxury brand undertakes radical rebranding?
2. How are authenticity, transparency and trust used to legitimise or contest the relationship between rebranding and heritage preservation?
3. How do source-situated stakeholder interpretations reveal the strategic tensions multinational luxury firms face when modernising across international contexts?
4. What theoretical and managerial insights can be derived from Jaguar's 2024 rebrand for managing perceived brand-equity risk during heritage-luxury repositioning?

Alignment is direct: Objective 1 establishes the theoretical constructs; Objective 2 examines Jaguar as the empirical context; Objective 3 compares UK-based and international source interpretations; and Objective 4 develops conditional lessons for multinational heritage luxury firms. The questions are therefore theory-led while remaining answerable through the proposed public documents.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical foundations

Aaker (1991) conceptualises brand equity through awareness, associations, perceived quality and loyalty, while Keller (1993) explains customer-based equity through brand knowledge and differential response. Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) define heritage through track record, longevity, values and symbols. Morhart et al. (2015) provide continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism as authenticity dimensions. Together, these theories explain what may be placed at risk when a heritage luxury brand changes its identity, but they do not mean that Jaguar's equity has objectively changed.

Heritage is not an archive that must remain visually unchanged. Hakala, Lätti and Sandberg (2011) show why brand and cultural heritage require operational attention to continuity, values, symbols and international context. Alden, Steenkamp and Batra (1999), Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003) and Özsomer (2012) demonstrate that global positioning, perceived brand globalness and local iconness may reinforce or conflict across markets. Authenticity and trust add relational tests: Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2001) connect trust with loyalty and commitment, while Schnackenberg and Tomlinson (2016) link transparency to disclosure, clarity, accuracy and stakeholder trust. These are theoretical constructs for interpretation, not survey variables in this study.

2.2 Rebranding, luxury repositioning and strategic transformation

Luxury brands compete through symbolic meaning, creativity, scarcity and distinctiveness as well as functional performance (Kapferer and Bastien, 2009; Ko, Costello and Taylor, 2019). Seo and Buchanan-Oliver (2015) emphasise the global and sociocultural character of luxury branding, while Shukla (2012) shows that luxury value perceptions vary across developed and emerging markets. Rebranding research distinguishes visual identity change from deeper strategy change and highlights the need to retain core values, link old and new meanings and secure stakeholder support (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006; Merrilees and Miller, 2008; Miller, Merrilees and Yakimova, 2014; Zhao, Calantone and Voorhees, 2018). Fiss and Zajac (2006) explain

how strategic change is framed through sensegiving, and Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) position transformation as the reconfiguration of capabilities in changing environments.

A heritage luxury brand cannot remain relevant by repeating its past unchanged, but radical novelty may reduce the continuity on which authenticity and trust depend. The analysis will therefore examine whether Jaguar's claims are interpreted as credible heritage preservation, strategic modernisation, unclear transformation or perceived dilution. The broader theoretical concern is how multinational luxury firms balance global coherence with local or national intelligibility.

2.3 Research gap and conceptual contribution

The research gap is broader than a single-company description. Existing work leaves four connected gaps. First, heritage preservation, authenticity, transparency, trust, luxury distinction and perceived equity risk are often studied in separate streams. Second, rebranding research gives less attention to the early public sensemaking moment when radical change is classified as legitimate reinvention or heritage dilution. Third, global-brand studies examine standardisation, globalness and local iconness, while heritage research gives less attention to how historical meaning is translated across international contexts. Fourth, quantitative measures cannot fully show how competing source groups use language and symbols to define continuity, credibility and risk.

Jaguar is therefore the empirical vehicle rather than the theoretical object. The study will examine the conditional sequence: strategic rebranding and modernisation claims; authenticity, transparency and trust judgements; heritage preservation and international translation; stakeholder interpretation; and perceived brand-equity risk. The framework does not assume a causal effect or a finding of commercial decline.

This contribution is theoretical and managerial rather than merely descriptive. It develops a heritage-preserving reinvention framework that can be applied to the Jaguar evidence and used cautiously to inform understanding of multinational heritage luxury repositioning.

This addresses an interpretive gap that outcome-focused research does not resolve.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The research will use a mono-method secondary qualitative design, structured through Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill's (2023) research onion. Interpretivism is appropriate because the questions concern assigned meanings rather than an objectively measurable effect. The approach will be primarily inductive, followed by an abductive return to brand-equity, heritage, authenticity, trust, luxury and global-brand concepts. Jaguar is a bounded empirical context; the theoretical contribution concerns heritage-luxury transformation and international repositioning.

This design directly serves the research questions. Official documents answer how Jaguar frames the change; media and professional sources reveal recurring and conflicting interpretations; comparison across source groups shows how heritage risk is constructed; and theory supports cautious strategic implications. Qualitative document analysis is suitable because documents can be systematically selected, evaluated and interpreted as data, while their purpose and production context remain visible (Bowen, 2009).

3.2 Data source and selection plan

No participants will be recruited or contacted. Following ethical approval, a purposive corpus of approximately **30-36 unique public documents** will be assembled: 6-8 Jaguar/JLR communications or reports; 12-14 reputable UK-based and international news or business-media articles; and 12-14 attributable automotive, design or marketing-industry analyses. International coverage will be distributed across at least two non-UK source contexts where full text is available. Academic literature will inform theory and methodology but will not be coded as empirical response data.

This comparison distinguishes authorised strategic claims from UK-based and international interpretations. The source groups are situated public accounts, not representative samples of customers or national populations.

Documents must be in English, have accessible full text, be published between 18 November 2024 and 31 March 2025, substantially discuss the rebrand or repositioning, and come from a traceable organisation or identified professional author. Duplicated

reports, passing mentions, unattributed reposts, individual social-media comments, private groups, confidential material and content requiring unauthorised access will be excluded. This period captures the launch debate while keeping manual analysis achievable.

Searches will use Jaguar/JLR websites, the UWTSD library, Google Scholar and targeted web/news searching. Indicative combinations include "Jaguar 2024 rebrand heritage", "Jaguar Type 00 brand identity", "Copy Nothing luxury repositioning" and "Jaguar rebrand authenticity". Each candidate will be recorded in a source log with author, date, URL, source type, inclusion decision and reason. Authority, relevance, purpose, evidence and potential commercial or editorial bias will be assessed before inclusion. This procedure will produce an auditable corpus rather than an informal collection of favourable or critical examples.

3.3 Manual thematic analysis and quality

The documents will be analysed manually in Word and Excel; AI, automated sentiment and AI-generated coding will not be used. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the student will read the corpus, code relevant passages, develop and review candidate themes, define themes and write a comparative narrative supported by attributed extracts. Coding will remain open to unexpected meanings. Heritage continuity, originality, authenticity, luxury elevation, audience change, recognition and strategic necessity will sensitise later interpretation without becoming predetermined findings.

An evidence record will connect each excerpt to its source, code, theme, objective and research question. Official, media and expert accounts will be compared rather than collapsed into one undifferentiated "public view". Divergent and negative cases will be retained. Trustworthiness will be supported through source triangulation, a documented coding trail, reflexive notes about the researcher's assumptions, repeated checking of themes against original texts and supervisor discussion of the theme structure (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.4 Ethics and data management

The project is low-risk secondary research. It involves no interviews, surveys, focus groups, observation, recruitment, consent process or confidential organisational data. Public author and spokesperson names may be retained only for accurate source identification and citation; no personal profiles will be created. Copyright will be respected through limited quotation and UWTSD Harvard attribution. Records will be kept in the student's password-protected UWTSD OneDrive project folder, with access limited to the student and authorised University staff; any local working copy will remain on the password-protected personal computer. Files will be retained and deleted in accordance with UWTSD requirements. Data collection and coding will begin only after ethical approval.

4. Expected Findings

The analysis may identify tensions between radical reinvention and heritage preservation; authenticity, transparency and trust claims; global modernisation and local or national intelligibility; and stakeholder recognition, ambivalence or resistance. It may also reveal alternative themes or stronger acceptance. These are reasoned possibilities, not findings.

The expected contribution is a conditional framework explaining how different source groups construct the boundary between legitimate heritage evolution and perceived dilution. This may help multinational luxury-brand managers distinguish enduring values from changeable expressions when undertaking international repositioning, while recognising that the study cannot measure realised brand-equity outcomes.

5. Limitations

The design cannot measure actual changes in customer-based brand equity, sales, loyalty or long-term reputation, so conclusions will remain about framing and perceived risk. The recent event also limits hindsight. Public commentary may overrepresent controversy, official communication is self-presentational, and English-language purposive sampling may omit other international interpretations. A single researcher's manual coding introduces interpretive subjectivity.

These limitations will be mitigated by balancing official, reputable media and professional sources; applying explicit inclusion criteria; retaining contradictory evidence; maintaining a source and coding audit trail; and using theory to interpret rather than predetermine themes. The dissertation will avoid generalising the findings to all consumers or all heritage brands.

6. Timeframe

The project runs from 17 July to 25 September 2026. The ten-week schedule is presented in Table 1. No formal corpus collection or coding will occur before ethics approval.

Table 1. Ten-week dissertation Gantt chart, 17 July-25 September 2026

Activity	W1 17-23 Jul	W2 24-30 Jul	W3 31 Jul- 6 Aug	W4 7-13 Aug	W5 14-20 Aug	W6 21-27 Aug	W7 28 Aug-3 Sep	W8 4-10 Sep	W9 11-17 Sep	W10 18-25 Sep
Ethics approval and final scope										
Literature review										
Source search and screening										
Corpus selection and appraisal										
Evidence extraction and source log										
Manual initial coding										
Theme development and review										
Findings drafting										
Discussion and chapter integration										
Revision, proofreading and submission										

7. Conclusion

This proposal sets out a feasible qualitative investigation of a current international brand-management problem. It asks how Jaguar and informed public sources construct the relationship between reinvention and heritage, while carefully avoiding an unsupported claim that brand equity has already eroded. A bounded public-document corpus, transparent purposive selection and manual thematic analysis align directly with the aim, objectives and research questions. The study should add a timely interpretation of contested heritage during radical luxury repositioning and produce practical lessons whose limits are clearly stated.

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