

Introduction: Thought leadership in brand management

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ABSTRACT

This special issue contains fifteen articles developed from presentations at the sixth annual Thought Leaders' International Conference on Brand Management, held at Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano, Switzerland in April 2010. The conference received 154 submissions and following a double blind reviewing process, a little under half of these, 75 papers, were accepted and presented at the conference. The authors of the accepted conference papers had the opportunity to revise their papers after the conference and submit them for possible inclusion in this special issue. A further round of rigorous double-blind reviewing resulted in the selection of these fifteen articles. This introduction presents an overview of this thought-leading research into brand management.

Keywords: brand management, thought leadership, brand research method.

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The articles in this special issue reflect the diversity and breadth of current research into brand management. Some articles shed useful new light on long-standing problems in our understanding of how brands work and others bring new issues and innovative methodologies to light.

Reflecting the diversity of scholars attending the conference, the authors are from nine different countries and the papers we publish here are similarly varied.

Conflict is an unfortunate fact of modern life – perhaps society has never known a period without conflict. More positively, perhaps, conflict and rivalry are among the main reasons why human beings form themselves into groups and how those groups behave. In the first paper in this special issue, Ewing, Wagstaff and Powell investigate how conflict and oppositional loyalty, or rivalry, manifest themselves both between and within brand communities. Their theoretical foundation is social identity, social comparison, self-categorization and brand culture theory. They use this to inform a netnographic study of the communities that have formed around two locally strong mass-market motor vehicle brands in Australia, the local branches of Ford and General Motors (known locally as Holden). They show that the underlying conflict and rivalry is continuous and deep-rooted, but is mostly evidenced in humorous name-calling and ridicule. However, certain events and occasions can heighten the latent tensions between the communities, escalating the manifestation of the rivalry into malicious behavior and remarkable outright hostility. At the other end of the spectrum, even non-users of the brands can vicariously align themselves with one or other brand community, which is interesting since both brands are commonplace, mass-market players.

In contrast to conflict between members of brand communities, the second article investigates a conflict between academic ideas. In this article, Urde, Baumgarth, and Merrilees stimulate our

thinking about brand orientation, comparing its underlying philosophy with that of market orientation using the varied perspectives of theoretical foundation, corporate culture, behavior and performance outcomes and also linking the strategic orientations of brand and market orientation to classical thinking in marketing. They discuss four ways of understanding the relationship between the two orientations – as two separate strategic options, as a process of natural evolution, as options for some but not others, and as a symbiotic or synergistic mutually beneficial relationship. Ultimately, they see brand orientation as an inside-out and brand identity driven approach that regards brands as a hub for an organization and its strategy. This might at first seem in contrast to market orientation, an outside-in and brand image driven approach, but they move beyond a simple dichotomous conflict and develop the idea of a more dynamic and helpful interaction between the two paradigms.

The third article is similarly integrative, drawing on ideas from two disciplines to develop our understanding of how brands work online. It combines insights from marketing and information systems research to arrive at an integrative model of online brand experience. Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou build on the established understanding of technology acceptance and supplement it with emotional aspects of brand relationship, using empirical data from a survey of users of online search engines. They show that trust and perceived usefulness positively affect online brand experience. These positive experiences result in satisfaction and behavioral intentions, which in turn lead to the formation of an online brand relationship. Brand reputation then emerges as an important antecedent of trust and perceived ease of use of an online brand, representing an interesting advance.

The fourth article develops the concept of brand identity itself. da Silveira, Lages and Simoes challenge the common perspective of brand identity as unilateral and aspirational– what managers want the brand to be – while emphasizing the need for stability over time, pointing out that the increasingly dynamic environment and the rising role of consumers as co-contributors in brand

construction and development require a fresh approach. Drawing on the sociology as well as the strategy literature, they show that brand identity is a dynamic process constructed over time through mutually influencing inputs from brand managers and other social constituents, notably consumers. The required consistency in identity management and presentation necessitates being adaptive to contextual changes while preserving a stable sense of self. Their contribution is showing how to cope with an unstable and unpredictable environment, which is becoming increasingly common. Should the brand identity remain fixed over time to create long lasting references for consumers, or should it instead be flexible and adaptable? They suggest that this depends on the meaning of the enduring identity attribute, which should be dynamic and flexible in a changing environment. They propose a brand identity framework consisting of the dimensions of brand identity, brand face, consumers' face, encounters and contextual factors such as competition for environments such as these.

A much-needed conceptual advance is to develop a robust framework for place and city branding. In the fifth article in this special issue Merrilees, Miller and Herington contribute to this by investigating the nature of a stressed satellite city brand profile that augments the core city brand development. They develop a common stressed satellite city brand profile that will help policymakers address the problems of stressed satellite cities in a way that will allow more insightful and structured government interventions instead of the previously applied piecemeal, unsustainable practices. In differentiating between self-sustaining cities and stressed satellite cities, their paper adds depth to the nascent place and city branding literature.

Moving from cities to countries, a complementary place branding paper reviews the concept of place brand identity within the supply side aspect of place branding. With no widely accepted model of place brand identity, Konecnik Ruzzier and de Chernatony propose a new model with roots in marketing, tourism and sociological theory, which they apply in a detailed case study to the branding of Slovenia. In addition to significant managerial implications that are generalisable to other

countries, the paper provides support for the three-stage model for identifying unique brand identity elements for the country concerned. Their paper also demonstrates the value of the community-based (key influencers and enactors) country branding approach.

Tuskeg, Golob and Podnar look at relationships between congruity of consumer and brand values, brand identification, brand commitment, and word of mouth as they investigate the role of consumer-brand identification in building brand relationships. This paper offers some significant insights into high involvement consumer behavior processes and has some important implications for managerial choices in building strong and lasting relationships with consumers. Of course brand values, especially if they are congruent with the values of the target consumer group, play a major role influencing consumer behavior. This study suggests that by focusing on factors that influence consumer-brand identification, notably the fundamental and intangible characteristics such as brand values, brand managers can significantly affect consumers' commitment and their willingness to generate positive word of mouth.

Dawes and Nenycz-Thiel investigate how buyers of one private label in a product category also purchase the private labels of competing retailers in the same category. Understanding this consumer cross-purchasing of private labels is important to retailers, who use private labels to differentiate themselves from other retailers, and to manufacturers whose brands compete against private labels. Higher levels of private label cross-purchasing indicate heightened competitive intensity among the private labels of rival retailers, and competition occurs across multiple stores. Private label marketers should consider competition between the two types of brands across stores, and regard private labels from other retailers as close competitors. National brand marketers should be aware that frequent price promotions could result in consumers switching to private labels, rather than other national brands.

In an innovative linking of data sources, Romaniuk and Nenycz-Thiel combine buying behavior data collected from scanner data with brand associations collected through an online survey of the same individuals. They use this to investigate whether two behavioral brand loyalty metrics, buying frequency and share of category requirements, are antecedents to the current brand associations held by customers. They show that in most cases a positive relationship exists between past behavioral loyalty and the current propensity to give brand associations, in a classic Ehrenberg (1995) generalization. However, marketing researchers need to include the influence of past behavior, particularly share of category requirements, in the modeling, and draw upon a dependent variable from a different data source, or collect data at a later point in time, in order to predict future buying behavior.

Another paper influenced by the work of the late Andrew Ehrenberg investigates variations in demand elasticity that indicate that brand attributes (conceived as the functional and symbolic benefits provided to consumers) contribute differentially to demand elasticities. In this case, however, in contrast to Ehrenberg and England's (1990) findings, Foxall, Yan, Oliveira-Castro and Wells show that price elasticities for products and brands are extensively dynamic. The study reported here was in a more open setting, featuring a wider range of brands available in diverse retail settings at prices that differed according to the competitive pressures of a range of complete marketing mixes, exhibited a more dynamic interaction of price elasticity among products and brands than did the experimental context of the earlier work. Through exploring and challenging the role of price elasticity, the paper opens up an opportunity for further work on the study of carefully defined open and closed settings.

Responding in part to Pittard et al (2007)'s call for systematic research into the effect of logo design on brand evaluation and preferences, Muller, Kocher and Crettaz investigate the impact of a change in visual identity and the consequences on brand modernity, brand attitude and brand loyalty. They give a broad vision of the implications of logo change to brand managers and researchers, with

specific reference to brand modernity, brand attitude and brand loyalty in a broader response to the issue than the detailed specifics of logo design analyzed by Henderson and Cote (1998).

In a paper that highlights the international nature of the research in this special issue, Li and He investigate how native consumers evaluate international brand alliances between a foreign brand and a native brand, showing support for the moderating effects of both brand order and consumer ethnocentrism on foreign and native partner brand attitudes towards an international brand alliance. The study has implications for both international brand managers and native brand managers working on strategies for international brand alliances. It also contributes to the academic literature by operationalizing fit for brand alliances as two-dimensional: brand-specific fit and between-brand fit.

Valta then responds to criticism of research on consumer-brand relationships (CBR) and relational norms. She develops a conceptual framework that highlights the mediating role of relational norms in consumer-brand relationships and their effect on brand relationship quality, building an alternative conceptualization and operationalization of brand relationship quality and relational norms. This provides evidence for a second-order structure of relational norms and brand relationship quality. This is an advance on previous work as this study draws on the business-to-business relationship literature instead of the interpersonal relationship metaphor.

Brand community research makes extensive use of the term "engagement", but there has been little attention to its theoretical meaning and foundations. Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek use netnography to explore the nature and scope of consumer engagement in an online brand community. They reveal the complex multidimensional and dynamic nature of consumer engagement, which may emerge at different levels of intensity over time, thus reflecting distinct engagement states. Drilling down, consumer engagement contains a range of sub-processes reflecting consumers' interactive experience within online brand communities and value co-creation

among community participants. Using this understanding, they show that engaged consumers exhibit enhanced consumer loyalty, satisfaction, empowerment, connection, emotional bonding, trust and commitment.

Finally, Buil, de Chernatony and Martinez explore the relationships between two central elements of marketing communications programs - advertising and sales promotions - and their impact on brand equity. Individuals' attitudes towards advertisements have received little research attention in the brand equity context, but are shown to be important in building brand equity (the dimensions of which are shown to be partly inter-related). By using an original, creative and different advertising strategy, companies can develop higher brand awareness and positive perceptions of their brands. Perceived advertising spend also has a positive effect on brand awareness, although interestingly such investment does not necessarily enhance perceived quality and brand associations.

These articles provide a wide variety of stimulating insights into knowledge advancements in brand management. The range of nationalities of the authors, the scope of topics and methodologies used indicate that a vibrant and healthy research culture in the brand management field was evident at the Lugano conference. We hope that thought leadership in brand management will continue to develop through meetings and special issues such as this.

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