Introduction: thought leadership in brand management

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A B S T R A C T

This JBR Special Issue contains ten articles developed from presentations at the Seventh Annual Thought Leaders' International Conference on Brand Management, held at Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano, Switzerland in March 2011. The conference organizing committee received submissions and following a double blind reviewing process papers were accepted for presentation at the conference. After the conference all authors wishing to submit papers for this Special Edition had the opportunity to revise their papers and submit them. A further round of rigorous double-blind reviewing resulted in the selection of ten articles. This introduction presents an overview of this thought-leading research into brand management.

1. Introduction

The articles in this special issue reflect the latest thinking among thought leaders in brand management. However, before introducing the papers, the Editors of the Special Issue express their gratitude to the many reviewers who have toiled to provide a critical perspective. The combination of a rigorous double-blind reviewing process leading up to the conference and a subsequent double-blind reviewing process following submission to the Special Issue represents the highest standard of academic review. Additional checks arose from a final round of editorial scrutiny of both content and format. Several authors expressed their gratitude for the high quality and constructive nature of the reviews.

The articles in this Special Issue admirably reflect the diversity and breadth of current research into brand management. Some articles shed new perspectives on long-standing problems in our understanding of how brands work, especially at a corporate level, and others bring new issues and innovative research approaches to light. Reflecting the diversity of scholars attending the conference, the authors were from nine different countries and the papers we publish here are similarly varied.

The first three papers as a block represent the most neglected or under-developed topic in branding, namely brand management theory and practices. Brand identity and brand visioning receives considerable attention in the literature (Balmer, 2012; de Chernatony, 2010). However, painstaking formulation and development of brands fall short of its potential impact without appropriate, effective and strategic management of the brand. A small number of previous papers examine the broader, integrated aspects of brand management (de Chernatony, 1999; Mzungu, Merrilees, & Miller, 2010). Similarly a scarcity of papers on the equally important specific category of the leadership aspects of corporate branding exists (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006).

Given the importance of general approaches to brand management and the paucity of literature on the topic, it is appropriate that the lead paper in the Special Issue deals directly with brand management systems. The Spanish contingent of Santos-Vijande, del Río-Lanza, Suárez-Álvarez and Diaz-Martin investigates how firms should manage their brands internally to maximize their value and the firm's commercial performance. Explicitly, the authors use the notion of a brand management system. Their theoretical foundation develops a multidimensional brand management system scale comprising three dimensions: brand orientation, internal branding and strategic brand management. The brand management system is interpreted as an internal management infrastructure necessary to design, control and sustain brand-building activities and brand equity creation. Relatedly from a resource based view understanding, the interpretation of the brand management system (BMS) is as a dynamic capability assisting firms gaining a sustainable competitive advantage. Data from a sample of business service firms show that BMS helps firms to perform better than their competitors. Market orientation and innovativeness are guided by the development of BMS. In summary, the research does much to manifest the black box of brand

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management systems so it is critical for brand managers to control and develop their brands.

Sympathizing with the need to understand the appropriate, effective and strategic management of a company's brand, the second article investigates the role of leadership in brand management. In this article, Merrilees and Frazer stimulate our thinking about the role of leaders in achieving more effective brand management. Specifically, the paper researches the role of franchisor leadership as a major influence on internal branding within the franchise system. The choice of franchising is interesting because franchising and branding are virtually interchangeable as concepts, yet little is known about franchise branding. A critical element in the franchising business model is the link between the franchisor and the franchisee in implementing the franchisor brand, without a guarantee that the franchisee will faithfully and exactly follow the franchisor specified brand. Thus achieving franchisee brand buy-in is critical to the effectiveness of franchise branding. The results indicate that marketing support and brand commitment are important for getting franchisee support for the franchisor brand. However, a major finding is that transformational leaders use a different pattern of getting franchisee buy-in compared to transactional leaders, with greater reliance on culture and facilitating brand commitment.

The third article is similar to the second in terms of focusing on the role of leadership. Rather than the role of leadership on de facto managers (the franchisees), the attention now shifts further down the line to employees. Wallace, de Chernatony and Buil analyze the role of leadership on front line employee commitment in the banking sector. Core to the study is an investigation of the extent to which banking employees are committed to their employers, to live the brand, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty. Effective leadership fosters employee commitment which in turn influences their brand adoption and brand-supporting behaviors. A noteworthy distinction is made between affective, continuance and normative commitment. The study examines whether an initiating structure leader behavior or a considerate leader behavior is most effective in encouraging employee commitment.

The next block of four papers in the Special Issue also represents an equally important and equally neglected topic in branding, namely the strategic aspects of brand management. Relatively little literature on the broader strategic aspects of branding exists (de Chernatony, 2001; Dewhirst & Davis, 2005) and similarly for the more specific consideration of corporate rebranding (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). A strategic approach to branding is important to ensure that brands leverage the most recent and relevant market information into creating more powerful brands, ones that have strong market positions.

The fourth article addresses a major strategic branding issue, namely corporate rebranding. Miller and Merrilees ask whether community organizations can benefit from corporate rebranding in the same way that for-profit organizations do. The study begins by analyzing why previous community rebranding efforts floundered. Failure to develop a robust revision of the brand and failure to get sufficient buy-in from stakeholders are the two main reasons. An action research design purposefully prevents these two failures from occurring. A systematic and dynamic corporate rebranding process embraces multiple stakeholder groups. A major achievement is the articulation of a values-based corporate rebrand, with grounding in actual brand experiences. Active involvement of clients, staff, managers and external bodies throughout the co-development of the corporate rebrand achieves total stakeholder buy-in. The action research process requires researchers to guide the rebranding process, while stakeholders guide the content of the rebranding.

A much-needed empirical advance is to develop a link between brand logos and customer brand commitment. Addressing the link rather than assuming it is preferable. In the fifth article in this Special Issue C Whan Park, Eisingerich, Pol and J Whan Park resolve this issue by firstly demonstrating the positive effects of brand logos on customer brand commitment and then on firm performance. Equally

important is the behavioral mechanism applied in this situation. Previous research provides a simplistic explanation, namely through enabling brand identification. The study provides an alternative and more elaborate explanation, deriving from facilitating customer self-identity/expressiveness; representing a brand's functional benefits; and offering esthetic appeal. The study examines whether brand names or visual symbols as logos are more effective at creating these benefits.

Another important aspect of brand strategy is the use of different forms of data analysis to guide strategy development. Informed decision-making is the basis of good brand strategy. Romaniuk in the sixth paper examines the role of normative benchmarks for a brand's network of associations as a means of providing managers with guidelines to set brand strategy. The paper outlines an approach for obtaining benchmarks for the relative size and structure of a brand's associative network using the NBD-Dirichlet model (Goodhardt, Ehrenberg, & Chatfield, 1984). The results indicate that the NBD-Dirichlet model is able to obtain accurate predictions for the Mental Market Share. This finding has implications for understanding the structure of consumers' memory for brands and the dynamic nature of the associative network across brands and time.

A final strategic brand consideration for the Special Issue is the potential role of different types of brand extensions. Traditional brand extensions are common in the literature. However, research is commencing in very specific and customized areas, such as downscale extensions. The latter is a somewhat complex and controversial area, much in need of good branding research. Downscale extensions are the topic for the seventh paper in the Special Issue. Dall'Olma Riley and Pina analyze consumers' evaluations and feedback effects of vertical downscale line extensions. The experiment varies price (medium versus large discount), brand concept (luxury versus prestige) and product category (cars versus fashion). The results show a significant interaction effect for the evaluation of extensions. Consumers attribute lower value, hold less positive attitudes and express lower purchase intentions toward a downscale extension originating from a luxury car brand in contrast to a luxury fashion brand. At the brand level, the size of the discount does not make much difference in the overall evaluation of the extension. Prestige brands are more sensitive to dilution effects resulting from the vertical extension than luxury brands.

The final block of three papers relates to the more practical and applied aspects of branding, particularly brand communication and the associated field of brand metrics. In the eighth paper in the Special Issue Huber, Meyer, Vogel, Weihrauch and Hamprecht investigate how to rejuvenate a brand using age endorsers in advertisements. Based on theoretical perspectives from personality transfer, social categorization, imagery and advertising literatures, the study proposes and tests several conditions for which age associations transfer from endorser to brand takes place. The results show that using endorsers can be an effective way to influence consumers' brand age perceptions and to rejuvenate a brand.

Innovative research is shifting the emphasis from traditional communication media to more recent forms of brand communities and social networks. Both brand communities and social networks are worthy topics to study in the new age of communication. Doubly important are studies which combine both aspects of these two social phenomena, as does the ninth paper in the Special Issue. Zaglia investigates the existence, functionality and different types of brand communities within social networks. The netnographic approach affirms such an existence, leading to a better understanding of such embedded brand communities, their peculiarities and motivational drivers for participation. Brand managers can leverage social networks to implement brand communities with less time and financial effort. Brand outcomes are contingent in choosing the appropriate brand community type, cultivating consumers' interactions and staying tuned to this social engagement.

Another paper probes the quality of data associated with brand metrics, in the marketing communication (advertising) context. In the tenth and final paper in the Special Issue, Nenycz-Thiel, Beal, Ludwichowska

and Romaniuk scrutinize the accuracy of consumers' self-reports about using brands and categories. The researchers use television as the category and programs as the brands in the context of their research. The results show that light users (viewers) are the main source of error at both the brand (program) and the category (total television viewing). At brand level, the data suggests that those viewers who engage in the behavior infrequently either forget that the event occurred or do not form a representation of the event in the memory. The paper provides recommendations for brand researchers on how to minimize errors from light users, which will increase the accuracy of the usage metrics overall.

Together, the ten articles span the three critical areas of brand management, brand strategy and brand applications to specific areas such as communication. New insights advance our knowledge in brand management and hopefully stimulate and motivate further research. The range of nationalities of the authors, the scope of topics and methodologies 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 further special issues.

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