Editorial

Brand, organisation identity and reputation: Bold approaches to big challenges

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The traditional boundaries between brand management and other management areas are dissolving. An important resulting change is that the goodwill or franchise embodied in the brand has become a major source of value through which organisations engage with the consumer.

While these permeate consumer thinking and behaviour (witness the success of Apple's *iPod/iPhone* and Nintendo's *Wii* and *Brain Academy*), this is just beginning to attract the attention of those who still see brand management as 'something done to a good product' and not a rigorous aspect of business strategy. Of particular importance here is the increasing role that brand, organisational identity (OI) and reputation occupy in competitive markets loaded with symbols and meanings, through which organisations express themselves.¹

Brands develop through consistent and positive consumer experience over time. Empowered by access to information, consumers are driven not just by the brand alone, but also by an evaluation based on their views of the organisation behind the brands.² Consumer technological sophistication³ and an array of information (through blogs, word of mouth, employee, industry news, and so on) influence what a brand offers to become worthwhile to the consumer. In this regard, what a brand offers encompasses a lot of traditional elements, as well as those that are based on the characteristics of the firm behind the brand.⁴ With a successful brand as its *raison d'être*, every interaction with consumers and other stakeholders influences and adds to the accruing brand equity of the firm:

the more positive the customer experience, the stronger the brand, and the greater the positive reputation for the organisation. Reputation is the more or less favourable regard in which a firm is held by its stakeholders.⁵ Such a regard, which translates into a greater reputation when compared to competitors, allows firms to cope with the intense competition and offer intuitive, relevant and customised values to their customers. Therefore, while branding cannot (and should not) be just a functional responsibility, it is inconceivable to develop reputation for an organisation's offerings embodied by its brand. The question would be: reputation for what?

In marketing, OI has variously been explained in terms of company logo, the design style, colour scheme, graphic design,⁶ the behaviour of employees,⁷ communication towards internal and external stakeholders.⁸ Fundamentally OI is concerned with (and addresses) the reality of what the firm is all about^{9,10} in time and space. OI entails the constellation and manifestation of an organisation's competency, capability, resources and structure that enables it to innovatively create, develop and maintain its brand and entrench its reputation.

Conceived this way, brand, OI and reputation seemingly fit into a broader integrative big idea requiring a holistic approach in addressing their importance and influence in determining competitive success. In the dynamic environment that we are witnessing, what has traditionally been regarded as functionally different and less important variables (in practice and in theory) are now

assuming the centre stage as part of the offerings that organisations must integrate in order to maintain their competitiveness. Perhaps, we as marketing scholars in both research and teaching have been lagging behind our colleagues from the industry and the consumers in recognising the need to look at the bigger picture in strategic brand management. Although it is natural to try to break down our research into bits addressing issues on a concept-by-concept basis, it is equally relevant, appropriate and important for us to examine the changing consumer and macroeconomic factors, and to tackle the three concepts accordingly.

We should be bold in addressing broader challenges that enable us to develop big ideas to tackle broad and strategic issues necessary for developing valuable knowledge for scholarship and practice of strategic brand management in the 21st century. It seems worthwhile to redirect attention to the interactive way in which the three concepts of *brand*, *OI* and *reputation* feed in to influence consumer, and meaningfully fit into today's consumer culture. An underlying gained knowledge here is that the greater the alignment between brand, OI and reputation, the more consistent and, therefore, the more successful a firm's offering.

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