Editorial

Journal of Brand Management (2011) **18**, 371–373. doi:10.1057/bm.2011.15

Brands are in the core of any firm's decision making. They are strategic resources; an intangible asset in which both value and effects are measured using various approaches. The development of brand equity that is formed because of the existence of the brand, should not be solely the concern of the group of people who are directly involved with the marketing decisions. Any organisational choice is a part of an ongoing process designed to create value and meaning to the external audiences. The effects that this choice is likely to have on the reputation of the corporate brand and the product brands the company offers, should be taken into account.

In the various audiences' minds, the reputation of a specific brand is formed after evaluating the information and experiences; collected over time, on the brands. Brand reputation is therefore formed both on the basis of the evaluation of signals the audiences receive through the organisation that produces and legally owns the brand and through the messages transmitted by any other source related to this particular brand in a direct or an indirect manner. The signals that the organisation is sending are controlled to a degree and include mass communication, signalling using the distribution choices, the interaction with the offer and the employees during consumption. On the other hand, the signals that the audiences receive from other sources are mostly uncontrolled and include the expression of the brand tribe, the word of mouth concerning the brand, the reports in the media and the information that competitors may offer to the market on the brand using means such as reports or comparative advertising.

For many years, academics and practitioners were feeling really confident that the reputation a brand earns in the minds of the various audiences interested in the brand could be managed solely by the firms' choices and behaviour. It was believed that the message the company was signalling to the market via various means originated and directed by the company itself. These were the main sources that the external audiences were using to form an overall evaluation of the brands. This was understood as the avenue in which the brand reputation was mostly formed. In an era where new technology and various environmental trends are facilitating the transmission and access to a myriad of information not transmitted by companies, it is recognised that brands are not exactly owned by the company and it becomes increasingly difficult to develop and maintain the desired reputation to various external non-company elements. Given that this uncontrolled information is often perceived by the market as more objective and is information which could contradict the companies' desires on the manner in which they wished to be perceived, it seems that organisations are nowadays challenged when they are trying to position their brands in the audiences' minds. Therefore, the consistent signalling based on a shared understanding of the brand identity becomes even more important for companies who would prefer to keep to a certain extent the management of their brand reputation.

The issue of the *Journal of Brand Management* Vol. 18 No. 6 consists of five papers, which focus primarily on the management of controlled signalling. They are all reporting

research findings from primary data collected from four different countries and analysis of secondary data taken from two databases who report information on companies perceived as being global leaders.

The first paper by Burmann and König is looking at the manner brand commitment is perceived in a call centre of a German media company. Given the fact that the employees in any call centre do have regular contact with customers and they are a touch point between the brand and the customers, the identification of behaviours that could make them increasingly brand oriented is core to the consistency of controlled signalling. The data was collected both from employees working in-house and employees working in shared-service call centres. The results of this study indicate that direct brand communication that is targeted to the employees has a direct effect on brand commitment. The results of this study further emphasise the importance of building the necessary internal marketing approaches to convince the internal customers about the characteristics of the brand first, before building massive external marketing campaigns that might have questionable results if the company has not secured the support of the internal market.

The second paper by Gromark and Melin is testing the impact of brand orientation on the financial performance of a firm. Using data collected from 263 companies operating in Sweden; the paper attempts to operationalise brand orientation, before examining its effect on profitability. It identifies eight dimensions which are characterised as the anatomy of brand orientation. These eight dimensions are: the firm's approach to brands, the implementation of brand programs, ability to set brand goals and to follow-up, the measures taken during the identity development, the role of the brand in the development of relationships with the various stakeholders,

the ability to use the core values for the development of operations, the participation of top management in the branding process and finally the firm's ability to allocate responsibility and roles. These particular dimensions are proven to have a positive relationship with the profitability of the firms. These results further support the view that brands are a valuable asset for the company and should be approached and managed as such.

Chapleo in the third paper is focusing on university brands in the United Kingdom. The paper is acknowledging that universities do have brands that should be developed and managed, as any other corporate brand. This exploratory study aims to unfold the objectives of branding activities, the rationale for branding and the degree metrics are articulated for university branding. Interviews were conducted with managers charged with responsibility for university marketing programmes. The findings of this research suggest that the University branding could be more complex than the branding of other corporations and the sector has a long way to go in the implementation of branding strategies. The coordination of the relevant branding decisions is crucial for the development of the institution but it can be a really challenging exercise.

In the fourth paper Melo and Galan are revisiting financial issues, which were also discussed in the second paper. In this particular study, the focus is the concept of brand value. The authors are investigating the degree that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has an impact on the value of the brand. An existing database that is measuring CSR by the firm Kinder, Lydenberg and Domini and the 'Most Valuable Brands' report by the firm Interbrand were used for the extracting the data. From the 100 brands included in the 'Most Valuable Brands' report, only 56 were also included in the CSR list by Kinder,

Lydenberg and Domini. The results of this study imply that brand value is influenced by the CSR, although the degree of impact varies depending on other market factors.

In the final paper of this issue, Mak is examining the perceived identity of another complex brand. The focus of the research here is destination branding, and in particular Iowa. Key informants were first interviewed to identify the desired identity and industry partners were then surveyed to examine their views of the identity of the destination in relation to the identity originally suggested by the key informants. Results showed consistency between the views.

I certainly hope that you will find reading these five fine papers as enjoyable

as I did to terminate, a little reminder, do send us top quality papers of interest for both academics and practitioners for eventual publication in this journal. It is always a pleasure to develop really good issues, like this one.

Cleopatra Veloutsou
Guest Editor
Senior Lecturer in Marketing,
University of Glasgow
Visiting Professor,
University of Bari
Head of the Marketing Research Unit,
Athens Institute of Education and Research
E-mail: Cleopatra.Veloutsou@glasgow.ac.uk