

Corporate behaviour vs brand behaviour: Towards an integrated view?

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TIM O. BREXENDORF

is doctoral candidate and research assistant in the competence centre for brand management at the Institute for Marketing and Retailing, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. Formerly, he worked in various positions for a number of international retailers.

JOACHIM KERNSTOCK

is head of the centre of competence for brand management at the Institute for Marketing and Retailing and assistant professor at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland. Prior to that he gained his doctoral degree at Munich Ludwig-Maximilians University, Germany, and worked in corporate marketing for an aviation company with worldwide operations.

Keywords

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Abstract

The behaviour of employees is an important element in the expression of identity. That behaviour therefore relates to different identity-focused, corporate-level concepts such as corporate identity and brand management. Both concepts are interlinked and need a stronger alignment in consideration of corporate-level marketing. The emerging interest in corporate and service brand management is increasing the relevance of behaviour. However, brand hierarchies could hinder identity-congruent behaviour on the part of the employees if the multiple identities of corporations are not aligned. We discuss the behaviour of management, corporate-level marketing, middle management and employees in the context of brand management and brand hierarchies.
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INTRODUCTION

Identity builds the basis for differentiation and competitive advantage by influencing the stakeholder image of the corporation. As such, corporate identity management is of great interest to both practitioners and researchers. Moreover, the shift of emphasis in brand management from product to corporate and service brand management underlines the relevance of employee behaviour. These developments suggest that a deeper alignment of corporate-level concepts and brand management as well as a stronger consideration of employee behaviour are needed.

This paper discusses how the concepts of corporate and brand identity should be

interlinked. Building on the disciplines of corporate identity and brand management, we emphasise the relevance of behaviour for the management of identity. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on a further understanding of an integrated view of corporate identity and brand management.

CORPORATE-LEVEL MARKETING AND DIVERSITY OF SCOPE

Balmer¹ states that 'marketing at the corporate level requires a radical reappraisal in terms of its philosophy, content, management and process.' Balmer and Greyser² plead that marketing should adopt

Joachim Kernstock
University of St. Gallen
Institute for Marketing
and Retailing Dufourstr. 40a,
9000 St. Gallen, Switzerland
Tel: + 41 71 224 71 60
Fax: + 41 71 224 28 57
E-mail: joachim.kernstock@unisg.ch



a more strategic, institution-wide role and broaden its view. The authors therefore argue for an integrated approach, termed corporate-level marketing. Corporate-level marketing is distinguished from traditional marketing concepts by a strategic and multidisciplinary scope³ and having multiple exchange relationships with different stakeholder groups.² The marketing perspective is often focused on the product or brand level, rather than on the corporate level.¹ Marketing in this view shifts away from products to corporations.^{1,5}

Unfortunately, the corporate-level concepts are less integrated and academics argue for an integrated corporate marketing concept. Corporate-level concepts are characterised by a diversity of scopes that address different aspects of managing a corporation,⁶ making it necessary to see through the 'fog'¹ and 'disciplinary silos'.³ Little integration exists in parallel terms of the various corporate-level constructs of corporate identity, corporate reputation, corporate image, corporate communications and brand management.⁴ Each of these concepts has its own intellectual roots and practice-based adherents.⁷

INTEGRATED VIEW OF CORPORATE IDENTITY AND BRAND MANAGEMENT

Two important streams of identity-based concepts are corporate identity and brand management. 'The Strathclyde Statement' emphasises that 'corporate identity differs from traditional brand marketing since it is concerned with all of an organisation's stakeholders and the multi-faceted ways in which an organisation communicates'.¹ Auton⁸ states that misunderstandings in the concepts of corporate identity, corporate brand and product brand are common. The concepts of corporate identity and

brand management coexist without much interconnection. Nevertheless, corporate identity and brand management are interlinked.^{9,10} Motion and Leitch¹¹ stress that 'it is useful to think of corporate identity management operating along the continuum that ranges between the branding and holistic approaches'. Whereas brand management is focused on the customer market, the corporate identity concept captures a multidisciplinary perspective and relates to the organisation.¹² Balmer¹³ stated that the integration of branding principles in the corporate identity concept creates a deeper alignment with marketing.

Bickerton¹² suggests that the concept of corporate brand management unites the concept of brand management with the concept of corporate identity. The concept of the corporate brand embodies the communication of values, internal and external, through corporate as well as marketing communication and requires a multidisciplinary approach.^{1,14} The corporate brand must help shape the vision, values and culture of the organisation¹⁵ as well as generate value for external stakeholders such as customers. The integration of the two perspectives combines the 'inside out' organisational focus with the 'outside in' marketing focus.¹⁶ An integrated conceptualisation incorporates both the internal building and the development of values as well as the external expression through the brand.¹⁷

Thus, the point of view changes from a product to a holistic corporate view.¹⁸ The broader scope of corporate brand management goes further than managing a product and building brand relationships with the customer.¹⁹ Brand hierarchies enhance the focus, the complexity and effectiveness of branding strategies. Branding at the corporate level needs to take the whole variety of products and services into account. The corporate brand is the

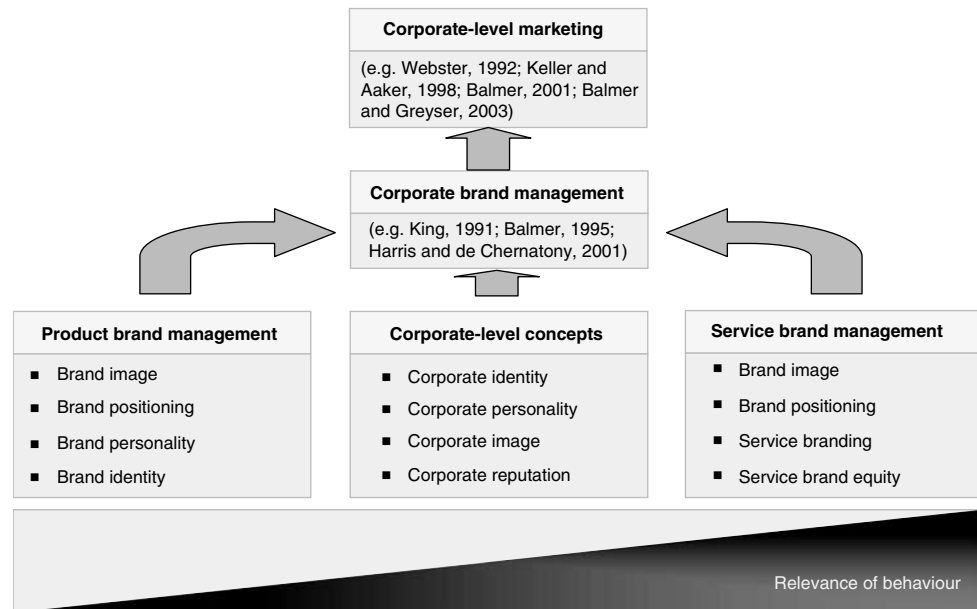


Figure 1 Integration of concepts

umbrella of the product and service brands at the organisational level.²⁰ As such, corporate brands are more complex to manage, and there are differences in managing a corporate brand, a product brand and a service brand (Figure 1).^{12,14,21}

When the company is the brand, there are more points of contact,^{14,21,22} whereas product brands often have relatively few points of contact. In the service sector, customers often have a number of touch-points with the employees of the brand.²³

RELEVANCE OF EMPLOYEES IN BRAND BUILDING

The shift of emphasis in brand management from product to corporate and service brand management underlines the relevance of employee behaviour.²⁴ Harris and de Chernatony²⁵ point out that employees are the most significant feature in distinguishing corporate from product branding. Until now, brand management

has mostly neglected the relevance of employees and seen them as passive elements in the branding strategy.¹⁸ Corporate as well as service brand management should highlight the role of employees in living the brand and identity-congruent behaviour. Especially in the service and retailing sectors, there is a direct interaction between customer-facing employees, such as service employees or sales staff, and the customer.²⁶ Accordingly, there is support for an increasing focus on the role of behaviour as an element in the branding process.

BEHAVIOUR AS AN ELEMENT OF BRAND EXPRESSION

Researchers suggest that the behaviour of the corporation as a whole is a core element of its identity.^{27,28,29} Corporate behaviour is often related to corporate culture.³⁰ The values of the corporate brand must be linked to the culture of the corporation to show



	Management	Corporate-level marketing	Middle management	All employees
Supervision and responsibility	Supervisory Board	Management	Management	Middle management
Relevant brand	Corporate brand	Corporate brand	Corporate, product and service brand	Corporate, product and service brand
Responsibility for	Corporate brand	Corporate brand	Corporate, product and service brand	Corporate, product and service brand
Impact of behaviour on	All stakeholders (internal and external)	All stakeholders (internal)	Employees and customers	Customers and suppliers
Key challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Securing the continuity and consistency of the brand ■ Behaviour and communication with focus on brand identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support at all levels to execute the brand promise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Close the gap between the brand promise and brand fulfilment ■ Alignment of the identity/image interface ■ Alignment with own interests and reward system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Close the gap between the brand promise and brand fulfilment ■ Knowledge, commitment and ability to live the brand ■ Alignment with own interests and reward system

Figure 2 Levels of brand-related behaviour

authenticity and coherence.¹⁹ The corporate values and culture shape and prefigure the behaviour of the employees.³⁰ In the context of organisations, the behaviour in question is between the employees and stakeholders of the corporation. Behaviour occurs at the identity/image interface at the 'moment of truth'.³¹ Ind³² stated that the perception of an organisation is directly or indirectly influenced by its employees and management. The behaviour needs to be strongly aligned with both the identity or values and the promise of the brand.²⁰ Behaviour forms an image in ways that generate brand equity at the brand and corporate levels, and affect the behaviour of relevant stakeholders. An identity's values form the core of the brand and can exert a strong influence on behaviour. The identity of the organisation guides employees in their behaviour. Thus, identity and behaviour are strongly interlinked.³³ A strong alignment between the core values of an identity and their expression through the behaviour of employees

is necessary in order to create a genuine coherence between the brand promise and employee performance. Dutton and Dukerich³³ state that the cohesion between the organisation and the employee plays an important role in the long-term development of the firm.

Weick³⁴ emphasises that organisational behaviour always takes place on an individual level. As a result, corporate behaviour as well as brand behaviour are manifested through employee behaviour. In our conceptualisation, we refer to the behaviour of management, corporate-level marketing, middle management and all employees. Figure 2 shows the levels of brand-related behaviour.

BEHAVIOUR OF MANAGEMENT

Many corporate brands—especially small—short and medium-sized corporate brands—are closely associated with the founder or the lead manager of the corporation. Hatch and Schultz²⁸ state that



management behaviour is increasingly influencing the corporate image. Furthermore, internal (employees, shareholders) and external (public, suppliers, partners, customers) stakeholders form their image of the corporate brand on the basis of the management's behaviour. As an example, the management behaviour of the CEO of Deutsche Bank, Josef Ackermann, has a huge impact on the perception of the Deutsche Bank corporate brand. Senior managers need to live the brand values and show staff how and why those values are meaningful for their own jobs.²² Balmer and Gray²¹ argue that the CEO has to manage the corporate brand. The supervisory board bears responsibility for the fact that management behaviour reflects the values of the corporate brand. In practice, different concepts and responsibilities for managing the corporate brand often do not exist.¹⁶

BEHAVIOUR OF CORPORATE-LEVEL MARKETING

Knox and Bickerton¹⁶ suggest that management should give the responsibility and authority to manage the corporate brand to a director and establish a senior corporate management team. They have to ensure the continuity and consistency of the development of the corporate brand. The behaviour of corporate-level marketing as an entity within the corporation becomes a specific role model for brand behaviour. The corporation as a whole, the corporate level, faces the same challenges as a 'micro-organisation'. Within the organisation, however, it attracts greater attention than other, nonbrand-related entities. Thus, corporate-level marketing becomes the incubator of brand behaviour for the rest of the organisation. Given a complex brand architecture, corporate-level marketing must also focus on the linkage of itself and

its behaviour to the specific brand identities of the product and service brands with their specific demands on brand behaviour.³⁵

BEHAVIOUR OF MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

The behaviour of middle management is mostly concerned with internal issues.³⁶ Middle management must help all employees to understand the brand promise so that they can come to appreciate the types of behaviour that serve to reinforce it.²² Furthermore, middle management plays a decisive role in the linkage between organisational identity, corporate brand behaviour and the brand behaviour of product or service brands. This is because middle management 'experiences' brand behaviour in at least three different ways, namely through interacting with senior management, receiving input from corporate-level marketing and working with their peers. The behaviour of middle management, in turn, is perceived by all employees. When there is only a single brand, there may be little or no controversy. In a multi-brand architecture, with several product and service brands, the behaviour of middle management becomes a key element, due to their guiding and supervisory role in the organisation.

BEHAVIOUR OF EMPLOYEES

The employees are the embodiment of the brand.²² Employees, as key stakeholders of the corporate brand, are both 'insiders' (part and member of the corporate brand) and 'outsiders' (eg consumers, community members).²⁸ In organisational literature, employee behaviour is often related to the internal perspective of the organisation. This perspective concentrates on the perception that employees



have of their organisation.³³ Mael and Ashforth³⁷ state that the more employees identify with their organisation, the more likely they are to have a positive attitude towards it. Furthermore, identification leads to employees accepting the values of the organisation and aligning their behaviour according to those values. Many studies on corporate identity, service management, brand management and human resource management emphasise that employees represent and deliver the corporate brand values when interacting with the key audience. Davies *et al.*³⁸ point out that, especially in the service sector, the identity perceived by the customer-facing employees could be expected to co-evolve with the image perceived by the customer. Identity therefore contributes to the shaping of perceptions and the actions of organisational members. The employees provide the interface between the internal identity and the external expression of identity and contribute to building and maintaining the brand.^{1,25} Identity determines the perceptions and actions of the organisation's members.³⁵ Employees must have a commitment to the brand and the ability, knowledge and motivation to live the brand values. Therefore, corporations need employees who express these values through their daily behaviour. Moreover, the structure and culture of the corporation must support the employees in enacting behaviour that is coherent with the values of the corporate, product and service brands.^{22,25}

BEHAVIOUR RELATED TO THE DIFFERENT BRAND LEVELS

Organisations can have brand architectures with multiple identities and multiple facets (hybrid identities).³⁹ Some product and service brands are closely associated with the

corporate brand, others are not. Consumers are often unaware of the companies behind the brands.³⁰ This could have an influence on the behaviour of the employees.

The corporate brand Diageo, for instance, unites different product brands such as Johnnie Walker and Smirnoff under its umbrella. None of these brands is strongly associated with Diageo. In these cases, the management of brand identity is of crucial importance and the influence of the corporate identity on the brand identities is usually minimal. Accordingly, the expression of identity at the level of the corporate brand and at the product brand is separated.

In other companies, the boundaries between corporate, product and service brands are not as strict. Quite the contrary, at times a close connection between these brands is intended. Corporations can introduce product and service brands under the corporate brand, with a new brand name or with a combination of the two.⁴⁰ Existing associations of the corporate brand may be linked with the brand if it is linked with the corporation.⁴⁰ For example, the boundaries between the customer perception of the BMW Group as corporate brand, BMW as product brand and BMW Financial Services as service brand become blurred. Similarly, Renault is a corporate brand as well as part of a product brand. In this case, the values of the different brands (Espace, Kangoo, Twingo) are more interrelated and contribute to the corporate brand. The values of the corporate brand determine the range of the brands under the umbrella and create a frame for desired and expected employee behaviour. In both companies, the brand identity is closely linked to the corporate identity that is the body behind the brand. Whereas the culture of the corporation is linked to internal behaviour, the brand identity is



focused on external expression. Corporate and product/service brands are not synonymous and share links of different strengths.³⁹ Kapferer³⁹ emphasises that 'unlike product brands have no "hinterland", corporate brands are based on an active organization, a living system with a formal structure, a culture and specific values that strongly affects its internal and external functioning'.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The alignment of behaviour with the values of the corporate brand is an ongoing process that requires management attention and is not without conflict.⁴¹ On the one hand, to deliver on the brand promise, employees have to act in accordance with the values of the corporate, product or service brand—even if their behaviour diverges from their actual preferences or capacities. This could lead to conflicts if, for example, the employee should express 'joy', but is momentarily frustrated. On the other hand, customers want to be served by a 'real person', without having the feeling of a programmed response.⁴² Therefore, management and middle management should create an environment in which employees can identify with the corporate brand and live the brand through their daily behaviour. Higgins⁴³ states that if the ideal identity is unattainable, employees dissociate from the organisation or the brand and do not make a great effort to achieve the ideal identity. Thus, we define brand behaviour as all behaviour that is congruent with the identity of the brand.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Achieving that is the task of managing the linkage between corporate identity and

brand identity. From the perspective of the employee there may be incongruities between these different identities. The employee can, however, only behave in one way and one style, and only live one identity. Management and middle management need to consider these multiple perspectives and prioritise the values of different identities so that they can tell their employees which kinds of brand behaviour are expected of them.

In this paper, we argue that organisations need to establish an aligned identity between their corporate, product and service brands. This is necessary if an organisation wants to transport a coherent identity to its stakeholders over time. The complexity arises because one needs to consider corporate marketing, marketing and the interplay between the corporation and strategic business units (SBU). In practice, the alignment of corporate brands and product and service brands is often neglected.⁴⁴ At the identity/image interface, employee behaviour needs to be managed in the interplay between corporate and brand identity. Behaviour as an intangible element is difficult to measure and manage. Values can give direction to employee behaviour, and brand values could be a part of desired employee behaviour. External and internal communication of the values can support behaviour that is consistent with those values. Furthermore, the recruitment and development of employees must be aligned with the identity. The values of the corporate brand can be integrated into employee evaluation and performance measurements.^{15,21}

The concept of identity has the potential to bridge the points of view between corporate identity and brand management. Further work in this area is encouraged in order to advance understanding of corporate and brand behaviour.



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