Editorial

Corporate branding, identity and communications: A contemporary perspective

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We are delighted that the double Special Issue in Volume 14 of this Journal has attracted an exceptional number of submissions. The papers received have passed through a rigorous two-stage reviewing process, which led to the selection of the relatively small number of papers that have progressed to publication stage.

The issues of corporate branding, identity and communication have generated much interest among scholars and business leaders in recent years. Academics have focused on the issues surrounding the definition of these concepts and their respective parameters. Business leaders' interest in the subject has increased as the function of the firm has evolved from the finite task of selling products, to the more complex task of projecting a positive identity to the multiplicity of its stakeholders.

Recent global scandals that resulted in the demise of Enron, WorldCom and Parmalat have triggered an increase in interest in corporate branding, identity and communication. Business leaders are starting to pay more attention to how the identity of a corporation reflects how the company operates within the wider context of a global community. Corporations are making a stronger effort to improve their stance in relation to the environment, governance, social responsibility, humanitarianism and safety.

An interesting and exciting phenomenon has occurred in the field of corporate identity. This area of academic research has been adopted by scholars from areas such as marketing, organisational studies, psychology, sociology, communication and strategy. The field has been enriched by a wide and diverse academic coverage that has inspired and provoked our thinking and increased its level of interest. But the diversity of academic approaches complicates matters as new concepts, constructs and frameworks are being introduced and added onto a highly challenging research area. The field is in the process of evolving from a complicated set of concepts to a more complex and structured body of knowledge.

The papers in this Special Issue are authored by academics and practitioners from diverse research origins and from different international perspectives:

In the first paper, Hulberg presents an extensive literature review from the sociological perspective. He reflects on the different opinions and approaches to corporate branding. He discusses how participants of a corporate branding process will have different perceptions of organisations, which will in turn affect the nature of the brand.

The second paper by Papasolomou and Vrontis is a qualitative analysis of internal marketing of corporate branding in the banking industry. Banks have adopted internal marketing because they have come to realise that their employees represent a valuable resource for building and promoting the corporate brand and its differentiation. Employees have a powerful

impact on consumer perception of both the brand and the organisation.

The third paper by Spears, Brown and Dacin presented a novel tool for assessing corporate association termed the Unique Corporate Association Valence measure. This technique integrates the qualitative and quantitative approaches with the specific intent of capturing the advantages while avoiding the disadvantages of either approach. This method provides both scholars and practitioners with a new tool for assessing corporate branding.

The fourth paper by van Rekom, Jacobs, Verlegh and Podnar discusses the positioning of McDonalds as a Western brand in the Eastern European country of Slovenia. The authors show how corporate communication efforts can influence consumers' understanding of the essence of a brand. The method adopted in this study shows which characteristics are most essential to corporate branding and why they are so central to the corporate brand.

In the fifth paper, Hatch and Rubin use hermeneutical inquiry in explaining that brands exist as symbols in popular culture with their meanings contingent on particular cultural contexts. The paper discusses how consumers may resist meanings originally conceived by managers and agencies, and that brands embody stories constructed by both the companies that produce them and by the consumers that experience the brand. Another interesting element discussed in the paper is that brands have past histories and that brand image is contingent on past branding performance.

Wheeler, Richey and Sablynski, the authors of the sixth paper, examine the relationship between corporate branding and employee personality traits, and between organisational culture and employee turnover. They found that a stronger corporate brand identity increases the employee's perception of an excellent organisational culture, which in turn increases the employee's intent to remain in the organisation. This is the second paper in this issue that refers to the importance of company employee as a valid and viable medium for communicating corporate identity.

The seventh paper by Gapp and Merrilees investigates the use of internal branding as a managerial strategy and as a communication strategy within the revitalisation process of a major Australian healthcare organisation in Queensland. The primary focus is to gain a greater understanding of how to integrate branding, quality, innovation and organisational transformation theories to achieve a practice of excellence.

The eight paper by Keller and Richey outlines three core dimensions of corporate brand personality and identifies two traits for each dimension that are crucial for success in the marketplace: passionate and compassionate traits associated with the 'heart' of the company; creative and disciplined traits associated with the 'mind'; and agile and collaborative traits that emerge from the structure or the 'body' of the company. The traits have an interactive effect whereby each trait can be enhanced by the existence of the other.

In the ninth paper, Opoku, Abratt and Pitt look at the websites of South African Business Schools to identify the brand personality of these institutions. Three characteristics were identified as vehicles for communicating the brand identity: the overall reputation of the business school, the academic status and profile of the director or dean, and the details of the historical context and nature of the school.

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The tenth paper by Karaosmanoglu and Melewar provides a research agenda to examine the relationship between corporate communication, identity and image. The authors present a conceptual framework for further empirical testing.

The eleventh paper by Donovan and Janda integrates elements of social identity theory with the literature on brand identity. Results from a survey of college sports fans indicate that the degree to which individuals identify with an entity is influenced by two main factors: their partners' view of the entity and their physical proximity to the entity.

The twelfth paper explores country monarchies through a corporate branding lens. Balmer, Greyser and Urde based their research on extensive field interviewing of individuals with knowledge and experience in managing the brand image of different monarchies around the world. The authors concluded that the monarchies are fertile ground for corporate branding. As institutions their branding process is highly analogous to that of a corporation. The monarchies' characteristic of embodying a rich historical heritage provides strong material for institutional branding.

The thirteenth and last paper by Lomax and Mador presents a qualitative study of seven British organisations that have changed their brand identity in the past five years. A matrix-based typology is developed to map changes in the brand name against the changes in the brand's features and values. The authors propose that both perspectives of strategic decision making and knowledge management offer practical insights for the effective implementation of the branding process.

It has been a highly challenging and stimulating experience to edit this Special Issue. We have gathered a collection of stimulating views on branding emanating from a diverse spectrum of perspectives. The academics and the practitioners who have contributed to this collection add to this diversity through the different countries that are included in their research. The submissions that could not be included in the Special Issue will feature in a forthcoming book on the topic to be published in the near future.

Special thanks go to Brenda Rouse the Managing Editor of this Journal, whose enthusiasm for the field and her constant encouragement has contributed to the calibre the publication has achieved.

We hope you will find the Special Issue interesting and thought-provoking. This collection of research material aims to push the boundaries of our knowledge and understanding of corporate branding, identity and communication, and to steer future research agendas towards newer horizons.

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