Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding and Corporate Reputations: Reconciliation and Integration

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1. ABSTRACT

Purpose-The main purpose of this paper is to explore, define, reconcile and depict Corporate Identity (CI), Corporate Brand (CB) and Corporate Reputation (CR) in a framework that reflects the dimensions of these constructs, discriminates between them and represents their inter-relatedness.

Design/methodology/approach-The paper draws on key literature relating to corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate reputation.

Findings-The paper develops a framework that explains and aligns the drivers of corporate brand and reputation.

Practical implications- managers will be able to use the framework to help them align and optimise brand and reputation building efforts of their organisation. Academics will be able to use the framework as a basis for empirical research.

Originality/value- The article reconciles disparate views from a number of theoretical streams that have investigated CI, CB and CR and develops a comprehensive framework that shows that although the management and measurement of the constructs may overlap, the constructs themselves are not interchangeable

Keywords- corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate reputation

Paper type- conceptual

2. INTRODUCTION

The last few decades have witnessed significant growth in interest, conceptual development and empirical research in the topics of corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate image and corporate reputation. Studies that focus on corporate identity (CI), corporate branding (CB) and corporate reputation (CR) research typically are conducted within one of three domains:

1. Problems and issues facing organisations, both in the private and public sectors.
2. Theories and conceptual frameworks used to understand CI, CB and CR issues and challenges.
3. Research methods, including research designs and analytical tools.

Given that academic researchers contribute to the literature in a number of ways, all of these domains are necessary to extend knowledge and make a scholarly contribution in these areas. Scholarship comprises four dimensions: scholarship of discovery; scholarship of integration; scholarship of application and; scholarship of teaching (Boyer, 1990). The scholarship of discovery is research that leads to new knowledge (Macfarlane and Spence, 2003). Scholarship of integration refers to research that synthesises knowledge and places it in its broader context (Boyer, 1990). Scholarship of application applies knowledge to problems (Macfarlane and Spence, 2003), whilst the scholarship of teaching involves using the principles of good research in teaching.

This article falls into the categories of scholarship of integration and application in that it synthesises the knowledge of CI, CB and CR to give direction to practitioners who seek an integrated approach to managing CI and CB in order to build brand image and corporate reputation. The purpose of the paper is to define, deconstruct and reconcile the constructs of CI, CB and CR to provide academics and practitioners with a consolidated framework that depicts construct definitions, dimensions and inter-relatedness. Although a growing number of authors (see for example Nuygen and LeBlanc, 2001; Dacin and Brown, 2002; Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004 and Balmer and Greyser, 2006) have noted the linkages between two or all of the constructs of CI, CB and CR, none have clearly articulated the differences and overlaps between the constructs. At the same time chief executives and their management teams recognise the importance of creating and maintaining both excellent reputations and strong brands but do not know what this process entails in totality.

3. CORPORATE IDENTITY, BRANDS AND REPUTATION AS STRATEGIC RESOURCES

The resource–based view within the strategy literature has argued that sustainable competitive advantage is created primarily from intangible capabilities, including brands and reputations (Omar, Williams and Lingelbach, 2009). RBV posits that resources are heterogeneously distributed between firms, with resource heterogeneity leading to inter-firm performance variations (e.g., Grant, 1996; Wernerfelt, 1984). Resources are viewed as assets enabling firms to accrue economic rents through the conception and execution of strategy within resource-based view thinking (Conner, 1991). In order for a firm resource to have a competitive advantage, it must be associated with the following four attributes: (1) it must be valuable, in the sense that it can exploit opportunities and/or neutralise threats in a firm's environment, (2) it must be rare among a firm's current and potential competition, (3) it must be imperfectly imitable, and (4) there cannot be strategically equivalent substitutes for this resource that are valuable but neither rare or imperfectly imitable (Barney, 1991). We argue that an organisation's reputation, its corporate brand as well as certain elements of its corporate identity, meet these four attributes. Corporate brands and reputations are important assets in enabling organisations to exploit opportunities and mitigate threats (Argenti and Druckenmiller 2004). Although every company has a corporate brand and develops a reputation over time, strong brands and reputations are rare and impossible to imitate in totality owing to the unique sets of assets, skills and choices made by organisations and the broad number of dimensions used across stakeholders to evaluate corporate brands and reputations.

Management of these strategic resources calls for a clear understanding of definitions, constituent components and overlaps of and between the constructs. The framework aligning CI, CB and CR is shown in Figure I. Multi-directional arrows show the systemic nature of the elements.

(insert Figure I about here)

Reputation is an outcome of interactions between stakeholders and the organisation over time (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004). An organisation does not have a single reputation at any point in time. It has a number of reputations depending on the stakeholders concerned. Interactions with brand-associated stimuli (including mass communication, employees, agents or other individuals and groups that are linked to the brand), enables stakeholders to form their perceptions of an organisation. These perceptions consolidate to become a single impression at a point in time - the brand image. Over time these fragmentary images evolve to become the stakeholder's perception of the reputation of the organisation.

The corporate brand comprises two aspects: corporate expression and stakeholder images of the organisation's identity. The former includes all mechanisms employed by the organisation to express its corporate identity to all stakeholder groups. Corporate expression links the organisation's corporate identity with its corporate brand and accordingly is classified as part of both constructs. The strategic choices that organisational leaders must make to determine the corporate expression include the conceptualisation and communication of the visual identity, the brand promise and the brand personality. The second aspect of corporate branding encompasses stakeholders' perspectives of an organisation's brand. A stakeholder can never interact with an organisation's corporate identity in its entirety – they interact with aspects of the organisation's identity and in so doing build their perception of the corporate brand. As stakeholders experience the brand, they develop brand images. Although every stakeholder will experience the brand, only some will form brand relationships or become part of brand communities. During these interactions, stakeholders will judge the brand by considering the extent to which the brand has fulfilled the brand promise and will evaluate the brand's personality relative to their expectations and requirements.

The corporate identity of the organisation is concerned with what the organisation is and what it seeks to be, and comprises two parts. Firstly, the strategic choices made by the organisation including the organisation's mission, vision, strategic intent, values and corporate culture and, secondly the corporate expression, which is also part of the corporate brand.

In summary, an organisation that seeks to create positive reputations amongst its various stakeholder groups must understand the dimensions on which stakeholders evaluate reputation. These include, but are not limited to, the organisation's performance, its products and services, its citizenship activities, service, innovation, the workplace, governance and ethics. The organisation creates its identity though its strategic choices and corporate expression. Thereafter, it must develop a strong corporate brand, through its corporate expression and influence of brand image. Each element of the framework will now be discussed in detail.

4. CORPORATE IDENTITY

We define corporate identity as an organisation's strategic choices and its expression thereof. He and Balmer (2007) have identifed four sub-perspectives of corporate identity: visual identity, corporate identity, organisation's identity and organisational identity. Visual Identity refers to the various visual cues that a company marshals as part of its corporate communications policy. Visual Identity includes the organisation's name, logo, slogan, colour and anything else that is related to graphic design. Corporate Identity is an area dominated by multiple identity categorisations. Balmer and Greyser (2003) identified six separate corporate identity types: actual identity, communicated identity, conceived identity, ideal identity, desired identity, and the corporate brand identity. Organisation's identity is the defining characteristics of an organisation (He and Balmer, 2007). This is seen as the perceptions of the organisation's various stakeholders about the organisation: "the identity of the organisation". Organisational Identity refers to the identity of people within the organisation. According to Hatch and Schultz (1997, p. 357), "Organisational Identity refers broadly to what members perceive, feel and think about their organisations. It is assumed to be a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organisation's distinctive values and characteristics". Organisational identity is defined as the characteristics of an organisation that contribute to the distinctiveness and uniqueness of an organisation (Albert and Whetten, 1985).

While He and Balmer (2007) are correct in identifying these four perspectives of Corporate Identity, we argue that visual identity is also part of the corporate brand as it forms part of what we term corporate expression. Balmer and Greyser (2003) identified six types of corporate identity; two of the types they mention, communicated identity and corporate brand identity are also part of the corporate branding decisions that an organisation has to make. In our model, communicated identity needs to be integrated with brand communication and corporate brand identity with the elements that form brand image.

Our view is that corporate identity consists of an organisation's strategic choices and how it elects to express these. Strategy formulation and implementation is well documented in the literature (see Barney, 1991 amongst others). Values expressed through various subcultures lie at the core of organisation and underpin the identity formation process (Abratt, 1989; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Aaker, 2004). Core values (that may or may not be explicitly defined) make up the backbone of an organisation's brand track record and must be aligned with the organisation's promises (Urde, 2009). Culture, defined by Kiriakidou and Millward (2000) as the corporate values that are held by staff and management and their concrete manifestation in organisational symbolism and behaviour which frame the way the organisation operates, is also part of CI.

The second aspect of CI that builds on strategic choices is corporate expression, which consists of the decisions concerning visual identity, the brand promise, brand personality and brand communication. This brand expression overlaps with corporate branding decisions and will be discussed as part of corporate branding.

5. CORPORATE BRANDING

There is little agreement in the literature as to what constitutes a corporate brand. According to Balmer and Gray (2003) corporate brands are marks denoting ownership;

image-building devices; symbols associated with key values; means by which to construct individual identities; and a conduit by which pleasurable experiences may be consumed. Knox and Bickerton (2003, p. 1013) proposed the following definition of corporate brand, “A corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organisation’s unique business model”.

In attempting to differentiate between the constructs of corporate brand and corporate reputation, Corkindale and Belder (2009) note that the focus of the corporate brand building focuses on relevancy to customers whereas reputation concentrates on legitimacy of the organisation with respect to the stakeholders. We disagree and hold the view that the corporate brand is integral in building corporate reputations across all stakeholder groups, not only customers. Our perspective conforms with the views of Hatch and Schultz (2001) who state that the corporate brand contributes not only to customer-based images of the organisation, but to the images formed and held by all its stakeholders.

Argenti and Druckenmiller (2004), note that a company engages in corporate branding when it markets the company itself as a brand. They state further that the reputation of the organisation is strengthened when the corporate brand promise is kept. According to Aaker (2004), the corporate brand defines the organisation that will deliver and stand behind the offering, and will potentially have a rich heritage, assets and capabilities, people, values and priorities, a local or global frame of reference, citizenship programs, and a performance record. Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) define a heritage brand as one with a positioning and a value proposition based on its heritage. Balmer and Thompson (2009) observe that corporate brands are multidisciplinary in scope and strategic in nature and must be underpinned by the brand promise and aligned with the corporate identity. According to Balmer and Gray (2003), corporate brands are different to product brands in terms of disciplinary scope and management, and have a multi-stakeholder rather than customer orientation. They acknowledge that the terms corporate brands and corporate identities are used interchangeably, but argue that there are fundamental differences between them. According to Balmer and Gray (2003), corporate identity refers to the distinct attributes of an organisation which addresses the questions, “who are we? And what are we?” and is relevant to all types of organisations. They go on to state that corporate brands on the other hand are not applicable to all organisations, and would not for example, be necessary for a monopoly (Balmer and Gray, 2003). We disagree, and argue that as a consequence of their formation, all organisations have a corporate brand, whether they make explicit choices to communicate it to all stakeholder groups or not. Organisations are identified by their name, symbols, colours, assets and the people who work for them. We define a corporate brand as expressions and images of an organisation’s identity. For organisations, it is the mechanism that conveys the elements and builds the expectations of what the organisation will deliver for each stakeholder group. Core elements of its corporate identity include corporate affinities, products and services, and social responsibility programmes. These reflect the organisation’s values and culture. Corporate identity is expressed through the corporate brand in the form of visual identity, the brand promise, the brand personality as well as by using brand communications which may be tacit or explicit. The corporate brand is thus the interface between the organisation’s stakeholders and its identity. Organisations seeking to build strong corporate brands must align their internal communications activities and human resource management practices with the brand values (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001). We argue that corporate identity is an internal organisational strategic decision, and the corporate brand is the mechanism that allows for alignment between the desired identity and how stakeholders “see” the identity.

5.1 CORPORATE EXPRESSION

The process of corporate expression spans an organisation’s corporate identity and its corporate brand building activities. It includes the development of visual identity, the brand promise and brand personality as well as the communication thereof.

5.1.1. VISUAL IDENTITY

According to Melewar and Saunders (1998, p.291) “corporate visual identity consists of the corporate name, logotype and/or symbol, typography and colour”. These visual elements are used on an organisation’s buildings, vehicles, corporate clothing and its stationery. Careful development and communication of corporate symbols and logos to all stakeholder groups confers organisations with enhanced stakeholder recognition and associations. A distinctive and well communicated visual identity is thus an important anchor that enables stakeholders to associate an experience with a specific brand, and over time, to build a perception of the organisation's reputation.

5.1.2 BRAND PROMISE

A corporate brand is underpinned by a powerful, albeit informal, contract or brand promise, which can be compared to a covenant in that customers and other stakeholder groups often have a religious-like loyalty to the corporate brand (Balmer and Greyser, 2006). Stakeholder understanding is required to develop an aligned, relevant brand promise that will meet a stakeholder's expectations which may be functional and/or emotional. For example, a customer may want a branch near the workplace or home (a functional expectation), they also want to be proud to wear the corporate clothing (an emotional expectation). In the case of product-based brands these expectations can be tightly controlled by production, communication, distribution and service systems. In the case of the corporate brand however, the entire organisation must be mobilised to deliver the brand promise to all stakeholders. Employees play an important role in expressing and delivering to the brand promise and need to be trained and encouraged accordingly. Organisational culture and business processes are also important levers that must be aligned with the brand promise. Development of a positive brand image will only occur when the brand promise expected by stakeholders is delivered. If this occurs consistently over time, a strong positive corporate reputation will result.

5.1.3 BRAND PERSONALITY

Brand personality has been defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). According to Keller and Richey (2006) corporate brand personality is a form of brand personality specific to a corporate brand. Unlike a product brand personality that typically relies on consumer and user imagery to project a personality, a corporate brand personality can be defined in terms of the human characteristics or traits of the employees of the corporation as a whole and will reflect the values, words and actions of all employees of the organisation (Keller and Richey, 2006). Because the projection of corporate brand personality is so reliant on employees, internal brand building is required to align behaviour of employees and any others who represent the corporate brand with a corporate brand’s identity (Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006).

Keller and Richey (2006) characterise corporate brand personality dimensions in terms of the tripartite view of attitudes, which consists of affective (feelings), cognitive (thoughts) and conative (actions) dimensions. These dimensions reflect three distinct sets of personality traits that can guide employees in the organisation and are described as “heart”, “mind” and “body” (Keller and Richey, 2006). The heart of the company comprises two traits: passion and compassion. The mind of the company encompasses a further two traits: creativity and discipline. The body of the company is made up of the final two traits: agility and collaboration. A company with a strong brand personality will thus manifest as passionate, compattionate, creative, disciplined, agile and collaborative.

5.1.4 BRAND COMMUNICATION

Corporate communication refers to the ways in which the organisation communicates with its various stakeholders (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). Van Riel (1995, p. 26) notes that “corporate communication is an instrument of management by which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent.” Van Riel (1995) divides communication into three sub-types: marketing communication, organisational communication and management communication. Marketing and brand managers use marketing communication to support the sales of the organisation’s products and services. Organisational communication is all forms of communication with stakeholders with whom an organisation has an independent relationship. Stakeholders such as media may in turn communicate with other stakeholders (Kotha, Rojopal and Rindova, 2001). Management communication occurs when management communicate with organisational employees. Melewar, Bassett and Simoes (2006) highlight the necessity for chief executive officers to be good communicators, particularly when the vision of the company must be communicated to external stakeholders. Successful branding also depends on consistency in communication which reinforces organisational credibility (Bronn, Engell and Martinsen, 2006).

Although corporate brands are birthed in organisations, their value is only realised when they are assimilated by stakeholders (Fournier, 1998, Holt, 2003). Brand management is thus a double-sided process that involves managing and influencing the expression of the brand as well as understanding and responding to the images that these expressions create in the minds of stakeholders.

5.2 BRAND IMAGE

The brand image of an organisation represents the current and immediate reflection that the stakeholders have towards an organisation (Bick, Jacobson, and Abratt, 2003). It is related to the various physical and behavioural attributes of the organisation, such as business name, architecture, variety of products and services, tradition, ideology, and to the quality cues communicated by the organisation’s products, services and people (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001). The concept of image is relevant in stakeholders’ perceptions of organisations as it embodies their opinions of the firm at a point in time (Balmer, 1998; Gray and Balmer, 1998). A variety of perspectives have been used to illustrate how consumers construe their imagery of a brand; these include brand experiences, brand relationships and brand communities.

5.2.1 BRAND EXPERIENCE

Organisations wishing to build stakeholder loyalty need to consider the experiences of stakeholders when they interact with the corporate brand. Customers are exposed to many brand-related stimuli including brand identifying colours, shapes, typefaces, background design elements, slogans, brand characters, packaging, marketing communications, and the environment in which the brand is sold (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). These are linked with four dimensions of brand experience: sensory, affective, behavioural, and intellectual.

Sensory experiences occur when consumers use their visual or other senses to perceive brand-related stimuli. Affective experiences lead the consumer to have strong emotions for a brand. Behavioural experiences comprise the physical actions and behaviours that consumers associate with consumption of a brand. Intellectual experiences result in the consumer being curious and encourage cognitive reflections on the part of when they experience the brand

Brand experiences strengthen consumers' memories and depths of association with brands. Without any experience of a brand a consumer cannot build a strong brand image. Although much of the brand experience research has been conducted within the context of consumer stakeholders, we argue that in the case of the corporate brand, brand experiences across stakeholder groups including for example suppliers, distributors and shareholders need to be designed, influenced, managed and monitored in order to build strong corporate brands and ultimately reputations.

5.2.2 BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

Researchers recognise that consumers conceptualise brands as relationship partners and those relationships represent bonds between the exchange partners (Fournier, 1998). According to Fournier (1998) the consumer-brand relationship will manifest in a number of forms, depending on the personality of consumers and the manner in which these individuals develop relationships. Although the building of company relationships with customers has received extensive attention in the marketing literature (Rowley and Haynes, 2005), relatively little consideration has been paid to the relationships that consumers form with corporate brands. Battacharya and Sen (2003) found that the strength of a consumer's relationship with a company is positively related to the perceived attractiveness of the corporate identity. They suggest that companies must articulate and communicate their identities clearly, coherently, and in a persuasive manner. Employees play an important role in influencing a brand's relationship with its customers and other stakeholders. Power, Whelan and Davies' (2008) study confirmed the central role that trust plays in building relationships. We argue that consistent communication and delivery of brand promises across stakeholder groups will strengthen brand relationships and in so doing, the corporate brand.

5.2.3 BRAND COMMUNITIES

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 412) define a brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand”. According to Veloutso and Moutinho (2009), brand communities comprise groups of individuals who are enduring and self selected and share a system of values, standards and representations, and who accept and recognise bonds of membership with each other and with the whole. Brand communities are more formal than brand tribes which are looser in nature (Veloutso and Moutinho, 2009). Because members of brand communities join and remain as a result of their positive belief in the brand, we argue that organisations with strong brand communities are more likely to build stronger reputations over time. Organisations that sponsor communities of customers and other stakeholders can reinforce their loyalty to the corporate brand and their willingness to recommend it to others. Although research around brand communities has focused on the roles played by customers (Schau, Muñiz and Arnould, 2009) it stands to reason that any stakeholder group can form a brand community. Brand communities carry out important functions on behalf of the brand, such as sharing information, perpetuating the history and culture of the brand, and providing assistance.

Virtual communities can also be seen as a rapidly growing form of brand community. Due to the low cost of interaction with others in cyberspace, consumers can easily and more frequently share their brand feelings or experiences with others, and the feelings of belonging, trust, and obligation, as well as group symbols, culture, and rules, can be developed in the virtual community (Shang, Chen and Liao, 2006). Virtual consumer communities may provide an easier alternative to traditional face-to-face brand communities for admirers of a brand. We believe that they play an important role in the development of the brand image and ultimately the reputation of the organisation.

6. CORPORATE REPUTATION

The domain of corporate reputation draws academic attention from the management, marketing, accounting, economics, and sociology areas (Brown, Dacin, Pratt and Whetten, 2006). Corporate reputation is much more than corporate image or corporate identity as it involves a temporal dimension that the latter do not consider (Cravens and Oliver, 2006). Helm (2007) observed that no consensus has been achieved concerning the core meaning and building–blocks of corporate reputation, although there is considerable agreement about the positive effects that stem from having a good reputation. According to Firestein (2006), reputation is the strongest determinant of any organisation's sustainability. While strategies can always be changed, when reputation is gravely injured, it is difficult for an organisation to recover.

Reputation is rooted in the aggregated perceptions of the organisation's stakeholders (Fombrun, Gardberg, and Sever, 2000). Fombrun and van Riel (2003) suggest that organisations with good reputations attract positive stakeholder engagement. A favorable corporate reputation results in business survival and profitability (Roberts and Dowling, 2002), is an effective mechanism to maintain competitive advantage, and can aid in buildling customer retention and satisfaction (Caminiti, 1992) and obtaining favourable media coverage (Fombrun et. al., 2000). Fombrun (1996) observes that managers should pay increased attention to building and sustaining their reputation for greater economic returns. What is not immediately clear is whether a good reputation leads to better returns, or good financial performance leads to a good reputation. A study by Inglis, Morley and Sammut (2006) failed to establish any relationship between reputation and performance. This is inconsistent with the findings of Rose and Thomsen (2004); Roberts and Dowling (2002) and Eberl and Schwaiger (2005) who showed that strong reputations have a positive impact on future financial performance. Strong corporate reputations have also been positively associated with successful organisational relationships with clients (Ewing, Caruana and Loy, 1999).

While the definition of corporate reputation is debatable, the one proposed by Gotsi and Wilson (2001, p. 29) is instructive: "A corporate reputation is a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder's direct experiences with the company, any form of communication and symbolism that provides information about the firm’s actions and/or a comparison with the actions of other leading rivals.” Following a review of the corporate reputation literature, Walker (2010, p.370) defines corporate reputation as “a relatively stable, issue specific aggregate perceptual representation of a company’s past actions and future prospects compared against some standard”. In his review of 43 well cited articles, only 19 provided a definition. None of these 19 definitions had repeat citations. Given the ongoing focus on corporate reputation in the academic literature, this is surprising, but illustrates the lack of consensus on the construct’s definition.

Because not all organisations are companies, we define corporate reputation as: a stakeholder’s overall evaluation of an organisation over time. This evaluation is based on the stakeholder’s experiences with the organisation and its brand(s), relationships with these and the organisation’s employees and representatives, memberships of brand communities and, any other perceived communication and symbolism that provides information about the organisation’s actions and /or a comparison with the organisation’s rivals.

Stakeholder theory recognises stakeholders may vary in their expectations of a company (Freeman, 1984). Adopting a stakeholder perspective enables marketers to better understand and leverage relationships between the firm and its stakeholders. According to Freeman (1984) “a stakeholder in an organisation is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. Not all stakeholders have the same influence. Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) and Clarkson (1995) categorise stakeholders by the level and nature of their influence as primary or secondary ones. Primary stakeholders interact with the organisation on a regular basis and include shareholders, customers, employees’ suppliers, investors and other business partners. Secondary stakeholders typically do not transact regularly with the firm and include government, the media, social pressure groups and competitors.

In developing a corporate identity and the corporate brand, it should be recognised that some stakeholders are more important than others. Organisations seeking to change stakeholder’s images and reputational perceptions will need to change some aspect of their strategic choices, and or their corporate expression. Either elements of their corporate identity will have to be changed or the brand expression will need to be tailored.

Identification of the dimensions that drive stakeholders’ perceptions of the organisation is integral to successful reputation management (Gabbioneta, Ravasi, and Mazzola, 2007). Managers need to build an understanding of these in order to focus their efforts in building and managing corporate reputation. A review of the literature evidenced varied recipes that purported to comprise the dimensions of corporate reputation. Walker (2010) and O’Callaghan’s (2007) state that these dimensions are issue specific for each stakeholder and/or company and a one size fits all approach to corporate reputation fails to consider the complexity inherent in managing corporate reputation.

Dimensions used to assess corporate reputation include environmental practices (Toms, 2002), sound leadership and good management practices including the personal reputation of top management, investments in good governance, competence development including training and relevant compensation packages (Dowling, 2004), engaging in socially responsible behaviour (Brammer and Paveline, 2004) and displaying high ethical values (Porter and Kramer, 2006). Having quality products, products that are safe and service levels that fit the needs of customers are also important in reputation building, as is evidence of innovations in production processes that bring down costs and introduction of new products that satisfy needs (Cravens, Oliver and Ramamoorti, 2003). Another key to gaining a positive reputation is to be seen as a good employer, to respects the rights of workers, and to remunerate and reward appropriately (Gatewood, Gowan and, Lautenschlager, 1993). Ethical conduct, particularly as it is associated with the brand, is another driver of reputation. According to Fan (2005) branding is a social construct as well as an economic construct. Ethical branding relates to certain moral principles that define right and wrong behaviour in branding decisions. Ethical brands make a positive contribution to the public good and do not harm the public good (Fan, 2005). We believe that the main drivers of reputation emanate from the organisation’s corporate identity as they are all strategic choices that leaders have to make. In addition they are also linked to what we term corporate expression, and thus are also part of the corporate brand.

9. CONCLUSION

Although the importance of CI, CB and CR is recognised by academics and managers, the lack of scholarship of integration has resulted in a difficulty on their part to integrate these concepts in a cohesive approach. We have presented a comprehensive framework that reconciles and integrates these constructs. We have suggested that corporate identity and corporate branding are key drivers of an organisation’s reputation management. We also highlight the key role of stakeholders in forming the organisation’s various reputations.

We make the point that reputation is a strategic resource that creates a competitive advantage for an organisation. The building blocks of reputation management are not always clear, but we have attempted to identify these in Figure 1. Every organisation seeks to build a strong positive reputation amongst its stakeholders who need to be considered when organisations make strategic choices. Leadership needs to establish their corporate identity by asking and answering the questions of who and what the organisation is, and what it seeks to be. This will set the stage to develop the mission, vision and strategic intent. It will also create a platform to articulate the core values of the organisation and establish an appropriate corporate culture. We have argued that this is the first stage of the development of an organisation’s corporate identity.

The second stage of corporate identity development is the formulation of what we term the organisation’s corporate expression. Corporate expression includes decisions about the organisation’s visual identity, brand promise and brand personality and how these will be communicated across stakeholders groups. Thus, corporate expression is not only part of corporate identity development, but it is also a major component of corporate brand development. The corporate brand is developed by management on a continuous basis not only through the decisions made about its corporate expression, but also through creating brand images in the minds of stakeholders.

We have argued that corporate branding comprises two components, firstly the creation of corporate expression by the organisation, and secondly the creation of brand images for all stakeholders through the provision of good brand experiences which enable them to form strong brand relationships and to support brand communities where relevant. As stakeholders experience, relate to and commune with the brand, they are afforded opportunities to evaluate the brand on a number of core dimensions. When considered in totality over time, these form the organisation's reputation. It is important for an organisation's leaders to consider these dimensions when formulating the corporate identity by making strategic choices and building corporate expression.

Practitioners seeking to build their reputations need to take stakeholder dimensions of reputation into account when they decide who they are and wish to be, and how they express this to their respective stakeholder groups. Building strong reputations requires strategic choices by an organisation to align decisions around strategy, culture and corporate communication. In addition, marketing communication, human resources and operations functions must build on these by working together to communicate and deliver brand experiences in order to build strong reputations across stakeholders. Rather than continuing to focus on construct conceptualisation and integration in the fields of CI, CB and CR, what is now needed is additional empirical research to test the validity of the constructs and relationships proposed. Whilst the corporate identity literature has always considered multiple stakeholder groups, literature on corporate branding has tended to focus only on customers and more recently on employees. Although the two constructs overlap, each has its place in stakeholder research. Both are multi-stakeholder constructs with corporate expression as their binding force. We therefore call for academics to recognise the importance of both corporate identity and corporate branding when determining how to build organisational reputations. There is an opportunity for academic researchers in the area of corporate branding to extend their research on brand experience, brand relationships and brand communities beyond customers as stakeholders to all stakeholder groups.

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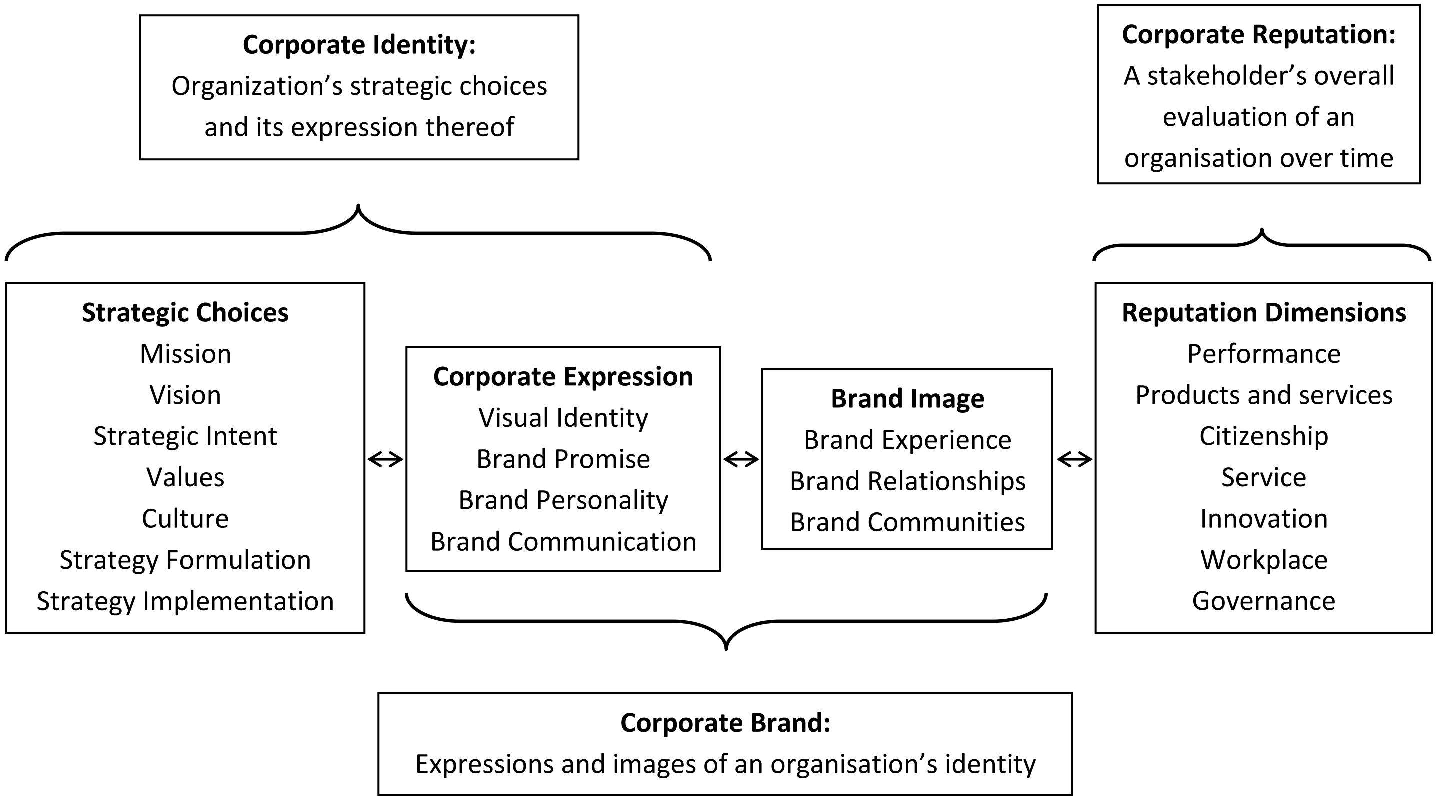
Figure I

Corporate Identity, Corporate Brand and Corporate Reputation: An Integration


Corporate Identity:
Organization’s strategic choices and its expression thereof
Corporate Reputation:
A stakeholder’s overall evaluation of an organisation over time
Strategic Choices
Mission
Vision
Strategic Intent
Values
Culture
Strategy Formulation
Strategy Implementation
Corporate Expression
Visual Identity
Brand Promise
Brand Personality
Brand Communication
Brand Image
Brand Experience
Brand Relationships
Brand Communities
Reputation Dimensions
Performance
Products and services
Citizenship
Service
Innovation
Workplace
Governance
Corporate Brand:
Expressions and images of an organisation’s identity