Editorial

Corporate brands: ignored, accepted and celebrated

Introduction

This special edition celebrates the formal introduction of the corporate brand notion in the early/mid-1990s (Balmer, 1995, 1998; Ind, 1998) – whilst also noting the work of King (1991) who presaged developments in the territory – and it is fitting that the *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, as a prominent journal in the field, should give its imprimatur to this special edition.

Corporate brands: ignored, accepted and now celebrated

Since the mid-1990s, we note the exponential growth of interest in corporate brands by scholars and practitioners (Balmer, 2010). With its foundations in the UK in the 1990s, the concept was initially ignored. From 2000 onwards it began to be accepted and, today, it is celebrated. Interestingly, the predictions that corporate brands would grow in importance have, unquestionably, come to fruition (Balmer, 1995, 1998). The reflections of King (1991), also presaged the aforementioned (even though his principal focus was on service brands and the corporate level).

As an aside, the lead guest editor can still recall that – until the early 2000s – most marketing scholars, senior managers and corporate identity scholars (who today, ironically, have rebranded themselves as corporate brand consultants) were often unsympathetic, and at best indifferent, towards the corporate brand notion. However, as previously stated, post-2000, there was a dramatic volte-face. Notably, corporate identity consultancies began to reposition themselves as corporate brand consultancies. Significantly, it was the publication of several prominent articles (some of which noted the earlier literature of the mid-1990s) that propelled the area forward with the academy (Balmer, 2001a, 2001b; Hatch and Schultz, 2001, 2003; Balmer and Gray, 2003). Arguably, it has been scholars – rather than practitioners – who have provided key foundations apropos the corporate brand concept. Their work helped the construct to be widely accepted, and, as this special edition devoted to corporate brands attests, the concept is not merely accepted but, significantly, is now celebrated.

Corporate brands: a critically important corporate marketing and strategic concern

Within the corporate marketing field, the corporate brand notion has become an increasingly important and prominent concept. Today, many of the world's most valuable and favoured brands are corporate brands and the management of corporate brands is recognised to be a strategic imperative (Balmer, 2012a, 2012b).

Unquestionably, they can be an organisation's most valuable strategic resource and are often a treasured asset. Moreover, where organisations follow an explicit corporate brand orientation (Balmer, 2013), the corporate brand may serve as an organisation's cornerstone: a centripetal force that guides and informs an institution's purposes, activities, culture and ethos (Balmer, 2012a; Balmer et al., 2017).

The above being noted, confusion and ambiguity all-too-often abounds within the corporate brand canon. Sometimes, too, there is unfamiliarity – sometimes appearing to be a form of strategic amnesia – apropos the existence and content of the foundational literature in marketing from the mid-1990s to early 2000's (Balmer, 2010). Sometimes, too, scholars and practitioners apply product/service brand analytical frameworks, theories and strategies which, quite often, are ill-suited to corporate brands. One of the aims of this special edition is to further clarify the above.

Special edition articles

The seven articles which constitute this special edition have undergone a rigorous reviewing process and cover a range of salient corporate branding themes. These include consumer identification with corporate brands, managing corporate and product brand portfolios, corporate brand image co-creation among business partners, corporate brands alliances, CSR and corporate brand loyalty, internal corporate branding and brand-supporting behaviour and corporate branding and rebranding. Written by scholars from Australia, Egypt, Finland, India, Slovenia, South Africa and the USA, this special edition also reflects the international importance attached to corporate brands.

The first article “Consumers’ identification with corporate brands: brand prestige, anthropomorphism and engagement in social media” (Urška and Lovšin, 2018), focusses on the important issue of corporate brand identification. Marshalling research insights from consumers in Slovenia, the research revealed that consumer identification with a corporate was stronger when consumers perceived the corporate brand to be not only more prestigious but also humanlike. In addition, the study showed how positive consumer corporate brand identification also resulted in higher consumer corporate brand engagement.

In the second article entitled “Managing across a corporate and product brand portfolio: Evidence from a large South African service organisation” (Sevel et al., 2018), the researchers detail how a large service organisation (with a significant multi-brand portfolio) managed its corporate brand. Generating rich research data, this study confirmed key precepts of corporate brand management which can be found in the formative literature of the mid-1990s including the importance of the CEO in corporate brand management, linking organisational values to the corporate brand, adopting a multi-stakeholder perspective and according importance to employees in corporate brand building. As such, this research represents a timely reinforcement of the saliency of the foundational literature.

The third article “The roles of business partners in corporate brand image co-creation” (Törmälä, and Saraniemi, 2018), adopts a B2B corporate brand perspective and focusses on the roles of business partners in co-creating a corporate brand image. The research findings detail seven distinct roles which business partners could have in this regard. A key insight from this study is

that business partners can materially influence an organisation's corporate brand image. As such, managers should take cognisance of this.

For its part, the fourth article "Corporate brands as brand allies" (Mohan *et al.*, 2018), investigates the role of the corporate brand in a brand alliance where one of the organisation's brands is a product brand. Data were collected from students from a US university. Given the above context, the findings showed that consumer evaluations of a product brand were burnished owing to its links with the corporate brand.

In the fifth article "CSR and corporate branding effect on brand loyalty: a study of Indian banking industry" (Pratihari and Uzma, 2018), the researchers examine the effect of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on corporate branding and on corporate brand loyalty. Marshalling insights from the Indian banking sector, the study revealed CSR on corporate brand loyalty. As such, the researchers recommend using CSR as a key dimension of an organisation's corporate brand covenant.

The penultimate article "Internal corporate branding impact on employees' brand supporting behaviour" (Garas *et al.*, 2018), scrutinises the effect of internal corporate branding on corporate brand supporting behaviour of Egyptian bank employees. Interestingly, the research findings showed that internal corporate branding did not have a direct impact on employees' behaviour. This being noted, it did have a positive effect on the role clarity of employees and in terms of their affective corporate brand commitment.

In the seventh, and final article "Corporate Branding and Rebranding: An Institutional Logics Perspective" (Stuart, 2018), the research examines how an appreciation of institutional logics and pluralism can impact on corporate rebranding. Marshalling insights from several organisations, this article explains that some entities were unable to successfully make the transition from one corporate brand logic to another because they failed to fully appreciate the underlying reasons for the change and the natures of the challenges which this presented.

Final reflection

In bringing our guest editorial to a close we wish to thank everyone who has been associated with this special edition. Special thanks are due of course to the authors and to the academic reviewers. We are also grateful for the support and encouragement of the Editors-in-Chief of the *Journal of Product and Brand Management*.

We hope this special edition will not only rekindle interest in the corporate branding domain but will also add both breadth and depth to the territory. Finally, we would like to think this special edition will meaningfully burnish the brand credentials of the corporate branding field and, of course, add

further lustre to *The Journal of Product and Brand Management's* brand credentials as well. Read on and enjoy.

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