

CORPORATE BRANDS: IGNORED, ACCEPTED AND NOW CELEBRATED

John M.T. Balmer *
And
Weifeng Chen **

***/**The Marketing and Corporate Brand Research Group, Brunel Business School, Brunel University London, The United Kingdom**

**THIS IS A PRE-PUBLICATION VERSION OF AN ARTICLE WHICH WILL APPEAR IN
THE JOURNAL OF PRODUCT AND BRAND MANAGEMENT - anticipated: VOL 27. No. 1 - (2018)
FOR REFERENCING PURPOSES KINDLY CONSULT THE JOURNAL FOR FULL DETAILS. THANK YOU.**

Abstract

This guest editorial for the special edition on corporate brands for the Journal of Product and Brand Management celebrates the formal introduction of the corporate brand notion in the mid-1990s. 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 has, unquestionably, come to fruition (Balmer, 1995, 1998). The reflections of King (1991), also presaged the above (even though his principal focus was on service brands and the corporate level). The guest editorial also explains that corporate brand notion is of strategic importance but also observes how confusion and ambiguity often abounds in the corporate brand canon. An overview of the seven articles constituting the special edition is enumerated.

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 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 has, unquestionably, come to fruition (Balmer, 1995, 1998). The reflections of King (1991), also presaged the above (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 to 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, 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,”* (Urska and Lovšin, 2018) focusses on the important issue of corporate brand identification. Marshalling research insights from consumers in Slovenia, the research revealed 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, Abratt and Kleyn, 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; 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, Voss, Jiménez and Gammoh, 2018) investigates the role of the corporate brand in a brand alliance where one of the organisation’s brands is a product brand. Data was 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 utilising 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, Mahran and Mohamed, 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!*

John M.T. Balmer and Weifeng Chen

REFERENCES

Balmer, J.M.T. (2013), “Corporate brand orientation: What is it? What of it?”, *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 20, No. 9. pp.723-741

Balmer J.M.T. (2012a), “Corporate brand management imperatives: custodianship credibility and calibration”. *California Management Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3. pp. 1-28.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2012b), “Strategic corporate brand alignment: perspectives from identity based views of corporate brands”, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol.46, No. 7-8), pp.1064-1092.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2010), "Explicating corporate brands and their management: reflections and directions from 1995 to the present", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol.18, No. 3, pp: 180-196.

Balmer, J.M.T. (2001a), "The three virtues and seven deadly sins of corporate brand management", *Journal of General Management*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp.1-17

Balmer, J.M.T. (2001b), "Corporate identity, corporate branding, and corporate marketing: seeing through the fog", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 35, No. 3-4, pp. 248-291.

Balmer, J.M.T. (1998), "Corporate identity and the advent of corporate marketing", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol.14, No. 8, pp: 963-996.

Balmer, J.M.T. (1995), "Corporate branding and connoisseurship", *Journal of General Management*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp: 24-46.

Balmer, J.M.T. and Gray, E.R. (2003), "Corporate brands: What are they? What of them?" *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 37, No. 7-8, pp: 972-997.

Balmer, J.M.T., Powell, S.M., Kernstock, J., and Brexendorf, O. (2017), *Advances in Corporate Branding*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Hatch, M.J. and Schultz, M. (2003), "Bringing the corporation into corporate branding", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 37, No.: 7/8, pp.1041-1064,

Hatch, M.J. and Schultz, M. (2001), "Are the strategic stars aligned for your corporate brand?" *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp: 657-663.

Ind, N. (1998), "An integrated approach to corporate branding", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 323-329.

King. S. (1991), "Branding in the 1990s", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 3-13.