

Identity Studies: Multiple Perspectives and Implications for Corporate-level Marketing

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**Identity studies: Multiple perspectives and implications
for corporate-level marketing**

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Abstract

Purpose – Provides a comprehensive review of the identity literature drawing on perspectives from marketing (corporate identity concept) and organisational behaviour (organisational identity) so as to provide an up-to-date overview of identity scholarship.

Findings – Reveals a growing congruency between scholars of marketing and organisational behaviour in their comprehension of identity. Identifies four principal schools of thought relating to identity which differ in terms of conceptualisation, locus of analysis and explanandum (corporate identity, visual identity, an organisation's identity and organisational identity). Our review confirms the importance of identity especially in relation to the concepts underpinning the nascent field of corporate-level marketing.

Practical implications – the importance of taking a multidisciplinary perspective in the comprehension and management of identity in organisational contexts.

Originality/Value – The first major review of identity studies that synthesises the marketing and organisational behaviour approaches to identity. Offers pointers in terms of the research agenda to be followed.

Key words: Corporate-level marketing, identity studies, corporate identity, organisational identity

Introduction

Within the disciplines of marketing and organisational behaviour, identity studies have attained considerable prominence over the last decade. However little has been done to synthesise both bodies of literature and to discover in-depth implications for corporate-level marketing. This article attempts to make a contribution in these regards. This literature review is distinct in that it provides a systematic review of the identity literatures that emanates from both the marketing and organisational behaviour literatures (a list of key previous literature reviews on identity studies is provided in Appendix 1). Therefore, our review has the potential to reveal a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional picture of the identity canvas. Our review also builds on the extant literature and stresses the integral nature of identity studies to the nascent domain of corporate marketing.

The corporate identity concept dates back to the early 1960s (Balmer and Greyser 2003) and was popularised first by US and then by UK consultants: the work of Olins (1979) being notable in this regard. It has strong practitioner roots and has a notable marketing, as well as graphic design, inheritance. However, its theoretical base is somewhat underdeveloped. Traditionally, the area has been characterised by adopting an overtly managerial perspective and (external) stakeholder perspective. The literature stresses its marketing and economic benefits in terms of positioning and competitive advantage.

Most academic work on identity emanates from the UK, Continental Europe and the Old Commonwealth. UK journals have been at the forefront in championing the area with the first special edition on corporate identity appearing in the *European Journal of Marketing* in 1997 and a second in 2001. Other special editions having corporate identity as a theme have appeared in *International Studies of Management and Organizations* (2003), and also in the *International Journal of Bank Marketing* (1997). Corporate Identity forms part of the marketing syllabus at undergraduate and postgraduate courses in some UK, Continental and Commonwealth business schools. Of note was the introduction of the Harvard MBA elective on the “New Corporate Communications” devised and introduced by Greyser, which had a large corporate identity component. It is also beginning to be treated as a core area of marketing in at least one marketing primer *Principles and Practice of Marketing* (Jobber, 2004 pp.288-293). Of note, has been the work of Balmer and Greyser (2003) especially with regard to the issuance of “The Strathclyde Statement” on corporate identity in 1995.

In contrast, the organisational identity concept¹, which is rooted in organisational behaviour, has its foundations in the seminal work of Albert and Whetten (1985). It has an overtly internal organisational focus with the

¹ Organisational identity is used here in its broader sense. It refers to the whole body of literature that adopts the OI terminology, though with differing meanings, in the organisational and management fields. Later on in this paper in the session of multiple perspectives, organisational identity is used in a more precise way to represent ‘identity of people within organisation’.

primary stakeholder group being employees. Most academic work is undertaken in the US even though some European scholars have made a significant contribution. Identity studies appear in many of top management journals in the US including the *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ), *Academy of Management Review* (AMR) and *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ). The first special edition devoted to organisational identity appeared in AMR in 2001. Leading UK general management journals have also accorded identity a good deal of importance and this can be seen in the heated debate relating to the nature of identity that appeared in the *British Journal of Management* in 2002-2003 (viz: Cornelissen, 2002a; 2002b; Gioia et al., 2002a; 2002b; Haslam et al., 2003).

Our review of both literatures has resulted in four sub-perspectives of thought being revealed under the traditional divisions of CI and OI perspectives. Our analysis is different in that it explains the four sub-perspectives that are used within the literature namely: visual identity, corporate identity, organisation's identity, and organisational identity. They differ in terms of identity's conceptualisation, locus of analysis, and key research issues.

This article is structured as follows:

1. An overview of identity studies from a marketing perspective and its

sub-perspectives

2. An overview of identity studies in the organisational behaviour perspective and its sub-perspectives
3. A comparison of the four sub-perspectives in terms of conceptualisation, locus of identity, and research foci
4. Outlining the convergence that has taken place with regard to the corporate identity and organisational identity literatures
5. A discussion of the implications of identification of five perspectives of identity studies for corporate-level marketing

1. Identity studies and Marketing

Within the literature there is a growing consensus that corporate identity provides the foundation for other *corporate-level* concepts such as corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image, and corporate reputation (Balmer and Greyser 2003 p.39). Moreover, it has been argued that it provides the foundation for the nascent area of corporate marketing (Balmer 1998; 2001; Balmer and Greyser 2003). Each of the corporate-level concepts outlined above have been the subject of scrutiny by marketing and other scholars e.g. corporate branding (Aaker 2004, Balmer, 1995; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Harris and DeChernatony, 2001; Kapferer 2002, Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Leitch and Richardson, 2003) corporate communications (Cheney, 1999; Cornelissen, Lock and Gardner 2001, Van Riel 1995) corporate

image (Abratt, 1989, Gray and Smeltzer 1986, Grunig 1993) corporate reputation (Davies, 2003; Fombrun; 1996; Fombrun and van Riel, 1997) corporate identity (e.g. Balmer 1995; 1998; 2001a; 2001b; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Stuart, 1999; Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Bick et al., 2003, Bick, Jacobson, and Abratt 2003).

In general, academic research into corporate identity increasingly adopts a multidisciplinary and strategic approach to corporate identity (e.g. Balmer, 1995; 2001a; 2002; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Bick et al., 2003). As a result, there has been a shift in conceptualisation which has manifested itself in the following three regards:

- A. From peripheral elements to central elements. The conceptualisation of corporate identity (CI) has metamorphosed from being concerned with the peripheral elements of organisations (graphic design) to more central elements of an organisation (strategy, structure, culture) (Balmer 1995; 1998; 2001a; 2002; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Bick et al., 2003).
- B. From external focus to internal focus to holistic focus. A shift from an emphasis on external concerns to an emphasis on internal concerns and to the source of identity. As such, the focus expanded to included not only customers but also employees and other stakeholders (Balmer and

Wilkinson 1991, Olins 1991, Gorb, 1992; Balmer 1995, Balmer and Wilson 1998, Stuart, 2002).

C. From tactical to more strategic. Corporate identity and strategy are now seen to be inseparable. A number of conceptual models accord strategy a good deal of importance, with the work of Marwick and Fill (1997) and Stuart (1999) being cases in point. Also, Gray and Balmer (1998) believe that effective corporate identity and corporate communication management lead to competitive advantage for a company. Balmer (2001; 2002) also argued that strategy should be a key component of the corporate identity mix in that corporate identity is, in part, the consequence of strategic decisions rooted in the past.

Visual identity

Though we realise that visual identity has been incorporated as a small part of CI by most authors, we still believe that it is of importance to make visual identity as a separate perspective for the following reasons. First, visual identity, as a marketing construct, is still used by some authors interchangeably with corporate identity (e.g. Feldman, 1969; Selame and Selame, 1975; Margulies, 1977; Olins, 1978; 1979; 1989; King, 1982; Bernstein, 1984; Chajet, 1984; Perkins, 1995; Schmitt and Simonson, 1997). Second, though visual identity has been treated as one element of CI from a multidisciplinary approach, it has significant conceptual and empirical value

standing by its own as a salient marketing construct. Third, deliberately treating VI as a separate perspective, we hope, would reduce the tendency of equalising VI with CI in future research or among the business parlance.

As noted by Balmer (1995) van Riel and Balmer (1997) and Balmer and Greyser (2003), during the earlier stage of corporate identity, practitioner's contribution was dominant. However, marketing scholars have recognised that corporate identity is fundamentally distinct from visual identity: it forms only one component of the myriad of elements that form corporate identity (e.g. Balmer and Wilkinson 1991; Balmer 1995; 1997; 2002; van Riel, 1995; van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Melewar et al., 2001).

Generally, visual identity refers to the various visual cues that (a) a company marshals as part of its corporate communications policies and, (b) as a means by which various corporate audiences can identify with the. Corporate visual identity normally includes: nomenclature, logo, slogans, colour, strap line, architecture, etc., anything that can be related to graphic design.

There have been a few empirical academic studies concerning visual identity within the corporate identity literature. Baker and Balmer (1997), Henderson and Cote (1998), Melewar and Saunders (1999), van Riel et al. (2001), and Glynn (2002) are notable exemplars of the genre. Baker and Balmer (1997) reported a case study of a UK university's change of visual identity, and

concluded that visual identity assessment and audit would be helpful in terms of spotting an organisation's weaknesses and malaises. Henderson and Cote (1998), based on an empirical analysis of 195 logos, developed guidelines to assist managers in selecting or modifying logos to achieve their corporate image goals. Van Riel et al. (2001) reported an evaluation study on the added value of corporate logos. Their research confirmed the utility of corporate visual identity. Melewar and Saunders's (1999) research undertaken in Malaysia concluded that a standardised visual identity was of importance in terms of new market entry. Glynn's (2002) historical survey on 1,600 name changes demonstrated that institutional forces/conformity had shaped the organisation's visual identity, and that symbolic (visual identity) isomorphism had great influence on organisational legitimacy.

Corporate Identity: multidisciplinary approach

A multidisciplinary approach to corporate identity has dominated the thinking of corporate identity scholars in recent years (e.g. Balmer and Wilkinson 1991, van Riel and Balmer, 1997; Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Balmer 2001a; Bick et al, 2003). This emerging body of literature is characterised by multiple versions of identity mix, and multiple identity categorisations. It is worth mentioning herein that multidisciplinary approach to CI is treated as a broad perspective of identity studies, though multiple schools of thought can

be found within this perspective. But this paper has no intention to examine those schools of thought within CI perspective.

Multiple versions of CI mix

The existence of various versions of corporate identity mix is also illustrative of the area's richness. The most influential of the mixes is that of Birkigt and Stadler (1986) which consists of the three elements: behaviour/communications/symbolism mix (Birkigt and Stadler, Balmer and Soenen (1998) suggested the following mix elements: mind/soul/voice (Melewar and Jenkins (2002) comprised: behaviour/corporate culture/market conditions (Melewar and Jenkins, 2002). Balmer (2001; 2002) made a distinction between the identity mix (the components that comprise and identity which consisted of strategy, structure, communication and culture) and the identity management mix which encapsulate the elements that need to be considered when managing an identity. As such, the following were added to the above elements: reputations, environment and stakeholders.

Multiple categorisations

The various permutations of the ACID test (see Balmer and Soenen 1999; Balmer 2001; Balmer and Greyser 2003) reflect the multiple categorisations of identity. In the most recent version (Balmer in Balmer and Greyser, 2003) six separate identity types were identified: actual identity, communicated identity,

conceived identity, ideal identity, desired identity and the covenanted (corporate brand) identity. The six identities represent the six forces impinging upon any corporate entity, which are reality, communication, perception, strategy, vision, and the promise contained within the corporate brand.

2. Identity studies and organisational behaviour

The seminal work of Albert and Whetten (1985) served as catalyst for the propulsion of identity study studies into the mainstream of organisational behaviour. Their work has exerted a profound influence among such scholars and has, in recent times, also achieved prominence within the marketing literature. Just as Lippincott and Marguiles are credited with the introduction of the corporate identity concept in 1964 so, for their part, are Albert and Whetten accorded the paternity of the organisation's identity which came to the fore twenty one years latter (Balmer and Greyser 2003).

In Albert and Whetten's (1985) landmark work, organisation's identity is defined as the claimed central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of an organisation. Most works on identity from organisation's identity perspective followed the original conception of identity (e.g. Dutton and Duckerich, 1991; Fiol, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Gioia and Thomas, 1996). On the other hand,

the introduction of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) to organisation studies by Ashforth and Mael (1989) catalysed another stream of identity studies at the organisational level, which are manifested in terms of the 'identity in the organisation' (organisational identity) and 'identity with the organisation' (organisational identification). Organisational identification is not discussed in this article because it deals with the consequence of identity, instead of identity itself.

The Organisation's Identity Concept (The Identity of organisations)

The organisation's identity concept is, in effect, a metaphor that is derived from the literature relating to an individual's identity (Gioia, 1998; Cornelissen, 2002a). However, it has recently been argued that it goes beyond metaphor but is a salient social psychological construct (Haslam et al., 2003). The basic assumption is that every entity has an identity, which defines that entity and represents the essence of that entity. Therefore, the organisation's identity concept can be defined as the defining characteristics of an organisation. The conventional definition is proposed by Albert and Whetten (1985) as the claimed central, distinctive, and enduring characteristics of an organisation, which answers the questions of 'who we are' and 'what we are'.

However, in most collective organisation's identity literatures (Dutton and

Duckerich, 1991; Dutton and Penner, 1993; Dutton et al., 1994; Ashforth and Mael, 1996; Gioia and Thomas, 1996; Elsbach and Kramer, 1996; Gioia et al., 2000; etc.), organisation's identity (in their term, organisational identity, because they didn't distinguish organisation's identity—*identity of an organisation*—from organisational identity—*identity in an organisation*) refers to the organisational members' perception of the defining characteristics of their focal organisation. Whether it is claimed identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985) or it is internal perceived identity (Dutton and Duckerich, 1991; etc.), the organisation's identity concept refers to the identity of an organisation, which is in contrast to organisational identity and organisational identification.

The organisational perspective to organisation's identity is very much linked to organisational and managerial cognition (Schwenk, 1988; Walsh, 1995) and organisation sense making (Weick, 1995). As such, it can be viewed as a special form of organisational members' collective cognitive schemata. Therefore one of its central issues is the relationship between organisation identity and other organisational phenomena, such as organisational image, issue interpretation, and action (Dutton and Duckerich, 1991; Dutton and Penner, 1993; Gioia and Thomas, 1996; etc.).

Organisational identity (The Identity of people within the organisation)

'The Identity of people in an organisation', which is normally called organisational identity, is a special form of social identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989); therefore, its full designation should be "an individual's social identity within an organisational context". Also in this context, "organisation" refers to the working or employing organisation and, as such, is distinct from the other social categories the individual has attachment or affinities with (such as ethnic, gender, nationality, occupation, professional, etc.). Organisational identity in this sense can be defined as the degree of salience with which an individual defines himself by his membership of an organisation in given circumstances (for instance, such membership may be mediated by spatial and or temporal factors). Therefore, organisational identity is socially constructed and situational in nature (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001).

Individuals also have a personal identity (who I am), as well social identity (social category membership or role) (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Social identity theory and self-categorisation theory have, to a considerable degree, underpinned the theoretical base for organisational identity. As noted by Hogg and Terry (2001:1), "Organisational contexts provide a near-perfect arena for the operation of social identity processes." Since the first systematic introduction of social identity theory to organisational settings (Ashforth and Mael, 1989), the literature on organisational identity adopting a sociocognitive approach has burgeoned (Pratt, 1998; Brown and Starkey, 2000; Hogg and Terry, 2000).

“The basic idea of social identity theory is that a social category (e.g., nationality, political affiliation, organisation, work group) within which one falls, and to which one feels one belongs, provides a definition of who one is in terms of the defining characteristics of the category—a self-definition that is a part of the self-concept.” (Hogg and Terry, 2001:3)

Thus social identity answers partially the question ‘who am I?’ (Turner, 1982; Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Therefore, it is reasonable to argue that organisational identity is part of the social identity process, and thus provides a special anchor for an individual’s comprehension of self.

3. Comparison of the four sub-perspectives in terms of conceptualisation, locus of identity, and research issues

We will do this by making reference to (a) conceptualisations, (b) loci of identity, and (c) key issues/research questions. Table 1 provides a summary of these comparisons. Our examination of the above should be viewed as illustrative rather than as an exhaustive guide.

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Conceptualisations

In order to differentiate between the various conceptualisations of identity studies we will refer to two key pairs of dimensions: *substance-cognition, and source and instrument.*

Substance-cognition dimension

The substance-cognition dimension can help us to differentiate, albeit conceptually, the differences between corporate identity (including visual identity and multidisciplinary approach) from organisational identity (including organisation's identity and organisational identity). The commonality in conceptualisations of corporate identity is that corporate identity refers to the substances (substantive elements) of a company, whether they are visual/verbal cues or distinctive attributes. In contrast, organisational identity, and organisation's identity are mainly cognitive concepts.

Source-instrument dimension

The instrument-source dimension can differentiate visual identity from corporate identity. For the main, corporate identity (taking a multidisciplinary perspective) has been defined mainly as the source, and visual identity as an instrument. With regard to the former, the current understanding of corporate identity is that it is the source and essence ('what the organisation is') of a company. As such, corporate identity should be the source for corporate visual identity (Olins, 1995), corporate branding (Balmer and Gray, 2003) and corporate communications (van Riel, 1995), which in turn can lead to favourable corporate reputation (Fombrun, 1996; Davis et al., 2003) and competitive advantage (e.g. Balmer and Gray, 2000; Bick et al., 2003).

Locus of identity and level of analysis

Identity in the organisational context has been studied from a range of levels of analysis, from individual, to group, to organisational as collective, to organisation as an entity. The four perspectives of identity studies differ in terms of their levels of analysis.

Visual identity's locus of analysis is the organisation's symbolism, which includes all sorts of visual cues that identify and distinguish the focal organisation. The Visual audit is the main means of assessing the saliency of corporate visual identity. Corporate identity's (CI) locus of analysis is more complicated, given the fact that, besides graphic design, historically there were two approaches to corporate identity: CI as integrated communications based on "the sum of the ways a company chooses to identify itself to its publics (Margulies in Balmer and Greyser 2003 p.68) and the more holistic and multidisciplinary approach to CI which addresses the question of "what are we as an organisation" i.e. those characteristics that make each identity distinct. Corporate identity's locus of analysis resides at the corporate level, rather than at the level of the individual.

Organisation's identity refers to the (communal) identity of an organisation; therefore the locus of identity would be the organisation as a social actor

(Whetten and Mackey, 2002). Thus the locus of identity, like corporate identity, resides at the organisational level instead of that of the individual. Organisational identity is about an individual's social identity; therefore the subject of identity is individual rather than the organisation. In this sense, the level of analysis is at the individual level.

Research focus

Research focus or what is sometimes known as the *explananda* refers to the central issues, and core research questions which the identity studies strive to answer.

Visual identity has variously been concerned with the providing an effective platform for corporate communications policies, creating positive perceptions and enhancing corporate awareness. It can also be concerned with issues relating to semiotics and with corporate aesthetics and the desire to keep the company's visual identifier and in many instances corporate brand marque fashionable. It often has a role in terms of corporate strategy in terms of articulating, *via* visual means, a corporation's brand architecture (the relationship between the brands of the holding company, its subsidiaries and its/their products and services.)

Corporate identity (taking a corporate communications perspective) shares certain similarities with visual identity, in that it is instrumental and managerial in approach. This perspective of corporate identity emphasises the need for consistency of communication with the aim of garnering favourable perceptions among key stakeholder groups (mainly external, but not exclusively so.) However, there is a temporal element to this perspective in that there the foci can change from reflecting what the organisation is, what the organisation wishes to become or, indeed, how senior managers wish the organisation to be seen. Of course, corporate identities and corporate brands are inseparable (Balmer and Gray 2003). In this regard, underlying promise of a corporate brand needs to be in alignment with corporate identity, and corporate communications and behaviours need to reflect this promise.

Corporate identity (when considered from those who adopt a multidisciplinary perspective) is concerned with a great deal more than graphic design and controlled corporate communications. Given its multidisciplinary roots and strategic focus, the multidisciplinary perspective *vis a vis* corporate identity is concerned with the overall performance of an organisation including internal, and external, as well as the financial and social dimensions of the corporation. Therefore, corporate identity is viewed as being dynamic and instrumental in effect owing to its strong links with strategy and with competitive advantage. Corporate identity can be also

explanatory, especially in terms of answering some fundamental marketing issues i.e. the need for corporate behaviours and performance to reflect corporate communications and with policies associated with the corporate brand. Given corporate identity's historical roots in marketing, it would be very theoretically fruitful to employ corporate identity as a central construct for marketing theories regarding the market behaviour of a company and in terms of consumer buying behaviour etc. However, the utility of identity with regard to the latter rarely presents itself within the marketing literature.

In contrast to corporate identity, a more homogeneous set of issues characterises scholars examining identity from the perspective of organisational behaviour/organisational studies which reflect on issues relating to collective organisation's identity, organisational identity and organisational identification. For such scholars their research foci as follows: 1) explain the personal, inter-personal, or social behaviour within organisational contexts; 2) explain a firm's heterogeneity, strategic behaviours, and performances. In the organisational behaviour/theory and strategic management literature, identity's theoretical and explanatory power has been the major drive for identity studies (in contrast to its instrumental and, to a lesser degree, its explanatory power from a marketing perspective).

However, although there is a large measure of homogeneity within the

organisational literature, subtle discrepancies can still be discerned. For instance, it seems that there is no given hierarchy in terms of different types of social identity: the saliency of different types of social identity will vary. For this reason there are likely to be differences in terms of the antecedents and consequences of organisational identity and identification: this will have an impact in terms of intergroup relations, members' attributions, motivations, commitments, and loyalties to the body corporate. The above will also inform the comprehension of organisational identity and identification as "instruments" of control. Whereas the corporate identity paradigm leans towards "harder" managerial systems for control and change (although not absolutely so) organisational identity and identification stresses more "softer" influences of control which can be, cultural, ideological in nature.

The above examination shows that the four different perspectives differ in terms of conceptualisations, loci of analysis, and subject matters. As we can see, the most subtle differences between these different perspectives are the differences between corporate identity (perspective two) and organisation's identity (perspective three). The subtlety of differences can be attributed to the recent convergence between marketing and organisational behaviour in their respective studies of identity. It is worth reemphasising here that though both corporate identity and organisation's identity are referring to the defining characteristics of an organisation, in terms of conceptualisation

corporate identity takes a more substantive approach, whilst collective organisation's identity takes a more cognitive approach. In terms of locus of analysis, corporate identity's locus lies on the substantive elements of an organisation, and these elements can be revealed by third-party identity audit, which can include the visual identity audit, behavioural audit, and communication audit. Yet, the locus of analysis of collective organisation's identity lies on the mind of the beholders (e.g. various groups of stakeholders), thus its revelation relies on the exploration of the beholders' cognitive framework regarding their perception of the defining characteristics of the focal organisation. Finally, the two perspectives also differ in terms of their subject matters. Corporate identity has been used as a construct mainly by marketing researchers, therefore marketing-related issues are the major subject matters for corporate identity; on the other hand, collective organisation's identity has been used mainly by organisational behaviourists, thus OB-related issues are the major subject matters for collective organisation's identity.

4. Corporate identity and organisational identity: signs of convergence

What has become transparent from our reading of the literature is that there has been a degree of convergence among marketing and organisational behaviour scholars in relation to identity studies. The first convergence can be

seen with regard to the mutual recognition of the marketing and organisational behaviour approaches to identity studies (See: Balmer, 1995; Balmer and Wilson, 1998; Hatch and Schultz, 2000; Gioia et al., 2000a). For instance, some organisational identification scholars (Hatch and Schultz, 2000; Gioia, Shultz and Corley, 2000) have acknowledged the significance of corporate identity and tried to identify their relationship. However, the biggest impact has not so much been the impact that marketing has made on the organisational behaviour literature but the latter on the former.

The second development relates to the emerging dialogue between marketing scholars and organisational behaviourists in terms of identity studies, especially through venues of identity conferences and special issues on identity studies. As a result, cross-fertilisation becomes an emerging occurrence. Moreover some scholars (notably Balmer and Wilson 1998; Rindova and Schultz, 1998; Hatch and Schultz, 2000; Gioia et al., 2000; He and Balmer 2005) have begun to study the relationship between CI and OI.

Lastly, both literatures have acknowledged the multiplicity of identity (viz from a corporate identity perspective: Balmer 1995, Balmer and Greyser 2002, Leitch and Motion, 1999; and from an organisational behaviourist perspective: Albert and Whetten, 1985; Pratt, 2000); Foreman and Whetten, 2002)

However, the above synergies cannot be taken for granted and, in the broader scheme of things, the dialogue between marketing and organisational behaviour is still in its adolescence. For instance, the current convergence between CI and OI is constrained by the ignorance of the existence of multiple perspectives relating to both CI and OI. Thus we argue that cross-fertilisation or integration should be carefully marshalled by taking into account the differences of multiple perspectives of both CI and OI in terms of conceptualisation, locus of analysis, and key research issues.

5. Implications for corporate-level marketing and identity research and scholarship

Our review has brought to light the synergy that now exists in relation to corporate and organisational identity. Based on these insights we have been able to discern four identity perspectives that characterise identity studies. Such insights have, we conclude, wide utility with regard to the nascent area of corporate-level scholarship. This is because it provides not only a useful route-map for corporate marketing scholars but also emphasises the centrality of the identity construct to corporate-level marketing (i.e. the application of the marketing philosophy and concepts to organisations in their totality and the nascent area of corporate marketing see Balmer (1998; 2001) and Balmer and Greyser (2003.)) The remainder of this article elaborates the points raised above. We make four general observations relating to the above.

With regard to corporate-level marketing we note:

- A. The Utility of the Theoretical Basis of Organisational Identity
- B. The Efficacy of Integrated Approaches to Corporate-Level Marketing research
- C. The Desirability of Empirical Studies within each identity tradition
- D. A greater reliance on Theory-Building Methodologies

A. The Utility of the Theoretical Basis of Organisational Identity

Without downplaying the merit of examining organisations through the lens of corporate identity (in its various conceptualisations) we deduce that the insights from organisational identity can exert the most vital of roles in informing corporate-level marketing scholarship. Clearly, there is much that can be marshalled for corporate-level marketing from the rich theoretical underpinnings of this sister concept of corporate identity.

For example, although the concept of organisational identity is normally narrowly conceived in terms of organisational members it most certainly has a much wider utility and, as such, could be applied to other stakeholders, e.g. customers, senior managers, and suppliers. Indeed, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) applied the organisational identification model to consumer research and proposed a new construct: customer-company identification. This model argues that customers can have psychological attachment with the focal

company when the company's identity is perceived to be attractive to the customers, despite the fact that customers, unlike organisational members, have less physical contact with the focal company. Such an approach would have significant implications for the further advancement of CRM (customer relationship management). For example further research should be undertaken to examine:

- 1) Under what conditions a customer's identification with the company's identity is stronger;
 - 2) Under what conditions customer's identification with the company's products/brands is stronger?
- and
- 3) What is the relationship between a customer's identification with the corporate brand (some corporations share the same corporate brand; for instance, consider Virgin, Volvo, Rolls Royce, and the Ritz Hotel Brands)?

B. The Efficacy of Integrated Approaches to corporate-level marketing research

Corporate level marketing (Balmer 1998; 2001), with its concern with multiple stakeholder groups (including customers and employees among others) and with issues relationship management/marketing with such stakeholders also lends itself to the holistic approach found within identities. There are the

different types of corporate identities: actual, conceived, communicated, ideal, and desired identities (Balmer and Greyser 2002) as well as different identity perspectives (visual identity, corporate identity, organisation's identity, and organisational identity). However, it is in examining the relationships and interrelationships among these various identity types that is likely to provide rich insights for this nascent area. For example, it would seem logical to consider visual identity as part of corporate identity and that the latter provides the sources for perceptions of organisational identity. Such insights would provide valuable foundations for these nascent areas of marketing.

C. The Desirability of Empirical Studies within each identity tradition

Owing to the breadth of identity studies and their underpinning by distinct disciplinary and philosophical traditions there is also merit in greater empirical research within each perspective. For example, scholars can draw on extant organisational, psychological, and management theories, with regard to corporate identity. Second, corporate visual identity would also merit further investigation. In recent years there have been signs that there has been renewed academic interest in this identity type (Henderson and Cote, 1998; Melewar and Saunders, 1999; van Riel and van den Ban, 2001). Third, organisation's identity has been advocated as an area in need of innovative thinking (Gioia, 2000; Whetten and Mackey, 2002). Fourth,

organisational identity theory needs to be constantly revised in the context of advances in social identity theory. Finally, organisational identity is becoming an important topic in organisational psychology and its attendant literature is voluminous (Dick et al., 2004; Dukerich et al., 2002; Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001; Mael and Ashforth, 1992; Shamir and Kark, 2004) and HRM (Li et al., 2002; Reade, 2001).

D. A greater reliance on Theory-Building Methodologies

The relative paucity of empirical research would suggest that theory-building methods would be efficacious. As such, inductive (e.g. grounded theory), qualitative and case study approaches would be appropriate. However, this is not the case in all regards. For instance, cross-sectional surveys are possible for research that applies organisational identity theory to corporate-level marketing. This is because organisational identity is a more mature construct with valid measurement scales. The area clearly also lends itself to more innovative research methods such as action research, experimental field study and longitudinal studies. For instance, such research could investigate the performance implications of corporate-level marketing, e.g. corporate branding, visual identity programmes, organisational identity management, organisational identification, and customer-company identification.

Conclusion

In this article we have reviewed identity studies from multiple perspectives.

Four perspectives regarding identity studies were identified which broadens the current categorisation of identity studies and, as such, expands the traditional dichotomy of identity studies in traditional terms of corporate identity and organisational identity. The coexistence of multiple perspectives highlights the richness and complexity of identity studies. The four perspectives of identity studies differ in terms of conceptualisation, locus of analysis, and key research issues. More importantly, by comparison, we found an explicit overlap between corporate identity and organisational identity. The emerging synergy between marketing and organisational behaviour in terms of identity studies might consolidate identity studies into an emerging area of study: corporate-level marketing. In terms of specific areas for research we suggest a) exploring corporate level marketing drawing of the theories from organisational behaviour; b) examining the dynamics of the relationships between various identity perspectives; c) undertaking empirical research (largely drawing on inductive and theory-building methodologies) with regard to the five identity perspectives outlined in this article. The above research strategies should make a positive contribution in providing a theoretical underpinning to corporate-level marketing.

Table 1: Comparing the four perspectives in identity studies

	Conceptualisation	Locus of analysis	Key issues (exemplars)
VISUAL IDENTITY	Identity as the visual means of organisational self-presentation	Organisation's symbolism	How to keep visual identity fashionable, updated, and appealing to audience
CORPORATE IDENTITY	Organisation's distinctive attributes addressing 'what the organisation is.'	Organisational Characteristics /rationale	How corporate identity can be communicated effectively to nurture positive corporate image and reputation, which in turn may lead to competitive advantage. Identity-image interplay Multiple types of identity Identity-strategy interplay
ORGANISATION'S IDENTITY	Defining characteristics of an organisation as perceived by beholders	Collectively perceived Organisational characteristics	Interplay between identity and image Interplay between identity and strategy Multiplicity of identity Identity dissonance among different stakeholders How to define an organisation
ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY	OI as a salient social identity (relating to an individual)	Individual employees	When and why OI is salient? Implication of OI for organisational behaviour

Appendix 1

Summary of previous literature reviews of identity studies

Author (s)	Core arguments	Limitations
Abratt (1989)	The earliest, comprehensive review of corporate identity. Early attempt at integrating the concepts of corporate identity, corporate communication and corporate image. Note the importance of bringing corporate image (perception) into alignment with corporate identity: one of the first academic articulations of the image-identity gap/misalignment. The article focuses more on corporate image rather than on corporate identity.	Focuses mainly on corporate visual identity. Perceives corporate identity primarily in terms of an organisation's self presentation. A greater link could have been made with the earlier, pioneering, work of Kennedy (1977) from which it, in part, appears to be derived.
Balmer (1995)	Identifies 7 schools of thought relating to corporate identity. Observed that identity is driven not only by visual identity, by also by strategy, organisational behaviour and communication, of which visual identity and organisational identity as separate schools of thought. An early example of the how identity studies are multi-faceted. An early example where an author argues that identity studies need to be underpinned by multi-disciplinary perspectives.	Focuses mainly on corporate identity, although limited attention to organisational identity. Article emphasis is accorded both to corporate brands as well as to corporate identity. Article, primarily draws on the literature written in English.
Van Riel (1995)	Summarises various definitions of corporate identity. Marshals various "national" literatures on identity from, for instance, the UK, Germany and the Netherlands. Advocates corporate identity as corporate self-presentation by corporate identity mix: behaviour, communication and symbolism	Deals exclusively with corporate identity but gives undue attention to corporate "self-presentation."

Van Riel and Balmer (1997)	Three approach to identity studies: graphic design, communication, and multidisciplinary. (In essence, a simplification of Balmer’s 1995 article)	Attempts to incorporate some key elements from the literature on organisational identity. Article reflects Van Riel’s notion of corporate identity i.e. “self presentation” rather than Balmer’s notion of corporate identity referring to an organisation’s distinct characteristics.
Balmer (1998)	Introduces the notion of Corporate Marketing (corporate level marketing) and argues for the integration of corporate-level constructs. Traces the historical development of corporate identity and its associate concepts (corporate image, corporate reputation, and corporate personality), introduce the concept of multiple types of identity. Notes that there are multiple identity misalignments that can be deleterious to organisations (and not just the identity-image gap as articulated by Abratt 1989). Article re affirms the view that corporate identity encompasses the distinct characteristics of an organisation rather than being concerned with self-presentation. Notes the multidisciplinary roots of identity.	Focuses mainly on the corporate identity perspective but attempts to integrate the organisational identity literature in terms of the historiography of identity studies.
Balmer and Soenen (1999)	The introduction of the ACID test model which is a synthesis of the different disciplinary and temporal dimension of identity. Model is based on empirical research and appears to be the first multidisciplinary/multi temporal model of its kind.	The distinction between perception and communication although made is somewhat unclear in the model.
Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000b)	Distinguishes organisational identity into three perspectives: identity of organisation, identity in organisation, and identity with organisation	Exclusively deals with organisational identity and makes no attempt whatever to marshal corporate identity (British and European marketing perspectives).

Hatch and Schultz (2000)	Attempts to bridge both corporate identity and organisational identity perspectives. Unusual in that this attempt at bridge building across disciplines is from the organisational behaviour rather than from the marketing perspective.	Narrowed view of both corporate identity and organisational identity. Only partially successful in capturing the richness and complexity of both concept. Corporate identity is characterised in somewhat dated terms in being that which is concerned with self-presentation and as a discipline that is fundamentally concerned with graphic design.
Moingeon and Soenen (2002)	Five types of identity as five facets of understanding organisation identity. Builds on earlier work from UK and European scholars which captures a good deal of the richness and complexity of the domain.	Focuses only on identity of an organisation, and fail to distinguish “identity of”, “identity within” and “identification with” organisation; also fail to grasp the richness of “corporate identity.” Appears to be a derivation of the early work of Balmer and Soenen and the provenance of this framework is only partly explained.
Balmer and Greyser (2003)	Building on the work of Balmer’s earlier work identity studies is discussed in terms of (a) disciplinary and national roots (b) schools of thought (c) philosophical underpinnings (d) components (e) characteristics (f) management (g) analysis (h) structure and hierarchy and (i) relationship with other corporate level concepts.	Only partially accommodates the complexity of thought within the organisational identity literature.
Bick, Jacobson, and Abratt (2003)	Reviews the development of corporate identity during 1990s and revises the original model of corporate identity management process. Identity is characterised now in terms of the distinct characteristics of the organisation rather than in terms of self-presentation as originally outlined by Abratt in 1999.	Focuses mainly on the corporate identity literature. For the main, the Organisational identity literature is not marshalled.

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