Negative Employee Corporate Brand Identification: A Case Study of a Prominent Malaysian University Corporate Brand

Sharifah Faridah Syed Alwi
Brunel University London, UK
(Sharifah.Alwi@brunel.ac.uk)

John M.T. Balmer
Brunel University London, UK
(John.Balmer@brunel.ac.uk)

Norbani Che-Ha
University of Malaya, Malaysia
(norbanicheha@um.edu.my)

Dorothy Yen
Brunel University London, UK
(Dorothy.Yen@brunel.ac.uk)

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate *negative* employee corporate brand identification towards a business school in Malaysia. The research marshals the nascent literature of corporate brand identification (Balmer and Liao 2007; Balmer, Liao and Wang 2008) which marked new ground by drawing on social identity theory in corporate branding contexts.

Corporate brand identification is relatively new concept but has been recognized as very important facet of corporate marketing (Balmer and Liao 2007). Additionally, issues of corporate brand identification have been identified in the previous works to affect not only the consumers (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) but also other stakeholders with the corporate brand such as student corporate brand identification (Balmer and Liao 2007; Balmer et al., 2008) and employees or member organisation or institution identification (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994). However, limited past research was found to examine corporate brand identification from employee's perspective. Although some research have attempt looking into organizational or institutional employee/member identification (Mael and Ashforth' 1992; Dutton et al., 1994; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995), most of these studies however report on the positive attachment of the members have with the organisations or institutions and furthermore, they are only focusing on institutional or organisation, which is somewhat different from corporate brand identification.

Corporate brand identification emphasizes the degree to which customers, and other stakeholders have feel there is an affinity with their own identity and that of a corporate brands whereas organisation and institutional identification typically focusses on organisational members affinity with their own identity and that of an organization per se. Understandably, the former takes and explicit corporate marketing approach whereas the latter is underpinned by an organisational behaviour perspective. Identification relates to social identity theory. Social identity theory refers to how individual define themselves in
their social environment. The identification relates to the concept of singleness with or belongingness to the group that could affect the level of satisfaction and effectiveness. In this study, employees' identification to the business school is investigated to gauge their level of belongingness, attachment and their perception about the school particularly after changes in policy took place within the university which affect the business school. Strong and positive corporate brand identification will help to understand how employees respond to organization's action, increase corporate brand performance and subsequently, corporate reputation. Balmer and Liao (2007) explain that corporation should recognise the strength and strategic importance of their corporate brand and the importance of employees, customers, stakeholder

(corporate brand identification). This is due to all personnel are seen as corporate brand spokesperson (Balmer et al., 2008) and corporate brand image begins from within the organisation, i.e. corporate brand identity which is reflected by the personality of the employees (Keller and Richey, 2006). Moreover, members' attachments to an organisation are not only based on economic transactions alone rather, heavily depends on: (a) Images they have about what the organisation means to them and (b) What they mean to others. A continuity of positive image evaluation will result in strengthen their attachment through organisational identification (Dutton et al., 1994). Furthermore, lessons should be learnt from organisation that possibly overlooks these issues (Balmer and Liao 2007). This is especially the case of higher education where stakeholder identification appears to be highly emotional (from the study of student corporate brand identification, Balmer and Liao 2007) and possibly the employees as arguably both of these stakeholders belong to life-long organisational member of corporate brand community (Balmer and Liao 2007).

We focus on a single case – a business school in Malaysia. Malaysia universities place high importance on ranking. As a result, in order to be competitive and sore high up in the ranking (e.g. The Times Higher Education World University Rankings), the university has done some changes to the present systems, structure as well as internal culture within the university. Dutton et al. (1994) explains that these changes could have significant psychological effects such as declining on organizational performance, weakening organisational identification and creating less cooperation with the school among the members/employees. We uses a theory-building case study within the phenomenology/qualitative research tradition (Balmer and Liao, 2007; Balmer et al., 2008). We investigate three groups of employees within the business schools (academic, administrative and top management). 25 in-depth interviews and one focus group discussion were conducted among the academics, administrative and top management of the business school. Content analyses were used to analyses the results and preliminary insights reveal the importance of considering negative identification in corporate branding contexts: this area is underexplored. The present study enhances previous works on corporate brand identification by focusing on employee and, in particular, the negative aspects of this in a business school context.

References

Balmer, J.M.T., and Liao, Mei-Na (2007). Student corporate brand identification: an exploratory case study, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal,* Vol. 12 No.4 pp. 356-375.

Balmer, John MT, Liao, Mei-Na, and Wang, Wei-Yue (2008). Corporate brand identification and corporate brand management: how top business schools do it, *Journal of General Management*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 77-102.

Bhattacharya, C. B. and Sen, S. (2003). Consumer-company identification: A framework for understanding consumers' relationships with companies, *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 67 No.2, pp. 76-88.

Bhattacharya, C.B., Rao, H. and Glynn, M.A. (1995). Understanding the bond of identification: An investigation of its correlates among art museum, *Journal of Marketing* Vol. 59 No.4, pp.46-57.

Dutton, J.E., Dukerich, J.M. and Harquail, C.V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification, *Administrative science quarterly*, Vol. 39 No.2, pp.239-263.

Keller, K.L. and Richey, K. (2006). The importance of corporate brand personality traits to a successful 21st century business, *Journal of Brand Management,* Vol. 14 No.1, pp.74-81.

Mael, F. and Ashforth, B.E. (1992) Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification, *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 103–123