Corporate Brand Identity:
A Conceptual Redefinition

Teresa Taveira de Barros, Francisco Vitorino Martins

Abstract — There is a wide agreement that identity is a multidisciplinary concept. Branding is an identity expression. Although there are some frameworks to assess brand identity there isn't an accepted definition. The authors consider this a gap in literature and investigate the components to assess brand identity under a holistic approach. Literature was reviewed and reinterpreted under an integrated perspective evolving corporate and brand identity studies. The authors propose a definition and nine components characterizing corporate brand identity: reputation, culture, positioning, personality, relationships network, presentation style, communication, environmental influences and mission. Some are related with internal and others to external facets. The authors are strongly encouraged to test these results empirically towards validity and reliability of the proposed construct.

Index Terms — Concepts redefinition, Corporate brand identity, Corporate brand identity components, Integrated perspective

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1 INTRODUCTION

The dictionary states that identity is a set of components that allow the recognition of someone as such. Organizations despite their not being individuals in the sense described are formed by individuals with values, beliefs, ideologies, personality, ways of acting and communicating therefore they have distinctive traits.

Balmer [1] considers there is a conceptual fog about business identity. He outlines fifteen contributory factors to this fog. In his opinion, the terminology, different concept definitions and the existence of different paradigmatic views; are some of the causes of this fog.

He and Balmer [2] describe five perspectives on identity: visual identity, organization's identity, collective organizational identity, organizational identification and corporate identity. Each perspective is focused on a different organizational issue. Visual identity perspective is focused on the organization's symbolism; organization's identity is focused on the definition of the organization's characteristics; collective organizational identity is focused on the social identity (individuals, staff); organizational identification is focused on the definition of the individuals based on the members of the organization and corporate identity is focused on the

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distinct attributes of an organization. Its interest is to know how identity can be effectively communicated in order to achieve positive image, reputation and competitive advantages.

In a management and marketing perspective the interest is to know how identity's distinct attributes can be effectively communicated to stakeholders. Marwick and Fill [3] conclude that a favorable image and reputation can lead to competitive advantages and competitive advantages can easily lead to profit. For these reasons the authors consider corporate identity the base of the brand identity studies.

There is a wide agreement that corporate identity forms the bedrock of corporate communications (Van Riel [4]), corporate reputation (Fombrum [5]), and corporate branding (King [6]; Aaker [7]; de Chernatony [8], Harris and de Chernatony [9]). According to Balmer [10] these concepts are distinct but strongly related. He states that corporate identity´s key question is "what we are, what are the distinct attributes of the organization? What is our business, markets, reputation, history, relation to other identities?" Corporate communication tends to integrate the management and marketing in terms of philosophy and process. Corporate reputation's key question is "what are the identity's distinct attributes?" Corporate brands key question is "what is the promise that can be inferred from the communication".

The acquisition of a favorable corporate brand is the aim of the identity management. This is also the author's point of view.

This paper proposes an organized vision

and a definition of the brand identity concept and its components anchored in a holistic perspective. The authors begin by reviewing the development of the identity concept to show its multidisciplinary roots. The brand identity definition proposed suggests an internal versus an external context towards brand. Authors divide this context in four major areas: corporate brand behavior, visual identification, modus of interacting and competitive environment.

2 BRAND IDENTITY REDEFINITION

2.1 Review Stage

The first identity studies were carried out on an organizational context. Authors review the most significant developments of the identity concept.

TABLE 1

DEFINITIONS OF THE IDENTITY CONCEPT

Authors	Identity concept
Abratt (1989)	"an assembly of visual clues-physical and behavioral by which an audience can recognize a company and distinguish it from others and which can be used to represent or symbolize the company (Abratt, 1989, p.68).
Olins (1990)	Corporate identity is the organization´s presentation to itself to its various stakeholders and the means by which it distinguishes itself from all other organizations.
Moingeon and Ramanantsoa (1997)	
Van Rekon (1997)	"a set of meanings by which an object allows itself to be known and through which allows people to describe, remember and relate to it" (Van Rekom, 1997, p 411).
Van Riel and Balmer (1997)	Strathclyde Statement: "every organization has an identity which articulates its ego, goals and values and presents a sense of individuality that helps distinguish the organization in its competitive environment" (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997, appendix)
Alessandri (2001)	Conceptual definition: a strategically planed presentation of a firm to its audience in order to achieve a positive image in the mind of the publics. Operational definition: all the observable and measurable elements of a firm's identity manifest in its comprehensive visual presentation of itself, including – but not limited to – its name, logo, tagline, color, palette and architecture. It also includes the firm's behavior including – but not limited to – its reception of employees, customers, shareholders and suppliers.
Suvatjis and de Chernatony (2005)	Strathclyde Statement: "every organization has an identity which articulates its ego, goals and values and presents a sense of individuality that helps distinguish the organization in its competitive environment" (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997, appendix)

Due to the lack of consensus about the definition of identity, some authors agree on a joint effort to find a definition. Hence the Strathclyde Statement signed in February, 1995. According to this statement every organization has an identity which articulates its ego, goals and values and presents a sense of individuality that helps distinguish the organization in its competitive environment (Van Riel and Balmer [11]). This statement is signed by authors like Balmer, Bernstein, Greyser, Day, Ind, Lewis, Ludlow, Marwick, Van Riel and Thomas.

Although there are other definitions proposed in literature, authors like Hatch and Schultz [12], de Chernatony [8], Harris and de Chernatony [9], Suvatjis and de Chernatony [13] also adopt this definition on their studies

related to corporate and brand identity.

Brand is an identity expression therefore it is very important to integrate branding with corporate identity strategy. Branding is a key element of a firm's marketing strategy. Strong brands help to establish the firm's identity in the marketplace and to develop a solid customer-perceived value and loyalty Aaker [7], kapferer [12], Keller [15].

A judicious branding strategy provides a means of integrating corporate strategy and enhancing the firm's visibility.

The brand must provide a rationale for branding decisions at different levels of the organization. It must be based on the principles that lead to the development of a strong advantage. Without a well conceived brand, the firm will be at a competitive disadvantage, suffering from inconsistencies in brand identity.

A key element of success is the framing of a consistent brand identity management. According to Balmer [16], "the use of branding principles to discuss corporate identity has tended to align the area more closely with marketing" (p.985).

The corporate identity and the brand identity approaches are both developed in literature. Authors like Kennedy, Abratt, Dowling, Balmer, Balmer and Gray, Marwick and Fill, Stuart, Suvatjis and de Chernatony, amongst others, focus on corporate identity while Kapferer, Semprini, Aaker, de Chernatony, Harris and de Chernatony, amongst others, focus on brand identity.

In the next theoretical discussion authors compare individual identity to social identity in order to find cues to an integrated brand identity definition.

Metaphoric analysis between individual identity and social identity are frequent in literature (Barros [17]). Yet, some authors avoid comparing individual identity with corporate identity. According to Gioa [18] the key point of the difference between individuals and organizations is that organizations can plausibly present a complicated multifaceted identity, each component is relevant to specific domains or constituents without appearing hopeless fragmented or ludicrously schizophrenic as an individual might. This author claims that corporate identity needs to modify its behavior to adapt to environmental transformations in opposition to individual identity – the latter is more stable. One may say that corporate identity is a result of internal elements like vision, philosophy, culture, personality and others referred to in literature, but also of external elements. This view is far from being the best accepted in

brand literature. According to Kapferer [14] brand identity is an emission concept. Most literature shares this view Aaker [7], a brandist, agrees that brand identity is a set of associations the brand strategist intends to create or maintain. Once again the focus is inside the organization, on the elements that allow the brand to be unique.

Literature about other approaches to identity also agrees with this view. On the side of corporate identity approach are most of the Anglophone authors and also the French school of thought about corporate identity (authors like Larçon, Reitter, Ramanantsoa and Moingeon) and the Dutch school of thought on corporate identity. For this school identity is "a set of meanings by which an object allows itself to be known and through which allows people to describe, remember and relate to it" Van Rekon [19], p.411). The last part of this definition refers a relation - something that occurs between a sender and a receiver. The number of meanings presented to people brings about a set of perceptions which the brand strategist should know. Hence the author's belief that identity is more than an emission concept. It should be framed as stakeholder's perceptions are known so that the conceived identity fits the actual one kept by stakeholders. When there is no agreement between those two concepts the brand strategist should plan a shift in brand identity or in its communication because there is a gap between identity and its image/reputation. If identity were a mere emission concept such correction would be impossible for it would lack feedback. Literature discloses authors agreeing with this approach Serra and Gonzalez [20] refer that Kapferer´s interpretation of identity as an emission concept are a denial of the receiver's participation in identity building because he places brand identity before brand image. Semprini [21] also disagrees with Kapferer. He states that the denial of the receiver's participation is a fallacious exclusion.

2.2 Corporate Brand Identity

Following these conclusions the authors propose the redefinition of brand identity concept based on the ICIG corporate identity concept. Therefore they suggest that brand identity is the result of the interaction between the ethos, aims and the organization values with the competitive environment namely stakeholders. From this interaction results a behavior, a visual identity, and a modus of interacting that allows the differentiation of the corporate brand on its competitive

environment. These four areas can be assessed internally or externally to brand.
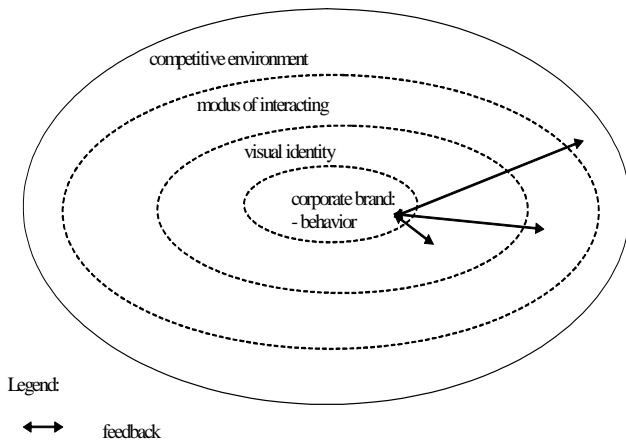

Legend:

↔ feedback

Fig. 1.

The behavior area is strictly connected with internal issues like vision, mission, philosophy, values, leadership, personality and culture. These issues are decided internally according to brand´s "raison d´être". The authors also consider that these internal issues should be adapted to stakeholders' needs and feelings. This way it is necessary to measure the stakeholder's opinions about the brand to be possible a feedback in order to do this fit. The reputation concept is used by de Chernatony reputation concept is used by de Chernatony [8] to evaluate the fit between the intended brand identity and the perceived brand identity.

TABLE 2

CONCEPTS USED IN THE MOST CITED MODELS

Authors discussing corporate identity	Relevant concepts associated
Kennedy (1977)	Employees, exogenous factors, image;
Dowling (1986/93)	Employees, culture, image, communication, policies adopted by the company;
Abratt (1989)	Personality, image;
Marwick and Fill (1997)	Strategy, reputation/image, personality, communication, exogenous factors;
Stuart (1998/99)	Strategy, reputation/image, personality, employees;
Balmer (1995)	Philosophy and mission, personality, image;
Balmer and Gray (2000)	Communication (primary, secondary and tertiary), reputation/image, competitive advantage.
Balmer (2001)	Strategy, structure, culture, history, reputation, leadership, total communication, image, corporate brand
Alessandri (2001)	Corporate mission, visual presentation (logos, tagline, color palette, architecture), firms public behavior, employees, customers, shareholders and suppliers
Balmer and Greyser (2002)	Corporate ownership, the leadership style of management, organizational structure, business activities and markets covered, the range and quality of products and services offered and overall business performance, values held by management and employees
Suvatjis and de Chernatony	Environmental forces, advertising, corporate visual identity systems, leadership, vision, mission, values, brands, products, services, reputation, personality, marketing, top management, image
Authors discussing brand identity	Relevant concepts associated
Kapferer (1991)	Culture, positioning, personality, relationship, reflex, "mentalization";
Semprini (1992)	Environment, production system, reception system;
Aaker (1996)	Product, organization, person, symbol, benefits (functional, emotional and self-expressive);
De Chernatony (1999)	Positioning, personality, vision/Culture, relationships, presentation.
Burman and Riley (2008)	Personality, values, vision, functionality competencies, origin.

Visual identity and competitive environment modus of interacting are more related to the exposure of the brand identity for authors consider them external areas. The visual identity area evolves issues like logos, lettering, coloring this means how the brand identity is presented to audiences. The modus of interacting evolves positioning and the network of relations established.

Authors consider competitive environment a context, so purely external. It is very important to the definition of the brand identity. It evolves competitor's behavior, government rules and all the external issues that influence the brand identity and that can't be internally controlled or absolutely predicted yet identity management must consider these issues. This follows Suvatjis and de Chernatony [13] views that "expressing corporate identity is a dynamic process evolving as the organizational context changes effectively managed through the use of an appropriated model" (p.1). One may say that the identity is distinct from its expression.

Following King [22], Aaker [7], de Chernatony [8] and Harris and de Chernatony [9], the proposed definition of brand identity is related with corporate brands for authors agree that corporate identity in the base of branding.

Some authors argue that most organizations consider the benefits of translating their corporate values to brand building (King, [22]; Mitchell, [23]). The central role of branding is establishing the firm's identity (Balmer, [10]) and building its position in the market makes it increasingly imperative for firms to establish a clear branding strategy. This is the reason why brand managers need to know how to assess brand identity.

By using an integrative approach and following the proposed brand identity definition, the authors come to the brand identity components. For this purpose the authors reviewed the most significant models of the corporate and brand identity studies and propose a redefinition of the components.

2.3 Corporate Brand Identity Components

Based on literature on corporate and brand identity the authors find nine components to characterize brand identity. According to the author's definition of brand identity it were redefined concepts related to the internal and the external identity areas based on the literature on corporate and brand identity.

The authors consider reputation a broader concept than image, which is considered a limited concept. According to Fombrum and Van Riel [24] image relates to the most recent perception and fluctuates over time in opposition to reputation which is about perceptions of the brand over time and is more stable. In a branding context, de Chernatony [8] argues that by auditing the gaps between brand identity and brand reputation managers can identify strategies to minimize incongruence and develop more powerful brands.

One definition of image is to be found in Porto Editora Dictionary [25]. The concept of image is defined as "... a representation of a person or object; a figure, a picture…" (p. 900). A picture is something static. It is not dynamic as reality is. It is something dependent on a context, a certain time, so it is likely to change with time. So, one may consider that images tend to alter in the short run. This opinion agrees with Kapferer´s view about image. According to this author, "brand image is a volatile and mutant notion" (p. 55). Reputation is considered a sum of images in time so it is considered to be more stable. It can easily be associated with the long term.

Reputation is a concept which is related to the way that identity expresses itself. It is assessed by outside the brand identity, on stakeholders. Reputation is the result of the modus of interacting.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn [26] find 160 different definitions of culture. It is an ambiguous concept. In a brand context, the authors consider that culture is a collective way of thinking of those who built, maintain and contribute to the success of the brand. Following this line of thought authors consider culture an internal component of brand identity. It is addicted to the behavior area. For Hatch and Schultz [12] culture is not a variable, it is a context. Balmer and Wilson [27] share this view and found empirical evidence that corporate identity is formed by a mix of subcultures. Dowling [28] doesn't share this view for he considers culture a single entity or as suggested, the glue that maintains the organization united.

According to Rosinter and Percy [29], brand positioning reveals what the brand is, for whom it is and what it offers.. Harris and De Chernatony [9] agree that brand positioning is affected by brand artifacts, by Kapferer´s [14] physic which gives cues about brand's characteristics and performance. On this context, the name of the brand is of great importance "… a carefully chosen new brand name can lend a measure of inherent and immediate strength to the brand" (Kohli et al, [30] p. 1506). Although positioning must be defined internally by the brand management team it depends of how the brand is perceived by its audiences.

TABLE 3

INTEGRATED PERSPECTIVE (COMPONENTS)

Brand Identity components	Authors
1. Reputation Collection of public opinions in time.	Marwick and Fill (1997), Stuart (1999), Balmer and Gray (2000), de Chernatony (1999)
2. Culture Collective way of thinking; shared culture, facilitates the congruency about brand perceptions, generates competitive advantage	Dowling (1986/93), Kapferer (1991), De Chernatony (1999)
3. Positioning Brand artifacts, objective characteristics, tangible factors	Kapferer (1991), de Chernatony (1999), Harris and De Chernatony (2001)
4. Personality A set of human issues related to brands: honesty, enthusiasm, competence, sophistication, rudeness	Abrat (1989), Marwick and Fill (1997), Stuart (1998/99), Balmer (1995), Kapferer (1991), Aaker (1996), Aaker (1997), de Chernatony (1999)
5. Relationships network Relation; relations between employers and all stakeholders to deliver brand values	Kennedy (1997), Dowling (1986/93), Stuart (1998/99), Kapferer (1991), Aaker (1996), de Chernatony (1999)
6. Presentation style Model of identification; attributes of the brand; brand heritage; brand values	Kapferer (1991), de Chernatony (1999), Harris and de Chernatony (2001)
7. Communication Translates identity into image; total corporate communication (primary, secondary and tertiary)	Dowling (1986/93), Marwick and Fill (1997), Stuart (1998/99), Balmer and Gray (2000)
8. Environmental influences Political context, social context, economical context	Kennedy (1977), Marwick and Fill (1997), Balmer and Gray (2000)
9. Mission Vision, philosophy, reason to exist	Balmer (1995/97), de Chernatony (1999), Harris *et al* (2001)

According to Kapferer [14], "a brand is a personality. It acquires a character..." (p. 56). Keller (1993) states that brand personality is a set of human issues related to brands. Aaker [31] uses this concept on her study to define the brand personality dimensions (honesty, enthusiasm, competence, sophistication, rudeness). One can conclude that brand "personality" is an internal component of brand identity. It is its character so it is highly related with behavior

The concept of relationships network was defined after Kapferers` concept of relation, and de Chernatonys` [8] concept of relationships. Kapferer [14] and Fournier [32] conclude that relations between consumer and brand are reciprocal. Nowadays, due to technology development and internet everybody establishes relations easily generating a network of relationships. Brands are no exception. One may say relationships network is both an internal and external component. It is internal because it relates with employers brand values and it is external because it is related with the way the employers pass those brand values to

stakeholders. The result of the relationships network is highly dependent of the modus of interacting.

Presentation style was a concept born from the connection of four other concepts: Kapferer´s [14] reflex (reflex as a model of identification), de Chernatony´s [8] presentation and Aaker's [7] concepts of "brand as a symbol" and "brand as an organisation".

Communication is an important concept in this literature review due to its link with identity specifically brand identity. According to Ind [33] communication is the process of translating identity into image. Balmer [34] defines total corporate communication as primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary communication is related with products, services, employees' behaviour; secondary communication is related with formal corporate communication and visual systems identification and finally tertiary communication is related with "word of mouth", media and concurrence and respective interpretation feedback. One may say that communication is a process decided

internally to relate with stakeholders.

The authors consider environmental influences of great importance on the process of translating identity into image and reputation. Other authors also consider them very relevant in their analyses (Kennedy [35]; Van Riel [4]; Marwick and Fill [3], and Balmer and Gray [36]. These influences are related to competitive environment.

The authors decide to integrate the concepts of vision and philosophy in the concept of mission. According to Barandas et al [37] the main objective of a brand's mission is the survival of the brand based on its reason to exist (brand's philosophy) and on long-term projects (brand's vision). This component is related with internal part of the corporate brand – behavior.

3 CONCLUSION AND CUES TO FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a wide agreement that identity is a multidisciplinary concept. Balmer [10] considers there is a conceptual fog about business identity. Branding is an identity expression. In a marketing context, literature reveals two approaches on identity: one focus on corporate identity and the other focus on branding. The authors consider this an opportunity do redefine the brand identity concept and its components. On this paper these approaches are integrated in order to redefine the brand identity components on a holistic base. Reviewing literature on identity the authors find nine components related to brand identity: reputation (a collection of public opinions in time); culture (a collective way of thinking); positioning (brand artifacts); personality (a set of human issues related to brands); relationships network (relations between employers and all stakeholders to deliver brand values); presentation style (model of identification, brand values); communication (total corporate communication); environmental influences (economical, political, social context) and finally mission (reason of existence, vision and philosophy).Some of them are more related with internal and others to external facets.

It would be interesting to do a primary test this framework in a corporate brand or sample of corporate brands as a primary approach to final results under a single or multiple case study methodology. It would also contribute to validity the use of other data gathering like quantitative analysis – surveys – directed to experts on brand identity (researchers and practitioners) in order to achieve a better

definition the components so that a scale for brand identity could be developed. This methodology is largely used in marketing literature namely in brand studies: brand trust scale (Delgado-Ballester et al, [38]); e-tail brand equity (Christodoulides, et al, [39]) and also on corporate studies: reputation ranking system (Schultz at al, [40]), yet there isn't any scale development on brand identity.

Following the scale methodology it would also be advisable to test it on stakeholders (clients and staff, for instance) so that it could be assessed whether there is a gap between the intended identity and the perceived identity. Reputation could be used to assess this fit. Leslie de Chernatony [8] also uses reputation to evaluate this fit on the model he proposed to brand identity.

The authors consider that these procedures are able to guarantee more valid and reliable results in order to build a brand identity scale to be used by practitioners to assess brand identity.

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