Corporate Brand Identity Management – Proposal of a New Framework

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Summary of Research

The term "corporate brand" has been widely used in literature since the eighties. According to Balmer (1998) this concept tends to be used as an alternative to the concept of corporate identity. The author argues that the use of branding principles to discuss corporate identity has tended to align the area more closely with marketing. However, the literature on brand management (Aaker, 1991; Kapferer, 1991 and de Chernatony and McDonald, 1992), gives little attention to the corporate brand" (p. 985).

Based on the concepts of corporate brand, brand identity and B2B relationship, the authors are interested in eliminating this gap in literature by designing a framework of corporate brand identity management. The aim of this investigation is to investigate the impact of B2B relationships in corporate brand identity management.

The methodology used is quantitative analysis of surveys and scale development.

The originality of this paper is to investigate the influence of the relationship between brands in corporate brand identity. This investigation is very important to help the decisions of the corporate brand managers and academics.

According to literature, namely on corporate brands (Balmer 2002b, Hatch and Schultz, 2001, 2003) and on brand identity (Kapferer, 1991, 2008, Aaker, 1996, de Chernatony, 1999) the authors developed a corporate brand identity management framework considering relationships between brands a context variable with definite impact on identity management as stated by Hakansson and Snehota (1989, 1995). These authors consider that organisations´ identity management is pursued under a relational perspective with impact on identity management.

Most researchers on identity and corporate brand emphasise the importance of external influences (Kennedy, 1977; King, 1991; de Chernatony, 1999; Balmer and Gray, 2000; Balmer, 2002a). Those influences concern legislation, concurrence, political issues... and stakeholders' perceptions and reputations (due to the holistic approach demanded by corporate brands). In this context the authors claim the importance of another influence: B2B relationships. This decision is inspired in sociological studies (Mannheim, 1950; and Tajfel and Turner, 1979) regarding individual identity. These authors claim that individuals form their personality by interacting in the social field. The authors argue that corporate brand identity also develops itself under a relational approach.

The relationships selected to pursue this investigation are the ones that are developed by Portuguese universities and investigation centres that cooperate by developing investigation. Those centres are administrative and financially autonomous.

The model will be described and the expected interactions explained in the following pages.

This is a work in progress. The inquiry is being pursued at the moment and authors are very confident that, very soon, they will have results to discuss.

Conceptualisation Method

The process of identification of the brand by their public is easier when the brand name coincide with the company´s name. This was one of the reasons for the recent development of corporate brands. Corporate brands demand a different conceptualisation and identity management than line brands.

Balmer (2002b) argues that the emergent theory on corporate brands is opposed to traditional approaches to brands, for it is multidisciplinary; it is not based only on marketing.

Consumers use brands to create their own individual identities (Simões and Dibb, 2005). Balmer (2002b) argues that there are other groups: staff, suppliers, shareholders, and others that relate themselves with brands in a not very different way.

Several authors have been studying corporate brands in an identity context:

(Table 1 here)

Balmer (2002b) refers the differences between the conceptualisations of:
- identity and identity management
- corporate brand and corporate brand management

But there are other authors who also refer the conditionings of a good corporate brand management. Therefore, corporate brand management depends on the:
- congruence between the brand identity facets and the organisational values (Kapferer, 2008),
- congruence between brand identity and brand reputation (de Chernatony, 1999),
- alignment between the elements that are part of the corporate brand management mix (Balmer, 2002b),
- alignment between strategic vision, organisational culture and image (Hatch e Schultz, 2001, 2003).

The authors´ propose is to add a new line to this field of studies by arguing that corporate brand management depends on the relationships´ influence on corporate brand identity.

One of the objectives of the authors is to know how brands/organisations create/maintain certain relationships with other brands/organisations. What are the brand identity facets which are more influenced by those relationships? What are the consequences in prospective and present consumers?

Identity is a sender concept (Kapferer, 1991), but identity is built and managed in a relationship context (Hakansson and Snehota, 1989, 1995). Thus it is the organisation´s/brand´s task to define and to manage identity. Kapferer (2008) argues that the corporate identity values are passed to the brand through the cultural facet. The author defines culture as an internal component of the brand identity, so less exposed to interaction. But he also refers to the external part of the identity facets which are, by definition, more related with corporate brands and its management. Therefore there are brand identity facets that are more exposed to interaction thus, it is convenient to separate identity and its management.

Kapferer (1991, 2008) describes the brand as a vision that drives to the creation of products and services under one name. Brand identity is formed by that vision, by key beliefs and by the brand´s core values (Kapferer, 2008). Brand identity is, like individual identity, complex and it is decided internally and used to relate to exterior. According to Kapferer (2008), identity is formed by internal facets (culture, personality, self-image) and external facets (physical, reflected consumer and relation – between the consumer and the brand). Although the internal aspects are very relevant for they are the core of the brand identity, corporate brands are focused in the external – stakeholders and its reputations (Balmer and Gray, 2002b). In line with this, the authors decided to investigate the effect of relationships between brands in the external and manageable facets of brand identity.

To answer the investigation question "how do relationships between brands influence corporate brand identity management?" the authors define the following framework:

(Figure 1 here)

This framework is inspired in corporate brand and brand identity literature.

Balmer (2002a) defines corporate brands´ characteristics as: cultural, intricate, tangible, ethereal and requiring total commitment of the organisation. The author considers the identity construct related but different from the corporate brand´s construct. Corporate brands require a holistic approach to brand management in which every member of the organisation behave themselves according to the desired identity (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001).

As Balmer (2002a) states, identity is focused on controllable internal aspects (strategy, structure, communication, culture) and although the internal aspects concern corporate brands, they are much more focused on the exterior (image and reputation). There must be an effective management of these aspects in order to eliminate any gaps between the brand desired by brand managers and stakeholders' perceptions.
The proposed framework is compound by a context variable (relationships) and brand identity (external perspective). The authors argue that corporate brand identity is manageable by the interaction between its external facets and B2B relationships. So corporate brand identity is managed in a relationship perspective where stakeholders` images and reputations are influenced by the relationships that brands have between them. Corporate brands attract more consumers if they believe the relationship between both brands will have some benefit to them as consumers. This "good feeling" about a relationship between brands will affect consumers, prospective consumers and the rest of the stakeholders contributing for the increasing of corporate brand reputation.

Those relationships are inspired in sociological studies regarding individual identity based on Mannheim (1950) and Tajfel and Turner (1979) according to whom individuals form their personality but they also receive feedback from the society where they interact. Tajfel and Turner (1979) were the progenitors of the well known social identity similarity theory according to which an individual can be defined as being part of one group (or not) underlying the collective behaviours of clients or other groups. This theory has been very relevant to marketing investigators in terms of collective identity and identification.

To study the influence of B2B relationships in the brand identity manageable facets the authors use the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 1991/2008), but only the external facets as

defined before: physical (tangible characteristics and quality), relation (tangible and intangible areas, concerns the relation between the brand and the consumer), reflected consumer (reflects the consumer as he/she would like to be seen by others by using a certain brand), for these facets are strictly related with corporate brands.

The external facet of the identity prism called relation refers to the relationship between the brand and the consumer. There are other authors that also study this relation: Aaker 1996; Aaker e Fournier, 1995; Fournier e Yao, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Fournier e Mick, 1999; Muniz e O´Guinn, 2001, just to name a few. The external variable that the authors argue to influence corporate brand identity concerns, as stated before, the relationships between brands and their influence in corporate brand identity management. The authors believe that these relationships are relevant to manage corporate brand identity and have not yet been studied in this context.

Major Findings

As stated before, the survey process is taking part now. The surveyed stakeholders are:
- present and prospective students of universities;
- companies that employ graduates from universities.

The investigation hypotheses are as follows:

H1: B2B relationships influence the physical evidence facet of corporate brand identity;
It is expected a positive relation between the relationship and physical evidence. There are many examples in the field confirming this (Nestlé and Frulact);
H2: B2B relationships influence the reflected consumer facet of corporate brand identity;
It is expected a positive influence between the relationship (between brands) and the way the consumer wishes to be seen as a result of using a brand (reflected consumer);
H3: B2B relationships influence the relation between the consumer and the brand.
It is expected a positive influence of relationships (between brands) and the one between consumers and corporate brands.

Authors are very interested in obtaining results to discussion and to refine the model if necessary.

Tables and Figures

Table 1

Autor(s)	Year	Corporate brand mix conceptualisation	Corporate brand management mix conceptualisation
Kapferer	1991, 2008	Brand identity prism – six facets: physical, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and self-image	Congruence between the six facets of the brand identity and the values of the organisation expressed in the cultural facet
de Chernatony	1999	Personality, culture, relationships, vision, positioning and presentation of the brand	Congruence between brand identity and brand reputation

Balmer	2002b	Strategy, culture, communication, structure and corporate brand covenant	Inter relationships between Strategy, culture, communication, structure and corporate brand covenant stakeholders, reputations and environment
Hatch e Schultz	2001, 2003	Strategic vision, organisational culture and vision	Inter-relationships between variables

Figure 1

B2B Relationships → Corporate Brand Identity
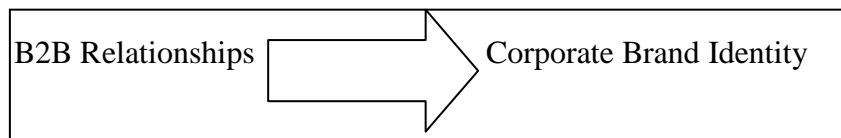
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