DEVELOPING INSIGHTS ON BRANDING IN THE B2B CONTEXT: CASE STUDIES FROM BUSINESS PRACTICE

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List of Abbreviations

AM	Amplitude modulation
B2B	Business to business
B2C	Business to consumer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRM	Customer relationship management
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
CSV	Creating shared value
FM	Frequency modulation
FinTech	Financial technology
HR	Human resource
HRM	Human resource management
IT	Information technology
KM	Knowledge management
NGO	Non-government organization
OTT	Over the top
R&D	Research & development
SME	Small- and medium-sized enterprise
TBL	Triple bottom line

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Preface

In planning and writing this book, it has become increasingly apparent that the role of corporate branding is a topical area for both business practice and academic research. The brand management research area has developed since the 1980s, but has been, up until now, strongly dominated by business-to-consumer (B2C) perspectives. Despite its importance for modern companies' business operations, the corporate branding approach in business-to-business (B2B) marketing has so far gained much less attention from both marketing scholars and practitioners.

Business marketing denotes the significant role of business relationships and networks as regards corporate branding. The "market," as such, consists of firms and organizations, which are interdependently producing value in the form of products and services, or combined offerings to other firms on the market. These key characteristics of business markets furthermore set the scene for how corporate branding of a single company, or group of companies, in business markets could and should be managed. With this in mind, we believe that it is time to develop our understanding of this relevant field of marketing research and practice.

This book started as a joint effort at our business school, where the graduate student teams wrote chapters on diverse themes related to corporate branding, during an advanced level course titled "Management of Industrial Brands." During the course, we could see a clear interest in exploring different perspectives of the concept, and how the topics explored would have a practical relevance for business managers. The aim of the book was to tackle the key concepts of corporate branding, and evaluate them in specific practical settings. In most chapters, the themes have been explored through specific case firms, and practical examples of how they have dealt with corporate branding in B2B markets. The presentations have gone through several peer reviews, and the texts are written in an easy-to-follow manner. In each of the chapters, the authors have addressed the implications for practitioners as regards to corporate branding. Subsequently, we have been able to present a multi-facetted view on corporate branding through the 11 chapters of this edited volume.

The editors have critically examined the chapters during and after the course. The final editing was conducted after a decision to publish was made by the Emerald Publishing Company. The editors gratefully acknowledge the support of the Publisher in the final editing process.

We hope that the book finds its readers both in business schools around the world and among practitioners and aids in identifying the importance of corporate branding in business marketing.

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Nikolina Koporcic
Maria Ivanova-Gongne
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The Editors

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Introduction: An Overview of the Current State of B2B Branding Research

Nikolina Koporcic, Maria Ivanova-Gongne,
Anna-Greta Nyström and Jan-Åke Törnroos

Abstract

In markets that are increasingly competitive, building strong business-to-business (B2B) brands is a key success factor. With this in mind, the first chapter of the book presents the current research on B2B branding and discusses the main topics of the book by presenting internal branding, external branding, and the contemporary perspectives on B2B branding. After a review of these topics, the chapter analyses each of the following chapters by presenting their short introductions.

Keywords: B2B branding; B2B research

I.1. An Overview of the B2B Branding Research

The importance of branding has been broadly acknowledged in business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts, while traditionally presented with the limited significance for business-to-business (B2B) marketing (Seyedghorban, Matanda, & LaPlaca, 2016). However, in today's fast-changing environments and recent economic situation, business companies are starting to be more aware of the importance of the corporate brand for their market strength and success. Even B2C-oriented companies are expanding to new

markets and moving toward the B2B territory (Viardot, 2017). Such companies originate in, for example, the tourism industry (Club Med's Club Med Business), electronics (e.g. Apple's iPhone), and detergents (e.g. Procter and Gamble's Mr. Clean). B2B actors have generally viewed branding as unimportant and disregarded it in favor of traditional managerial issues, such as quality control, sales, and key account management. Nevertheless, during the past decade, both academics and practitioners have increasingly focused their attention on branding as a viable tool within the B2B context. The corporate brand constitutes a focal area in this discussion, followed by, for instance, brand image, brand identity, brand promise, and various brand tools available for the B2B actors and how to use them purposefully. This book offers an overview of the current state of B2B branding research, by focusing on internal and external branding, as well as its contemporary perspectives. The book is divided into three parts, namely (1) internal branding, (2) external branding, and (3) contemporary perspectives on B2B branding. In the next sections, we briefly present the three perspectives of the book and then proceed to presenting short overviews of each book chapter.

I.1.1.   Internal Branding

The first part of the book, internal branding, presents corporate identity as a focal component of understanding the essence of B2B branding. Prior to building the corporate brand, a company must understand and develop its own brand identity, which provides direction, purpose, and meaning for the firm (Aaker, 1996). A strong corporate brand enables brand knowledge sharing, which is an important internal communication practice aimed to shape the environment of the company as regard its corporate brand. Thereafter, when the identity is developed and can be maintained, the company can strive to achieve a connection between the internal and external perspectives of branding. As an example of this, employer branding is a means of creating a relationship between the company and its current and potential employees.

I.1.2.   External Branding

The internal branding process leads on to an external branding perspective, which embodies the brand image or reputation of the company on the market. The brand image can be understood as the first impression of the perceived quality of the product/service that a firm delivers

(Cretu & Brodie, 2007) or the general impression of a company. In addition to this, image can play an important role when initiating B2B relationships, as well as for the firm's long-term survival and growth. As Aaker (1996) argues, branding provides value for business partners and boosts their market relationships. Considering that relationship building consists of central decision making, brand image has a notable influence on choosing business partners. For instance, the study by Minsky and Quesenberry (2016) reported that 90% of the decisions their case companies made had been influenced by referrals and peer recommendations. Thus, it must be emphasized that key information sharing is done through individuals in companies. As Graham and Mudambi (2016) highlight, B2B marketing has recently altered its approach from transactional to informational (Holland & Naudé, 2004). One of the ways companies can use this informational approach, that is create and share information, is through their sales personnel (Graham & Mudambi, 2016). A salesperson is presented as the face and voice of the company and is therefore of crucial importance for B2B branding (ibid.).

I.1.3.   *Contemporary Issues Related to B2B Branding*

In addition to sales people, IT services and the management of online and offline data have also begun to play an increasingly important role, especially for brand image creation (Holland & Naudé, 2004). Furthermore, when taking into account the importance of people, both within business and consumer contexts, emotions cannot be treated as a separate phenomenon. However, the influence and importance of emotions, as crucial characteristics of human beings, for corporate brand creation, as well as their influence on decision making has often been neglected (Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004). Another contemporary perspective that has been under-researched involves the influence of sustainability in relation to corporate branding and strategies of B2B companies. Therefore, each chapter of the book focuses on presenting a specific segment relevant for corporate branding.

I.2.   **An Introduction to the Chapters**

In the words of Graham and Mudambi (2016, p. 276), "[w]hile past research has laid the groundwork for B2B branding research, the theoretical and empirical foundation is incomplete." In other words: "There

is an abundant opportunity for examining additional theoretical and strategic aspects of B2B branding" (ibid., p. 277). This is the main reason for presenting in this book a diversity of aspects as regard branding in a B2B context. Throughout its 11 chapters, the book summarizes and discusses theories that are supplemented with practical cases, which furthermore explore and present relevant managerial implications for each of the presented B2B branding issues.

Chapter 1 Value of B2B Branding presents a short overview of core branding values that are important for companies operating in a B2B context. The chapter starts with general aspects on how to build a brand, while focusing on corporate identity and reputation as two crucial aspects of corporate brands. In addition, the authors present brand-building tools, such as personal selling, direct marketing, public relations, trade shows and exhibitions, as well as advertising and sales promotion. The applicability of these tools is demonstrated through the practical example of Axel technologies and their Fuugo service. Finally, the chapter discusses the value of branding for business marketers, connecting the topic with forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 2 elaborates on *Developing Corporate Brand Identity* and aims to study the phenomenon of identity development in the property management service company called Uniko. This chapter starts by defining branding identity, after which two traditional brand models are presented. After providing the characteristics and commonalities of these two models, and their connection with the case in focus, the chapter emphasizes the importance of starting the branding process from within the company.

Chapter 3 Brand Knowledge Sharing offers a new perspective on disseminating information about the brand within an organization acting on B2B markets. This section presents several models of knowledge sharing and outlines their applicability to the field of internal branding. Through a case study of a Finnish multinational company, Teleste, the chapter shows the usefulness of the presented theories for brand knowledge sharing. In particular, it looks at how knowledge sharing helped Teleste when promoting its new brand image within the organization.

Chapter 4 The Use of Corporate Social Responsibility in Employer Branding presents a multiple case study of three multinational companies working in the IT industry. Employer branding is described as an outcome of combining corporate branding, corporate social responsibility, and human resource management. The author wants to raise awareness of the fact that all branding work is dependent upon the input and commitment of the firm's employees. In addition, findings from the case

studies show how these companies communicate their employer branding efforts externally. The chapter concludes with a recommendation that employer branding requires straightforward work processes, efficient communication, systematic co-ordination of activities, and simple tools.

Chapter 5 Brand Image as a Facilitator of Relationship Initiation focuses on uncovering how the personal brand of a company's CEO may impact corporate brand image and how both personal and corporate brands can benefit from initiating customer relationships. By providing the results of an interview with a Finnish consulting company, the chapter provides a practical perspective on the issue in question. The chapter also highlights the importance of trust and quality in the firm's services and products, both for creating business relationships and for the maintenance of a positive brand image.

Chapter 6 Maintaining B2B Relationships through Branding presents the business relationship initiation process and its outcomes. It furthermore provides answers to the question: How can companies maintain their B2B relationships and how does branding contribute to long-term relationships? The chapter contributes to current knowledge about the importance of maintaining business relationships by providing a theoretical framework and by analyzing it through a case study of the Verso Globe Company. The authors argue that branding is currently needed more than ever, due to the reduced personal relationships between partners. In addition to this, new branding solutions are needed in order to add value to existing relationships and to keep them efficient and effective.

Chapter 7 Branding within B2B Sales offers insights into one of the most influential aspects of external branding, namely B2B sales. In particular, the authors of this chapter claim that B2B sales are indispensable for the growth and existence of a brand. The chapter offers an interesting case study of Logomo, a cultural venue in Finland, specializing in selling customized space to companies, as well as organizing different kinds of public events. Through a combination of theory and practice, the authors also demonstrate the impact of sales personnel on branding in a B2B context and the influence of the salesperson on the brand. The chapter concludes by providing specific implications for practitioners.

Chapter 8 Understanding Emotions in B2B Branding focuses on the importance of emotions, as a notable part of corporate branding. The issue of emotion has often been neglected in B2B branding research. Thus, the chapter focuses on ascertaining what kind of emotional

differences exist in B2B branding, compared to B2C contexts. It also explores how rational versus emotional impressions affect decision making in the business environment and whether the B2B sector can turn emotions into an advantage in corporate branding. The interview in which four respondents from the Suomen Henkilöstötalo Company participated offers interesting findings and managerial contributions by highlighting both emotional decision making and the importance of business relationships in strengthening the position of the company.

Chapter 9 Online Branding and the B2B Context focuses on the importance of online B2B branding and the potential benefits for companies if executed correctly. In addition, the chapter explicates what kind of content should be published online and what kind of mind-set the company's marketers should have in order to create compelling content. As well as fore fronting this issue, the authors also provide the tools needed for improving brand loyalty, brand awareness, customer relations, and an increase in sales. Knowledge of different branding platforms is essential for successful online branding and will aid companies in choosing the platforms that are most relevant for their target market.

Chapter 10 Creating and Maintaining a Sustainable Brand focuses on sustainability and how it can benefit the corporate brand. Sustainability is regarded as a crucial part of modern companies' business strategy and as forming an essential aspect for developing a positive brand image. By providing findings from an interview with Gaia, the largest consultancy for sustainable business in Finland, the chapter offers several practical insights concerning the business advantages of acting in a sustainable manner.

Chapter 11 Dangerous Mistakes and Severe Blunders within B2B Branding provides numerous up-to-date examples of B2B operations and branding failures so that readers can learn from such mistakes. The chapter examines what kind of B2B failures are likely to befall companies in specific industries and provides a detailed case of the Finnish multinational IT services company Tieto. In addition, to highlighting errors, the chapter goes behind the scenes and addresses the reasons why blunders occur, how to avoid them, and lastly, what to do when a mistake has already been made.

The final chapter of the book, the *Summary: Branding in the B2B Context and Future Challenges*, provides an up-to-date overview of research on B2B branding and presents future research avenues and upcoming trends within the B2B branding context.

Most chapters present a specific case that offers practical contributions to the industrial marketing field, as well as literature on corporate

branding and business relationships. In addition, the book offers both best practices in branding and presents mistakes made by companies involved in branding processes. Thus, it provides a holistic perspective, which will enable companies to learn not only about ways to implement branding in B2B companies but also about avoiding mistakes in branding processes and strategies. In addition to the novel practical cases, each chapter provides relevant theories explained in a simple, down-to-earth manner. Most importantly, this book is written by future professionals and thus provides fresh ideas, which might have an influence on current and forthcoming business environments.

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