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The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management

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Structured Abstract

Purpose- By outlining the evolution of brand management research over the last 25 years, as reported in the Journal of Product and Brand Management, this paper analyzes the changes in the way branding has been approached in research, highlights the current challenges the discipline faces, and suggests future research avenues that will hopefully further enrich brand management knowledge.

Design/methodology/approach- Internal historical literature review and commentary.

Findings- After a thorough analysis of the journal's content, the contribution that the Journal of Product and Brand Management has made in the development of brand management knowledge over the past 25 years is highlighted. Eight major shifts in brand management research and thought, and three overarching difficulties and challenges, are identified.

Research limitations/implications- By solely focusing on the contributions published in the journal, by no means this review is exhaustive and includes all the contributions to the discipline. Its contribution is limited to the analysis of the work, and the evolution of brand management thinking, recorded in the Journal of Product and Brand Management.

Originality/value- The paper highlights the evolution of brand management thought and presents imperatives and challenges to guide future research in brand management.

Keywords: Brand management, brand relationships, brand engagement, brand experience, brand communities, brand equity, brand hate, brand as a person

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Introduction

Since its inception, the Journal of Product and Brand Management (JPBM) has featured papers that advance the theoretical and managerial knowledge in the areas of product management and brand management. During the last 25 years branding has drastically evolved—becoming global, strategic, and interdisciplinary—in response to the ever changing market, environmental, and technological challenges organizations face when managing their brands and brand reputations. As a result, the JPBM has developed into an international and interdisciplinary journal.

In its early years, the papers published in the journal mostly focused on product decisions, new product development in different types of companies (Hanna *et al.*, 1995), general product advice (Valentin, 1993; 1994), support to specific product questions including concept development, product testing (Duke, 1994), and management of the interfaces (Warren, 1992), and managing product development teams (Pitta *et al.*, 1996). The role of the product managers (Lysonski *et al.*, 1995; Wood and Tandon, 1994) and the product management system was also another popular theme (Katsanis and Pitta, 1995). A lot of the early work presented in the journal that focused on product related decisions remains relevant, and papers on product management related issues will always have a place in the journal.

Although in some of the early work products and brands were approached in a similar manner (i.e. Alreck, 1994), as time passed the proportion of papers published in the journal from the area of brand management increased. Furthermore, brand management progressively became seen as a distinct field. During the last 25 years a lot of new ideas have been introduced in the area of brand management dramatically changing the field. These changes

were driven by factors such as changes in the way that consumers think about, approach, and consume brands, technological changes, and an increased need for brand accountability. Over time, the field of brand management became increasingly important as brands were recognized as key drivers for business success.

The Journal of Product and Brand Management has significantly contributed to the development of brand management knowledge. This piece outlines the evolution of brand management research over the last 25 years, by reporting the contribution of the journal to the advancement of brand management thinking. In particular, it reports changes in the way to approach branding and the current challenges the discipline faces both in terms of research and of managing brands. It concludes by suggesting future research avenues that will hopefully further enrich brand management knowledge and result in strategies relevant to practice.

The evolution of brand management over the last 25 years

From brands as transactional tools managed from within companies to brands as engagement entities co-created with others

As a reflection of brands being considered a tactical tool that facilitated selling products, a lot of the early research on brand management examines the role of the management team in the development of brand meaning and the management of the brand (Boatwright *et al.*, 2009), the performance of the brand through the performance of its management team (Wood and Tandon, 1994), and the team supporting the brand (Panigyrakis and Veloutsou, 1999); while limited research focuses on the internal brand management processes (Dunes and Pras, 2013). Today, however, as a reflection of brands being strategic assets that generate value for multiple actors, it is widely acknowledged that other stakeholders such as consumers (Cova and Paraque, 2016; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016),

employees working in various positions and not direct members of the brand management team (Indounas and Arvaniti, 2015; Judson *et al.*, 2006; Kaufmann *et al.*, Loureiro and Manarioti, 2016), and other brands associated with the focal brand (Papadimitriou *et al.*, 2008; Thomas, 2014; 2015)—amongst many others stakeholders who might see the brand differently from one another (Pino *et al.*, 2015)—co-create a brand. What these stakeholders say, believe, and express impacts the market's perception and evaluation of a brand; even expressions that some might feel have limited relevance, such as the political views of managers (Leak *et al.*, 2015).

While some research suggests that brand management teams still have most of the control and a strong influence in the development and management of brand meaning (Urde, 2016), other research argues that the branding process has been transformed and the control of brand meaning has been mostly surrendered as brands are co-created with agents that do not work in the company (Cova and Paraque, 2016). This holds true for multiple industries (Kristal *et al.*, 2016) and, in some occasions, for the development of brand extensions (Boon *et al.*, 2016) or new products by brand communities (Pitta and Fowler, 2005). Other research argues that even the stories that build brand meaning have transitioned from being developed by the companies—storytelling—to being developed by the consumers—storygiving (Hughes *et al.*, 2016).

The challenges of having highly engaged consumers have been well researched and documented (Roberts and Alpert, 2010). Although different relational models that may generate different types of consumer engagement with brands have been suggested (Kaltcheva *et al.*, 2014), consumers engage with brands via various dimensions: cognition—in particular attention and absorption; affect—in particular enjoyment and enthusiasm; and behavior—in particular learning, endorsing, and sharing (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). There is also evidence that consumers develop specific mental connections (Baxter *et al.*, 2015) and

positive brand relationships with brands from a very young age (Rodhain and Aurier, 2016), sometimes initiated within a family via the interactions with other family members (Iyer *et al.*, 2016). Consumers develop relationships with brands of various product categories in similar ways (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014) and proactively behave in ways to support and protect the reputation of a brand (Taute and Sierra, 2014) given their investment in building a brand relationship (Hess *et al.*, 2011). Research has also identified the factors that influence the duration of a brand relationship (Huber *et al.*, 2015), the level of engagement (Franzak *et al.*, 2014), and the factors that will enact active engagement (Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014).

Given the role of multiple internal and external stakeholders in the development of brand meanings, securing that there is consistency amongst the views of all of them is of crucial importance for any organization (Biedenbach and Manzhynski, 2016; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016). Thus the imperative of developing consistency throughout all brand touchpoints has now become developing consistency throughout all brand touchpoints and for all stakeholders, understanding that the flow of brand meaning is multidirectional.

From interacting with brands as individuals to interacting with other consumers and with brands collectively

To satisfy various personal and social needs (Palazon *et al.*, 2015; Ruane and Wallace, 2015; Simon *et al.*, 2016), or to express their feelings towards a brand (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016) consumers decide to belong to brand related groups. Consumers develop bonds, a sense of community, and a social structure with other people who consume a same brand (Taute and Sierra, 2014). Although brand related consumer groups, or brand communities, have existed for a long time, the wide use of the internet and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest facilitate the process of consumers finding likeminded individuals that support the brands they like (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Simon *et al.*,

2016; Tafesse, 2016). In sum, research shows that, individually or collectively, consumers are using brands to define their individual and social selves.

The trend of joining brand related groups seems to be increasing, as evidence of the existence of brand communities has been heavily researched in various contexts and industries: automobile (Hutter *et al.*, 2013; Tafesse, 2016), clothing (Wallace *et al.*, 2014), cosmetics (Tafesse, 2016), fashion (Wallace *et al.*, 2014), food (Cova and Paraque, 2016; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), higher education (Chauhan and Pillai, 2013), retail (Wallace *et al.*, 2014), and spirits and beverages (Tafesse, 2016; Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Research also highlights the existence of internal brand communities, namely of employees, and their importance in supporting and developing the delivery of a brand identity (Devasagayam *et al.*, 2010). Thus the imperative of delivering value to an individual consumer has now become delivering value that is right for both individuals, brand groups, and individuals in their brand group settings, understanding that value creation is multidirectional.

From consuming brands to experiencing brands

As consumers shifted from using brands as identifiers to expecting brand experiences, research followed path (O’Cass and Grace, 2004). A brand experience originates from the multiple interactions a consumer has with a brand, including the perception of the brand name, the billing, order, and application forms, mass media impressions, point of sales material and assistance, recommendations from acquaintances and salespeople, the emotional reaction to events, and the connectedness of the brand stories (Khan and Rahman, 2016). The expectation of brands becoming experience providers highlights the importance of creating consistency throughout all touchpoints and for all stakeholders.

Today consumers crave both hedonic and functional brand experiences (Merrilees, 2016). Research uses two paradigms to approach the phenomena: consumption experience

and brand experience (Mishra *et al.*, 2014). Brand experience is primarily classified as sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual (Trudeau and Shobeiri, 2016) and has perceptual epistemic and embodied dimensions (Tafesse, 2016) in terms of usability (functional value), social value, and pleasure in use (hedonic value) (Mishra *et al.*, 2014). Research has also identified that consumers are subjected to some interactive experiences, primarily during brand co-creation, but that the process development and the nature of the experience itself varies depending on the type of consumed product or service and the consumption context (Merrilees, 2016).

Ultimately, the manners that consumers experience brands influence the way that they relate and react to them (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016), as well as the way that they process any brand related information (Mooy and Robben, 2002). Technology has played an important role in how consumers experience brands, as research in an internet and social media context has proven (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). Thus the imperative of developing an individualized brand experience has now become developing an interactive, individualized but yet communal, brand experience throughout all brand touchpoints for all stakeholders, understanding that not all stakeholders are actively involved.

From measuring the strength of the brand to developing complex brand equity systems

Brands are one of the most valuable organizational intangible assets (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2001) and this value is commonly measured through the concept of brand equity. Brand equity is the added value a brand provides a product or service compared to the value of a similar unbranded product or service. The concept of brand equity has been thoroughly studied and examined over the last 40 years from multiple perspectives and approaches (Davicik *et al.*, 2015). New ways of examining the concept are constantly introduced.

The main research focus on brand strength or value over the years has been from a consumer perspective. The main construct used to measure the strength or value of a brand in consumers' minds has been consumer based brand equity (Davicik *et al.*, 2015). Consumer based brand equity has been analyzed under multiple market and environmental circumstances, as when a brand's reality changes, such as in the case of brand name change (Delassus and Descotes, 2012). Although a lot of research is still based on conceptualizations that have been used for a long time to measure consumer based brand equity—such as Aaker's four dimensional model that suggests that consumer based brand equity is comprised of awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Jaikumar and Sahay, 2015; Myers, 2003; Pappu and Quester, 2006; 2008; Su and Tong, 2015; Tong and Hawley, 2009)—for long research has also highlighted the need to improve its measurement (Buil *et al.*, 2008; Mackay, 2001; Nguyen *et al.*, 2015; Pappu *et al.*, 2005; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2013). Some research suggests that the measurement of brand equity might be context specific (Christodoulides and de Chernatony, 2004). Other research discusses the dimensions of consumer based brand equity and argues that brand strength measurement evolves over time (Veloutsou *et al.*, 2013). Recent research has begun to use alternative conceptualizations to measure the construct (Nguyen *et al.*, 2015).

Another research focus on brand strength or value over the years has been from a financial perspective. The financial value of the brand and the financial performance of the company have often been conceptualized as financial based brand equity (Davicik *et al.*, 2015). Research often uses publicly available data to assess the financial strength of brands (Isberg and Pitta, 2013; Wang, 2010). Although historically conceptualized as two separate constructs or perspectives, research has focused on the links between consumer and financial based brand equity. Since organizations are primarily concerned with the real tangible value that their companies will get from their brands, rather than the intangible strength in the

minds of consumers, research has tested the link between the financial and consumer based brand equity constructs (Nguyen *et al.*, 2015) attempting to bridge this gap.

New concepts have also been introduced to measure the strength of brands for other stakeholders and various focal entities. In terms of the strength of a brand in the minds of other stakeholders, recent research examines employee based brand equity (Poulis and Wisker, 2016). In terms of the strength of a brand for other focal entities, research examines store equity (Gil-Saura *et al.*, 2016) and the effect of global nation product equity on cultural products available in places other than their country of origin (Lim *et al.*, 2015; Orth *et al.*, 2005). Most of the existing research examines brand equity as the past or historical strength of a brand, but recent research suggests that it is necessary to move forward and evolve our thinking, as the concept has, to a more forward looking approach—based on the estimation of future income flows—such as market brand equity (Schultz, 2016). Thus the imperative of estimating the strength or value of a brand from a single perspective with a static or snapshot approach has now become estimating dynamic and forward-looking brand equity systems.

From focusing on positive brand outcomes to managing negative brand outcomes

Most research on branding focuses on the development of positive customer feelings and company or brand outcomes. It is common to find research that supports positive brand relationships (Giovanis, 2016; Trudeau and Shobeiri, 2016)—such as brand romance (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011), brand love (Huber *et al.*, 2015; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), brand advocacy (Wallace *et al.*, 2014), brand evangelism (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013)—and positive brand outcomes—such as trust (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Ha, 2004; Hegner and Jevons, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2015) and brand loyalty (Ferreira and Coelho, 2015; Lu and Xu,

2015)—to the extent that consumers often purchase second hand branded products in search of positive reinforcement (Turunen and Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2015).

Although past research explores the negative perception of products (Widrick and Fram, 1992), research on brand negativity, or a negative brand outcome, is limited. Recently this research trend began to change. Studies have analyzed the importance of information, feelings, and experiences that lead to negative outcomes, such as information overload (Hutter *et al.*, 2013), information on crisis situations (Jeon and Baeck, 2016), product recalls (Souiden and Pons, 2009), negative consumer reviews (Ullrich and Brunner, 2015), and guilt (Jeong and Koo, 2015). Recent research also investigates how negative brand feelings rival positive brand feelings (Marticotte *et al.*, 2016) and how brand engagement may be positively or negatively valenced (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014). The assessment that consumers have about an offer over time influences the effect of a negative stimulus about a brand (Ullrich and Brunner, 2015).

The increase of research attention on negatively valenced feelings and behaviors highlights the importance of examining the nature and role of this phenomenon. Recently introduced constructs include different forms of brand hate (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016) and brand avoidance with its dimensions and categories (Rindell *et al.*, 2014). The study of negative brand phenomena is in its infancy and needs further investigation. Future research should examine its antecedents, outcomes, the manner it develops over time, and ways that it should be managed to benefit brands (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016). Thus the imperative of exploring ways to increase positive brand outcomes is now complemented by exploring ways to manage negative brand outcomes, understanding that these happen in real time and can be quickly communicated.

From goods and services brands to brands of all different natures

As mentioned in the first section of this manuscript, the original focus of brands being a tool to better sell products and services has evolved. Today, almost everything is branded—products, services, places, people, animals, events, organizations, ideas, etc. Research has responded accordingly examining countries, regions, and cities as brands (Rojas-Méndez, 2013), tourist destination brands (Balmer and Chen, 2016; Pino *et al.*, 2015; Rojas-Méndez *et al.*, 2015), places to invest as brands (Papadopoulos *et al.*, 2016), places to work as brands (Pino *et al.*, 2015), places to live in as brands (Hakala *et al.*, 2015; Kemp *et al.*, 2012; Pino *et al.*, 2015), the contribution of the place of origin to a brand (Brodie and Benson-Rea, 2016; Lu and Xu, 2015; Yousaf and Li, 2015), and the influence of the place of production on brand evaluation (Ar and Kara, 2014).

Research has also examined people as brands, including celebrities or politicians in their own right (Bigi *et al.*, 2016; Hsu and McDonald, 2002; Kowalczyk and Pounders, 2016) or in a supportive role as brand endorsers (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2015; Jaikumar and Sahay, 2015; Till, 1998). Other contexts in which brands have been examined include employers as brands that attract employees (Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013), stores as brands (Gil-Saura *et al.*, 2016) and sports teams as brands (Kwak *et al.*, 2015).

In addition, research has examined brands in contexts that have gained importance given their market growth in the past 25 years. Studies have focused on rarity as a key characteristic of luxury brands (Kapferer and Valette-Florence, 2016; Veg-Sala and Roux, 2014), and brands offered by retailers—own label brands (Santos *et al.*, 2016; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2004), store brands (Baltas, 1997), or private label products that carry a retailers' brand (do Vale and Matos, 2015; Halstead and Ward, 1995; Richardson *et al.*, 1996). Thus the imperative of viewing brands as a selling tool for products and services is now viewing everything and everyone as a potential brand, understanding that many powerful brands have grown organically without a traditional business organization behind it.

From using traditional data collection and data analysis methods to introducing new methodological approaches

A lot of the early research in brand management simply reported descriptive statistics. Over the years, data collection and analysis methods constantly advanced. Methods that today are seen as the norm, such as Structural Equation Modeling and Experimental Design, were introduced into branding research during the last 25 years.

This trend has continued in recent years, and studies using novel data collection methods such as functional magnetic resonance imaging fMRI (Al-Kwafi, 2016; Santos *et al.*, 2016), electroencephalography (Boshoff, 2016), and netnography (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014) have been published. The overall goal of introducing new research methods will always be to capture reality in the most accurate way, improve our understanding of why consumers and companies act the way they do, and provide better suggestions to managers and policy makers on how to navigate in an ever changing market reality.

From focusing on tangible brand characteristics to appreciating human-like brand characteristics

Much research and discussion has examined the human-like characteristics of a brand since the introduction of the brand personality concept to the literature. Brands are seen as having human characteristics including personality (Arora and Stone, 2009; Freling and Forbes, 2005; Lin, 2010) and gender (Azar, 2013; 2015). How a brand is viewed as a person appears to be a one of the key positioning attributes today. The decoding of the characteristics of a brand as a person and the perceived brand personality (Lin, 2010; Maehle and Shneor, 2010) as well as the level of congruence between a consumer's personality and the perceived personality of a brand (Lin, 2010) influence consumer purchase decisions. Research has also

found that perceived brand personality is considered by potential employees when considering working for a company, as well as it affects the performance of current employees (Gammoh *et al.*, 2014). In sum, the imperative of viewing brands as static and lifeless product or service identifiers and descriptors is now viewing brands as dynamic experiential entities full of life, to which consumers can talk to, connect with, and with whom they can build long lasting relationships.

Difficulties and challenges for brands

Increased expected accountability and loss of control

With change and evolution, it is only natural that new difficulties and challenges emerge. For example, it is not uncommon for successful brands to have to compete with counterfeit products that look similar to the genuine offer (Baghi *et al.*, 2016; Bian and Moutinho, 2011; Le Roux *et al.*, 2016) or to have to compete with products imported via unauthorized channels, commonly called gray goods (Chen, 2007). Likely, with co-creation organizations need to cope with the challenge of losing total control of the brand meaning (Cova and Paraque, 2016; Hughes *et al.*, 2016; Kristal *et al.*, 2016; Saleem and Iglesias, 2016; Urde, 2016). It can only be expected that as the environmental and technological characteristics of the market change, brand managers and academics will keep identifying and learning how to cope with arising difficulties and challenges.

Technology, brands, and speed of change

One of the key changes of modern society is the level of engagement with, and speed of change of, technology. During the last 25 years the everyday activities of most consumers has been heavily influenced by technology; trend that is not likely to change. Probably one of the most drastic changes relates to how people go on with their daily lives engaged to social

media. Consumers spend a lot of their working and personal time in various social media platforms and interact online with other consumers of a brand (Simon *et al.*, 2016; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). Specific technologies allow individuals to express themselves in different manners using the functions they offer (Tafesse, 2016). Brand use today often transitions from the real to the virtual world and vice versa (Ramanathan and Purani, 2014). Consumers have grown to expect a seamless experience of a brand and its extensions in both contexts, forcing managers to learn how to support the brands and secure their success in this new reality. The imperative of brands adapting and adopting new technologies to keep up with market change is now that brands are technological in order to provide a seamless and real time brand experience throughout all real and virtual brand touchpoints.

The increasingly global nature of markets

As markets have become more global, brands are diffused across borders and cultures (Frank and Watchravesringkan, 2016). Companies are therefore using less differentiated methods to approach countries that in the past were seen as very dissimilar, while global market segments are being identified and targeted, since customers located in different parts of the planet behave in a similar manner (Pitta and Franzak, 2008). Companies have to respond to this challenge by assessing the suitability of their practices and choices, such as the choice of brand names or of the use of the appropriate marketing mechanisms to develop brand equity.

Given the increasingly global nature of the markets, recent research has focused on the implications of using foreign brand names by Chinese companies in the USA (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2015) and foreign-name brands in the USA and China (Villar *et al.* 2012). The appropriateness of choosing local versus global brands is a current branding concern (Lee *et al.*, 2008), as exposure to global mass media has been found to influence the way that global

brands are perceived (Frank and Watchravesringkan, 2016). Likewise, the country of production has also become a big concern for global players and brands (Ar and Kara, 2014).

Given the increased global environment in which brands compete, there is a need to understand both the similarities and differences in brand perceptions in many country contexts (Godey *et al.*, 2013). It is thus not surprising that quite a lot of the research reports findings from data collected from managers or consumers who are based in multiple countries using both online (i.e. Hegner and Jevons, 2016; Dessart *et al.*, 2015) and traditional (i.e. Buil *et al.*, 2008; Li *et al.*, 2015; Veloutsou *et al.*, 2013) data collection methods. The imperative of global brands adapting their brand stories to local markets is now that global brands must identify consumer similarities across markets to develop a unified brand story that resonates across markets, understanding that global consumers, regardless of their location, are ever more alike.

The way forward

As brand managers and academics adapt to evolving brand realities, research will focus on new technological, environmental, and global challenges. Such as during the last 25 years, the Journal of Product and Brand Management aspires to be in the forefront of these academic conversations providing an outlet for innovative research. In the previous sections, a series of imperatives and challenges have been outlined in hope of motivating future research. Moving forward, the journal invites research that addresses these and other brand changing phenomena:

- how brands develop consistency throughout all brand touchpoints and for all stakeholders considering that the flow of brand meaning is multidirectional

- how brands deliver value that is right for both individuals, brand groups, and individuals in their brand group settings, considering that value creation is multidirectional
- how brands develop an interactive, individualized but yet communal, brand experience throughout all brand touchpoints for all stakeholders, considering that not all stakeholders are actively involved
- how brands estimate dynamic and forward-looking brand equity systems
- how brands manage negative brand outcomes considering that these happen in real time and can be quickly communicated
- how everything and everyone is a potential brand, considering that many powerful brands have grown organically without a traditional business organization behind it
- how new research methods capture reality in a more accurate way to improve our understanding of why consumers and companies act the way they do and provide better suggestions to managers and policy makers on how to navigate in an ever changing market reality
- how brands as are becoming dynamic experiential entities full of life, to which consumers can talk to, connect with, and with whom they can build long lasting relationships
- how brands integrate technology in order to provide a seamless and real time brand experience throughout all real and virtual brand touchpoints
- how global brands identify consumer similarities across markets to develop a unified brand story that resonates across markets, considering that global consumers, regardless of their location, are ever more alike

Given the critical role of brands for business success, the future of branding and brand management is promising and exciting. The Journal of Product and Brand Management is

looking forward to receiving leading research during the next 25 years and beyond to continue contributing to the evolution of brand management thought and practice.

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