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Branding in B2B markets: insights from the service-dominant logic of marketing

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore how the service-dominant (S-D) logic of marketing proposed by Vargo and Lusch impacts on business-to-business branding concepts and practice.

Design/methodology/approach – Vargo and Lusch argue that service interaction comes from goods-in-use as well as from interactions between a buyer and a supplier. Their key concepts are examined and the branding literature critically compared.

Findings – Goods become service appliances. Buyer judgments about the value-in-use of goods extends the time-logic of marketing. The exchange concept is no longer transaction bound. Service-ability (the capability to serve) becomes the essence of a firm's value propositions. Service experience becomes paramount in developing and sustaining the life of a brand.

Research limitations/implications – S-D logic highlights the need for rigour and clarity in the use of the term "brand". It also opens up for consideration a variety of previously unexplored contact points in the customer service cycle, expanded to include customer assessments of value-in-use.

Practical implications – S-D logic encourages extending brand strategies into a wider variety of communicative interaction modes.

Originality/value – Some of the issues raised are not new but currently compete for attention in the shadow of media-dominant approaches to branding.

Keywords Brand image, Value added, Value-in-use pricing, Marketing, Knowledge management, Relationship marketing

Paper type Conceptual paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this issue.

Introduction

The service-dominant (S-D) logic of marketing proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004a) emphasises that customers make critical value assessments when goods are in use, based on their service-ability. Put another way, goods become service appliances and customers judge the worth of the service they experience from goods as *value-in-use*. Thus "service" according to S-D logic includes the service experience derived from interacting with goods in use as well as from service interactions with a supplier. So, by extending the temporal dimension of marketing to cover the service experiences derived from goods, and by aligning exchange thinking around value-in-use, the concept of marketing becomes service-dominant, and exchange is no longer transaction-bound. Every value proposition is an offer of service. Every business becomes a service business.

This brief introduction shows that the S-D logic of marketing has both radical components and also familiar associations for business-to-business (B2B) marketers. "Service interaction" is broader in concept and extended in time. It involves the reciprocal application of resources,

knowledge and competencies for the benefit of another party. The emphasis in S-D logic on value-in-use is potentially paradigm challenging but the foundational principle of *interaction* resonates well with much of contemporary marketing thought in services marketing, relationship marketing and B2B marketing.

Understanding what S-D logic means in particular for brands and branding in a B2B context is the intent of this article. We start with a commentary on the S-D logic thesis. Next, we offer a critical examination of current thinking on brand marks and brand meanings. Then, we examine the contribution of S-D logic to understanding B2B branding. From this, the role of marketing communication in all its forms becomes clear as a source of brand meanings. Finally, we draw some conclusions that we believe have important implications for practitioners.

Commentary on S-D logic

The catalyst for the current interest in an S-D logic for marketing was the publication of an award-winning article by Vargo and Lusch (2004a) entitled "Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing". In the same year, another article by Vargo and Lusch (2004b) appeared, directly challenging the validity of the characteristic differentiators between services and goods (intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability), which had been established more than 20 years earlier (see Fisk *et al.*, 1993). In 2005, the University of Otago in New Zealand invited a number of leading international academics to The Otago Forum[1] to debate the issues. A selection of papers from the Forum, together with commentaries, later appeared as a special issue of *Marketing Theory* (Aitken *et al.*, 2006). Also, Lusch and Vargo (2006a) published an editorial selection of articles by

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leading scholars early in 2006. The *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* will publish a special issue on S-D logic in 2007.

The idea behind the Vargo and Lusch thesis is simple, but the effects are far reaching: S-D logic asserts that *service* is what customers are hoping to buy, anywhere, any time. Of course, service interaction in business markets is not new but under S-D logic, goods purchased become *service appliances*. In other words, a supplementary form of service experience comes from goods, as buyers interact with those goods. If goods become valuable to customers, as mechanisms for service, it follows that the value of the experience derived from goods is determined at time of use by customers, as value-in-use[2]. This applies equally in an industrial setting as goods (resources) become part of a customer's own value creating inputs, whether in manufacture, assembly or distribution.

Service activity, of course, comprises a greater proportion of GNP than goods in many countries, but this is not the “service-dominant” meaning of Vargo and Lusch. Instead, they seek to show that service is the undeniable core of every marketing interaction. This is not a mainstream marketing way of thinking but it has been emphasised by others, for example, in services marketing by Grönroos (1990), in relationship marketing by Christopher *et al.* (1991), and – which may surprise some – in an early text by Kotler (1976). However, Vargo and Lusch (2004a) extend their service-centricity further. The essential points in summary are these:

- S-D logic emphasises that customers are the arbiters of value in service interaction, either directly in interaction with suppliers or through service interaction derived from goods.
- S-D logic also emphasises the potential for co-creation of value and sharing of *competencies* and other *knowledge resources* between customers, suppliers and other market actors. Again, value is derived from the service experience of the particular actors in interaction.
- S-D logic supports the notion of *relationship development*, through which all kinds of communicative interaction and co-created value might emerge over time. This forces marketing innovation to the fore, in the sharing of new ideas and knowledge *within* the firm, and *between* the firm and its customers and suppliers.
- S-D logic proposes that what a supplier firm essentially does in its marketing activity is offer *value propositions* (promises) and marshal resources together for customers. This puts a new perspective on selling activity, marketing communication and brand management, as will be discussed later.
- S-D logic requires a managerial focus on the customer interaction processes, and attention to monitoring the productivity and value potential of the continuous activity flows. Rather than firms marketing *to* customers they market *with* customers (an interaction process). The bottom line is that *marketing exchange* becomes a set of interactive episodes across time and is no longer transaction-bound.

Overall, S-D logic has the potential to shift strategic marketing attention away from a point-of-sale selling focus to a service relationship focus, and in so doing, to rearrange marketers' notions of efficient resource allocations. Put another way, to reveal the challenging aspect of this agenda,

the *time logic* of marketing exchange becomes open-ended, from pre-sale service interaction to post-sale value-in-use, with the prospect of continuing, as relationships evolve (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006).

Until quite recently, *exchange* in a marketing context was synonymous with a market transaction. Under such logic, derived from mainstream goods logic and with origins in the neo-classical economic paradigm, any “value added” for customers is also a cost to the firm. This linear logic has been under constant challenge in B2B marketing and services marketing domains due largely to the influence of relational perspectives entering the literature over the last 20 years (see for example, Anderson and Narus, 1990; Axelsson and Easton, 1992; Berry, 1995; Christopher *et al.*, 1991; Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Grönroos, 1990; Gummesson, 1987; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995).

Lusch and Vargo (2006b) have recently outlined a lexicon of terms for the S-D logic which indicates the kind of cognitive shift involved in rethinking the scope of marketing action (see Table I). This is clearly a provisional list that invites further work. For example, under S-D logic, customers engage in buying “service solutions” to solve problems rather than buying product benefits or features. But what if there are no problems? Why should marketing innovation be restricted to problem solving? Also, “promotion” is a limited form of marketing communication. Dialogue is by far a superior way of learning together. Both would seem to have their place as part of a more interactive concept of integrated marketing communications (Varey and Ballantyne, 2005).

What is absolutely clear under S-D logic is that any value judgment at point of purchase by a customer is necessarily provisional. Thus, the capability to perform and the reliability of the firm become critical aspects of the firm's value propositions. With the function of goods seen as service appliances, value-in-use will confirm or disconfirm these provisional judgments. There are important implications for branding here. We believe it works this way: The brand (as a tangible mark) serves to signify the nature of the firm's promises and implicit obligations, and customers and other stakeholders project these or any other values they see fit back into the brand (as a socially constructed value system). This “brand morphing” is examined in the next section.

Marks and meanings critically examined

Coverage of branding issues in the B2B literature has been sparse (Michell *et al.*, 2001). A natural enough tendency has been to associate branding with fast moving consumer goods and so branding in this domain dominates the research picture. However, there are notable exceptions, for example Baldauf *et al.* (2003), Bendixen *et al.* (2003) and Mudambi *et al.* (1997). Yet, while brands are one of the most researched topics in the marketing literature, ambiguity rather than clarity of understanding has been the outcome.

Ambiguity and complexity begin with the almost universal habit of using the single word “brand” in at least three different marketing contexts. First, when “brand” means a name or identifier, and second, when “brand” means a product and its characteristics. Then there is a third and more obtuse way of using “brand”, and that is as a symbolic framing device for utilitarian and non-utilitarian values that customers and others may see as attributes belonging to the brand, as if these values were embedded characteristics of the

Table I What's happening to marketing concepts?

Goods-dominant logic concepts	Transitional concepts	Service-dominant logic concepts
Goods	Services	Service
Products	Offerings	Experiences
Feature/attribute	Benefit	Solution
Value-added	Co-production	Co-creation of value
Profit maximization	Financial engineering	Financial feedback/learning
Price	Value delivery	Value proposition
Equilibrium systems	Dynamic systems	Complex adaptive systems
Supply chain	Value chain	Value-creation network/constellation
Promotion	Integrated marketing communications (IMC)	Dialogue
To market	Market to	Market with
Product orientation	Market orientation	Service orientation

Source: Lusch and Vargo (2006b)

product (see, for example, the seminal paper by Levy, 1959; also Lindlof, 1988; Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård, 2004).

This three-mirrored view of brands, we hope, is more revealing as an explanation than that offered by the American Marketing Association (AMA), who state that:

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler, 2000, p. 404).

Variants of this AMA definition occur in all major introductory marketing texts and also in more specialist treatments of brands and branding (see, for example, Aaker, 1991, 2004; Wilson *et al.*, 1995).

Brands at a fundamental level certainly are marks or symbols, the marketing purpose of which is to *identify* and to *differentiate* one product from another, or one firm from another. A brand, however, is much more than its brand-mark. Any firm hopes that its stakeholders and target markets, both customers and future prospects, will find its brand mark to be memorable and associated with positive values about the product or the company. However, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) comment bleakly that, within the traditional branding model, the brand is a tactic used to drive short-term results. Even more problematically, many firms assume that the meanings associated with the brand mark are something they uniquely own and control. We take the contrary view that says suppliers and their customers and other stakeholders *co-create* brand meanings, that is to say, brand meanings are socially constructed and in the public domain. It follows that diverse interactions, discussions and opinions generate and regenerate any firm-based notions of brand value.

Some authors make a distinction between the firm's brand identity and its brand image (see, for example, De Chernatony, 1999). We find the identity/image distinction helpful in describing some aspects of brand thinking. The distinction works this way: a firm's *brand identity* is an idealised set of firm-generated propositions communicated to customers and other parties by whatever communicative means available. This notion of brand identity is by no means automatically accepted by target audiences because the collective thoughts and feelings that individuals and industry groups hold at any time about the brand-mark meanings are ultimately of their own determination. Hence, we come to *brand image* as representative of perceptions within the market place, and beyond.

Any brand image in our view is essentially *socially constructed* (see Berger and Luckman, 1967; Gergen, 1994; Hackley, 1998). This means that brand image is not just the sum of individual perceptions but a shared reality, dynamically constructed through social interaction. If this perspective is accepted, the meanings attached to a particular brand are located in the minds of its customers, and the wider community of opinion makers and stakeholders. It will likely differ from the hoped-for perspective of the marketer or brand manager. Also of note, the usage of the term "brand" to cover multiple meanings is a recipe for ongoing confusion and manipulation. In a related way, Vargy and Ballantyne (2005) have argued that advertising as the dominant form of marketing communication declares its motives but often conceals its methods. In the traditional logic of branding the same applies, but here methods concealment potentially extends to those who use them, a case of *branding myopia*.

So far, we hope to have shown that the logic of branding inherited from mainstream (consumer) markets is ambiguous at least, and we have tracked the source of confusion to the semantics of the term "brand" itself, and to the current paradigmatic tension over where the brand "resides", i.e. either in the strategic plans of the marketer or in the heads of the users and indeed other stakeholders.

We now explore what the S-D logic of marketing means for brands and branding, especially in a B2B context.

Branding logic seen from the perspective of S-D logic

The analysis that follows draws from the fundamentals of the Vargo and Lusch (2004a) thesis. However, an elaboration of branding strategy is not specifically part of their thesis, a point also made by Brodie *et al.* (2006).

S-D logic has the useful potential to shift strategic marketing attention away from a point-of-sale selling focus to a service and relationship development focus, and in our view, important implications follow for branding strategy. Under S-D logic, any brand value judgments at point of purchase by customers are provisional, awaiting testing in action. Service-ability (as the service capability derived from goods) thus becomes a critical risk factor in fulfilment of the firm's value proposition. Put another way, brand value is confirmed or disconfirmed in-use, at time of use, as

customers confirm or disconfirm the value proposition. As has been discussed, the *time logic* of marketing exchange under S-D logic is open-ended. The open-ended nature of brand relationships means that individual perceptions of brand (the meanings that become associated with a brand mark) are part of a brand's wider stakeholder associations, whether based on direct first-hand experience (value-in-use), or through indirect experience shared or circulated in communicative interaction, media-based or otherwise.

What are the specific B2B brand management implications of this S-D logic?

A brand-mark is a relational asset whose value to the firm is contingent on past, present and future interactions with various firm stakeholders

A firm rightly controls its brand-marks, which are the tangible evidence of its brands. They also control the trademarks and copyrights that support the brands. Brands have histories and hopefully futures. However, marketers cannot naively assume that they have sufficient brand power or market dominance to control the *meanings* ascribed to their brands by others.

Many trade journal commentaries on brands and branding obfuscate the identity and image meanings associated with a brand mark. Difficulties arise when marketing managers, without reference to product defects that will impinge on customer value-in-use experiences or firm-to-firm interdependencies, seek to develop marketing communication programs to improve "brand image". Such split-task thinking can lead to a branding logic that pays more attention to communicating the value proposition than product efficacy (improving product service-ability). Both, of course, are aspects of customer relationship development.

A brand-mark is an aid to memory

The brand-mark offers communicable evidence of the product and past value-in-use experiences, and is an index for customers to cognitively file such brand meanings, especially the customer's inferred reputation of the "brand" (in all its variety of meanings). For example, Keller's (1993, 2003) Customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model could be adapted for use in a B2B environment. Defining CBBE as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer responses to the marketing of that brand", he states that the model is based on the belief that "the power of a brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand as a result of their experiences over time" (Keller, 2003, p. 59).

There is a contrary point of view that says a brand-mark is not essential to create brand meaning. For example, a "no-name" brand is sometimes successful where the strategy is to cultivate a trendy anonymity within a word-of-mouth generated community of users (Ballantyne, 2004a, p. 423). Nevertheless, the more common position is that brand-marks serve to *represent* (or stand in for) the product or firm.

Only by coupling the brand-mark and product (or firm) reputation together is it appropriate to talk of brand meaning (the brand as a symbolic framework for indexing meanings)

It may seem trivial to make this point but it takes social interaction and product use together to sustain brand meanings, unless it is argued (as many do) that the dominant source of brand meaning is that projected by the

firm in marketing communication (brand identity) and accepted by target audiences (brand image). With this latter perspective, the responsibility for the brand is assumed to reside totally with the marketing department (Davis, 2002), so the focus becomes more tactical and reactive than strategic and visionary (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). This is a difficult position to sustain in S-D logic terms as it ignores the value-in-use derived from a product by a customer over time, and also the word-of mouth communicative effects generated from within brand communities (see, for example, Andersen, 2005; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In our view, developing brand image solely by traditional media message-making in a B2B context (indeed in any context) is like trying to capture someone's attention by clapping with one hand.

Brand strategies can impact positively or negatively on the strategic positioning of firms within business networks of relationships

The concept of *network positioning* (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) is not to be confused with *brand positioning*. The point here is that many brand strategies develop with the customer specifically in mind, and yet the branding implications extend to resellers and other stakeholders. The latter group includes employees who must fulfil the brand promises made to customers as *value propositions* in S-D logic terms, and resellers who *co-create value* with their customers from a diversity of upstream sources and resources. Managing often conflicting stakeholder requirements requires particular coordination skills and a developed cognitive framework to assist in the task (Payne *et al.*, 2005).

De Chernatony (1999) has suggested that employees are major stakeholders in brand building efforts. He suggests that the brand should represent the vision and culture of the firm, and this necessarily involves employees and staff in shaping and representing a firm's values. Corporate branding has undergone similar shifts in emphasis to encompass employees as stakeholders in recent years (Hatch and Schultz, 2003).

Branding is essentially a form of communicative interaction

An important question for firms is: at what point does the awareness of a brand and its assumed meaning actually begin? The formulation of brand perceptions and the non-specific nature of their timing fit closely with the S-D logic emphasis on value and its creation, past, present and future. There is room for an expansion of media-driven branding where brand-marks serve to *represent* the firm's product benefits and projected values, necessarily modified by the efficacy of the product and its value-in-use, and opinion generated by word-of-mouth in the target markets and in the business community at large.

A useful framework for re-focussing corporate branding that fits with S-D logic is presented by Hatch and Schultz (2003). In this structure, three elements are central:

- 1 strategic vision;
- 2 organisational culture; and
- 3 corporate image.

However, if the gap between the projected image and the reality of the customer experience widens, customers smell hypocrisy. Reputation matters.

The limits of advertising as a source of brand meaning

Brand advertising is a dominant and favourite communication medium for making branding messages in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industries. However, to the extent that brand advertising promises are persuasive, studies of product diffusion and communication show that people are more inclined to act on mass-media messages if confirmed by word-of-mouth from trusted relationship sources (see, for example, Rogers, 1995). This does not mean that trusted sources are always correct: it means that they have a higher status of reliability.

Marketing communication today still basically operates as a one-way, media-based *message making* system (Varey and Ballantyne, 2005). This hegemonic message-making logic dominates in marketing texts, and in use, notwithstanding the emergence of more interactive perspectives represented by integrated marketing communication (e.g. Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Grönroos and Lindberg-Repo, 1998). However, even integrated marketing communication perspectives give limited cover on how to co-create meaning, acquire knowledge or achieve flashes of inspired understanding.

We think it limiting to consider interaction and communication as separate processes. Any form of *interaction* between buyer and supplier acts as a source of brand meaning, whether this is direct experience with a product or supplier firm, or derived experiences passed on from other users, advertising messages, and news media including such new forms as internet weblogs.

It is possible to put communication and interaction back together again by combining three useful and traditional forms (see Table II). Communication can be informational, communicational, and dialogical (Varey and Ballantyne, 2005). The informational mode includes message-making, which has the useful intention to inform. Next, much of integrated marketing communication's (IMC) aspirations are grounded in the *communicational* mode, where listening and informing are key aspects of interaction. Finally, *dialogue* is a process of learning together and it works in support of innovation and the co-creation of value[3]. The purpose of dialogue is always open-ended, learning-oriented and value-creating (Ballantyne, 2004b; Ballantyne and Varey, 2006).

The concept of *brand community* fits this broadened communicative context for creating brand meaning. According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), a brand community is a "specialised non-geographically bound community that is based on a structured set of relationships

among admirers of brands" (p. 412). Brand communities share a number of core characteristics that include shared rituals and behaviours, and a sense of moral responsibility between members that relates to brand values, as they see them.

An allied concept of brand community provided by Cova (1997) suggests that post-modern society is characterised by tribal affiliations that function to develop a series of communal linkages. Individuals today are not only looking for service which enables them to be free but also something which can link them into a community of others, as if in a tribe (Cova, p. 311). There seems to be no reason to suppose that this tribal logic does not to some extent also apply to industrial buyers (remembering it was once said with conviction that "Nobody ever got sacked for choosing IBM"). S-D logic and its emphasis on service experience rather more than the service promise, on co-creation of value and mutual updating of knowledge, all make sense in this context.

S-D logic calls for a broadening of marketing communication modes used between exchange parties, from informational, through communicational to dialogical. No one modality need take precedence, but certain business contexts and situations will call for certain communicational responses. However, S-D logic particularly supports dialogue as a means of learning in interaction together, in the context of ongoing business relationships.

Conclusions

Branding under S-D logic becomes a communicative interaction process whereby firms attempt to support the intended meanings of their value propositions. However, we go further and say that brand value is confirmed or disconfirmed in use, at the time of use, as customers confirm or disconfirm the value propositions in play. Let there be no doubt that value propositions are essentially promises to perform. Customers will make their most important judgments of value received through direct service interactions with supplier firms and on service-ability of goods-in-use. Put another way, the time-logic of marketing exchange is open-ended, from pre-sale service interaction to post-sale value-in-use (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006). This alone completely rearranges branding opportunities and possible impacts.

S-D logic further suggests that it is the *service experiences* of customers that most commonly impact on brand value, through brand awareness and brand memory. Indeed, given the potential longevity of brand preferences and brand

Table II A classification of forms of interaction

Mode of social association	Underlying decision practices	Source of value	Form of "market" system governance
Informational: persuasive message making	Controlling and coercing	Promised by <i>selling</i> the benefits	Power inequivalence (perceived as domination)
Communicational: informing and being informed	Ethical communication with stakeholders	Co-produced by making and keeping <i>promises</i>	Relational norms (perceived as equitable exchanges)
Dialogical: a bias to learning	Finding a voice in co-determination	Emergent in <i>learning</i> together: co-created and integrated	Networked (perceived as spontaneity)

Source: Ballantyne and Varey (2006), revised from Varey and Ballantyne (2005)

memory derived from historical experience, the importance of the service-ability of goods becomes paramount in sustaining the life of a brand (in all meanings of the term). All product experiences and service perceptions meld with brand associations over time, and this helps to consolidate the reputation of firms in both their internal (employee) and external (customer) markets. These dynamical changes also impact on the perceptions of the wider community of a firm's stakeholders.

We are confident in asserting that S-D logic opens up new branding research opportunities. First, it will demand renewed rigour and clarity in the use of the term "brand", and second, it will open up for consideration a variety of communicative interaction modes beyond (but including) advertising and packaging. S-D logic also gives rise to the practical possibility of experimenting with time-based customer contact points, and with strategies aligned more closely to customer value-in-use assessments. Some of these issues are not new to branding scholars but they currently compete for attention in the shadow of media-dominant approaches to branding. These new S-D branding perspectives seem to us to be amenable to use in a B2B context.

Implications for practitioners

- *Great customer service is a B2B firm's principle branding opportunity. This comes in two forms – direct service interaction with a buyer company and indirect service interaction through goods-in-use. Media advertising should have a useful but support role in brand building in most B2B companies..* With S-D logic, the service experience of customers (direct or indirect) leads in varying degrees to positive or negative trust in the supplier firm and/or its goods and services. It follows that judgments of value-in-use and resultant word-of-mouth effects are the primary communicative sources of brand awareness and meaning. Notwithstanding, media advertising over the last 50 years has carried the weight of brand building, and still does today. This is the conventional branding logic, even to some extent for service brands (Berry, 2000, p. 135; however, see also Berry and Lampo, 2004).

That said, marketing communication can play a varied and useful support role in any service-oriented brand development, especially in creating awareness of the offering, stimulating trial, and providing appropriate language and imagery to help position a brand in its market (Berry and Lampo, 2004). But if value-in-use (experiential) judgments are out of line with media-mediated messages, customers will place trust in their own experience and the word-of-mouth of trusted colleagues and friends.

- *View brand-marks as transitional communicative devices which over time stimulate brand recognition, reputation and other meanings associated with the variety of interactions and exchanges between a firm, its customers and other stakeholders.* B2B marketers in our view should always explore the full range of branding opportunities from media messages to explanatory brochures and distinctive packaging through to communicative interaction in the form of trade fairs and other forms of dialogical interaction. That said, *task capability* seems to be uppermost in buyer consideration in many industrial markets rather more than developed

product characteristics. That is to say, buyers make judgments about the future efficiencies, effectiveness, and networking competencies of various suppliers (Möller and Törroen, 2003). Also, Golfetto and Gibbert (2006) report in their recent work on "competence-based marketing" that they found industrial buyers selecting suppliers by profiling and evaluating supplier resources and competencies. This process was not limited to marketing communication and was often initiated by a buyer in a pre-contractual phase to align supplier competencies with that buyer's business processes, and later, with the supplier and buyer experientially working together to deliver these competencies to fit the buyer's business processes.

This matches well with the S-D logic and its emphasis on communicative interaction, reciprocal servicing, resource sharing, solution orientation and the co-creation of value. Of special interest in the context of this article, the assessment of brand value is a shifting process rather than an act, and begins "upstream" with assessments of the competencies available to the buyer firm, backed by the reputation of the supplier firm. Any assessment of defined tangible product characteristics comes later again. It does seem to us that B2B buyer behaviour strategy is more akin to a service orientation than consumer goods. And when the appropriate focus for branding activity is reflectively considered, it is likely as not the B2B firm that is brand-marked, rather more than its products.

- *Explore strategic opportunities for developing or supporting brand communities using web-based media sites as well as call-centres and perhaps direct marketing as appropriate to enhancing knowledge exchange in value-in-use contexts.* Traditionally, industrial markets have not shown much interest in developing *brand communities* of the consumer-based variety, like those of Harley-Davidson and Saab described by McAlexander *et al.* (2002) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), respectively. However, the potential positive impact of encouraging web-based brand communities in industrial markets could be even greater than in consumer markets, according to Andersen (2005), because business and professional users may have a more committed interest in exchanging product-related information with the supplier company and amongst themselves.
- *Develop a strategic branding approach contributing to the cycle of service episodes experienced by customers.* S-D logic offers opportunities to connect with customers in new ways, based on the specific use to which goods are put in a buyer's value creating processes. This could mean new dimensions of post-sale service and logistics service support. The concept of the *cycle of service* from services marketing fits well, where the interaction process is characterised as a sequence of episodes, moments of truth, or critical incidents (see Albrecht, 1990; Ballantyne *et al.*, 1995; Carlzon, 1987; Vandermerwe, 1993).

The central S-D logic idea of goods as service applications means that tracking the service experience of customers over time and contributing additional service support is an open-ended opportunity. These ideas are not new in service industries but are less common in B2B contexts.

- *Co-creation of value under S-D logic enhances opportunities for co-branding.* The relationship between a supplier and a customer or another stakeholder evolves around a mutual and reciprocal understanding of where value resides. Value is mutual when it has benefits for all involved and reciprocal when value is co-created. S-D logic lends itself to all forms of value creation through co-operation, such as through co-design, co-production, co-delivery, and especially in the context of this article, *co-branding*. The opportunity for a more integrated communication approach is thus broadened and deepened. This in turn supports the development of an enhanced brand image. For example, Intel, as an industrial component provider, has enhanced its brand image through association with computer hardware manufacturers and assemblers, and the highly visible placement of its brand mark on their products.
- *A common view is that branding in consumer markets is based on emotional appeals while branding in B2B markets is based on logic and rationality. We recommend testing the validity of this assumption in specific contexts.* Consumer-oriented firms (such as IBM, Apple, Coca-Cola, and Toyota) use emotional brand appeals to differentiate and position themselves uniquely in their markets. Such emotional ties are thought not to exist in B2B settings. However, understanding the emotional and cognitive interplay that impacts on any brand image might be a matter of assessing the degrees of emotional relevance, rather than assuming that absolute rationality applies. It is possible to monitor and track brand image over time in terms of performance criteria, so we recommend firms test the validity of assumptions about the emotional appeal of brands in particular market contexts. The idea that emotion as a social well-spring can be bracketed out of B2B marketing decisions seems extreme to us, especially when B2B marketing logic acknowledges the benefits of social relationships as a basis for generating trust and commitment with customers and other stakeholders.

Future directions

S-D logic encourages us to think differently about the fluidity of brand connections between firms, their B2B customers and stakeholders, and the excessively constrained communication logic that may exist in B2B settings. S-D logic also asks us to break out of the narrow role specifications of marketing exchange and to explore the untapped potential for co-creating brand value. Perhaps the most exciting challenge of the S-D logic is its potential for extending the time-logic of marketing exchange[4], beyond its still current transactional straitjacket, in exchanges of service for service, legitimized by a marketing logic that emphasises communicative interaction, relationship development and the generation of knowledge competencies adequate to serve our fast developing post-industrial society.

Notes

- 1 The Otago Forum web site is available at: www.business.otago.ac.nz/Marketing/Events/OtagoForum/
- 2 This emphasis on value-in-use resonates with pivotal debates in classical economics as to the comparative utility of goods and services. For a revealing historical account of

the development of economic thought around these themes, see Vargo and Morgan (2005). Tangible goods of course won out as the *dominant logic*. See also an earlier historical review by Ramirez (1998) which emphasises a value co-production framework at variance with that commonly associated with industrial production.

- 3 Dialogue is not given any depth of treatment in the original S-D logic thesis, although there are supportive references (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, pp. 13–14). For a fuller treatment of the application of dialogue in various marketing contexts, see Ballantyne (2004a, b), Varey (2002), and Varey and Ballantyne (2005).
- 4 For a perceptive commentary on how marketing interaction works in time, see Medlin (2004).

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