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COMMENTARY

Corporate marketing Integrating corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation

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Abstract

Purpose – The aims of the paper are to examine the nascent area of corporate marketing.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on some of the key literature relating to the history of marketing thought.

Findings – The study reiterates the case that corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate communications, and corporate reputation should be integrated under the umbrella title of corporate marketing. The paper introduces the 6Cs of corporate marketing.

Originality/value – The paper integrates British and US perspectives on the area and draws on Balmer's work *vis-à-vis* corporate marketing and Greyser's historical overview of marketing written for the Marketing Science Institute (MSI)

Keywords Organizations, Marketing strategy, Corporate identity, Corporate branding, Corporate communications, Corporate image

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

Like the Roman God Janus, we gain perspective by looking both backward and forward. In looking forward we conclude that marketing is undergoing another paradigm shift and is increasingly characterised by having an institutional-wide focus. Balmer (1998, 2001, 2006) in observing the above, has given the label “corporate marketing” to the area.

Since the 1950s various concepts about corporate-wide marketing have captured the imagination of scholars and practitioners (corporate identity, corporate branding, corporate image, corporate reputation, and corporate communications.). Each of these concepts has its own intellectual roots and practice-based adherents. While individual corporate-level concepts provide a powerful, and radical, lens through which to comprehend organisations, these individual perspectives are necessarily limited. For this reason an integrated approach to marketing at the institutional level would seem to be highly desirable and thus the need for what Balmer calls “corporate marketing” and what we in our book, *Revealing the Corporation* (Balmer and Greyser, 2003), termed corporate-level marketing.



In our commentary, we marshal the literature relating to the historiography of marketing and use this as a platform for our examination of the embryonic area of corporate marketing.

We explain that a corporate marketing philosophy represents a logical stage of marketing's evolution and introduce a revised corporate marketing mix (the 6Cs) as an illustrative framework representing the key concerns that underpin this expanded viewpoint of marketing. In addition, we explain why marketing (rather than other areas of management) represents the logical disciplinary domain relating to the territory we are treating.

In this article we draw on a range of sources including our own scholarship on the area. This is not for purposes of self-aggrandisement but for purely practical reasons. In truth, the canon of work on the area is modest and we hope that our observations will engender interest in what (we believe) is likely to emerge as a progressively vital area of marketing. In looking backwards we briefly reflect on how marketing has evolved to its present state. Such retrospection not only provides a platform to look ahead but also gives us permission – intellectually, and perhaps psychologically – to speculate about the nature of corporate-level marketing.

From the outset, we acknowledge that any discussion of marketing is beset by a number of difficulties including the lack of consensus as to its nature. We note that Crosier (1975) found no less than 50 definitions within the literature, which broadly envisioned marketing in terms of a process, a philosophy and as a business orientation. Similar discussions are likely to characterise on-going discussion relating to corporate marketing as it has in relation to more traditional notions of marketing (see Gummesson, 1991). From our perspective we regard corporate marketing's strengths as principally in terms of a philosophy rather than as a function.

Marketing: reflections on the past

What is marketing's historiography? What eras have passed in reaching the present? Of course, the importance of having a customer focus has long been recognised and pre-dates the emergence of marketing as a cognate area of management. For instance, Frank Taussig, a former President of the American Economic Association stated back in 1912 that, "We must accept the consumer as the final judge" (*The Economist*, 2006). In a seminal work by LaLonde (see Greyser, 1997) the existence of company-wide consumer orientation was traced back to the 1920s. However, it was during the 1950s and 1960s that the marketing philosophy and function began to be elucidated by scholars and adopted by managers. Key proponents of the above include Drucker (1954), Levitt (1960) and Kotler and Levy (1969). In terms of the marketing mix the contributions made by Borden (1964) and McCarthy (1960) are noteworthy. From a practitioner perspective, Jack McKitterick (then vice president of General Electric) is credited as providing the first articulation of the marketing concept. Speaking at a meeting of the American Marketing Association in 1957 he remarked that:

[...] the principal task of [...] marketing [...] is not so much to be skillful in making the customer do what suits the interests of the business as to be skillful in conceiving and then making the business do what suits the interest of the customer (McKitterick in Greyser, 1997).

In a similar vein, Robert Keith (in Greyser, 1997) writing in the *Journal of Marketing*, and making reference to his own organisation's historical development, made a clear

distinction between having a production/manufacturing orientation, a sales focus and, finally, a truly marketing orientation. Greyser (1997) reflecting on Keith's tripartite categorisations (and the more recent relationship marketing perspective) observed that each is underpinned by a central question/concern which he detailed as follows:

- Production and manufacturing orientation: "Can we make it?".
- Sales orientation: "Can we sell what we can make?".
- Marketing orientation: "Can we determine what consumers, or a group of consumers, want that we can make and sell profitably within our zones of skills?".
- Relationship marketing orientation: "Can we generate continuing business (loyalty purchasing) via consumer/customer satisfaction with what – and how – we make, sell, and service?".

To us, corporate-level marketing represents a further stage of development, that of corporate-level marketing orientation: "Can we, as an institution, have meaningful, positive and profitable bilateral on-going relationships with customers, and other stakeholder groups and communities?". From the outset we wish to make it clear that corporate marketing has a general applicability to entities whether they are corporations, companies, not-for-profit organisations as well as other categories such as business alliances, cities and so on. A key attribute of corporate-level marketing is its concern with multiple exchange relationships with multiple stakeholder groups and networks. Another feature is the importance accorded to the temporal dimension with there being fidelity not only to present relationships but those of the past and those prospective relationships of the future. (Such a perspective has traditionally characterised mutual entities such as building societies, co-operatives and partnerships; John Lewis is one such example.)

From practice to power relationships

Again, taking another retrospective and drawing on his collaborative work with the legendary Raymond A. Bauer (late Harvard Business School Professor), as well as that of his own, Stephen Greyser offered a tripartite analysis of marketplace relationships between marketers and consumers, especially with regard to power and influence (Greyser, 1997).

The three types of relationship have been termed:

- (1) manipulative (a critic's model);
- (2) service (a pro-business model); and
- (3) transactional (an exchange-based model).

Each model employs different assumptions about the power/balance in the marketplace, the origin of consumer needs and desires, the type of consumer power exercised, the "warning" to consumers or business that pervades the marketplace, and the role of the marketer. To us, corporate marketing represents a logical fourth stage in terms of the above. We call this stage: expectational (a stakeholder-institutional model).

The table provided by Owens and Greyser (Greyser, 1997) relating to the above has been adapted by us in Table I so as to accommodate the above (see also Table II).

Table I.
Comparing and
contrasting the four
models of power
relationships in
marketing

Assumption about	Models			
	The manipulative model	The transactional model	The service model	The corporate model
Power balance in the marketplace	Marketers dominate	Consumer-marketer balance	Consumers dominate	Consumers and stakeholders dominate
Origin of consumer needs/desires	With marketers	With consumers and marketers	With consumers	With consumers and stakeholders
Type of consumer power	Forces consumer choice	Consumer choice	Consumer sovereignty	Consumer and stakeholder sovereignty
Marketplace warning	<i>Caveat Emptor</i> Buyer beware	<i>Caveat Omnes</i> All beware	<i>Caveat Venditor</i> Seller beware	<i>Caveat Societas</i> Company beware
Role of marketer	To persuade/seduce consumers	To work with consumers	To service/cater to consumers	To work with consumers and stakeholders
	The consumer's adversary	The consumer's partner	The consumer's servant	The stakeholder's servant

Source: Balmer (2006) adapted from Owens and Greyser in Greyser (1997)

	Major components of corporate marketing (Balmer, 2001)	Major components of marketing (McGee and Spiro, 1990)
Orientation	<i>Stakeholder</i> Understanding present and future stakeholder (including customer) wants, needs and behaviour.	<i>Customer</i> Understanding customer's wants, needs and behaviour
Organisational support	<i>Co-ordinated organisational activities</i> Undertaken to support stakeholder's orientation elicited above	<i>Co-ordinated organisational activities</i> Undertaken to support customer orientation elicited above
End-focus	<i>Value creation</i> Profit orientation is a primary but is by no means the only focus. It includes business survival and meeting societal needs as detailed below	<i>Profit orientation</i> Focus on profit rather than on sales (needs to be adapted to not-for-profit organisations)
Societal application	<i>Present and future stakeholder and societal needs</i> Balancing current stakeholder and societal needs with those of the future. Showing sensitivity to the organisation's inheritance where applicable	<i>Community welfare</i> An obligation to meet customers' and society's long-term interests

Table II.
Comparing the major
components of corporate
marketing

Corporate marketing: towards a new *Gestalt* of the corporation

Balmer's (1998) historical analysis of corporate-level constructs since the 1950s reveals the ascendancy of various concepts during different time frames. Each has attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners alike and appears, in part, to reflect the *Zeitgeist* of a particular epoch. For instance, the concern with corporate image during the 1950s and 1960s and the current interest in corporate brands, which dates back to 1995, are illustrative.

This is also reflected in the special editions of the *European Journal of Marketing* that have appeared in 1997, 2001, and 2003 and have focussed on concepts such as corporate identity, corporate brands, corporate communications, corporate image and corporate reputation. These special editions have provided a forum for different ontological and epistemological issues to be aired relating to the above.

The integrative approach adopted here in relation to corporate marketing is not without parallel: the latter is most conspicuous in the fields of communication. This can be seen in the growing interest in integrated marketing communications by authors such as Schultz *et al.* (1992) and Nowak and Phelps (1994). Of particular significance is the integration of institutional-level communications. Such a perspective informs the corporate communications domain with the work of Bernstein (1984), Cornelissen *et al.* (2001) and Van Riel (1995, 2003) being noteworthy. Such advances are significant but are necessarily narrower in conceptualisation in what we advance here.

Raising the corporate marketing umbrella

What we find to be enormously exciting is that when the broad topography of the area is contemplated, the synthesising of corporate-level concepts such as corporate identity, corporate branding and corporate communications and so on offers the promise of a critical breakthrough in the conceptualisation of organisations by marketing scholars. This leads to the need to raise the umbrella of corporate-level marketing.

For us, corporate marketing provides a vortex that is not only pristine but also powerful and practical in addition. This is a vortex that synthesises myriad corporate level perspectives, and concepts, that have emerged from the 1950s onwards Balmer (1998). The orchestration of these concepts provides the cornerstone of Balmer's corporate marketing mix.

Figure 1 depicts the six elements (6Cs) of Balmer's (2006) corporate marketing mix cited above and elucidates the importance of each element by ascribing a key question which underpins each of the six elements. The disciplinary foundations for each of the six elements are additionally outlined. Again, we reiterate that we regard corporate marketing as more of a philosophy rather than a function. For this reason the mix elements should be seen as informing an organisational-wide philosophy rather than as encompassing a mix of elements to be orchestrated by a department of corporate marketing. In essence, the philosophy of corporate-level marketing should permeate how people in the organisation think and behave on its behalf. (Table III compares the 6Cs of the corporate marketing mix with the more extended 11Ps model of the mix).

Character

Those factors that, in their totality, make one entity distinct from another. These include key tangible and intangible assets of the organisation as well as organisational

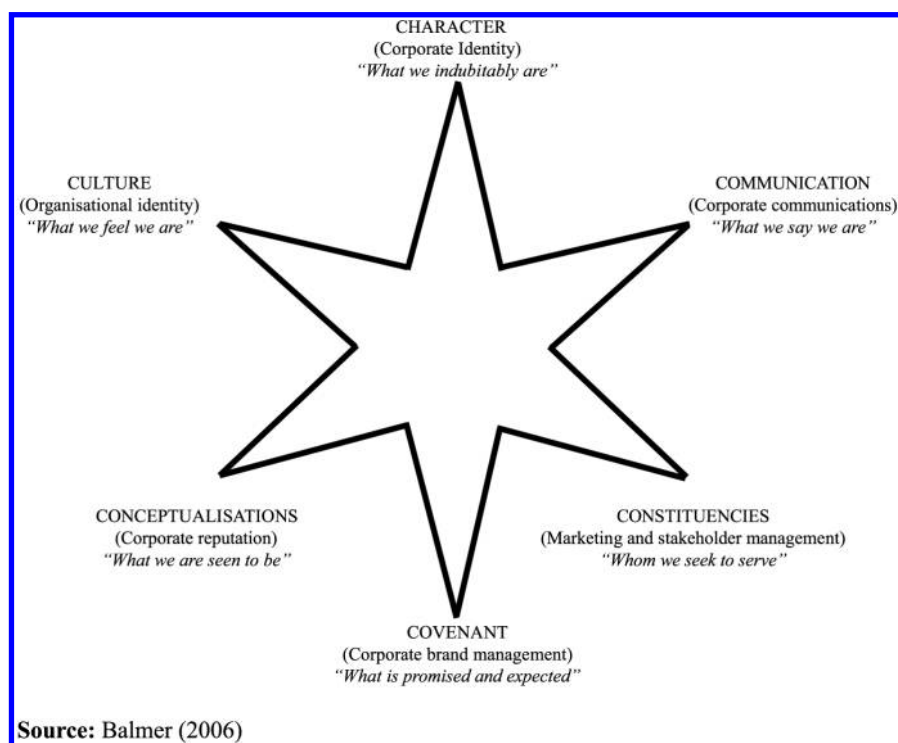


Figure 1.
The 6Cs of corporate
marketing

activities, markets served, corporate ownership and structure, organisational type, corporate philosophy and corporate history.

Culture

This refers to the collective feeling of employees as to what they feel they are in the setting of the entity. These beliefs are derived from the values, beliefs and assumptions about the organisation and its historical roots and heritage. Individuals may, in part, define themselves in terms of organisational membership and may, in turn, feel that they, as individuals, share common values with the organisation. Culture is important since it provides the context in which staff engage with each other and with other groups such as customers: employees represent the "front line" of the organisation.

Communication

Corporate communications relates to the various outbound communications channels deployed by organisations to communicate with customers and other constituencies. At its most comprehensive (total corporate communications) it also takes into account the communications effects of management, employee and product behaviour and of word-of mouth and media/competitor commentary (see Balmer and Greyser, 2003, p. 125).

The 6Cs of corporate marketing (Balmer, 2006)	The 11Ps of corporate marketing (Balmer, 1998) adapted	Explanation
Character	Philosophy and ethos	How the organisation is constituted. What the organisation stands for, the way it undertakes its work and activities
	Product	What the organisation makes and does
	Price	The emotion and capital assets of the organisation. The valuation of its brands (corporate, services and product). What it charges for its products and services. The share price. Staff salaries
	Place	Distribution and organisational relationships in terms of the selling and distribution of products and services. (Franchising, outsourcing, licensing)
	Performance	Quality of products and services. Standards <i>vis-à-vis</i> issues of governance, ethics and social responsibility
	Positioning	The organisation's position relative to its competitors (size, geographical coverage, product and service range)
Culture	Personality	The critical role of personnel <i>vis-à-vis</i> corporate marketing activities. The shared (as well as differentiated) meanings accorded to the organisation by personnel including strength of identification with the organisation)
Communication	Promotion	Co-ordinated corporate communications (corporate advertising, corporate PR, visual identification etc.)
Constituencies	People	In addition to customers: the organisation's internal and external constituencies and communities (the latter boundary spans constituencies)
Conceptualisations	Perception	The images and reputations held of the organisation by groups, communities and by individuals
Covenant	Promise	The expectations associated with the corporate brand (stakeholder perspective) and the promise underpinning the corporate brand (organisational perspective)

Table III.
Comparing the 6Cs of corporate marketing

Conceptualisations

This refers to perceptions (conceptualisations) held of the corporate brand by customers and other key stakeholder groups. The latent perception of the organisation held by the above will affect their view of and their behaviour towards the organisation. Such conceptualisations of the organisation will, of course, differ between different groups and account needs to be taken of this.

Constituencies

Corporate marketing recognises that many customers also belong to one or indeed many organisational constituencies or stakeholder groups (employees, investors, local community, etc.) and also comes with a realisation that the success of an organisation (and in some cases a "license" to operate) is dependent on meeting

the wants and needs of such groups. Also see Arthur W. Page's legendary statement on public permission and approval in Greyser *et al.* (2006, p. 904).

Covenant

A corporate brand is underpinned by a powerful (albeit informal) contract, which can be compared to a covenant in that customers and other stakeholder groups often have a religious-like loyalty to the corporate brand. Whereas legal ownership of a corporate brand is vested in an entity, its emotional ownership (and therein its substantial value) resides with those who have a close association with the brand (Balmer, 2005). Of course, different groups and individuals may have different expectations associated with the institutional brand.

Marketing claims on corporate marketing

In recent years scholars from management disciplines other than marketing have become interested in key corporate-level concepts such as corporate brands and corporate identity. Often their work is underpinned by a firm theoretical and empirical base, and can provide meaningful insight to thinking on the larger corporate-level area. While we acknowledge the contributions of other management disciplines and recognise that a multi-disciplinary perspective on the area is efficacious, we wish to note why marketing has strong claims on this nascent area. We contend (Balmer and Greyser, 2003, pp. 349-50) that marketing's claims on the area are related to its:

- inheritance;
- prescience;
- expedience; and
- assemblance.

Inheritance

Of all the disciplines that have made a contribution to the corporate-level constructs detailed earlier, marketing has been the most conspicuous. Consider communication, image, reputation, and branding. These are key concepts within the marketing domain, although marketing scholars and practitioners frequently incorporate others, such as identity. To date, the above concepts have tended to be narrowly conceived by marketers in terms of products or services rather than corporations (or organisations generally.)

Prescience

The notion that the marketing should concern itself with corporate-level concerns is far from new. In the 1960s, Kotler and Levy (1969) had the prescience to articulate that the marketing concept should be broadened so as to encompass any entity and that it should be able to be applied to all areas of business and not just product-dominated organisations.

More recently, Webster (1992) advanced the view that it was *de rigueur* for marketing to affect a paradigm shift away from products and firms to people and organisations. As such, there was a requirement for greater scrutiny to be accorded to phenomena which traditionally have been the preserve of psychologists,

organisational behaviourists, political economists, and sociologists. In terms of corporate-marketing the insights gleaned from identity theory as employed by organisational theorists and behaviourists can be influential in the conceptualisations of marketing (see Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003).

Marketing's entrée into the corporate domain has, already, become a reality. This has been reflected in the rise of "new" areas of marketing interest such as relationship marketing (Gummesson, 1994), the marketing of services (Lovelock, 1983; Booms and Bitner, 1992), internal marketing (Berry, 1981), marketing for non-profits (Kotler and Andreason, 1996), green marketing (Meffert and Kirchgeorg, 1993), and in relation to corporate brand management (Balmer and Gray, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003), corporate communications (Van Riel, 1995) and corporate image and reputation (Kennedy, 1977; Dowling, 2001). Kotler's (1986) notion of megamarketing with its recognition of groups "beyond customers", the importance accorded to political power and public opinion, and the importance attached to marketing networks in their various guises (Achrol, 1991) all resonate with our comprehension of corporate marketing.

Expedience

Marketing has been particularly effective in demonstrating its utility to managers. Baker (1999) observed that marketing is a synthetic discipline in that it distils insights gained from other fields (both business and non-business) into a body of knowledge with an immediate and practical relevance. In other words, marketing is adept in operationalising theories. It should be noted that the corporate-level constructs mentioned in this article all have a strong applied nature and are in common parlance in business and consultancy contexts. This has not been without its critics however; the over-reliance on the marketing mix is case in point (O'Malley and Patterson, 1998).

Assemblance

Marketing is, and always has been, a repository of insights and theories marshalled from other disciplines. Traditional marketing draws heavily from a number of management and non-management disciplines such as psychology, economics, and strategy. The assemblance of diverse perspectives to form a unified whole has been a basic tenet of marketing. Indeed, Borden (1964), who first devised the marketing mix, was profoundly influenced by the work of Culliton (1948) who had envisioned the marketer to be first and foremost a mixer of ingredients, in other words an orchestrator. To some degree the corporate marketing mix outlined here follows in this vein but we are sensitive to the fact that any list of attributes underpinning a marketing mix or philosophy are likely to be limited (Grönroos, 1993; Gummesson, 1994).

Conclusion

In bringing our short commentary to a close we are mindful that for the last 50 years, or more, marketing scholars, as well as practitioners, have realised the crucial importance of corporate-level concepts, beginning with the concept of the corporate image and the pioneering work of the English economist Kenneth Boulding. We celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of his book, *The Image* this year (Boulding, 1956). Whereas the marketing concept as applied to products and services has achieved wide

acceptance, the same cannot be said, alas, in relation to the application of the marketing concept to organisations in their totality. While scholarship relating to individual corporate-level marketing constructs is developing apace we note that integrative perspectives still remain the exception rather the rule. However, we hold that it is difficult to examine one concept without recourse to another: corporate communication is one prime example of this. In terms of management, although we hold that corporate marketing is extrinsically a boardroom and CEO concern, responsibility for corporate marketing should be institution wide and should not be assigned to a particular department or directorate. In short, all staff are corporate marketers.

What of the future? We acknowledge that for some the very notion of corporate-level marketing is likely to be contentious especially the notion that marketing should have a more strategic and institutional-wide role. However, we are of the firm view that the ascendancy of corporate marketing concerns and concepts (corporate brands being illustrative) is inexorable. We opened this article by observing that we gain perspective by looking forward and backward. In bringing this commentary to a close we are reminded that Theodore Levitt (1960) fashioned the phrase “marketing myopia”. In this century, such myopia could reside at the institutional level. As Janus would no doubt have mused “what goes round comes around”.

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