

Call for Papers: journal Special Issue

Anticipating Future Challenges for Businesses in a Dynamic Polarising Environment: Branding, Reputation and Identity

Special Issue Guest Editors:

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Recent changes in the environment have thrown many plans for branding, reputation and identity into confusion. The guest editors observe that the corporate environment is becoming more dynamic and polarized. Increasing public awareness and pressure means that corporations and other organizations need to consider their roles as socially responsible members of society. There are substantial implications for the future management of businesses and their identities as many countries are experiencing major political changes at faster rates than in the past, in ways not fully anticipated by many businesses. Marketers of the future face unprecedented paradoxes in trying to direct offers and communications to be in sympathy with the current social climate. On one hand, marketers must be increasingly sensitive to diversity issues such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), minority groups, refugee rights and so on. On the other hand, the turbulent political environment is becoming more polarised as disruptive political events such as unexpected election results, coups, referenda results and charges of turning a blind eye to corruption impact on marketing strategies. Political changes include, for example, the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA, and the Turkish constitutional referendum that has given sweeping powers to President Erdogan. These changes have been followed by, for example, a (partial at the time of writing) travel ban into USA on travellers from various mainly Muslim countries; the attempted revocation of the law that protected young illegal immigrants in the US from deportation and provided temporary permits for work and study; and the banning of the annual gay pride march in Istanbul, Turkey. And even in the UK, then Prime Minister Theresa May sought (and partially obtained) Turkish-style so-called 'Henry VIII' powers to allow the Government to change laws originally emanating from the European Union without further parliamentary scrutiny. Will marketers of the future have to identify products and services with one polar extreme or another? Or try to straddle the fence, thus risking losing communication power in a world where strength and clarity of will and purpose will be paramount to a strong identity?

Social media is revolutionising the ways that we communicate. Research from Middlesex University indicates that use of social media and digital communication technologies forms an integral part of a shopping experience inside and outside a store. Social media may offer an opportunity to ameliorate social isolation. Posts are usually happy and attractive but there is a downside: research from Glasgow University reveals that teenagers are getting more anxious and depressed because of the 24-hour demands of their social media accounts. Similarly, research from Pittsburgh University in the USA reports a linear, positive relationship between social media use and perceived social isolation. And research from the University of California San Diego finds a negative relationship between mental

wellbeing and Facebook use. As social media marketing budgets grow inexorably, will future marketing contribute to or gain an identity associated with poorer wellbeing?

Google and Facebook revolutionise our access to information and news but much of the growth comes at the expense of traditional news sources such as newspapers and magazines, resulting in jobs and tax revenues being lost from the UK and other European countries. The digital media giants' advertising revenues are massive but they are apparently unable to avoid ads from reputable organisations from the UK government to L'Oréal appearing alongside hate videos. And despite huge resources, Google remains unable to track advertising effectiveness to the satisfaction of (now former) clients like Unilever. According to the Sunday Times (UK, 13 August 2017), large corporations such as Coca-Cola, General Motors, HSBC, Pepsi and Starbucks have withdrawn advertising from YouTube. Meanwhile, holocaust deniers, rape apologists and Islamic extremists have received pay-outs from Google through YouTube ads. So again, will the trend towards digital marketing lead to corporate identities being associated with negative images? How should marketers respond?

Changes in government policies and regulatory regimes can strike at the very heart of countries' and corporations' identities and reputations, which have knock-on effects on corporate branding. Companies that have enjoyed a positive 'country of origin' effect may find their corporate brand image suffers when political or regulatory changes in the supplier country are viewed negatively in customer countries. Companies that have been 'buying' corporate brand image with major customers by payment of 'commissions' may find their reputations suddenly dented by allegations of bribery. And if future customer awareness leads to the 'commissions' marketing route being closed, what will replace it?

Social factors, too, are likely to be a fast-changing issue in the future dynamic environment. Political and legal changes to visa and immigration procedures, or even the threat of them, may leave whole communities (both within and outside the country making the changes) feeling side-lined and even lead to boycotts of a country's products, again adversely affecting corporate reputation. UK voters have opted to leave the European Union (BREXIT), which may free the country from some unwanted regulation. But in the drive to harden immigration controls, where is the help and compassion for refugees? Where is the accountability and governance? How are world leaders going to tackle that? How will the polar possibilities of a substantially greater proportion of asylum seekers in the marketplace or alternatively, the trend to homogenisation of cultures as immigration declines, affect the country of origin image of products and services?

Similarly, future economic changes may disrupt consumer behavior and marketing strategies, as, for example, changes to tariff regimes between countries that might previously have formed a major proportion of exports. Or even a threat of such changes may affect customer confidence and exchange rates, again negatively influencing corporate brand image. Will companies be forced to seek new markets in other parts of the world and effectively start over in developing and growing corporate identity, reputation and brand?

Future technology developments, too, may lead to catastrophic falls in production and sales in formerly technology-leading countries as production shifts to countries that may be catching up technically and industrializing quickly. Country-of-origin effects may correspondingly rub off on to companies' corporate brands.

And all of this is, of course, taking place in the context of the hoped-for recovery (in health, productivity and business outputs) from global pandemic and the context of the new normal environment that no-one yet understands.

These are just some of the recent changes in the business environment that have knocked organizations future planning for six.

The guest editors do not prescribe or proscribe solutions or predictions except for the opinion that the one thing that will not suffice is 'business as usual'. Rather, the guest editors hope that authors may present studies on the medium and long term futures backed by evidence and analysis. Similarly, the guest editors do not require papers to accept any single hypothesis or argument such as contained in this call for papers. Authors are free to consider any more fundamental way of problematizing the issues outlined above.

So, in this dynamic environment, will organisations be able to maintain power? How will they accommodate (or resist) environmental change, particularly the sudden, unexpected or polarising changes such as in the examples above? On one hand, the marketing environment is progressing towards openness, empowerment and liberation, whilst at the same time, movements seem to be in the direction of conservatism and traditionalism. All these changes can affect not only countries' but also organizations' identity and associations positively or negatively. How should marketers take these conflicting macro factors into account? Tackling such issues may require a significantly radical departure from business as usual. For instance, how will the complex issues of polarising identity evolve in the corporate world of the future? Can we envisage a future corporate world that actually takes sustainable development seriously, with degrowth rather than growth, with planet put before customers, with equality and cooperation put before competitive advantage? And how would that change the framing of the practice, values and meaning that make business (and its identity) what it actually is?

The special issue aims to explore the medium and long-term future implications of the effects of a dynamic, polarising corporate environment on organizations' branding, reputation and identity including (but not limited to) the trends outlined above. Submissions may address (but are not limited to) these issues and others that may concern the future of the dynamic, polarising business framework.

Submissions

Scholarly, conceptual and empirical papers on the futures of the dynamic, polarising social framework and its business implications are welcomed. **Papers must make a significant contribution to knowledge relating to the medium to long-term futures of corporate power, its sources and manifestations.** Contributions should demonstrate awareness and use of relevant extant Futures Studies literature. Papers may address issues including, but not necessarily limited to the futures of:

- Corporate Identity
- Personal Identity
- Identity Development
- Stakeholder-Organisation Identification
- Corporate Reputation
- Corporate Associations
- Corporate Branding
- Corporate Citizenship
- Sustainability
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Sustainable Consumption
- Character Congruence
- Stakeholder Behaviour

- Psychology of Stakeholder Behaviour
- Cause-Related Marketing
- Consumer Behaviour
- Narratives and Identity
- Creating Functional Identities
- Group and Community Identity

This interdisciplinary special issue welcomes academic papers from researchers in any field of corporate reputation, identity, branding and marketing, and related areas of the humanities and social sciences. The special issue organizers also extend an invitation for collaborative papers between academics, practitioners and policy makers.

Articles submitted for publication in FUTURES must show awareness of the futures field and make an original contribution to the advancement of knowledge in futures studies. See Guide for Authors.

This journal operates a double-blind review process. All contributions will be initially assessed by the editor for suitability for the journal. Papers deemed suitable are then typically sent to a minimum of two independent expert reviewers to assess the scientific quality of the paper.

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