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Defining A “Brand”: Beyond The Literature With Experts’ Interpretations

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There are many definitions of the “brand”, yet a comprehensive theory of the brand construct is still missing. This paper is a step towards developing a theory for the brand construct. Through analysis of the literature and focused interviews with 20 leading edge brand consultants, we propose a concept of the brand as a multidimensional construct, matching a firm’s functional and emotional values with the performance and psychosocial needs of consumers.

Introduction

In common with other areas of research in marketing (e.g. brand “loyalty”), there is a plethora of definitions of the “brand”. Apart from the lack of an established terminology in marketing research, “so many definitions make it difficult and hazardous to compare, synthesise, and accumulate findings”, (Kollat et al., 1970 p. 329). As a consequence, “inconclusive, ambiguous or contradictory findings are the rule rather than the exception” (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). Additionally, and in spite of Churchill’s (1979, p. 67) plea that “the researcher must be exacting in the conceptual specification of the construct and what is and what is not included in the domain”, authors have failed to fully develop the brand construct and its boundaries. As a result, a theory of the brand remains missing. Specifying the domain and the boundaries of the construct is the first step towards developing a theory of the brand which satisfies Zaltman et al.’s (1973) formal, semantical, methodological and epistemological sets of criteria for theory evaluation.

Developing a theory for the brand and setting the boundaries of its construct is beneficial also from the point of view of evaluating possible redundancy with other constructs, e.g. with the brand attitude construct, as later discussed. Singh (1991, p. 257) contends: “it is not useful to have multiple constructs that tap a similar underlying phenomenon without explicitly understanding the nature and extent of the redundancy between the competing constructs”. In his view, if redundancy issues are not addressed, substantial confusion can persist. As a first step towards redundancy evaluation, Singh advocates the need to integrate previous research and posit precise definitions that represent the most defensible view of the construct.

On these premises, the aim of this paper is to lay the foundations for establishing a theory of the brand. To satisfy this, we followed Churchill’s (1979) and Singh’s (1991) recommendations, and undertook a comprehensive brand definition literature review which this paper opens with. By next examining

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these definitions for any similarities we were able to consider issues of redundancy, enabling us to better define the brand construct and set what we perceived as its boundaries. One of Zaltman et al.'s (1973) criteria for evaluating a theory is the confirmatory criterion that the theory should cohere with facts. As such the next part of the paper describes the focused interviews we undertook to compare the interpretations from twenty leading-edge brand consultants, whose daily activity is shaping the current and future agenda for brands. This complies with Hunt's (1990) contention that theories should "truly say something about the world" (p. 11). A shift in emphasis from a notion of brands as logos to a more integrated view as the matching of a firm's functional and emotional values with the performance and psychosocial values sought by consumers emerges from this analysis. We conclude by discussing the implications for branding strategy.

Definitions in the Literature

We content analysed over one hundred articles from trade as well as from academic journals, providing a broad and rich perspective of the range of definitions used. Over 80% of the articles reviewed were published in the 1980s and 1990s, reflecting not only the increased interest on brands as valuable assets in the late 1980s-early 1990s, but also the debate on the "death of the brand" in the mid-1990s.

As a result of the content analysis of this literature, we identified twelve main themes which we thought were an accurate categorisation of the broad range of definitions of the "brand" in the literature, i.e. as: i) legal instrument; ii) logo; iii) company; iv) shorthand; v) risk reducer; vi) identity system; vii) image in consumers' minds; viii) value system; ix) personality; x) relationship; xi) adding value; and xii) evolving entity. The categorisation into the twelve themes was fairly straightforward, since most authors used buzz words such as "personality" or "relationship" either in the definitions themselves, or in the discussion of their view of the brand. As we discuss in more detail in below, there is some overlap among the elements of different definitions, which are therefore not mutually exclusive. However, the twelve themes represent a categorisation of the most important propositions in the branding literature. Various academic disciplines, such as consumer behaviour (Assael, 1995), strategy (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994) and marketing management (eg Kotler et al, 1996; Balmer, 1995) underpin this literature.

i) Brand as a legal instrument.

At its simplest, branding could be defined as a legal statement of ownership (Cramer, 1995), or as adopting a mark to designate legal ownership (Broadbent and Cooper, 1987). This is the origin of the term "brand", as encapsulated in the Oxford English Dictionary definition: "A particular sort or class of goods, as indicated by the trade-marks on them."

Branding represents an investment and consequently firms seek legal ownership of title, as protection against imitators. For example, part of the branding strategy for Absolute Vodka stresses the importance of continually monitoring competitors' brand activity, to quickly stop any firm adopting this
name or bottle design.

Trade-marks are an important asset, but their value depends on the ability to protect them from infringement (Simonson, 1994). Legislation offers some protection (e.g. 1994 Trade Mark Act), but look-alike own labels (Kapferer, 1995) are evidence of the limited scope of the legislation (Lea and Murphy, 1996).

ii) Brand as a logo.

The traditional definition of a brand, proposed by the American Marketing Association (AMA) in 1960, derives from the concept of the brand’s logo and visual features as a basis for differentiation, i.e.:

“A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.”

Many (e.g. Watkins, 1986; Aaker, 1991; Dibb et al, 1994; Kotler et al, 1996) strictly adhere to this definition. Others add variants on the theme of the brand’s visual features as differentiating devices (e.g. Koch, 1994). The distinctive “golden arch” of McDonald and the “X” of Halifax plc. are notable examples of brands instantly identifiable through their logos.

Researchers have criticised the above definitions as too preoccupied with the product (e.g. Crainer, 1995) and too mechanical (Arnold, 1992). It is limiting because it focuses only on the firm’s input activity of differentiating by means of a name and a visual identity. As Meadows (1983) observed, consumers are not passive recipients of brand marketing activity, and thus branding is not something done to consumers, but rather something they do things with. No reference is made either to the managers formulating any strategic thinking or vision for the brand, or to it acquiring connotations in consumers’ minds.

iii) Brand as a company.

It has been argued that, due to growing competition from own-labels and spiralling marketing costs, an instantly recognisable corporate identity is vital (The Economist, 1994). By “borrowing” the equity accrued by the corporate name, product lines become an extension of the corporate personality, as Barclays exemplifies with its portfolio of financial services offerings which all carry the Barclays name. This implies the CEO becomes responsible for the health of the corporate brand (Vick, 1993).

The advantage of considering the company as the brand is the opportunity for achieving a coherent focus across the brand portfolio and conveying consistent messages to all stakeholders. However, any problems with the organisation’s reputation can taint the image of its products.

iv) Brand as a shorthand

For consumers, brands act as a shorthand device of functional and emotional characteristics, enabling rapid recall of information in memory and speedier purchase decisions. With grocery superstores typically stocking 20,000 lines, brands such as Mars succeed by displaying only a little information on their packaging, which enables consumers to rapidly recall associations with the brand. For Brown (1992):

“a brand name is nothing more or less than the sum of all the mental
connections people have around it."

As brand names provide memory shortcuts (Jacoby et al., 1977), time-
pressed consumers are more inclined to buy brands with names they recognise
(Chevan, 1992).

The interpretation of the brand as a shorthand device recognises how the
myriad of marketing activities are integrated in the consumer's mind to form the
brand entity. However, from a strategic perspective, this does not enable the
marketer to decide which particular attributes should be developed and strongly
associated with the brand's name.

v) Brand as a risk reducer

Consumers perceive risk when they buy products or services (Bauer, 1960). An
understanding of the dimensions of perceived risk enables marketers to
present their brands to instil consumer confidence (Assael, 1995). For example,
acting as a guarantee of consistent quality, a brand reduces performance risk. A
Hewlett Packard press advertisement showing a man on a plank extended out
of the 40th story of a skyscraper with the caption: "and for his next trick he'll
buy a PC without proper support" sought to present this brand as a no risk PC.

This theme is related to the concept of the brand as a contract between the
organisation and the consumer (Staveley, 1987; Kapferer, 1995).

v) Brand as an identity system.

Highly critical of the "deconstructionist" perspectives of the brand as a legal
device and as a logo (McWilliam, 1993) is Kapferer (1992), who defines a brand
in holistic terms, i.e.:

"A brand is not a product. It is the product's essence, its meaning, and its
direction, and it defines its identity in time and space. ... Too often brands are
examined through their component parts: the brand name, its logo, design, or
packaging, advertising or sponsorship, or image or name recognition, or very
recently, in terms of financial brand valuation. Real brand management,
however, begins much earlier, with a strategy and a consistent, integrated
vision. Its central concept is brand identity, not brand image" (p. 11)

The definition of brands as logos and Kapferer's view represent two
extremes. The former is itemised, almost a check list of the elements necessary
to create a brand (e.g. Kotler et al, 1996), the latter emphasises the brand's
identity as a structured whole of six integrated facets of culture, personality, self-
projection, physique, reflection, and relationship. Whilst some of these elements
overlap with other definitions (e.g. personality), Kapferer's contribution is to
stress the importance of the concept of the brand as more than the sum of its
parts.

The new tail plane designs of British Airways is an example of the new
visual design reflecting the organisation's identity changing to become more
multi-culturally sensitive and striving to offer better customer service.

The role of brand identity as a means of developing brand positioning is a
theme frequently addressed by both practitioners (e.g. Olins, 1989; Smythe et al,
1992; Bona, 1994; Burke, 1994; Hagglin, 1994; Prinz, 1994; Wilson, 1994) and
academics (e.g. Balmer, 1995; Aaker, 1996). Developing an identity not only
protects against competitors, but also enables firms to reap economic gains
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(Fombrun and Shanley, 1990). A carefully managed identity system helps managers reinforce a meaning behind a brand for consumers. It also communicates the essence of the brand to other stakeholders and encourages a more strategic approach (Diefenbach, 1992).

The weakness of defining a brand as an identity system is being over-reliant on the firm’s input activities, since identity relates to the desired positioning and not how it is perceived, i.e. the brand’s image.

**vii) Brand as an image in consumers’ minds.**

Boulding (1956) was one of the early authors drawing attention to the commercial importance of image, arguing that people do not react to reality, but to what they perceive as reality. This raises an interesting philosophical point about “reality”, which social theorists argue is socially constructed (e.g. Weick, 1979). While this issue was not explored in depth by Boulding, his contribution draws attention to cognitive psychology, in particular perception theory, to explain differing interpretations of the same stimulus. Building on this, Martineau (1959) described brands as images in consumers’ minds of functional and psychological attributes. The evolution of a more consumer centred perspective on the meaning of brands is exemplified by Newman’s (1957) definition of brand image as everything people associate with a brand, and Pitcher’s (1985) view that a brand is a consumer’s idea of a product.

Numerous examples can be found of authors adhering to the concept of brands as associations in consumers’ minds (e.g. Joyce, 1963; Arnold, 1992; Keller, 1993), succinctly expressed by Keeble (1991) as: “a brand becomes a brand as soon as it comes in contact with a consumer” (p. 170).

Adopting an image definition of a brand forces management to face the challenge of perceptual filters changing consumers’ opinions. As the disparity between the brand identity and its image becomes notable, it triggers management to change their strategy, as shown by Dutton and Dukerich’s (1991) analysis of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. On the other hand, managing a brand from an identity perspective addresses the problem of all employees having to act in a coherent and consistent manner with each of the firm’s stakeholders. Yet, effective brand management needs to balance supplier activities with consumers’ perceptions. Gardner and Levy’s (1955) definition is couched within a dyadic identity-image perspective, i.e.: “A brand name is more than the label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes. It tells the consumers many things, not only by the way it sounds (and its literal meaning if it has one) but, more important, via the body of associations it has built up and acquired as a public object over a period of time.” (p. 35)

The strength of this definition is that, by balancing identity and image, managers should be better able to avoid two pitfalls identified by Kapferer (1992). These relate to either being over reliant on consumers’ views about how they would like their brand to evolve (“excess of democracy”), or restricting the brand’s evolution by not appreciating what aspects of the brand can be changed (“excess of code”). Park et al. (1986) clarify that the relationship between a brand’s concept and its image can be managed over its life, through a process of
selecting a general brand concept (functional, symbolic, or experiential) then
introducing, elaborating and fortifying the concept over time. The notion of
"brand concept" is akin to that of the brand as a "value system", as we discuss
below.

viii) Brand as a value system

Values are a subject of notable interest, as shown by references to "core
brand values" in the trade (e.g. Thrift, 1997; Beckett, 1996; Southgate, 1996) and
academic literature (e.g. Cook, 1995; Meenaghan, 1995).

The concept that consumers' decisions are influenced by personal and
cultural values is central to consumer behaviour theory (e.g. Reynolds and
Gutman, 1988; Engel et al., 1993). For example, Clark (1987) remarks that
consumers find value in the brand, in its heritage, in their personal experience
with it, and in how it reflects what the individual stands for. One of the reasons
for the success of First Direct is its foundation on values such as customer
respect, openness and getting it right first time.

Sheth et al. (1991) identify five possible values characterising brands and
influencing choice, showing that brand choice decisions are made with the aim
of satisfying specific consumer values. Under this perspective, individual brands
are representations of unique clusters of values.

The strength of this definition is that it challenges the organisation to take
into consideration not only the functional capability of the brand, but also the
relevance to consumers of symbolic values and meanings imbuing the brand.
In Clark's (1987) words, "values provide the important link between consumers
and marketers".

ix) Brand as a personality:

Since competitors are able to emulate or leapfrog brands' functional
advantages (Lambin, 1993; The Economist, 1993), one way to sustain their
uniqueness is through stressing psychological values, using options such as
advertising and packaging. This differentiates brands in terms of their symbolic
values, such as association with the kind of people using them (e.g. Keeble,
1991). For example, a few years ago consumers were asked to personify the
Lurpak brand of butter. The descriptions given showed that it was equated to a
very successful, but too refined and stand-offish person, lacking immediacy and
friendliness. As a consequence, the packaging was changed to incorporate a
fine silver stripe and italic script to enliven it and add warmth. After the change,
consumers described the brand as a successful, intelligent, healthy man in his
forties to fifties, who commands respect.

This theme has given rise to a considerable volume of research defining
brands as symbolic devices with personalities that users value beyond their
functional utility (Alt and Griggs, 1988; Blackston, 1992; Arnold, 1992;
Goodyear, 1993). When choosing between competing brands, consumers assess
the fit between the personalities of the brands and the personality they wish to
project (Zinkhan et al., 1996). As evident from this review, the topics of
personality and values are inter-related (Gutman, 1982), with personality being a
sub-set of value constellations.
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Plummer (1985) raises the point of semantic confusion between personality and image. In his view, the brand’s personality is primarily the result of the firm’s communication, whilst image is the way consumers perceive the brand’s personality.

In addition, as a strategic tool, Aaker (1996) describes brand personality as a metaphor which

“can help brand strategists by enriching their understanding of people’s perceptions of and attitude toward the brand, contributing to a differentiating brand identity, guiding the communication effort and creating brand equity” (p. 150).

x) Brand as a relationship.

Having a respected personality is a pre-requisite for a relationship between consumers and brands (Duboff, 1986; Woodward, 1991). A brand relationship is a logical extension of brand personality (Blackston, 1992) and if brands can be personified, then consumers would not just perceive them, but would also have relationships with them (Kapferer, 1992; Blackston, 1993). In other words, consumers would not just have an attitude towards a brand, but the brand would have an attitude towards the consumer. The growing recognition of, and respect for each other’s personality would lead to a strong bonding and attitude reinforcement, along with repeat-usage. American Express is an example of a company which used this concept of the brand as a relationship to position itself as the “not everybody’s card”. Its advertising portrayed American Express to be offering its status, authority and power to the card holder, by showing only well-known and important people as the likely bearers of the card.

In view of the increasing importance of relationship marketing, Arnold (1992) rejects the AMA definition, arguing instead that the brand is the expression of a relationship between consumer and product.

Thus, within the perspective of relationship building, a successful brand would be characterised as having a special relationship between the customer and the company (McKenna, 1991).

xl) Brand as adding value.

Concepts such as “added value” are cited in the literature as means of differentiating brands, achieving competitive advantage, and possibly charging a premium price. For example, recent advertising campaigns for American Express have majored upon the added value of their customer service staff, as yet another benefit in addition to being a globally accepted charge card. However, because this term has been used in so many different contexts, its meaning has become rather elusive.

Jones (1986) and King (1973) define added value as the non functional benefits over and beyond a product’s functional characteristics. This differs from the economics perspective of the “added value chain model” (e.g. Durand, 1993). A further perspective is the consumer behaviour literature, for example Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), whereby consumers imbue a product with a subjective meaning in addition to the functional characteristics it possesses. As such, new “layers of meaning” evolve (Hirschman, 1980) over and beyond utilitarian attributes.
Jones (1986) argues that the added values are the most important part of the definition of a brand, differentiating between a product (something with a functional purpose) and a brand: "A brand is a product that provides functional benefits plus added values that some consumers value enough to buy" (p. 29).

Similarly, others point out that brands are bought because consumers perceive benefits through enhancement of core products or services, i.e. brands are:

"an identifiable product, service, person or place augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs more closely" (de Chernatony and McDonald, 1994 p. 18).

Thus, brands are said to add value to products (Murphy, 1992). The concept of the "augmented-product" is not new. For example, almost 30 years ago Levitt (1969) argued: "The Manufacturer / must surround his generic product with a cluster of value satisfactions that differentiates his total offering from his competitors" (p. 2).

xii) Brand as an evolving entity.

Several writers (e.g. Young & Rubicam, 1994; Goodyear, 1996) categorise brands according to their evolution. Goodyear (1996) bridges some of the definitions of brands through her chronological categorisation. Specifically, she sees brands evolving from "unbranded commodities", to "references" where the name is used for identification, akin to the AMA definition. This appears particularly prevalent in business to business branding, especially for "commodity like" products such as stationery. Brands then develop into a "personality", offering emotional appeals besides product benefits, for example the implied status of the Jaguar owner. At each stage, the emphasis of the brand gradually shifts from the firm to consumers. At the fourth stage, the consumer "owns" the brand, which acquires "icon" connotations, as in the case of Levi jeans. A further progression is "brand as company", focusing on a distinct set of corporate "brand values" that permeate organisations, for example Virgin. The ultimate stage, "brand as policy", stands for social and political issues relevant to consumers, as with the Body Shop.

This framework is useful for analysing the different brand definitions reviewed. However, it suffers from:

(i) Lack of criteria marking transitions between stages;
(ii) The typology is underpinned by increasing consumer experience, but does not explicitly stipulate how to categorise this;
(iii) The elements which are important at the earlier stages of a brand's development do not cease to be relevant later. For example, the functional characteristics of the brand are still important, although they might be taken for granted, at the final stage of "brand as policy";
(iv) The evolution of the brand is left too much to the initiative of the consumer, suffering from Kapferer's "excess of democracy". Recognition is needed of the organisation's role;
(v) Empirical verification is not apparent.
Emerging Brand Construct

We used the twelve themes identified in the literature as the starting point for setting the boundaries of the brand construct. Our first step was to analyse the definitions so we could identify any commonalities and differences regarding the antecedents of the brand and its consequences for brand strategies. By drawing on the discussion of such similarities and differences, we then considered issues of redundancy with similar constructs. This enabled us to better define the brand construct itself and set what we perceived to be its boundaries, based on the analysis of the literature.

However, it should be realised that, though comprehensive, no coverage of the literature can ever be thoroughly exhaustive, hence additional literature might have produced further themes. Moreover, the proposed construct is based on a necessarily subjective interpretation of the literature.

Antecedents and Consequences of the Brand Construct in the Literature

As already mentioned in the literature review, the twelve themes are not entirely mutually exclusive and there is a certain degree of overlap among the tangible and intangible aspects of the brand assumed by each definition. The analysis that follows brings out the bases for such overlap.

Following Singh’s (1991) approach, in Table 1 we summarise the antecedents and consequences of the brand construct, as emerging from the definitions reviewed in the previous section.

This highlights similarities and differences in the antecedents and consequences of the extant definitions. These overlaps suggest definition redundancy (Singh, 1991). For example, definitions such as "company", "identity system", "image", "value system", "personality", "relationship" and "added value" share the common antecedent of the brand’s personality. There are also similarities in the consequences from various definitions. For instance, the definitions of the brand as "company" and as "identity system" both refer to the coherent message communicated to the brand’s stakeholders.

The notions of the brand as a "legal instrument", a "logo", a "company" and an "identity system" also share a common orientation, in terms of a firm, or "input" centred orientation (de Chernatony, 1993). The first two definitions focus on the brand name and on the logo as "antecedents" to legal and visual sources of differentiation, devoid of deeper meanings. However, the consequences differ, as the legal instrument enables prosecution of infringers, whilst the logo enables recognition. The definitions in terms of "company" and "identity" adopt a wider perspective whereby, when considering antecedents, the organisation embeds the brand’s visual identity with meanings which have different levels of abstraction. The "company" definition stresses the corporate name, and lower and higher levels of brand meaning can be identified. At the lower end, firms may promote their corporate name primarily to facilitate differentiation. In contrast, a higher level of abstraction results in managing specific associations, such as the firm’s culture, its value proposition, and particular customer relationships (Aaker, 1996), enriching the decision and consumption experience. Finally, the notion of the brand as an "identity system" represents the highest level of abstraction of these "input-based" set of definitions referring, as a
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Brand definition</th>
<th>Antecedents</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Legal Instrument</strong></td>
<td>Mark of ownership. Name, logo, design. Trademark.</td>
<td>Prosecute infringers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>Logo</strong></td>
<td>Name, term, sign, symbol, design. Product characteristics.</td>
<td>Identify, differentiate through visual identity and name. Quality assurance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Company</strong></td>
<td>Recognisable corporate name and image. Culture, people, programs of organisation define corporate personality. CEO is brand manager.</td>
<td>Evaluate over long time horizon. Product lines benefit from corporate personality. Convey consistent message to stakeholders. Differentiation: proposition, relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Shorthand</strong></td>
<td>Firm stresses quality not quantity of information.</td>
<td>Rapidly recognise brand association. Facilitate information processing, speed decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Risk reducer</strong></td>
<td>Confidence that expectations being fulfilled.</td>
<td>Brand as a contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Identity system</strong></td>
<td>More than just a name. Holistic, structured with six integrated facets, including brand’s personality.</td>
<td>Clarity direction, meaning, strategic positioning. Protective barrier. Communicate essence to stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Image</strong></td>
<td>Consumer centred. Image in consumers’ mind is brand “reality”.</td>
<td>Firm’s input activities managed using feedback of image to change identity. Market research important. Manage brand concept over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <strong>Value system</strong></td>
<td>Consumer relevant values imbue the brand.</td>
<td>Brand values match relevant consumer values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. <strong>Personality</strong></td>
<td>Psychological values, communicated through advertising and packaging define brand’s personality.</td>
<td>Differentiation from symbolism: human values projected. Stress added values beyond functional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. <strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td>Consumer has attitude to brand. Brand as person has attitude to consumer.</td>
<td>Recognition and respect for personality. Develop relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. <strong>Evolving entity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Change by stage of development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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consequence, to the brand's holistic strategic direction as the source of brand positioning.

The antecedents of the next seven brand definitions i.e. "shorthand", "risk reducer", "image", "value system", "personality", "relationship" and "adding value" blend the input of the firm with an "output" consumer perspective (de Chernatony, 1993). A common characteristic is that the brand's name and logo are considered as more than mere legal and visual identifiers, and represent the set of experiences and associations that consumers have acquired over time as a result of organisations' activities. As Poliesz (1989) noted, increasing levels of abstraction of brand meaning may be attributed to the notion of the brand as "image" in consumers' minds, since there is no accepted definition of image. Different authors refer to images in varying ways, ranging from holistic, general impressions (Poliesz, 1989), to very elaborate evaluations of brands' attributes (Keller, 1993). By blending an input/output perspective, the definition of the brand as "image" implies that the firm's activity can be managed using feedback of image to change identity. The highest level of abstraction among this set of input/output definitions is achieved by the concept of the brand as "value system" which transforms the usage experience through the subjective meanings the brand represents for consumers.

Another common antecedent of the "image", "value system", "personality", "relationship" and "adding value" definitions is the theme of the brand's personality. It was an antecedent also in two of the "input-based" definitions reviewed earlier, i.e. it was one of the six facets of brand identity (Kapferer, 1992) and it personified the culture of the company brand. However, whilst in the two input-based definitions the brand's personality was considered as a firm's creation, here it is consumer centred, resulting from consumers projecting human values onto brands.

A common consequence of definitions numbered 6 to 12 in Table 1 is the notion of differentiation through symbolism. However, the extent to which symbolism is used as a means of differentiation depends upon the level of abstraction of the brand antecedents. For example, whilst a consequence of the brand as "personality" perspective is the opportunity to achieve differentiation through the human values projected onto the brand, the concept of the brand as a "relationship" goes one step further, implying a proactive role of the brand towards the consumer, stipulating necessary characteristics of the brand's user and developing a mutual relationship between the brand and the consumer. The ultimate stage is the "value system" definition, which refers to the body of beliefs and group norms that have been internalised by individuals (Engel et al., 1993) and that are expected to imbue the chosen brand.

Setting the Boundaries of the Brand Construct

As a consequence of the above considerations, the "brand" is a multidimensional construct whereby managers augment products or services with values and this facilitates the process by which consumers confidently recognise and appreciate these values. The likelihood of repeated use is enhanced when consumers' feedback is monitored and used to better tune the value constellations to consumers' needs.
Recognising that there are numerous stakeholders with an interest in a firm's brand (e.g. government, shareholders, suppliers, etc.), the above discussion of the antecedents and consequences of the brand construct highlights that two key stakeholders are the firm's staff and consumers. While not all brand definitions consider both stakeholders, every brand theme takes the perspective of either the firm's staff or the consumers (or both) in determining the antecedents and the consequences of the brand. Hence, the firm's activities (input) and consumers' perceptions (output) emerge as the two main boundaries of the brand construct, setting the "sine qua non" condition for the very existence of the brand itself. The brand exists mainly by virtue of a continuous process whereby the values and expectations imbued in the brand object (product or service) are set and enacted by the firm's staff and interpreted and redefined by the consumers, so that:

![Brand Model Diagram]

The model above is a simplified representation\(^1\) of the cyclical process through which the brand becomes the interface between the firm's activities and consumers' interpretations. For example, the brand is positioned by the firm through the elements of the marketing mix, which work together to convey a pre-determined brand identity and personality. These are perceived by consumers in ways which are coherent with their self-images, and their functional and emotional needs. By monitoring consumers' perceptions of the brand, the firm's input can be either rectified (to close any gaps with consumers' perceptions), or reinforced, along the aspects which are more relevant to consumers.

While the firm's input and consumers' perceptions are the two main and necessary boundaries, a number of elements lie at each end of the boundaries of the brand concept.

For the firm, these elements are the features and beneficial attributes imbued in the brand (see Lefkoff-Hagius and Mason, 1993). In addition, as encapsulated by several of the earlier definitions, marketers may choose to stress symbolic, experiential, social and emotional values (Park et al., 1986; de Chernatony and McWilliam, 1989; Sheth et al., 1991). Since these attributes and values are used to characterise and differentiate the brand, they are inside the brand construct. By themselves, however, the attributes and values set by the firm are insufficient to define the brand construct, which is at a higher level of

\(^1\) A parallel can be seen in the literature on managerial sense making which shows how managers are able to manage complexity through developing models which simplify complex issues by reducing them into a smaller number of parts (Schwenk, 1988).
abstraction and also relates to quality and values as perceived by the consumer, as we next discuss.

From the consumers' side, central to the concept of the brand is the construct of brand image. Dobni and Zinkhan (1990, p.118) define brand image as: "largely a subjective and perceptual phenomenon that is formed through consumer interpretation, whether reasoned or emotional." Kirmani and Zeithaml (1993) have a more precise perspective and describe it as a multidimensional construct incorporating perceptions of quality, value, attitude as well as brand associations and feelings. In their configuration, perceived quality can affect brand image either directly or indirectly, through the mediators of brand attitude and perceived value. Its antecedents are lower level attributes referring to functional properties of the brand ("intrinsic cues") and attributes such as price, brand name, level of advertising and warranty which are external to the brand's functional characteristics ("extrinsic cues") (Zeithaml, 1988). Perceived value is the consumer's overall assessment of the "utility" of a brand, based on perceptions of what is received and what is given (Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993). As inputs to brand image, perceived quality and perceived value are within the boundaries of the brand construct. They help define the brand construct from the consumer's perspective, and provide feedback enabling firms to fine tune their brands' values.

With regards to brand attitude, Kirmani and Zeithaml (1993) regard it as a mediator between perceived quality and brand image. However, there appears to be redundancy (Singh, 1991) between the constructs of brand attitude and brand image, since Kirmani and Zeithaml describe them both as including affective and cognitive interpretations of the brand. It is also not clear why, in their configuration, perceived value should influence brand image and not brand attitude. Indeed, many authors (e.g. Joyce, 1963 and 1967; East, 1997) make no distinction between the constructs of brand image and brand attitude, defining them both as the set of associations a brand has acquired for an individual. Following Joyce (1967) we do not make any distinction between brand attitude and brand image, which are redundant constructs.

Research Aim and Methods of Analysis

Our aim in this study was to contribute to the formation of a theory of the brand. Among the set of epistemological criteria specified by Zaltman et al. (1973) for evaluating theories, is the confirmation criterion, i.e. that the theory should cohere with facts. Earlier we developed a theory of the brand grounded partially in scholarly articles and books and partially in the management press. We now needed to assess the coherence of such theory with current branding reality. Reviewing the management press indicated that the evolution of new pragmatic ideas in branding is predominantly led by consultants. Through their daily activities, consultants are in touch with a wide variety of branding problems, thus their knowledge of brands is broad and their thinking reflects best brand management practice. In contrast, relatively few brand managers were cited in the management press as influential brand thinkers. In fact many authors were critical of brand managers' lack of vision and understanding of branding principles (Mitchell, 1994; Low and Fullerton, 1994; Freeling, 1994).
In view of their considerable branding expertise and knowledge, it is appropriate to understand how leading-edge brand consultants, whose daily activity is shaping the future agenda for brands, interpret them. To our knowledge no previous research has undertaken a comprehensive and structured analysis of the concept of the brand from the perspective of “experts”. Therefore, in the second part of the study we sought to explore experts’ understanding of brands, to contribute to the development of the theory of the brand.

This stage of the research corresponds to Churchill’s (1979) “experience survey”, whereby a judgement sample of people is used to gather ideas and insights into the phenomenon.

As we wished to uncover as wide a perspective as possible, we followed Gordon and Langmaid’s (1988) suggestion and undertook 20 focused interviews. To qualify, respondents had to be senior consultants in agencies which specialise in advising clients about brand marketing issues. They needed to be sufficiently well recognised for their brand consulting expertise that they frequently present at management conferences on branding, or had written books or papers on branding for management journals, or be recommended by other experts, albeit only two of the twenty respondents were chosen through recommendation. The 20 consultants were either chairmen, partners, or directors in brand consultancies (9), advertising agencies (7), market research agencies (2) and corporate communications agencies (2). They were all involved with branding projects on a national and international scale. Interviews were undertaken in or around London, mostly at the premises of each agency, between January and March, 1996.

Given the nature of the research, the most appropriate approach was to conduct qualitative focused (or semi-structured) interviews (Sampson, 1967). This allowed us to elicit experts’ views within their frames of reference, without imposing any of our preconceptions. A topic guide was used to steer the overall interviewing process, whereby at the beginning of the interviews all respondents were asked: “How would you define a ‘brand’?”. We did not wish to taint respondents thinking and thus deliberately kept the questions broad, encouraging them to develop their own arguments. Respondents were encouraged to talk as much or as little as they wished, with no interruptions on our part, except when we thought we needed clarification of what they meant. Their answers varied in length from a couple of lines of transcribed text (1 respondent) to three pages (1 respondent). The modal length of responses (10 experts) was less than one page of text.

The focused interviews were recorded, then subsequently transcribed. Each of the authors worked through the transcripts and, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), independently analysed the contents of the interviews by developing coding frames to appreciate how each of the comments related to the definitions identified in the literature review. Whenever an expert’s comment did not seem to relate to any of the definitions in the literature, a new category was added. After the two separate analyses had been undertaken, the results between the two authors were compared and the coefficient of agreement (i.e. the total number of agreements divided by the total number of coding decisions) was calculated as 84%. Where disagreements occurred these
were discussed and an agreed view adopted (cf. Miles and Huberman, 1994). A limitation that might have been introduced by the two authors analysing the transcripts this way is that their preconceptions from the literature may have influenced their coding frames. Ideally independent coders should have been employed, however our approach is common practice in qualitative market research (e.g. Gordon and Langmaid, 1988), not least because of time limitations.

**Experts' Definitions of the "Brand"**

While several experts had to pause for thought, all were able to give definitions. Below we report the main findings from the interviews, we compare them with previous literature, and advance a series of propositions relating to the brand construct.

**Relating Experts' Views to the Twelve Brand Theme Definitions**

We compared the experts' definitions with the twelve themes earlier reviewed, to classify each expert's comments into the categories reported in Table 2.

The top part of Table 2 shows the number of experts who mentioned definitions concurring with the themes identified in the literature. All the themes from the literature review were mentioned. It was rare for the experts to mention just one theme. Some referred to different interpretations of brands, such as the "naive-complex" spectrum which will be discussed in the next section. Others gave definitions that span several themes. Averaging across all consultants, each mentioned 2.4 of the twelve literature branding themes.

The value system, personality, image and logo themes were most commonly mentioned. Interestingly, the former three themes encompass both the input and output perspectives, depicting brands as recognition devices which evoke values and images and acquire meanings through their unique personalities. For example: "Brands in my definition are brands like Marmite, like Benetton, like Virgin, that have got a real understanding of the key associations that form those [consumers'] perceptions more powerfully, that are what I would call values. That understand those values, that categorise them appropriately, that measure them and communicate them." (brand consultant). An advertising consultant spoke about "people find it much easier to see a brand as a total personality, and use the analogy of a brand as like a person" and another advertising consultant explained that a brand "creates the illusion, in the mind of the consumer, that I am dealing with one thing, with which I can have a relationship. When I am dealing with Barclaycard I am dealing with one thing called Barclaycard, for which the best analogy is a person, although I know it is not a person".

In the bottom of Table 2 three new themes emerged, relating to positioning and to having a vision binding a brand's values, for example: "| Brands | also have some kind of vision which binds those values together, gives them meaning, but also gives them impetus and direction" (brand consultant). Finally, a brand consultant mentioned the element of goodwill: "At the very bottom [the brand] is just the name ... But of course the name carries with it a huge amount
of goodwill" (brand consultant).

Table 2. Categorising Experts’ Definitions of “Brand”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from literature</th>
<th>Number of experts mentioning</th>
<th>Illustrative explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value system</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Real brands have an understanding of values that characterise them”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“The personality surrounding a product or a service”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“The way an object is perceived by consumers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logo</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“A set of visual features animated by advertising”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk reducer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“It means that I know what I am getting from one purchase to the next”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“The perception that the organisation is trying to engineer and maintain and achieve”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding value</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Added values, qualities beyond product performance”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorthand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“All we know, learn, taste, experience about the brand over a long period of time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal instrument</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“A trade-mark in use”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“A form of identity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“A relationship with a customer or a consumer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolving</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Can mean different thing for different people in different scenarios”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Additional themes</th>
<th>Number of experts mentioning</th>
<th>Illustrative explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positioning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“The attributes which are made to adhere to a product in order to give it attractiveness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“[Brands] have vision and purpose to give them meaning to consumers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodwill</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Accumulated weight of goodwill”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We attempted to apply Goodyear’s framework of brands as evolving entities to the experts’ definitions but we found problems fitting every definition to the specific stages in Goodyear’s framework that was reviewed in Section 2. Firstly, Goodyear’s spectrum does not explicitly stipulate how to categorise specific levels of consumer experience or expectations. Secondly, we encountered
definitions that could be categorised at several points on this spectrum.
These findings lead us to postulate:

Proposition 1: Due to the complex multifaceted nature of brands, practitioners draw on several themes to describe them, in particular brands as value systems.

Whether All Experts had the Same Brand Definition

From the literature about the way people use mental models to help them understand complex issues (e.g. Brown, 1994; Day, 1992; Morecroft, 1992), and in view of the complexity of brands, we expected brand consultants to have well developed mental models to understand them. From the multiplicity of definitions in the literature, we thought it unlikely that every brand consultant would have the same definition. However, in view of the fact that the brand is consultants' common focus of interest, they might adhere to similar brand concepts. From the previous section, when examining the experts' responses, no one identical definition emerged. However, we could identify some common themes.

As discussed earlier, the twelve literature themes varied, among other things, by the extent to which they focused on the brand's tangible (e.g. name, logo, visual features) or intangible elements (e.g. personality, symbolic elements, added values beyond functional elements). As a consequence, one way of characterising the experts' definitions is the extent to which they regarded brands as being tangible or intangible entities. The most tangible perspective was given by a brand consultant defining a brand as "a set of visual features, animated by advertising and promotion, which symbolise a product or service and which are used in various ways to identify it". This definition stops short of imbuing the brand with any symbolic values, or "personality", beyond its physical appearance. Indeed the same consultant continued: "branding [...] has to do with the selection and blending of the various visual elements of the brand, in order to produce something which is attractive, distinctive and differentiated from competitors' brands in that particular market place." Another brand consultant adopted a far more intangible perspective of the brand as a cluster of values "with a vision that binds those values together". Virtually all (18) stressed brands' intangible nature, and half of these linked the tangible component to the intangible, e.g. "Trade-mark that has acquired a personality trait" (brand consultant), "a badge or name.... that everything spins from" (advertising consultant).

These replies indicate that the brand's visual features are insufficient to define the brand construct. While experts considered the brand's name and logo as an antecedent, they stressed that it is the intangible element - "a sort of net accumulated weight of goodwill" (brand consultant) - which gives brands "a sort of forward momentum that keeps them going" (same brand consultant).

This contention is reinforced by the finding that only one expert had a definition that came close to the AMA 1960 interpretation of the brand as a logo, i.e. the "visual" perspective in the tangible-intangible spectrum previously reviewed. The others incorporated additional themes from table 2. This finding indicates the restrictive and outdated nature of the AMA definition. An
advertising consultant directly addressed this, stating that "the old definition would be a product with a logo on it, but really a brand now is something that can be perceived by its target to exist and to have both an image and personality".

However, several respondents gave examples of brands still being managed as products with logos on them. Specifically, experts referred to petrol retailers and many of the financial services organisations having little understanding of the potential for branding, urging a need for radical changes in the way brands in these sectors are managed. A brand consultant referred to a "naive-complex" spectrum of branding, with "trade-marks in use" reflecting the naïve position still adopted in some sectors. For example, with implicit criticism for the definitions of the brand in terms of "a legal instrument" or "a logo", a brand consultant remarked: "I think there are a lot of so called 'brands', in inverted commas, that are nothing more than names, which happen to have an awful lot of awareness". By contrast, some of the airline firms (e.g. British Airways) and new entrants into financial services (e.g. Virgin Direct and First Direct) were regarded as having sophisticated brands, epitomised as "sets of perceptions that live, exist and breath in consumers' minds" (brand consultant). As a result of the relationships firms were building with consumers, the experts spoke about consumers having ladders of anticipations about brands, such that "brands define people's expectations" and that brands evolve as consumers gain more "competitive experiences" (market research consultant). It appears that for the experts "more sophisticated brands" relate to definitions of the brand as "an image", "a personality" or as "a relationship".

These remarks about a "naive-complex" spectrum of branding are reminiscent of Goodyear's (1996) evolutionary view. However, whilst Goodyear derives her view from the consumerisation of markets in different countries, the experts' "naive-complex" spectrum refers to different product fields or different brands within the same product field. Furthermore, whilst Goodyear's spectrum is underpinned by the notion of increasing consumer experience, the experts' "naive-complex" spectrum refers to the way managers define and, consequently, manage their brands in different sectors.

The experts' emphasis on brands' intangible elements is at odds with the widely quoted AMA definition. Rather, the experts' views are more akin to the recent academic literature (e.g. Jones, 1986; Kapferer, 1992) which advocates brands as complex entities, blending both tangible and intangible elements. Consistent with Kapferer's remark that the name, logo, design, or packaging are a brand's component parts, while a consistent, integrated vision make it "an identity system", the experts have referred to the brand's intangible elements as essential constituents of the brand construct, beyond the brand's visual features. The experts' definitions encompass several themes in the literature, referring to brands as sets of perceptions in consumers' minds (brand "as image" in the literature), and to brands having acquired personality traits (brand "as personality"). Hence we posit:

**Proposition 2: The 1960 AMA's definition of brands is too restrictive, having insufficient regard for both intangible components and consumers' perceptions, which are essential aspects of the concept of the brand.**
Input Versus Output Theme

The branding process starts with managers devising brand plans, and results in consumers choosing brands, based on their perceptions about the fit between their values and their needs. As a consequence of consumers’ choice behaviour, the firm’s activities are either reinforced or necessitate fine tuning. Within this context, the themes of the brand as a “legal instrument”, “logo” and “identity” overly stress the supplier, or input perspective, on brands. On the other hand, definitions such as “an image”, “a personality”, “a relationship” and “added values” had a more balanced perspective encompassing both the firm’s and the consumer’s considerations. As we are dealing with experts, we anticipated a balanced definition, blending input with output.

Only one brand consultant adopted an overly input stance, (“set of visual features”), whereas four experts adopted a notable output stance: “I would start with what people think of this thing” (brand consultant), “it is something that exists in people’s heads” (advertising consultant), “it defines expectations” (market research consultant), “something perceived by target market as having both an image and personality” (advertising consultant). The remaining 15 had a balanced perspective in their definitions, where both input and output considerations are encapsulated. For example “It’s the [consumer] perception of what an organisation is trying to engineer” (corporate communication consultant); “it is simply a badge or name or means of recognition ... and that badge then acquires certain meanings or associations for people over time” (advertising consultant).

A recurrent theme amongst those making output related comments (i.e. those solely adopting an output perspective and those having output and input comments) is the concept of brands as perceptions in consumers’ minds. This point was made by nine respondents (e.g. “a brand exists in the mind, or not at all, as a blend of both tangible and intangible elements” - advertising consultant). Within this theme, it is possible to discern rational as well as emotional aspects of perceptions. For example, “a collection of things that exist in people’s heads that lead you to believe in some way that the product is superior to other products ... then there is another collection of things which are to do with emotions” (advertising consultant). The emotional aspect (e.g. “are they my kind of people?” - advertising consultant - and “if the product came to life ....how comfortable would I feel? - advertising consultant) interacts with performance perceptions to affect people’s overall assessment. These views are akin to the definitions of the brand as “image” and as “personality”.

Consistent with our earlier configuration of the concept of the brand as the interface of the firm’s activities with consumers’ perceptions, a dominant theme in the experts’ replies was that brands succeed when firms’ marketing activities have been so effectively enacted that marketers’ intentions perfectly mirror consumers’ perceptions of brands’ capabilities. This is summarised in the quote from a corporate communications consultant: “The challenge to organisations is to make sure that the external projection is consistent with the experience, which requires that the internal dimensions be quite carefully considered and deployed”. With specific reference to the theme of brands as “value systems”, and consistent with Kapferer’s (1992) and Aaker’s (1996) views of the essential role of the firm in building and sustaining brand identity, a brand consultant
stated: "So values are hopeless unless they are guided and driven towards some conclusion, and have some central purpose that makes them important and relevant to consumers, otherwise they are not going to buy it."

Therefore, we postulate:

**Proposition 3:** A brand represents the matching of functional and emotional values devised by a firm with the performance and psychosocial benefits sought by consumers.

**Proposition 4:** The closer the match between the values of the brand and consumers' rational and emotional needs, the more successful the brand.

**Discussion**

From the literature review there are numerous definitions of the brand, which can be synthesised into twelve themes. Using Singh's (1991) redundancy analysis, we found several similarities between the antecedents and consequences of these definitions, with considerable overlapping among some themes. As such, this analysis indicates that when consultants and managers talk to each other about brands, they may be broadly referring to the same construct, albeit using alternative definitions. However, as different themes imply different branding strategies, this lack of precision in terminology may lead to the enactment of brand strategy being different to that anticipated by all members of the brand's team (cf. Mintzberg and Waters, 1982). Through analysis of the branding literature, the application of Singh's redundancy analysis and the experts' comments, we have fulfilled the aim set in the Introduction, laying the foundations for a theory for the brand.

To encourage better communication and more effective use of resources, we propose a definition of the "brand", drawing on the extant literature. The brand is a complex multidimensional construct whereby managers augment products and services with values and this facilitates the process by which consumers confidently recognise and appreciate these values. The likelihood of repeated use is enhanced when consumers' feedback is monitored and used to better tune the value constellations to consumers' needs. Consequently, brands are co-produced by firms and consumers. By incorporating knowledge about consumers' interpretations of brands, the virtuous cyclical process above should enable firms to build powerful brands.

Focusing on the brand's two key stakeholders, i.e. the firm's staff and consumers, two critical boundaries help characterise the domain of this construct. From the firm's perspective, the performance attributes and values developed by the firm are inherent constructs of the brand. Further constructs emerge by considering the consumer's perspective, i.e. the constructs of brand image and value are central to the brand concept.

By means of focused interviews with 20 leading edge brand experts, we were also able to assess their interpretations of brands against the literature and suggest several propositions for researchers to test. Specifically, further research should assess whether the propositions we put forward in the preceding sections reflect best brand management practice.
In view of the complexity of brands, experts predominantly drew on several brand themes. Possibly due, in part, to the branding philosophies their consultancies adhered to, no one definition was common amongst all consultants interviewed. However, some patterns emerged in the themes of their interpretations. A tangible - intangible spectrum encompassed all their definitions, with a marked bias to intangible themes. Since it is easier to interpret an intangible concept when it is explained in tangible terms, some experts referred to the logo theme epitomised by the AMA definition of the brand. However, underpinning the majority of experts' definitions is the notion of brands as value systems, personality and image which is consistent with the more recent branding literature. This more advanced view of brands allows for a wider range of strategic brand growth options and resulted in the experts being critical of the restrictive nature of the AMA definition. Failing to move beyond the AMA definition, as shown by petrol retailers and many financial services organisations, impedes brands capitalising on their potential.

The experts' comments reinforced the appropriateness of defining the domain of the brand construct in terms of firms' and consumers' perspectives. The majority of experts had a balanced interpretation of brands drawing on both firms' and consumers' perceptions. Their comments lead us to suggest the proposition that one of the discriminating characteristics between successful and failed brands is that successful brands show a greater degree of congruence between the values firms develop for their brands and the rational and emotional needs of their consumers.

Researchers should consider testing the propositions advanced in this paper, not only amongst a larger group of brand consultants, but also amongst managers and consumers.

Conclusions and Managerial Implication

In their interpretations of brands each consultant emphasised several aspects of the twelve brand definition themes identified in the branding literature. However, there was considerable overlap in terms of the emphasis attributed to the notion of the brand as a multidimensional construct, whereby managers augment products and services with value constellations matching consumer needs. This is in contrast with the traditional, possibly dated, view of the brand stressing the importance of branding to visually differentiate a firm's offering.

Goodyear's (1996) evolutionary spectrum and the experts' comments indicate that the opportunities for branding are to be found in developing consumer-relevant values, and then in the use of symbols and designs to communicate these. If communicated effectively such values can become strongly held perceptions in consumers' minds and through increasing brand usage these values become respected.

Building brands as value systems necessitates going beyond short-term promotions, increasing awareness and looking for temporary gains in market share. It necessitates a longer term commitment, building on any latent or current values which are fine tuned to match consumers' needs. Pressure to change these values because of changed competitor activities should be resisted without assessing whether there are any changing consumer trends. The values
that are developed as the core of the brand must be bound together by a vision which gives them meaning, impetus and direction.

In view of the different interpretation of brands in the literature, it is not improbable that managers will have different conceptualisations, leading to differences in strategic emphasis. However, all employees in the firm need to work together to ensure that the promises being made for the brand are consistent with consumers' experiences. Particularly when a management team is working together to improve their brand's performance, it may be helpful to get each manager to make explicit their view about their interpretation of the brand and if there are diverse views these should be exposed and a consensus sought amongst the team. An open discussion will surface differing assumptions and give the team greater confidence in their task. This is particularly important where the team consists of senior managers, since their diverse interpretations will lead them to direct their staff in potentially conflicting directions. The growth of corporate branding may indicate increasing awareness amongst firms of the need to consider brands as value systems and to ensure a consistent brand message, regardless of consumers' points of contact with the firm.

Finally, agencies and consultants working for the first time with a brand management team would benefit from understanding how their client interprets its brands. Without this knowledge there is a danger of inappropriate recommendations in the formative stages of the working relationship.

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