UNDERLYING DRIVERS OF CORPORATE BRANDING ADOPTION

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Abstract

This article presents a review of literature on the key drivers behind the adoption of corporate branding by organisations. In this regard it traces the origins and evolution of corporate branding from the academic and managerial perspective and attempts to identify the major factors that have led to this adoption and thus provides the link between this adoption and the changes in the dynamic environment, in which organisations operate in. Therefore, it is the objective of this paper to provide a better understanding of the key drivers that have influenced the adoption of corporate branding.

Key Words: Corporate Branding, Corporate Branding Key Drivers

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1.0 Introduction

As a concept, corporate branding is dynamic and multidisplinary in nature as envelops all the major departments of an organisation in addition to adopting concepts from disciplines such as organisational behavior, sociology and anthropology. This dynamism is due to the changes in the environment in which organisations operate in and thus they must adapt and develop strategies to ensure they have a competitive edge in addition to differentiating themselves from other rivals. This article examines how corporate branding has evolved over time and the key drivers that have influenced its adoption by organisations. Based on previous studies, the origins of corporate branding as an important and relevant concept can be traced from the academic and the management perspectives. These are highlighted below.

1.1 Academic perspective

Beginning with the academic perspective, according to Knox and Bickerton (2003), the origins in academic literature, can be traced to the 1970's, when it was seen as corporate image which later emerged as a unified concept with the convergence of the marketing perspective and the multidisplinary perspective in the 1990's with the marketing perspective focusing on the consumer while the multidisplinary perspective focuses on the organisation. From figure 1below, it can be observed that Knox and Bickerton posit that, corporate branding as a concept has been developed as a result of the merger of the marketing perspective and the multidisplinary perspective, with a focus on the customer and the organisational respectively. Further, from the organisational viewpoint Knox and Bickerton posit that, the concept of corporate branding as we know it today, was initially considered as corporate image in the 1970's, then as corporate personality in the 1970's, then as corporate identity in the mid 1990's), then as corporate reputation in the late 1990's which incorporated aspects of corporate association resulting in the development of corporate branding in the early 20th century due to the convergence of the corporate association and corporate reputation areas of study.

On the other hand, from the parallel perspective of a customer, Knox and Bickerton (2003) further posit that, corporate branding was viewed as part of the brand image in the 1950's, then later as being a component of the brand's positioning in the early 1980's, much later on as an element of the brand identity of a product or service in the late 1990's. After this period, organisations focused on the perceptions and evaluations that consumers focused on in relation to the organisation in the form of corporate associations in the late 1990's. Later in the early 21th century, the corporate association viewpoint merged with the corporate reputation perspective to form the corporate branding concept as it is known to date. Finally, after 2001, Merrilees, Gyrd-Jones and Miller (2013) adds, a huge numbers of articles have since then emerged on studies relating to corporate branding after a seminal article by John Balmer in 2001.

1.2 Management Perspective

From this perspective, Fombrun and Shanley (as cited in Merrilees, Gyrd-Jones and Miller (2013) trace the history of corporate branding to the 1990's when it began as part of reputation management. This is supported by Balmer and Gray (2003) who note that, at this time, corporate branding was referred to as company branding as it was Stephen King in the 1990's, a branding expert, who made explicit reference to a corporate brand as a company brand in one of his well known articles on the distinguishing features between a product brand and a company brand.

This concurs with Usurnier and Fetscherin (2012) who trace the origins of corporate branding as a concept to the 1970's where it developed and was mostly driven by managers' needs and aspirations to solve problems rather than academic aspirations to create new knowledge. The problems were as a result of companies expanding their operations to the international arena and forming subsidiaries. Later in the 1980's, as Usurnier et al further observes that, the first academic studies on effects of corporate advertising on corporate image was conducted by Winters in 1986 and was followed by paper on corporate reputation and factors underlying it. Lastly, Usurnier et al adds, in the 1990's first papers outlining the multidisciplinary nature of corporate identity were published by G. Dowling in 1993 who developed a model of integrating the vision, culture and image of an organization to transform its corporate identity

Finally, Inskip (2004) observes that over the past two decades, corporate branding has evolving from being seen as the "consistent application of strong graphic design into a philosophy and a process of organisational change" in which the organisation's unique personality traits have a value attached to, and require proper management more than its products and services (p. 358).

2.0 Underlying Key Drivers in the Adoption of Corporate Branding

Over time corporate branding has evolved to become a concept that managers cannot ignore in the highly competitive world in which they are currently operate in. This growth in interest and practical application has been as a result of several factors as identified by different researchers. These are highlighted below.

2.1 Increased Expectations and Need for Transparency and Accountability by Stakeholders

To begin with, Balmer and Gray (2000) identify the heightened expectations from members of the society towards organisations in which they demand more in terms of the social and ethical duties of the organisations to the society, thus giving rise to the recent trends towards increased levels of corporate social responsibility by organizations as the organisations aim to create an image of being socially responsible citizens. This is supported by Einwiller and Will (2002) who add that this increasing demand by the organizations' stakeholders is for honesty, information disclosure and accountability in the management and financial affair of the organisation and is promoted by the growth of the social media and increased government regulation of certain industries to protect the rights of the shareholders.

Secondly, Hulberg (2006) observes that increased access to information by the organisation's stakeholders has necessitated the need for openness and transparency on the part of the organization to promote a positive corporate image as the stake holders are now more informed and aware of what is going on around them. Thirdly, the increased scrutiny by consumers to know the organisations behind the products and services and to obtain information to be used in evaluating the products and services they offer has encouraged organisations to spend large amounts of resources to improve on their corporate brands (Mann & Ghuman, 2014). Lastly, all these drivers are as a result of the increasing importance of stakeholders namely the consumers and the deregulation and developments in the information and communication technologies which have enabled the stakeholders to get instantaneous information about an organisation and its product from anywhere around the world (Einwiller and Will 2002; Figiel & Szromnik, 2012)

2.2 Mergers, Alliances and Acquisitions

Recently there has been a trend towards merger and acquisitions amongst some competitors as organisations try to consolidate their assets together to create one organisation to increase their bargaining power, market share, as well as create synergy in their marketing operations and improve their overall competitiveness (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; Balmer & Gray, 2000; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Figiel & Szromnik, 2012). This has resulted in a major change to the company's image and identity as its organisational profile is altered due to a gap being created between its true identity and the perceived image its stakeholders hold about it (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; Balmer & Gray, 2000). This has created a need to for the organisation to adopt corporate branding in order to bridge this gap by forming a single identity which embodies the different identities of organisations that have agreed to enter into a "business marriage" (Balmer & Dinne 1999, p. 182).

2.3 Deregulation and Privatization of Industries

On this driver Balmer and Gray (2000) notes that the deregulation of industries such as banking and airline sectors, has opened up firms that operated like monopolies to compete in markets that were previously restricted, and therefore as a result of the extensive privatization of state owned corporations a need has arisen for the newly privatized organizations to differentiate themselves from their competitors and the previously held identities as government owned. In short this can be viewed as the change of companies from state controlled or private ownership to public of therefore meaning that the company loses the advantages for instance, restricting the entry of competitors in the market it is serving (Einwiller & Will 2002; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006).

2.4 Lack of Adequate Qualified and Talented Employees

The other driver in influencing the adoption of corporate branding as noted by Balmer and Gray (2000) is the of lack of adequate skilled and motivated employees who can directly and indirectly promote the organization's reputation to the outside world and attract even more skilled and knowledgeable employees. This results in stiff competition between organisations for gifted and qualified personnel to drive an organisation's corporate branding activities (Einwiller & Will, 2002). This is because gifted and qualified have over years assumed a growing role of being at the point of contact and interaction with stakeholders and thus their importance in communicating the brand messages and fulfilling the brand promise has resulted in employees being regarded as brand ambassadors for the organisations notes Helmsley (as cited in Harris & Chernatony, 2001). With regard to business start ups, Rode and Vallaster (2005) content that the uncertainty and limited experience in entering a competitive market which has more established organisations compel entrepreneurs to adopt this concept to gain a competitive edge. In summary, by attracting, recruiting and sustaining a highly qualified staff, the organisation is able to propagate a competitive, successful and profitable brand (Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

2.5 Standardized and Homogeneous Global Brand

Another factor is provided by Makarichev, Kaufman, Tsangari, and Temperly (2001) who remark that, this adoption is as a result of an increasingly standardized and homogeneous global marketplace which creates a need for the organisation to be unique, differentiated and in order to gain a competitive edge. This is in agreement with Anisimova (2010) who adds that, companies are more than ever being forced to adapt to a globalised market in which homogeneous and standard products and services are becoming the norm and thus corporate branding is key to maintain a competitive advantage and promoting differentiation by going beyond the traditional marketing mix.

2.6 Access to Information and High Levels of Informedness by Stakeholders

As for this driver improved global communication supported by the development of the internet and the advent of new media, have improved accessibility to information and improved the level of informedness of stakeholders, and specifically consumers, thus enabling them to make informed comparisons between market offerings, which results in fickle-minded consumers who are constantly changing their loyalty as they have a wide variety of brand to choose from (Stuart & Jones 2004; Knox & Lawer, 2008; Anisimova, 2010; Figiel & Szromnik, 2012). Therefore, due to the urgency of developing profitable relationships with the consumers and thus gain a competitive edge in the global market, organisations are nudged towards the trend of creating strong and well reputed corporate brands, through developing unique corporate brand associations that meet a more informed and educated stakeholder who has distinct demands and interests (Einwiller & Will, 2002; Anisimova 2010). In addition, this need ensures that the organisations continuously innovates and are always ready to counter competition and develop a distinct and lasting identity in an over communicated world due developments in the information and communication technologies (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Jensen & Beckman, 2009).

2.7 Increasingly Complicated and Multiple Global Corporate Identities

As organisations expand into the global market and enter into different and distinct new markets by setting up subsidiaries, they are faced with the challenge of coordinating the communication of its complex and multiple corporate signals (Einwiller & Will, 2002). This is compounded by the communication of the different corporate brand signals at the same time resulting in inconsistent messages which create confusion in the stakeholders' minds (Hulberg, 2006). As a consequence organisations have opted to use corporate branding to align and communicate the organisation's multiple identities in a unified manner such that the stakeholders focus is on the organisation and not the different product, services or even subsidiaries that it owns (Hulberg, 2006; Balmer, Stuart & Greyser, 2009). This scenario is also replicated in the not for profit and the public sector where the problem of communicating multiple identities is felt as different public organisations have multiple corporate identities even though they may have similar visions and objectives, making the search for consistent and coherent corporate brands in the public sector, key in the development of a single corporate identity and image (Waeraas, 2008).

2.8 Increased Interaction between Stakeholders and the Organisation

As the boundaries between the internal and external stakeholders are broken down due to the increased need to focus on building relationships with the customer, organisations have increased their interaction with their stakeholders who they now view as part of the organisation, has resulted in increased interaction between the company's stakeholders thus a need to create a corporate identity that has meaning to both (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Stuart & Jones 2004). In addition, this interaction is as a result of the move from the consideration of one stakeholder, mainly the shareholder, as the most important, towards the consideration of a wide range of stakeholders including customers, employees and the general public as part of the organisation, (Fielder & Kirchgeorg, 2007). Further, Figiel and Szromnik (2012) affirm that the adoption of corporate branding has been spurred through the increased interactivity between the organization and the consumers, interaction between the various specialist teams in the organization towards creating a single corporate brand. This interaction can be viewed as the involvement of both the organisation and its customers in networking and the creation of the brand and value in terms of the experiences that consumers have with the intangible corporate brand, thus differentiating the organisation from competitors (Stuart & Jones 2004; Merrilees, Miller & M'zungu, 2010). This interaction is two way as it involves a dialogue between the organisation and the stakeholders thus leading to the development of a relationship between the two parties as they are both actively engaged in the creation of the brand as well as adding value to is resulting in a positive consumer image of the corporate brand and improved competitiveness for the organisation (McEnally, & de Chernatony, 1999).

2.9 Increased Competition

In the global marketplace increased competition in both the business and non business sectors as a result of new businesses being started is being witnessed thus creating the need for these organisations to respond to competitors activities, differentiate themselves from competitors, and make an impression in the marketplace, (Balmer & Gray, 2000; Inskip, 2004; Stuart & Jones 2004; Curtis, Abratt & Minor, 2009). Further, this increased competition has created the need to develop and nurture a distinct corporate identity and improved competitiveness, (Donovan, Janda,& Suh, 2006). Moreover, Hulberg (2006) posits the growth in interest in corporate branding is as a result of the increased need for differentiation due to increased stiff competition.

Apart from the above, other factors include the need to communicate an organisation's corporate identity to improve its corporate image and consequently its competitiveness in a very congested market in addition to strategically enabling its employees deliver on the corporate brand covenant with the consumer, (Chong, 2007). Therefore, it is evident that corporate branding constitutes a component of strategic decision making aimed at improving the competitiveness, reputation and image of an organisation, (Kazi, 2009).

In summary, most organizations are now forced to adopt corporate branding to differentiate themselves from competitors and gain a competitive advantage and to this end, a company has to continually improve its product and services to maintain its image, reputation and heritage, especially in a fast paced and globalised world we are living in where consumers are well informed and have instantaneous information about company offerings and competing substitutes (McEnally, & de Chernatony, 1999).

2.10 Other Key Drivers

To begin with, Balmer and Gray (2000) posit that accelerated product lifecycles have ensured that companies with established corporate reputations need to maintain favorable images through continuous product and service innovation. This is as a result of increased innovation by competitors who develop new products to be ahead of the competition, (Nedergard & Gyrd-Jones, 2013). In addition, Bateson (cited in McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999) contends that, the advent of the service sector and importance of creating customer value in which consumers are actually involved in the process of creating value, influenced the adoption of corporate branding by most organisations in the 1990's. Another factor closely related to the above mentioned is provided by Melewar (2003) who identifies technological changes, as well as changes in values held by consumers which affect the way they perceive the products and services of the organisation.

Further, from a financial point of view, Hulberg (2006) notes that the need to reduce costs associated with promoting different brand messages using different promotional strategies has is an advantage that most organisations seek by adopting corporate branding. This is intertwined with the increasing role of global financial capital markets on the prices of an organisation's stock market prices as the organisation tries to ensure its profitability and survival in the ever changing and highly competitive marketplace (Einwiller & Will 2002; Melewar 2003). To add on, the shift in focus from managing the organisation's tangible to intangible assets which add value to the organisation, has created the need to manage the corporate brand as an intangible asset which has a financial value attached to it in terms of the projected cash flows it is expected to bring in the future, (Rao, Agarwal, and Dahlhoff, 2004; Merrilees, Miller and M'zungu, 2010; Figiel & Szromnik, 2012). This trend has been influenced by the shift from viewing a corporate brand as owned by the organisations to viewing it as an asset that is collectively owned by all the stakeholders affected by the operations of the organisation, (Merrilees, Miller and M'zungu, 2010).

In addition, other drivers that include internationalization, diversification, growth of the internet, and the need for a sustainable corporate brand promise and vision, have also contributed to this growth and application of corporate branding by both (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Stuart & Jones, 2004). To add on, another key factor is the need to develop a good distribution system and to encourage consumers to accept the organisation's new product extensions as a result of the disintegration of channels of distribution and communication media (Kay, 2006; Merrilees, Miller, and M'zungu, 2010)

Finally, globalization, the introduction of free trade zones, emergence of low cost exporting economies and the end of preferential trade agreements have motivated and spurred organizations to shift their focus and concentrate more on creating and nurturing a favorable global corporate identity organisations as well as developing distinct corporate identities which can differentiate them from their competitors who may be dealing with similar products and services especially in a globalised marketplace with global brands (Balmer & Gray, 2000; Hawabhay, Abratt, & Peters, 2009).

Below in table 1 is a summary of the key drivers, as identified in the previous sections which have promoted the adoption of corporate branding by organisations as they seek to improve their competitiveness and to differentiate themselves from competitors.

Table 1: Key Drivers Influencing the Adoption of Corporate Branding.

Researcher	Identified Underlying Drivers
Hatch & Schultz (1997)	• Breaking down of the boundaries between the internal and external stakeholders thus increased interaction between the company's stakeholders.
Balmer & Dinnie (1999)	• Increase in mergers and acquisitions,
Bateson (as cited in McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999)	• The advent of the service sector and need to create customer value.
Balmer & Gray (2000)	• Increased competition in the business and non business sectors. • Deregulation of industries and markets previously restricted. • Accelerated product lifecycles. • Extensive privatization of state owned corporations resulting. • Lack of adequate skilled and motivated employees who can directly and indirectly promote the organization's reputation to the outside world. • Increased levels of corporate social responsibility due to heightened expectations by stakeholders. • Mergers divestitures and acquisitions resulting in a major change to the company's image and identity. • The setting up of free trade zones and globalization.

Harris & Chernatony (2001)	• Need for consistency and coherence in the brand messages communicated by the different brand teams • The growing role of contact staff in communicating the brand messages and fulfilling the brand promise
Helmsley (as cited in Harris & Chernatony 2001)	• The recognition of employees as ambassadors of the firms brands
Makarichev, Kaufman, Tsangari, & temperly (2001)	• Increasingly standardized and homogeneous global marketplace • Need to be unique, differentiated and have a competitive edge.
Einwiller & Will (2002)	• Increasing role of global financial capital markets on the prices of an organisation's stock. • Stiff competition for highly gifted staff due to the shortage of qualified personnel to drive an organisation's corporate brand. • More informed and educated customer demands and interests. • Poor coordination in the communication of complicated and multiple corporate signals. • Increasing demand by stakeholders for honesty, information disclosure and accountability in the management and financial affair of the organisation.
Melewar (2003)	• Changes in Technology and values held by consumer and the ever-changing market conditions.
Stuart & Jones (2004)	• Need to respond to competitors activities. • Need to get a presence in the marketplace.
Rode & Vallaster (2005)	• Uncertainty and limited experience by start-up businesses in

	entering a competitive market.
Kay (2006)	• Need to develop a good distribution system. • Encourage consumers to accept the organisation's new product extensions.
Hulberg (2006)	• Increased need for differentiation due to increased stiff competition. • Increased access to information by stakeholders necessitating openness and transparency on the part of the organization • Need to reduce costs associated with promoting different brands using different promotional strategies.
Donovan, Janda & Suh ((2006)	• Need to create a distinct corporate identity and improved competitiveness
Muzellec & Lambkin (2006)	• Mergers, acquisitions, internationalization, diversification, and the global business environment changes
Fielder & Kirchgeorg (2007)	• The move from one stakeholder approach towards the consideration of a wide range of stakeholders.
Chong (2007)	• To compete in a congested market, and strategically enable employees deliver on the brand covenant
Waeraas (2008)	• To develop a consistent and coherent corporate brands when faced with multiple corporate identities.
Knox & Lawer (2008)	• Increased access to information by consumers and the advent of new media
Moroko & Uncles (2008)	• Need to attract, recruit and sustain highly qualified staffs that are in shortage.
Jensen & Beckman (2009)	• Need for continuous innovation and a distinct and lasting identity in an over communicated world.
Kazi (2009)	• Part of strategic decision making in improving competitiveness and

	differentiation
Hawabhay, Abratt & Peters (2009)	• Free trade areas, emergence of low cost exporting economies, and the end of preferential trade treaties
Balmer, Stuart & Greyser (2009)	• Need to align and communicate the organisation's multiple identities in a unified manner
Curtis, Abratt & Minor (2009)	• Increased competition and the need to differentiate itself from competitors
Anisimova (2010)	• Being forced to adapt to globalised market with standardized and homogeneous products and services
Merrilees, Miller & M'zungu (2010)	• The disintegration distribution channels, communication media and the co-creating value by the organisation and its customers, and the need to manage the corporate brand as an intangible assets
Figiel & Szromnik (2012	• Increased interactivity between the organization and the consumers, interaction between the various specialist teams in the organization in creating a single corporate brand, improved global communication supported by invention of the internet, shift in focus from tangible to intangible assets, increasing importance of consumers and the increase in interest alliances, mergers and partnerships.
Stuart (2013)	• For sustainable corporate brand promise and vision
Nedergard & Gyrd-Jones (2013)	• Increased innovation by competitors
Mann & Ghuman (2014)	• Increased scrutiny by consumers on the organisations behind the products and

Source: Researcher (2015)

3.0 Summary

Based on the above review of literature on the origins of corporate branding it is evident that it is a concept which is two decades old and continuing to evolve. As a term corporate branding was initially referred to as company branding, while its evolution can be attributed to the convergence of the organisational and customer focus which were initially viewed as distinct and separate. Further, this convergence was propelled up by the key drivers identified which created an urgency to find a solution due to increased competition as a result of globalization, improved communication channels, deregulation of state controlled industries, mergers, society's need for transparency and the advent of the internet.

Lastly, it is evident from the above identified key drivers, the main reasons for adoption of corporate branding are to counter increased competition, to differentiate the organisation from other rivals, need to create a consistent and unified corporate identity, increased informedness of various stakeholders and ultimately, globalization. These factors have forced the organisations to either adapt to changes in the environment or perish, and therefore, organisations had to find a way of differentiating themselves from competitors by creating a unified corporate brand image based on their unique corporate identity. to achieve this marketing practitioners sought help from academicians who developed the relevant theories, some of which are still in use today. In conclusion, the article is of the view that corporate branding is a relatively young concept whose potential is yet to be realized based on the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the global environment in which businesses are currently operating in, now and in the future especially with the increased levels of informedness and interaction by and with the organisations stakeholders respectively.

4.0 Conclusion

This article has presented the underlying key drivers that have promoted the adoption of corporate branding as a concept. In this regard the origins of corporate branding have been traced from both the academic and managerial perspective. Thereafter, this article has attempted to bring out the key factors that have created the need for organisations to adopt corporate branding. Most of these factors are brought about by changes in the external and internal environment in which organisations operate in and more specifically globalization and advances in the communication industry. Therefore, it is the opinion of the researchers that this paper will provide a better understanding about how the evolution and adoption of corporate branding.

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