Chapter 9
The Brand Stakeholder Approach:
Broad and Narrow-Based Views to Managing Consumer-Centric Brands

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ABSTRACT
With the emergence of schools of thought which examine brands and branding according to relationships, brand communities, and popular culture, consumers are becoming more significant in shaping the brand agenda. Furthermore, the evolutionary growth and mutations spawned by Web 2.0 draw non-brand users, social networks, and anti-branding movements towards engagement and the possession of greater social capital. When gifting stakeholders with a larger share of voice, consumption definitions become judged less by tangible transactions; and more by figurative, intangible, and co-dependent communication drivers. In addition, with the increase in interactivity afforded by media channels, two-way communication, and the inclusion of more parties; a normalisation and levelling of information also occurs. Therefore, this chapter presents stakeholders as occupying grouped, interconnected, and dynamic states, which are subject to time-specific communication, influence, and self defined legitimacy. Following this, the creation of brands becomes a collaborative process with brands seeking to engage consumers in new and innovative ways in order to gain authenticity.

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INTRODUCTION

Following such hard rules of classification based upon economic factors, there has been a movement towards expanding brand definitions to also regard ‘selling’ in a more figurative manner. In doing so more intangible and psychological pricing constructs are accommodated—which are reflective of the application of marketing and brand theory to other supporting business disciplines; not to mention the premium attached to associated emotional components. Therefore in retrospectively applying current brand definitions to creations and instances throughout history, it can be argued that brands and branding, despite their relatively recent study, in fact stretch right back much further to ancient civilisations.

The analogy often conveyed within branding literature is that of a cowboy branding his cattle; which is perhaps a reflection of majority of branding literature hailing from the US. However pre-dating this, clans, tribes, armies, artists, societies, leaders and nations, amongst others, have also clearly demonstrated desires to ‘brand’ themselves. Their intention appears to be as a means of identification and for future strategic gains—economically, emotionally, societally, and politically. Within these constructs, the common denominator lies in defining boundaries and terms of engagement. In doing so, identities according to easily communicated membership and ownership are central. This chapter houses and addresses these issues through stakeholder analysis, and is structured in the following way:

- Stakeholder Analysis: origins and approach
- Refining stakeholder theory for Brand Stakeholder analysis
- Broad view: Brand Stakeholders from a macro/mezzo-perspective
- Narrow view: Brand Stakeholders from a micro-perspective
- Case examples in practice
- Moving forward and managing the branding process for stakeholder gains

BACKGROUND

Where business literature has previously commented on these phenomena surrounding stakeholder relations, seldom have they been described as being part of branding. Rather, for example Bernays (1928, 1955) talks of ‘ideas’ and describes his processes as a method of Engineering Consent; a term that has later been adapted by Herman and Chomsky (1988), becoming Manufacturing Consent. The following section examines branding from the perspective of mapping communications relationships between stakeholders and their frames of reference. The argument put forward is that with branding’s demonstrable efficacy and in search of further understanding in the field; academics and practitioners have been drawn towards new means by which brands and branding can be understood.

Brand Stakeholders: Homo Economicus vs. Homo Sociologicus

As branding has initially been defined as being a creation positioned within an economic construct, it follows that their stakeholders would in turn engage for economic gains. The American Marketing Association (1960) defines a brand as being: “A name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors.”