

## Editorial

## Quo Vadis Corporate Marketing?



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## ABSTRACT

An analysis of corporate marketing-related articles is undertaken to identify trends in the literature. It scrutinizes past, present, and future directions of corporate marketing as an organization-wide philosophy and culture. Also revisits corporate marketing rationales and components. The premises of corporate marketing are enumerated. The challenges and opportunities inherent for corporate marketing in moving to the centre ground are considered. This short paper concludes by providing summaries of the articles contained in this special section.

## 1. Introduction

“Where are you going?” is the English translation of the famous Latin question “Quo Vadis?” Hence, it is an appropriate question to ask of corporate marketing and, equally, is an opportune time to deliberate on the “state of play” regarding corporate marketing. This article appraises the engagement with the corporate marketing by examining of the extant literature. It reflects on developments since the formal introduction of the corporate marketing notion (Balmer, 1998); scrutinizes developments in the corporate marketing arena; and anticipates future directions in the territory. By these means it is envisaged a clearer discernment, appreciation, and perspective on corporate marketing will transpire for scholars and managers alike. Of course, a similar question is intermittently asked within marketing, “Quo Vadis Marketing?” (Grönroos, 1994; O’Leary & Iredale, 1976).

An organizational-focussed perspective in marketing was briefly mentioned as far back as 1964 (Otterson, Panchar, & Patterson, 1964) and in 1976 (O’Leary & Iredale, 1976). As Balmer (2001) observed, Bernstein (1984) also made passing reference to what he called “organizational marketing”. However, it was only in the late 1990s that an explicit corporate-level focus on marketing was highlighted within the canon when corporate marketing was formally introduced (Balmer, 1998). The emergence of corporate marketing can be seen as a logical outcome apropos developments in relationship marketing, services marketing, internal marketing, international marketing, not-for-profit marketing, where corporate level concerns have, over successive decades, increasingly being accentuated. More telling, as noted by Balmer (1998, 2001), the growth of interest in the corporate-level constructs relating to corporate branding, corporate communications, corporate identity, corporate image, corporate reputation meant that it was incontrovertibly the case these concepts were connected, and therefore, should be integrated. Moreover, this came with a realization that organizations’ corporate identities – along with their corporate brands –

were increasingly recognized to be of fundamental importance in meeting the wants, needs, and expectations of customers and other stakeholders (Balmer, 1998, 2011). Also, there is an appreciation that corporate marketing is not merely an approach to management (corporate marketing management) but is an organizational-wide philosophy and orientation (corporate marketing orientation).

Since 1998, it is apparent that corporate marketing has developed into a distinct body of knowledge with its advocates and adherents. However, the question of whether corporate marketing has made a noticeable impact on the mainstream marketing literature is difficult to answer. On one side it is still the case that corporate marketing is a nascent field of scholarship. For some it is a specialized sub-field of enquiry. For others, there is an implicit acknowledgement that it is of importance. This can come to the fore when the corporate-level concepts of identity, branding, communications, image, and reputation are, in whole or in part, integrated and, at this juncture, corporate marketing has utility as an umbrella, and overarching, standpoint. From the outset, it was asserted that marketing is multi-disciplinary in scope (Balmer, 1998) and, in addition to marketing, draws on management, HRM, communications and strategy. Although marketing has always melded insights from other disciplines in the social sciences and management, the explicit organizational and strategic focus of corporate marketing can be challenging for those who are informed by a traditional marketing perspective. Outside of marketing, corporate marketing can be problematical since marketing is often narrowly conceived. Consequently, while corporate marketing proponents regard corporate marketing as a critical for organizations and their senior managers, others regard it as marginal, highly specialized, and fragmented.

The article continues by elucidating the key premises of corporate marketing. This is followed by review of the extant corporate marketing canon and an explanation of the dataset employed and the methods utilized to analyse and interpret the dataset. Lastly, findings are discussed and prospects for corporate marketing are enumerated. Finally,

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this guest editorial ends by providing summaries of the articles contained in this special edition.

## 2. Key premises of corporate marketing

Corporate marketing has been defined as follows: “Corporate marketing is a customer, stakeholder, societal and CSR/ethical focussed philosophy enacted via an organisational-wide orientation and culture. A corporate marketing rationale complements the goods and services logic. It is informed by identity-based views of the firm: this is a perspective which accords importance to corporate identities and corporate brands. The latter provide distinctive platforms from which multi-lateral, organisational and stakeholder/societal relationships are fostered to all-round advantage. Whilst its primary focus is on mutually advantageous multi-lateral organisational and customer/stakeholder partnership of the present and future, a corporate marketing logic also has sensitivity to the institution’s inheritance. The corporate marketing orientation is also mindful of its corporate responsibilities in societal, ethical and in CSR terms. All employees share responsibility for the corporate marketing orientation, but senior managers and the CEO, in particular, has ultimate stewardship of the corporate marketing orientation”. (Balmer, 2011, p.1350).

### 2.1. Corporate marketing: philosophy, culture, gestalt, and a new strategic approach

The corporate marketing paradigm (Balmer, 1998) is an organizational-wide philosophy and management approach (Balmer & Greyser, 2006), underpinned by a distinct culture (Balmer, 2011; 2017) that views organizations and their brands as vehicles for establishing mutually profitable exchange relationships between companies and stakeholders (Balmer, 1998; 2017). Significantly, corporate marketing represents a new corporate gestalt (Balmer, 1998). As a gestalt, corporate marketing recognizes, and integrates, key corporate level constructs (corporate brand, communication, identity, image, and reputation) and emphasizes the importance of stakeholder relations, corporate and brand identification, internal and employer branding, among other components (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). As a company-wide orientation, philosophy and culture, corporate marketing is epitomized by its corporate, stakeholder, societal and CSR facets that is enacted via a corporate-wide philosophy which it is enacted in a strategically managed organisational culture based on identity (Balmer, 2011).

The corporate marketing logic is grounded in the notion that organizations and their corporate brands can be principal vehicles of exchange between organizations and their customers/stakeholders in a similar way that products/product brands are in traditional marketing or services/services brands in relation to services marketing (Balmer, 2017; Balmer & Greyser, 2003, 2006).

However, unlike the mainstream product marketing, corporate marketing adopts explicit stakeholder and CSR approaches; emphasizes that ultimate responsibility resides with the CEO/Management Board and, significantly, is informed by a trans-temporal perspective where the past (and not only the present and future) is accorded importance (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Just as product and services marketing have their own mixes, as noted by Balmer and Greyser (2003), as exemplified by Borden (1964) and McCarthy (1960), the same is true for corporate marketing (Balmer, 1998, 2001)

### 3. Corporate marketing and the two realities of organizations

Since corporate marketing’s primary focus are organizations – either profit or non-profit – it axiomatic the duality of organizations is understood. On the one hand an organization is an aggregate of people – a community, people joined and working together by common goals. Equally, an organization is an autonomous social actor or pseudo-person, recognized by the law and as an entity involved in social

interaction (Podnar, Golob, & Jancic, 2011; Podnar, 2015; Balmer, 2017). Corporate marketing understands these two realities of the organization. They represent two sides of the same coin, and, thereby, constitute a complete and undividable unit (Podnar & Golob, 2015). This explains why corporate marketing accords importance to both identity and culture. At the same time, corporate marketing acknowledges that different disciplines, which are dealing with organizational phenomena, have different understandings of, and approaches towards, the organization including practice-based adherents (Balmer & Greyser, 2003). However, corporate marketing sees the importance and advantages of integration which constitutes an approach that is holistic and panoptic. An approach which reveals the corporation in innovative ways (cf. Balmer & Greyser, 2003). Consequently, corporate marketing is deemed to be an approach which is necessary for building, maintaining, and delivering a competitive advantage of the firm in meeting the wants, needs, and expectations of customers and other stakeholders.

Seeing through this duality, and mindful of social exchange theory, corporate marketing orientated organizations are arenas for monetary and social exchanges among shareholders, managers, employees, consumers, government, local communities etc. Moreover, corporate marketing regards the organization itself as an actor engaging with networks of relationships with different stakeholders with whom it exchanges intrinsic and extrinsic benefits and values in terms of what it does and behaves. Approaching the organization and its management as an arena and entity at one at the same time opens new perspectives and opportunities. This can be advantageous for strategy and for strategic management. Consequently, corporate marketing focusses attention on the numerous integrated processes, necessary for developing a competitive advantage. Frequently, these are hidden, or obscured, by the emphasis accorded to different organizational functions and disciplines. Corporate marketing challenges this silo mentality. Following this, corporate marketing also challenges traditional marketing nostrums, which all-too-often adopted a narrow conceptualization of marketing as an area primarily focused on serving customer needs by delivering a product or service at the right price, through the right channels and supported by good promotion.

Nowadays, organizations are facing a complex reality. Society demands companies to be places of good investment. As organizations who are reputable and competitive as producers, and sellers. As entities, who are virtuous employers, responsible citizens, and even social activists among other concerns. Corporate marketing-with its emphasis on CSR, ethics, and stakeholders-takes account of these realities.

The holism of corporate marketing assists firms to orient themselves when facing such complexities. It also aids firms competing on different “markets”, assists in managing relationships with different stakeholders, and pro-actively responds to challenges and opportunities within different organizational internal and external environments. In the contemporary social, political, natural, and economic environment, organizations - especially those which are medium-sized and large - may have little choice but to become corporate marketing orientated, as socially responsible entities. The phrase, “corporate marketing myopia”, was used to characterize organizations who have failed to appreciate the value of an institutional, stakeholder and a societal orientation, and with having an CSR/Ethics ethos. It also exemplifies institutions which have failed to nurture and maintain a corporate marketing philosophy and culture (Balmer, 2017).

To sum up, corporate marketing fully acknowledges, that in the today’s global competitive business world, organizations are forced to act as social actors within a complex network of relations, expectations, demands, interests, exchanges, and responsibilities. Public, environmental, and social concerns demand an organizational shift toward a more sustainable and holistic approach. This is a normative view on corporate marketing as a business philosophy and practice.

As an academic field of scholarship and enquiry, corporate marketing – with its broad remit - allows the integration of knowledge from different disciplines. These are often viewed as cognate disciplines

within institutions and among scholars and a good deal of research on topics of interest/saliency to corporate marketing is done within the confines of discrete disciplinary areas. This reality contrasts with the bricoleur approach, and character, of corporate marketing. A bricolage approach, of course, has the advantage of appropriating an existing body of knowledge to create something new and marketing has the capacity to do this at the corporate level. As noted by Balmer & Greyser (2003; 2006), marketing as a discipline has always been a repository of insights and theories garnered from other disciplines, and they noted the same is true for corporate marketing.

#### 4. Analysis of the corporate marketing literature

After more than two decades of scholarship on corporate marketing, this is an opportune time to review the literature on the area.

##### 4.1. Methodology

In analysing the literature, a keywords co-occurrence analysis was undertaken (He, 1999; Van Eck & Waltman 2010, 2014), using the VOS Viewer package. It was decided to focus only, and exclusively, on the topics that are discussed under the “Corporate Marketing” keyword. Consequently, all related concepts such as corporate branding, corporate identity, image and reputation, corporate communication were excluded. The rationale for this was to obtain a clear overview of what content is published specifically under the corporate marketing. This approach assumes that authors in using the “corporate marketing” keyword were aware of this body of knowledge and were consciously contributing to the body of knowledge on the territory. Although many concepts can be linked to corporate marketing, they are often grounded in separate theoretical debates. Therefore, it was decided to exclude them.

Bibliographic data was collected from the Scopus repository, this is the most comprehensive database of journals relevant for corporate marketing and it covers a range of ABS 1–4-star journals. After reviewing the abstracts, and removing any repetitive results, the papers were examined to determine inclusion.

#### 5. Findings

After compiling a final list of papers, a brief overview in the Scopus database shows, that up to 2020 there are 168 scholarly articles containing the term “corporate marketing” in the article title, abstract or keywords, published within the business, management, accounting, and social sciences subject areas. However, it should be noted that these articles are only a selection of those directly addressing corporate marketing and closely related terms. Articles tackling broader corporate marketing topics were approximately about ten times higher.

The findings also revealed the number of published articles that mention “corporate marketing” in keywords grew exponentially, for the main, over the period s, with peaks in 2009 (12 articles), 2011 (17 articles), 2015 (11 articles) and 2017 (13 articles).

It seems logical to surmise, that an upward trend in the number of studies is likely to occur in the future. The most important academic journals (included in Scopus database) for corporate marketing were the European Journal of Marketing, Corporate Communication: An International Journal, Corporate Reputation Review, Journal of Business Ethics, Management Decisions and, Journal of Business Research just to name the most prominent journals.

From our keywords co-occurrence analysis (Van Eck and Waltman 2010, 2014) (with minimal number of occurrences of a keyword = 5) it is clear that “corporate marketing” most closely interrelates with concepts such as “corporate identity”, “corporate branding”, “corporate communications”, “corporate heritage” a well as “corporate social responsibility”, “corporate image” and “reputation” (see Fig. 1).

A more detailed analysis reveals seven clusters. The first one refers to

identification-with-a-company, and includes the keywords “corporate branding”, “organizational identification” and “consumer-company identification”. The second topic of emerging interest is clustered around different types of organizational associations such as “corporate reputation”, “trust”, “corporate image” and “organizational culture”. The third topic is clustered around “corporate social responsibility” alongside with “ethics” as well as stakeholder positive (“customer loyalty”) and negative (“scepticism”) responses. The fourth cluster consists of “organizational identity”, “corporate heritage identity” and “corporate heritage”. The fifth cluster is centred around keywords such “corporate brand”, “ethical corporate marketing” and stakeholders”. The sixth topic of continued interest is “corporate communication” alongside with “co-creation” and “social media”. And the final cluster consist of “corporate identity” and “design”.

#### 6. Discussion

The analysis highlights that corporate marketing has emerged as a significant, and meaningful, umbrella term as intended by Balmer (1998, 2001). Consequently, a corporate marketing orientation connects research themes at different levels in the past, but also unites the articles published in the present as evidenced in this special edition devoted to corporate marketing.

While noting the above, it can also be observed that corporate marketing has not yet been accorded a high-profile status within marketing. In the past, reflections have been made in this regard in relation to the “fog” surrounding the broad territory (Balmer, 2001) and the fact that a disregard of corporate, and what is called “corporate marketing myopia,” can be prevalent among both scholars and practitioners (Balmer, 2017; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Certainly, the lack of dialogue between disciplines and between Anglophone and Non-Anglophone scholars can militate progress in the area and the lack of interest by North American scholars also does not help.

There is another reason for the lack of progress in the territory and this is because few marketing academics these days – and over recent decades past – are generalists. Most marketing scholars specialise in a particular branch of the discipline and often a scholar’s research interest is highly specialized. There is little opportunity to publish conceptual articles which deal with marketing at a meta level and this, arguably, has held back developments in the field. Moreover, those scholars with interests in corporate communications, branding, identity, image, and reputation often have strong disciplinary-or sub disciplinary-allegiances and can be hostile to the view that their area should fall under the umbrella of corporate marketing. However, as we have explained in this article, the facts speak for themselves. Not only is corporate marketing important but it is an approach that not only reflects the greater attention accorded to organizations and their brands and to stakeholders but also to larger CSR and environmental concerns.

*Quo Vadis Corporate Marketing?* (Where is corporate marketing going?) In our estimation, not only is corporate marketing too important to ignore but its rise inexorable and its logic incontestable. It is much needed as an organizational philosophy by scholars and managers alike.

#### 7. Overview of papers in this special section

The selection of papers published in this section demonstrates what is important in the realm of corporate marketing and what will determine the future focus of investigation under the corporate marketing umbrella. The papers contained in this section show that the internal aspects of corporate marketing along with CSR are very much live, and are important, topics. Moreover, a closer look at the articles in this special section confirms that corporate marketing is indeed quite firmly established as an umbrella concept covering several of the clusters of topics defined in our brief bibliometric analysis above.

The opening article by John M.T. Balmer and Klement Podnar, focusses on corporate brand orientation and emphasizes the importance

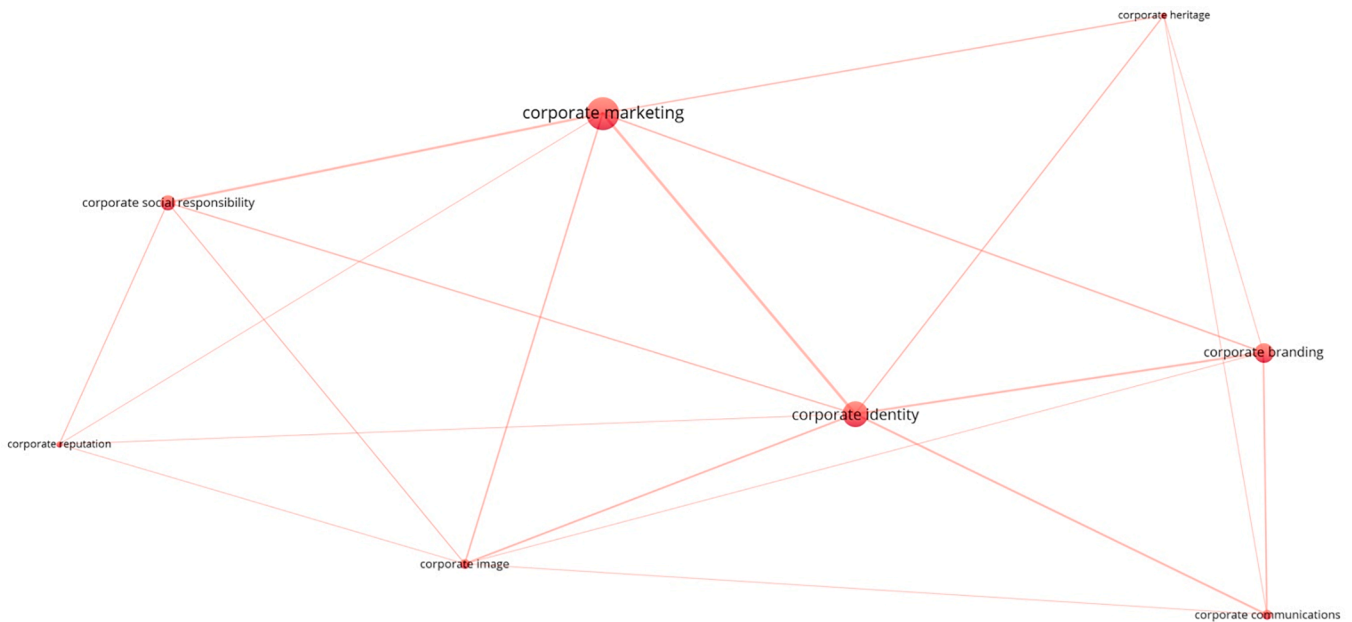


Fig. 1. The co-occurrence network of key corporate marketing terms.

of social identity theory, corporate identity, and internal corporate brand/corporate in forging a corporate brand orientation. By focussing on the aforementioned, scholars and managers are more fully able to comprehend their importance in fostering and maintaining a company-wide corporate brand orientation. It also notes the interrelatedness of corporate brand orientation and corporate marketing.

The second paper, authored by Urša Golob and Klement Podnar, links corporate marketing with a micro perspective on internal CSR. It shows how CSR affects employees' life satisfaction and the role of mediating variables, such as job satisfaction and corporate identification. It argues that the ethical corporate marketing has an important role in employees' lives at work and beyond.

In the third article, written by Achilleas Boukis, Khanyapuss Punjaisri, John M.T. Balmer, Kostas Kaminakis, and Avraam Papastathopoulos, the authors provide empirical evidence on the nature of frontline employees' corporate brands construal, and their response on internal branding initiatives, including corporate brand identification.

The fourth paper, co-authored by Sophie Esmann Andersen, and Trine Susanne Johansen, focuses on external perception of corporate citizenship and in the context of active agency of the users highlights the challenges of corporate centrality when the brand becomes part of a politicized discourse and enacts corporate citizenship.

Boris Bartikowski, and Guido Berens, in the fifth article, investigates the effects of positive and negative attribute framing in CSR communication on consumer attitudes toward the firm and purchase intentions.

The sixth paper, written by Valérie Swaen, Nathalie Demoulin, Véronique Pauwels-Delassus, empirically demonstrate that customers' CSR perceptions positively influence corporate reputation, but that this relationship is negatively moderated by corporate social irresponsibility perceptions in the context of grocery retailers. They highlight the mediating role of corporate reputation between CSR perceptions and customer trust, retailer equity, and customer share of wallet.

Finally, the seventh article by Valérie Swaen, Nathalie Demoulin, and Véronique Pauwels-Delassus, offers an insight into the co-creation of the corporate brands, with CSR as central to the attractiveness of corporate brands. The authors offer an integrative framework of CSR identity and reputation creation cycles and develop a potential future research agenda at the crossroads of CSR and corporate branding.

The guest editors wish to take this opportunity to thank the authors of the papers who have passed the rigorous reviewing process along with

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