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How corporations' transition from product branding to corporate branding

By Celina Burian, Sofia Lilliehorn, Johanna Schönberg

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Assistant Professor

Heads of master course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21), part of master program International Marketing and Brand Management.
Lund School of Economics and Management

How corporations' transition from product branding to corporate branding

By Celina Burian, Sofia Lilliehorn & Johanna Schönberg

Abstract
Purpose: This study explores and defines the transition from product branding to corporate branding by answering the following research questions:

- Why are corporations transitioning from product branding to corporate branding?
- How are corporations transitioning from product branding to corporate branding?
- What does it mean for corporations to transition from product branding to corporate branding?

Design/methodology/approach A qualitative research approach was suitable for this research since we studied a complex phenomenon. The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the corporations Thule and Pantamera. The secondary data was collected through corporations' websites.

Findings: Corporations undergo three key stages when transitioning from product branding to corporate branding: 1. Brand strategy 2. Brand communication 3. Brand reinvestment. Stage 1 includes changing the corporations' mission & vison, brand core, and position. Stage 2 includes switching to value-based communication, building a credible relationship with stakeholders, and communicating one consistent message. Stage 3 includes reinvesting continuously in the corporate brand.

Research limitations/implications: Since the study only includes two corporations, it would be of interest for further research to include a higher number of corporations in a similar study to gain a deeper insight into the transition. Thereafter to conduct a quantitative study to determine whether the findings are generalizable or not.

Practical implications: The different stages of transitioning can be used as guidance for managers who seek to converse their marketing strategy from product branding to corporate branding.

Originality/value: The paper is among the first of its kind to explore the ongoing phenomena of transition from product branding to corporate branding. Thus, it adds to the existing gap, both theoretically and practically, regarding management of corporate brands.

Keywords: Strategic Brand Management, Product Branding, Corporate Branding, Brand Transition

Introduction

The trend for corporations to transition from product branding to corporate branding has intensified in recent years but dates back to the beginning of the 2000s (e.g., Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Keller, 2000). The prominent reason for this shift in marketing emphasis was that corporations wanted to highlight their actions, values, and missions more clearly and disseminate specific added values (Kapferer, 2008, p. 27). According to Hatch and Schultz (2003), globalization is another crucial driver for focusing on corporate branding. Furthermore, this change is typically attributed to the challenges of maintaining credible product differentiation in the face of product and service imitation and the fragmentation of traditional market segments as markets become more complex (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Differentiation necessitates the positioning of the whole corporation, not just its goods (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). As a result, the corporation's values and emotions become essential components of differentiation tactics, and the corporation takes center stage (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). While corporate branding shares the same objective as product branding in creating differentiation and preference (Knox & Bickerton, 2003), it has a much broader scope than merely the relationship between the consumer and the product (Roper & Davies, 2007).

Problem identification and formulation

First, most brand management research focuses on product branding, while corporate branding has typically been accorded far less attention (Urde, 2013). In the last couple of years, however, the initial development of a corporate brand has been extensively researched. There are now numerous articles and even frameworks on the subject, like the corporate brand identity matrix (Urde, 2013). However, there is still little to no literature on the transition from product branding to corporate branding. This research gap in theory and practice regarding the management of corporate brands is also emphasized by Urde (2016). Thus, this study ais to fill in some of the theoretical gap by exploring the stages necessary for transitioning from product branding to corporate branding. Therefore, this paper is among the first of its kind to explore this transition.

Aim

The purpose of this study is to explore and define the transition from product branding to corporate branding.

For this purpose, the following research questions are proposed:

- Why are corporations transitioning from product branding to corporate branding?
- How are corporations transitioning from product branding to corporate branding?
- What does it mean for corporations to transition from product branding to corporate branding?

Literature review

Strategic brand management

Strategic brand management relates the brand to the business model (Kapferer, 2008), and it involves designing and implementing marketing programs and activities to build, measure, and manage brand equity (Keller et al. 2013). According to Kapferer (2008), branding decisions are determined by the business model and cannot be understood without it as they are intimately intertwined (Kapferer, 2008). Moreover, the author states that there are a few ways to build a sustainable advantage over the competition, and it is essential to track product and corporate brands. Strategic brand management aims to create value with proper brand management (Kapferer, 2008, p. 7) and make the corporation's name a point of reference within the category it competes in (Kapferer, 2008, p. 12). Deepening the relationship to end customers, rewarding customers' involvement for them to become active promoters of the brand, globalizing the brand and its products, and acting in a responsible way is among the key principles of strategic brand management (Kapferer, 2008).

Product branding

A product brand in its simplest form can be described as "[...] a brand based on a product advantage" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 58). Furthermore, a product brand can be viewed as a strategy where the focus is on one product or product line and the single positioning for each of these products (Kapferer, 2012).

The prominent role of brands and brand management has always been to differentiate a product or service from those of the competitors (Knox & Bickerton, 2003; Kapferer, 2012; Aaker, 1992). The American market association defines a brand as "a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (AMA, n.d.).

For many centuries, this product-oriented brand management has been the ruling paradigm that puts the product in the center and, for instance, is managed through Kotler's marketing mix (Louro & Cunha, 2001). Other brand management techniques focus on brand identity, brand image, and brand positioning (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). One valuable and highly used framework to define and explore a product brand is through the brand identity prism developed by Kapferer (2012). This tool helps capture the brand's identity through analyzing six dimensions: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection, and self-image (Kapferer, 2012).

Corporate branding

In our study, the choice has been made to relate to this categorization in the field of corporate branding. Corporate branding emphasizes an understanding of the essence of the corporation as a strategic element in focus during the branding process (e.g., Balmer, 1995, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Knox & Bickerton, 2003). Fetcherin and Usunier (2012) highlight corporate branding with greater emphasis through three approaches, transactional, internal, and external (Fetcherin & Usunier, 2012). First, the transactional approach emphasizes the essence of what the corporation does (product, services, sponsorship). Second, the internal approach focuses on what the corporation is (corporate identity) and the people it reaches. Third, the external approach surrounds the influence of corporate image on how the corporation is perceived by the public (Fetcherin & Usunier, 2012).

Corporate branding started to raise attention when the desired corporate label was not seen as a corporate brand but rather an enclosing and strategic label viewed as "the corporate brand" (Balmer, 1995). After Balmer raised attention in the field of corporate branding, it became an emerging theory. According to Balmer (2001), the depth of the corporation's responsibility for the brand's promise was highlighted through 15 factors contributing to the fog in corporate branding (Balmer, 2001). Later, Balmer and Gray (2003) identified five distinct schools of thought surrounding corporate branding (Balmer & Gray, 2003). According to Knox and Bickerton (2003), branding through a corporate-wide approach makes corporate branding more complex as differentiation and preferences are now activities at the organizational level rather than solely a product level (Knox & Bickerton, 2003).

However, Gyrd-Jones et al. (2013) emphasize that corporate branding is a broad scope that reveals a lack of a consistent theoretical definition and shows vagueness and conflicts in key terminology (Gyrd-Jones et al. 2013). According to Schroeder (2017), corporate branding emphasizes focusing on brands from a strategic point of view where the purpose is to emphasize brand value, brand essence, brand equity, and brand DNA. This is to highlight what a corporation stands for rather than what the products intend to illuminate on their own (Schroeder, 2017).

Benefits of corporate branding

Benefits of corporate branding surround several aspects within strategic brand management. This paper has decided to focus on a few of them. First, according to Roper and Davies (2007), the sustainable relationship of corporate branding has a broader reach than solely between the customer and the product (Roper & Davies, 2007). Second, the credible promise through corporate branding; according to Urde (2013), corporate branding connects to the *brand core*, which is *"an entity of core values supporting and leading up to a promise"* (Urde, 2013, p. 758). Third, the support from multiple stakeholders approaches through issues such as identity, corporate strategy, and vision characterizes corporate branding (Balmer, 2001). Fourth, corporate brands are an essential element of a corporation's strategy and a top management concern (Balmer & Grey, 2003). Fifth, with continuous brand reinvestment, corporate branding can create credibility (Balmer & Grey, 2003).

Corporate brand building

Corporate brand building, a process where core values within the corporation lay the foundation for a successful brand building process (Urde, 2003). In building a stronger corporate brand, previous research focuses on *corporate brand identity*, *brand communication*, and *corporate image* (e.g., Aaker, 1992; Balmer & Gray, 1999; Urde, 2013; Urde, 2016; Witt & Rode, 2005).

Corporate brand identity

A prerequisite for creating a solid corporate brand is communicating a clear identity within the whole corporation (Aaker, 1992). During previous years of research, Urde (2013) established and introduced the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix (CBIM) that, with its structure of nine elements, explains and distinguishes "the internal, core and external components of a corporate brand's identity" (Urde, 2013; p. 745). Further, the matrix was developed by Urde and Greyser (2016) into the Corporate Brand Identity and Reputation Matrix (CBIRM) (Urde and Greyser, 2016). Its linkages can serve as a guide for corporations' management of their corporate identity and reputation. The elements are now interlinked and categorized as either competition, strategy, communication, and interaction with links to how identity elements or reputation elements influence or are influenced by the corporate brand identity (Urde & Greyser, 2016). For instance, the diagonal strategy, mission and vision, and position elements are interlinked through the brand core in the middle (Urde & Greyser, 2016).

Brand communication

To achieve consistent brand communication, a corporation needs to estimate consistent brand communication on both an internal and external level (Aaker, 1992; Balmer & Gray, 1999). Furthermore, the internal interpretation of a brand can influence the reputation and the image of a brand externally through communication (Urde, 2016). In 2015, Urde presented a brand management framework to examine a corporation's core, which includes three perspectives: *logos, ethos,* and *pathos* (Urde, 2016). Logos relates to the issue itself and is based upon logic (Gudacker et al. 2015). The second perspective, ethos, is concerned with credibility and pathos, the third one, is related to making an emotional connection with the customer (Gudacker et al. 2015).

Communication is essential to all three perspectives and needs to be aligned with the brand's identity while considering the brand's position, reputation, and track record (Urde, 2016). While product branding refers more to the reason (logos) by focusing on offering certain products or services, corporate branding emphasizes the significance of the 'we' in the brand core's communication (pathos) (Urde, 2016). Corporate brand communication includes both the reason (logos) and the character (ethos) in the brand core (Urde, 2016).

Corporate image

Corporate image, according to Witt and Rode (2005), is defined as "the perception of the corporate brand by external stakeholders" (Witt & Rode, 2005, p. 279). The corporate image can be directly formed through communication with stakeholders and indirectly formed when establishing the corporate identity (Witt & Rode, 2005).

Fundamental differences between product branding and corporate branding

Previous research emphasized the differences between product branding and corporate branding (e.g., Balmer, 2001; Balmer and Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Product branding and corporate branding differ in implementation and strategic focus (Balmer, 2001). According to Balmer and Grey (2003) and Hatch and Schultz (2003), there are significant differences within focus, managerial responsibility, attract attention/support, time horizon, and importance to corporations. In this study, the choice has been made to emphasize those fundamental differences in particular, which are stated in Table I.

Table I. How corporate branding differs from product branding (e.g., Balmer, 2001; Balmer and Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

	Product brand	Corporate brand
Focus attention on	The product	The corporation
Managerial responsibility	Middle manager	CEO
Attract attention/ support	Customers	Multiple stakeholders
Time horizon	Short (life of a product)	Long (life of a corporation)
Importance to corporations	Functional	Strategic

Methodology

Research design

Since this research aims to define a complex phenomenon, the transition from product branding to corporate branding, a qualitative research approach was suitable (Bryman & Bell, 2017). Furthermore, the qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding than the quantitative method, which focuses on measuring already existing findings (ibid). Therefore, the quantitative approach is not suitable for our research.

Empirical data collection

The collection of both primary and secondary data was necessary to explore and define the transition from product branding to corporate branding. Primary data was needed to find key similarities and differences between corporations' transitions so these could be pinpointed into different stages. The secondary data was collected through corporations' websites to build an understanding of the chosen corporations.

The primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This allowed the respondents to talk freely about the determined topics while ensuring that valuable information was gathered. The semi-structured interview was possible to conduct since the respondents had enough competence and insight into the subject to speak freely about it (Bryman & Bell, 2017, p. 452-454). There would have been a risk of wandering too far away from the relevant subject with unstructured interviews. Moreover, the use of structured interviews would neither have been suitable since the information required broad and corporation-specific answers, which this form does not allow. Additionally, structured interviews are mostly used for quantitative research where the data needs to be standardized and therefore not well suited for this purpose.

One semi-structured interview for each of the two corporations was conducted. To get a holistic view of the transition from product brand to corporate brand, questions were asked about the corporation's strategy before, during, and after the transition.

The interviews were held over Zoom and lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Worth noting is that the interviews were held in Swedish in consideration of the respondents' desire. To be able to focus on asking relevant follow-up questions, the interviews were recorded, and no notes were taken. The recording also made it possible to re-listen as well as transcribe the interviews. Since the interviews were held in Swedish, the transcription was later on translated into English.

The data analysis of the transcription coding was conducted through meaning interpretation, meaning categorization, and meaning condensation. The three methods were equally used during the process where all researchers individually analyzed the compiled text, compressed, and categorized the information into shorter sections within the categories. Subsequently, the individual sections were compiled and serve as the basis for the empirical analysis.

Sample selection

The selection of corporations began with the authors establishing criteria for corporations participating in the study. It was agreed that medium-sized Swedish corporations that had recently made the transition from product branding to corporate branding should participate in the study. Once the criteria were established, a brainstorming session followed, during which the authors created a list of suitable potential corporations. After further research on the corporations, this list was narrowed down, and the final selected corporations were contacted. Out of seven corporations contacted, two agreed to participate in the study, and these were Thule and Pantamera.

Participant's selection

Respondents have been selected through judgmental sampling (Saunders et al. 2019). For our study, the respondents should be directly involved in marketing, communication, and branding to be suitable candidates to contribute to the research and represent the corporation. Based on these criteria, we decided to interview Thule's Global Brand Communications Director, Tina Liselius, and Pantamera's Marketing Communications Project Manager, Lovisa Lannerstedt. Further in this paper, the respondents will be referred to as the name of the corporations rather than their roles within the corporation.

Empirical results and analysis

The following section presents the empirical results and analysis. Initially, the interviewed corporations, Thule and Pantamera, will be presented briefly. The empirical results are thereafter highlighted to analyze why corporations transition from product branding to corporate branding. At last, an analysis of what it implies for a corporation to undergo this transition is presented. The central part of the empirical results, and seen as the uniqueness of this analysis, is that we propose three different key stages for how corporations transition to corporate branding.

Introduction of Thule

Thule is a Swedish corporation that provides people all over the world with products that make it easier to live an active outdoor life (Thule, 2021). The product range includes roof boxes, roof racks, and bicycle racks for vehicles, strollers among other products (Thule, 2021).

Introduction of Pantamera

Pantamera (Returpack AB) intends to contribute to a sustainable society through its deposit return schemes for the recycling of beverage containers within Sweden (Pantamera, 2021).

Product branding

To gain a better understanding of corporate branding, we need to add empirical evidence to the theoretical concept of product branding. Therefore, an outlook on corporate brands before their transition is necessary.

The earlier conducted literature review clearly states that product branding focuses on the single product and the communication and positioning of the one product (Kapferer, 2012). This can be illustrated through how Thule describe their corporation before the transition into corporate branding:

Thule: *"We've gone from being a company that made basically just accessories for cars or accessories for cars with carrying things on or in their car, in one way or another, or their vehicle anyway [...]"*

The above quote stresses the focus on single products with no holistic view of the brand. To add on and illuminate product branding in practice, Pantamera was focused on the functional aspect before the transition:

Pantamera: *"[...] there was more talk about practical measures and facts, quite simply"*

Pantamera focuses on the functional aspects such as facts in their communication, which is in line with Urde's description of product branding: that the arguments mainly make use of logos (Urde, 2016).

Why corporations transition from product branding to corporate branding

We propose two dimensions to why a corporation chooses to transition from product branding to corporate branding: external pressure/trigger from stakeholders and internal recognition for change due to the benefits of being a corporate brand.

Firstly, many different stakeholders are influencing the decisions made regarding a corporation's strategic brand management. Among other things, the consumer is one of the most essential stakeholders a corporation must attend to and keep track of their needs and behavior. For Thule, a shift in consumer behavior was one of the contributing factors to why the corporation wanted to transition into a corporate brand:

Thule: *"With the availability of communication and the availability of information using, of course, the internet, but also social media and the business need to in this new way, new behavior [...] Something changed drastically somewhere in there, like ten years ago, that the average citizen had access to learn a lot more about brands and what brands stood for"*

As illustrated in the quote, the technology shift enabled the consumers to get access to more information regarding different types of brands. Suddenly, Thule recognized a need to offer something more to the consumer than only the product:

Thule: "*[...] we have to be able to fight for something other than just a product. We have to have our own values. We have to have our own style, our own platform to stand on, that is compared"*

Another stakeholder that needs to be taken into consideration is the government. One of the reasons why Pantamera decided to transition into corporate branding was due to pressure from the Swedish government:

Pantamera: *"We got a regulation from the Swedish government that said that we should [...] set a target of 90% and [...] you can do that by raising deposit money, you can kind of increase the availability of deposit machines and so on but somewhere along the line you also realize that it's about an attitude change, you have to get people to want to go to these places instead of just throwing their packaging in the trash, and then you realized that then you have to kind of start talking in a different way about these things quite simply"*

Through this external pressure of a new recycling goal, Pantamera realized that they needed to change into something more than just a service. Something more than only short-term advertising was required to change the consumers' behavior.

Secondly, we found that corporations want to transition from product branding to corporate branding because of internal recognition of change. For instance, Thule expressed an internal desire to act and think more long-term:

Thule: *"[...] it's important for us to have something more than just the products that are authentic and long-term [...]"*

The quote illustrates how Thule recognized and wanted to reap the benefits of being a corporate brand. Pantamera also realized how being a corporate brand could benefit them:

Pantamera: *"There's credibility as well a little bit. If we are liked, if we can profile ourselves as a sender who is fun, relevant, and credible then once we want to say other things, maybe a bit more hard-hitting things then it will be easier to get the messages out"*

Thus, by developing a long-term orientation together with focusing on core values (Balmer, 2001; Urde, 2013), different corporate brand benefits such as credibility and multi-stakeholder support drive corporations to transition.

How corporations transition from product branding to corporate branding

We propose that corporations undergo three different stages during the transition, where the focus of change is different for each stage:

1. Brand strategy
2. Brand communication
3. Brand reinvestment

Stage 1: Brand strategy

The first stage in transitioning from product branding to corporate branding is to change the brand strategy. In contrast to product branding, the essence of the corporation as a strategic element is in focus during the branding process for corporate brands (e.g., Balmer, 1995, 2001; Balmer & Gray, 2003; Knox & Bickerton, 2003).

Through careful analysis of the collected data in combination with previous theory, three vital elements within brand strategy were identified: *mission and vision, brand core,* and *position.* These internal/external elements can be considered a brand's strategy in accordance with the corporate brand identity and reputation matrix (Urde & Greyser, 2016). Together, when aligned, these elements are interlinked and influence the corporate brand identity of the corporation (Urde & Greyser, 2016).

First, *Mission and vision* put an emphasis on the internal aspect and should be supported and aligned with the corporation's core values. When a corporation transitions from product branding to corporate branding, its mission and vision will likely be changed. The following quotes by Thule and Pantamera clearly state this change, with the emphasis on vision:

Thule: *"[...] Number 1, it's about someone having the bigger picture, as our CEO, that this is where we're going and how we get there [...] visually taking us away from just meeting customers in the automation industry [...]"*

Pantamera: *"[...] vision is somehow just to maintain our position I would say and to continue to be relevant, continue to be where we need to be and continue to be a positive force in all this climate anxiety"*

These quotes emphasize that a clear plan that supports the brand core of the corporation is a requirement within the mission and vision, which confirms the importance of highlighting what a corporation stands for (Schroeder, 2017).

Second, *Brand core* is the most essential element for a corporate brand since the corporation's core values lay the foundation upon which the brand is built and should be reflected in every aspect (Urde, 2003). Since this focus differs from product branding, a corporation in transition must first redefine its values and implement them in the whole organization. The collected empirical data confirms that both Thule and Pantamera have defined their values and incorporated their brand mantra within the branding process. To illustrate, Pantamera's name itself in Swedish stands for "recycle more", which is the whole core and reason for the corporation's existence. To add on, Thule expressed that their brand mantra "bring your life" permeates all activities, both internal and external:

Thule: *"'Bring your life' explains everything we do [...] important that you base the brand on the company's purpose. We come back to logos, ethos, and pathos in the logic there. What is really like the logic of what we do in anything, well we do what is relevant to the end consumer, we make it easy to "bring your life" in one way or another, whatever life is to you?"*

This example clearly displays that the corporation emphasizes the brand core and the continuous focus on the core values permeating the entire organization. Further, this aligns with Urde's (2013) emphasis on the brand core to hold the organization's promise and the corporate brand identity matrix (Urde, 2013; Urde & Greyser, 2016). Drawing upon the previous quote, Thule also highlights the importance of the brand core's inclusion of *logos, ethos,* and *pathos*. An indication that Thule has evolved from product branding to corporate branding is that the value of the brand core has evolved from only emphasizing logos to include logos, ethos, and pathos.

Third, *Positioning* of the brand relates to how a corporation wants to be perceived in the minds of its stakeholders (Urde, 2013). Corporations transitioning from product branding must therefore change their focus from positioning each of their products differently to a single position for the whole brand. By doing so, the corporate brand will be perceived as consistent and therefore credible and trustworthy, which aligns with Roper & Davis' (2007) findings. The following quotes by Thule and Pantamera highlight the importance for brands to be perceived as credible:

Thule: *"[...], pressure on us to be a credible brand, a trustworthy brand. And it's also important from the company's perspective that we stay true and consistent"*

Pantamera: *"We've established ourselves in different areas where we think we're going to be for a long time, so again it's just to continue to be relevant and credible. [...] to be in the place you need to be, in the way you need to be without losing credibility"*

To conclude stage 1, corporations have taken the first step in changing their branding process to develop a corporate brand identity. Both corporations emphasized that they aim to be a credible, relevant, and trustworthy brand. The changes the corporations have undergone during the first stage, changing their brand strategy, have led to the development of their corporate image. Further, the development of the corporate image has an indirect connection to establishing the corporate identity (Witt & Rode, 2005). There are clear indications that how these corporations today work with their mission and vision, brand core, and positioning has developed since they previously put the product and not the corporations at the center of their branding process.

Stage 2: Brand communication

The second stage in transitioning from product branding to corporate branding is to change the brand communication. In contrast to product branding, corporate branding focuses on value-based communication in alignment with the brand core through one consistent message to build a long-term relationship with various stakeholders. Therefore, a corporation in transition must develop value-based communication through an emphasis on ethos.

In the previous section, "product branding", we determined that the corporation's communication before the transition was focused on arguments based on logos and the functional aspects. In contrast to this, corporate branding emphasizes the significance of the "we" and the arguments are based on ethos (Urde, 2016). According to Kapferer (2008), brands have no power if they miss emotional ties with their target group, and the emotion is driven by intangible factors (Kapferer, 2008). Both corporations defined values such as authenticity and credibility and wanted their brand communication to be emotional, as demonstrated by the following quotes:

Thule: *"[...] we will have a more precise and more consistent way of talking [...]"*

Thule: *"[...] brand-based communication and brand-based values in a company is a very sustainable way to work."*

Thule: *"What was said two years ago should still be relevant two years later."*

Pantamera: *"[...] even though Pantamera is a serious brand, we can still afford to work with humor and music and like entertainment in a different way."*

By communicating values consistently, the corporations gain depth and emotion (Kapferer, 2008). This has proven to be essential for the longevity of the brand and corporation. Moreover, the change in communication can be illustrated through how Thule now creates relationships with its customers through ethos, by communicating shared values and personality traits through ambassadors:

Thule: *"[...] we believe that when you're working with brand communication and long-term brand communication, then ambassadors are the way to go for us, not influencers [...] But ambassadors who are with us, almost like part of our family and who really, really live with our products and not just showcase them"*

This quote emphasizes that within the transition to a corporate brand, Thule communicates their "bring your life" brand mantra, highlighting the long-term brand building approach through ambassadors instead of the short-term orientation that is more sales-driven through influencers. All these actions fall back on the ethos perspective, which aims to build trust with consumers and add credibility to the brand (Gudacker et al. 2015).

Pantamera also shifted its focus to value-driven communication and have a long-term approach within their brand communication. Like Thule, they want to create a relationship with their target groups and reach them in a credible way, as they state below:

Pantamera: *“We agreed that we wanted to be funny and relevant without pointing fingers, so it was also a way to talk about an important issue, but in a light-hearted way. [...] this is much more about value, and then I think it’s definitely long-term work that you have to be patient with, but if you have built up a brand over a long period of time [...]”*

To conclude stage 2, the empirical results highlighted that both corporations changed to value-based communication by working with ethos to build long-term relationships with stakeholders. From stage 1 and stage 2 it can be concluded that corporations already meet the characteristics of being considered a corporate brand based on how they work with their branding.

A prerequisite for creating a solid corporate brand is communicating a clear brand identity within the whole corporation (Aaker, 1992). At this stage, deeper relationships have been formed with various stakeholders through the new way of branding within the entire organization, which aligns with the fact that corporate branding is a long-term and sustainable solution for corporations to reach the desired target group credibly.

Stage 3: Brand reinvestment

The third stage in transitioning from product branding to corporate branding is to reinvest in the corporate brand. This is necessary since corporate brand building is an ongoing process (Urde, 2013). Thule emphasizes the branding process as an ongoing process which can be illustrated through the following quote:

Thule: *“I think that a very important part of building the brand is about having a plan that you stick to. [...] What do we stand for? Where are we headed? How do we want to tell that story and then sticking to that plan for you and going back to yourself and constantly saying, is this right?”*

The empirical results in combination with the theoretical view that corporate branding is long-term point towards that corporate branding is an ongoing process. Thus, the need for continuous reinvestment, which the corporation’s states:

Thule: *“[...] building credibility in that, that it was just some "quick and dirty" thing we had gotten for us, but it was a long-term plan without there being a long-term explanation in it.”*

Pantamera: *”The more we have proven to ourselves that the brand adds weight to our communication and success in it, the more we invest, of course [...]”*

The quotes emphasize that reinvesting in the brand has the purpose of a long-term time horizon, where the branding has a focus throughout the organization, the life of the corporation rather than the life of the product (e.g., Balmer, 2001; Balmer & Grey, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2003).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore and define the transition from product branding to corporate branding. Through extensive research, combining previous research in the field with a qualitative study of our own, we present the following main findings.

First, corporations’ transition from product branding to corporate branding due to external pressure and triggers by different stakeholders. Further, the internal recognition of change due to the benefits of being a corporate brand is also considered to be a driver for the transition.

Second, we identified three key stages which corporations undergo during the transition from product branding to corporate branding:

1. Brand strategy
2. Brand communication
3. Brand reinvestment

Each of these stages has sub-items that are crucial within the transitioning phase. Revising the brand strategy includes changing or developing the mission and vision, brand core values, and positioning of the brand. Revising brand communication includes switching to value-based communication, building a credible relationship with stakeholders, and communicating one consistent message. Brand reinvestment entails continuous branding efforts and developments, as corporate branding is a long-term process.

Theoretical contribution

This research is among the first of its kind to explore and define the transition from product branding to corporate branding. Further, this journal contributes to the earlier conducted research within corporate branding by emphasizing the importance of value-based relationships to various stakeholders and how crucial this is for building sustainable long-term relationships and creating credibility. Contribute to theories by emphasizing that choice is primarily based on stakeholder motivations through external triggers and internal recognition for a change. Emphasizes the importance of having a clear plan, communication, and focus on the brand. With the study's confirmations and assumptions, from a theoretical point of view, the study has started to fill the literature gap in corporate branding by putting it in perspective to product branding.

Managerial implications

This article provides valuable guidance for managers who seek to converse their marketing strategy from product branding to corporate branding. It starts by emphasizes the changes and benefits of making the transition and compares product branding to corporate branding.

First, it gives an insight into reasons and incentives for transitioning to a corporate brand. such as external pressure from stakeholders.

Second, it offers managers three clear key stages of transitioning from product branding to corporate branding: revising the brand strategy, revising the brand communication, and reinvesting in the brand. These stages are a top-management issue and concern the whole cooperation.

Third, this article highlightes some of the many aspects of the corporation change throughout the process, the corporation's mindset switches from short to long-term thinking, and the CEO now has the managerial responsibility of managing the corporate brand.

Limitations & further research

Since this research is solely based on two corporations, further inclusion of added corporations would enable a broader and deeper view of the stages of the transition. At this point, the research finding can only be seen as mere suggestions to be further built upon since it is the first of its kind. Further, analyzing more recent transitions would be favorable to extract as much empirical data as possible to build a more extensive framework. Thus, our research is a basis for further research on the phenomena of transitioning from product branding to corporate branding. As mentioned, more corporations would add valuable insight into the transition. In addition, after further research has established more concrete stages, quantitative research that investigates whether the findings are generalizable would be of utmost interest.

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