



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management



Corporate brand expressions in business-to-business companies' websites: Evidence from Brazil and India

Cláudia Simões^{a,b,*}, Jaywant Singh^{c,1}, Marcelo G. Perin^{d,2}^a Open University Business School, Open University, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK^b University of Minho, School of Economics and Management, 4710–057 Braga, Portugal^c Kingston Business School, Kingston University, Surrey KT2 7LB, UK^d Faculdade de Administração, Contabilidade e Economia, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Av. Ipiranga, 6681-90619-900 Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 16 May 2014

Received in revised form 8 March 2015

Accepted 9 April 2015

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Corporate branding

Financial performance

B2B

Brazil

India

Website

Emerging economies

ABSTRACT

In the business-to-business (B2B) domain, the corporate website is an effective platform for communicating the corporate brand (CB) features (e.g., personality, values). Despite the growing importance of websites as the primary means for corporate communication, research on the relevant dimensions for online corporate branding expression is sparse. This study examines the expressions of CBs on the websites of B2B companies in two emerging markets — Brazil and India. In addition, the study investigates whether the dimensions of CB have an effect on the company's financial performance. Findings highlight the following items for CB expressions in the website: CB values; CB personality; sustainability in the CB; CB heritage, and company demographics. There are similarities in the CB expressions in India and Brazil. In addition, the findings show that higher levels of strength in the expression of the CB in the website lead to higher levels of financial performance. Managerial recommendations and avenues for future research are presented.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In the current competitive business environment, companies operating in B2B contexts look for sources of competitive advantage grounded at the corporate level. Creating unique forms of presenting the company and managing stakeholder's perceptions of a corporation provide an important basis for sustainable competitive advantage. Developing a strong corporate brand (CB) is a possible instrument for corporate presentation as it entails visual and behavioral expressions of the organization's uniqueness (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). Companies in B2B contexts are concerned with managing CBs as they have key business benefits. For example, perceptions related to the supplier company (Aspara & Tikkkanen, 2008a) and supplier reputation (Roberts & Merrilees, 2007) affect the business customer's purchasing decisions; the CB allows organizations to differentiate themselves in the marketplace and impacts on business performance (Glynn, 2010; Herbst & Merz, 2011; Kay, 2006). That is, a strong CB brings long-term benefits to the company (Inskip, 2004). Ultimately, the CB is a key strategic

instrument and asset through which the organization can differentiate itself from competitors and can articulate the purpose of the organization and its business model.

In order to create and convey their uniqueness amongst multiple stakeholders, B2B companies increasingly enunciate features (dimensions) of CB as, for example, company values, CB personality, the company's activities towards sustainability, and company heritage. Such features strengthen and consolidate the CB, and in turn may influence the performance and profitability of the company. Thus, well-articulated features may prove vital for the success and endurance of the CB (Herbst & Merz, 2011). Although there is an increasing interest in the study of corporate branding in B2B contexts (e.g., Aspara & Tikkkanen, 2008a,b; Herbst & Merz, 2011; van Riel, de Mortanges, & Streukens, 2005; Webster & Keller, 2004) and its relevance is well-established, there is still a paucity of research addressing the combination of features of CBs used to convey and present the CB. In particular, the expression of the CB in B2B contexts in different platforms, such as the internet, and its impact in business performance is not fully understood, with little related research conducted in emerging economies. Hence, the motivation for this study is grounded in three key aspects: (i) the need for understanding the representations of CB features in a B2B context in different platforms, such as, the internet; (ii) the need for establishing a clear connection between CB expressions and financial performance; and (iii) the need for insights into CB management in companies in emerging economies.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 1908654741.

E-mail addresses: claudia.simoes@open.ac.uk (C. Simões), j.singh@kingston.ac.uk (J. Singh), mperin@puccs.br (M.G. Perin).

¹ Tel.: +44 2084175158.² Tel.: +55 51 33203524.

CB development and management is a challenging and complex endeavor in current dynamic business contexts and increasingly sophisticated media. A review of studies on corporate branding reveals that research investigating CB features in B2B settings tends to focus on specific aspects (e.g., [Beverland, Napoli, & Lindgreen, 2007](#); [Herbst & Merz, 2011](#); [van Riel et al., 2005](#)) and features of CB, such as, values ([Lynch & de Chernatony, 2004](#)). Yet these do not examine the combination of features needed to express the CB in an on-line setting. Technology and the internet have transformed the ways communication and interactions occur ([Keller, 2009](#)). To convey and articulate the CB, companies attempt stronger online presence ([Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011](#)). The company's website is frequently the first contact that stakeholders have with the company, being a relevant instrument for creating a consistent company presentation to stakeholders. Often companies use an online presence to shape their corporate brands and build relationships with audiences ([Booth & Matic, 2011](#)). Given that an increasing number of B2B companies tends to, or aspires to, operate at a global level ([Lindgreen, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2010](#)), the company website is a vehicle of corporate presentation showing its commitments to the various publics ([Esrock & Leichty, 2000](#)). It becomes a particularly relevant reference to convey the CB. However, little is known about the way the CB is expressed in the company's website.

Brands are believed to leverage business performance. The underlying idea is that brands drive business performance since they affect market perceptions of the company's offerings (e.g., quality) and generate loyal customers willing to pay a premium price for a trusted brand. Ultimately strong brands have higher sales volume, profits and shareholder value ([Doyle, 2000](#); [Ellwood, 2002](#); [Keller, 2008](#)). Although the rationale for the financial impact of brands is well-established, there is still a paucity of research that empirically tests the CB features that should be emphasized for attaining consistent managerial goals, such as, creating a strong CB image, and achieving higher levels of business performance. In addition, the prevailing reference for research in CB is still with an emphasis in the developed economies context. The generalizability of the practices may not always occur, in particular in the context of emerging economies ([Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006](#)). Consequently, there have been calls for research in different contexts, in particular in emerging economies (e.g., [Sheth, 2011](#); [Wiersema, 2013](#)). Emerging economies become 'natural laboratories' for research and for the development of contingent theories. Consequently, they support the assessment of the robustness of (marketing) knowledge amongst distinct backgrounds ([Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006](#)). Given the high number of B2B companies originating in emerging markets ([Kumar & Steenkamp, 2013](#)), it is vital to understand expressions of CBs on the companies' websites and verify the impact in business performance.

This study focuses on the analysis of the features of the CB that are represented in B2B companies' websites in two key emerging economies – Brazil and India. The contribution of the research is threefold. First, studies in the B2B context do not tend to systematize the features that should be used to represent the CB and, as a consequence, overlook representations of CB in websites. By systematically analyzing CB representations in websites, we aim to bring insights into CB expressions in web platforms. Second, we address the implications of CB expressions for the company's financial performance. Third, considering that little is known about CB in different environments, we bring insights into CB practices in the context of two prominent emerging economies.

1.1. The emerging markets of India and Brazil

BRIC³ (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) countries have been having a relevant role in the world economy over the last decade. These countries are increasingly seen as established markets for investment

([BDO, 2012](#)). They have a large manufacturing and service base capacity, producing relevant economic exchanges amongst themselves and world-wide ([Biggemann & Fam, 2011](#)). A great amount of these exchanges occur globally in B2B settings.

In this study we focus on India and Brazil, which are two prominent members of the BRIC group and amongst the top five international investment destinations ([BDO, 2012](#)). Evidence from the two countries shows strong recent growth in the industrial sector. Forecasts suggest that the two economies will continue to grow. According to a study by Goldman Sachs, by the year 2050, India and Brazil are going to be world's third and fourth economies after the US and China ([Wilson & Purushottam, 2003](#)). The recent formation of the BRICS Bank ([2014](#)) (formally known as the New Development Bank) further consolidates the two countries' position in terms of future prospect of industrial growth. A number of B2B companies in the two countries have international or global operations, and a growing number are expanding internationally. As the B2B companies in these countries expand, they become aware of the need for developing strong corporate brands and for investing in branding activities. Therefore, the countries provide appropriate settings for conducting the present study.

1.1.1. The Brazilian context

The Brazilian economy has grown over the past decade. In 2011 the economy grew at the rate of 7.5% ([MDICE, 2011](#)). There is an overall optimism on the increasing internationalization of the Brazilian companies. Such internationalization has been facilitated by the establishment of international alliances (Brazil is part of the Mercosur) and by the increasing recognition of the BRIC countries in the international business arena ([BDO, 2014](#)). A substantial number of businesses operate in the B2B and industrial markets. Increasingly, companies including those operating in B2B markets, maintain a web presence.

1.1.2. The Indian context

Following economic liberalization, the Indian economy has shown sustained growth over the past decade, with an average GDP growth rate of 7.6% during 2004–13 ([Planning Commission, Government of India, 2014](#)). Much of this growth is fuelled by a healthy industrial growth rate that averaged at 7% during the same period. The IMF has made a positive forecast for the economic indicators in India, with industrial growth set to keep its momentum in coming years ([Kapur & Mohan, 2014](#)). English is a widely spoken language and the country has become a center for many global companies ([Gupta & Shapiro, 2014](#)). The rapid growth of the industrial sector is characterized by increasing internationalization of the companies, especially in the B2B sector. Almost all B2B companies listed on the stock exchange, large or small-sized, maintain a web presence.

2. Background

The notion of a CB reflects an understanding that the brand concept can be applied at the corporate level ([Aaker, 1996](#)). As opposed to the product brand that relates to what the brand does and represents, the CB entails what the brand does but also who the brand is ([Keller & Richey, 2006](#)). The CB needs to be considered and managed as a strategic asset ([Webster & Keller, 2004](#)). As [Ind \(1997\)](#) explains, "a corporate brand is more than just the outward manifestation of an organization – its name, logo, visual presentation. Rather it is the core of values that defines it" (p. 13). Such an overarching view of the CB is echoed in [Knox and Bickerton's \(2003\)](#) definition of CB: "the visual, verbal and behavioral expression of an organization's unique business model" (p. 1013).

This idea of behavioral expression and uniqueness of the organization may be linked to the notion of corporate identity. Corporate identity refers to the uniqueness and character of the company ([Simões, Dibb, & Fisk, 2005](#)). In this regard, [Votaw and Kleyn \(2014: 1053\)](#) consider the CB as "... expressions and images of an organization's identity"

³ The acronym has been extended to BRICS including South Africa.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7432590>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7432590>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)