

# EMBRACING BRAND COMPLEXITY: CONCEPTUALISING AND UNDERSTANDING THE POSITIONING CHALLENGES OF 'BROAD BRANDS'

## BASIC RESEARCH QUESTION

What is a broad brand? How do broad brands implement positioning strategies, especially in the digital brandscape?

## KEY PAPER(S)

Keller, K. L. (2014). Designing and implementing brand architecture strategies. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(9), 702-715.

Lury, G., & Jowitt, H. (2012). Is it time to reposition positioning? *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(2), 96-103.

Meyvis, T., & Janiszewski, C. (2004). When Are Broader Brands Stronger Brands? An Accessibility Perspective on the Success of Brand Extensions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(2), 346-357.

## MOTIVATION/ PUZZLE

Contemporary branding presents new challenges of dynamism and complexity, which need to be addressed in brand management theory and practice (Klaus-Peter, 2015). However, complexity is perceived as a negative characteristic for brands, meaning that the brand is unclear, fuzzy or incoherently positioned in comparison to other brands (Zenker, Braun, & Petersen, 2017). Current branding models fail to acknowledge the multidimensional reality for brands (Lury & Jowitt 2012). Therefore, there is a compelling and timely opportunity to understand the dimensions and challenges of *broad brands*.

## THREE CORE ASPECTS OF ANY EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

### THE IDEA

The traditional segmentation-targeting-positioning paradigm is too simple for the new complexity today. This study is innovative – in focus and method - as it will identify and explain the influence of complexity as a brand phenomenon. In this paper I argue that complexity can bring positive outcomes to broad brands. The complex and dynamic architecture and positioning of the broad brand concept provides a valuable resource to companies that need to be acknowledged by the marketing literature. This paper is driven by two aims; (1) develop the broad brand concept and its conceptual framework; (2) identify the attributes and dimensions that inform an understanding of a broad brand and its relative position in the market.

### THE DATA

This research adopts a qualitative line of inquiry, applying a case study approach (Yin, 2014). The context is broadcasting television in Australia because of the major transformations undergone by TV channels and Networks during the time due to the introduction of digital platforms. This study identifies current broadcasting television brand positioning strategies pursued in television branding practice, through the analysis of current traditional positioning tools used in broadcasting television: promotions. A sample of three commercial free-to-air broadcasting stations' promotions (TV commercials) covering the time period of one "normal" week during prime time was collected. This study draws on *multimodal frameworks* (Jewitt, 2009) to conduct a brand analysis. Promotions are considered multimodal artefacts, as they combine more than one mode (e.g., sound, music, language, images) as resources for brand meaning making.

### THE TOOLS

The research approach involved multiple analytical steps or phases, which were adapted from past visual research approaches. The first descriptive step involved creating a rich description of each promotion, which was imported into NVivo10 for data management and analysis. Phase 1, involved identifying internal sources of information that define the image or elements represented (Schroeder, 2005b, p. 115). The internal elements of the promotions, for example, brand elements, colours, visual effects, characters, were coded during this phase. Phase 2, also part of the descriptive phase, then considered the context of the promotion (e.g., channel, time,

**Claudia Gonzalez** (PhD Program)

ADVISORS: FRANK ALPERT & JO PREVITE

program, genre, etc.). Next, Phase 3 in the coding process further iterates the data to an interpretive level by linking the outcome of the descriptive phases to branding theory. During phase 3 the coded data was clustered into brand entities and brand associations (Keller, 2014). Phase 4 evaluated the initial Broad Brands framework dimensions and refined the development of broad brands as a construct.

## TWO KEY QUESTIONS

### WHAT'S NEW

There is some recognition in the marketing literature that the *breadth* of a brand is a function of multiplicity and variety, including multiple associations and a variety of product categories. However, what is lacking in the current branding literature is a theoretical framework to formally define and differentiate a broad brand from a traditional (classic) or narrow brand. The study is also novel in its method. To date, little attention has been paid to the role of multimodality in advertising and branding (Jessen & Graakjaer, 2013), despite the development of the method in aligned, established disciplines such as communication. The development of the visual analysis of the promotions brings forward a novel, systematic approach integrating text and visual resources to understand broad brands and the positioning strategies used by broad brands in the digital brandscape.

### SO WHAT

Data collection for this study occurred at a significant time of market transformation in the media - multi-channel networks were evolving to bigger media platforms, adding television channels, streaming services and subscription video on demand (SVOD) (Ibisworld, 2017). Practitioners have recognised the need to revise traditional branding frameworks towards a better understanding of broad, messy and multidimensional brands that can operate in a changing market. This study leverages this shift in branding to present practical implications, and a new brand theory informed by a strategic perspective.

## ONE BOTTOM LINE

### THE CONTRIBUTION

The academic literature on broad brands is limited and fragmented. This study makes a significant theoretical contribution to identifying key dimensions of the construct through the explication of a conceptual framework. Broad brands include several dimensions, which are beyond simple framing of brand extensions. The findings from this study will offer a resolution to prior conceptual inconsistencies of the broad brand concept (e.g., broad brands vs. corporate brands). Both theoretical and managerial contributions will be made to inform a revised perspective on emerging branding phenomena enhanced by the digital landscape.

### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Collaboration: this research involves collaboration with a multidimensional (broad) brand company that has been the market leader in the media industry for more than 10 years. Data collected from this organisation informed the context of this study and provided data for subsequent papers.

Target Journal: *European Journal of Marketing*

Ethical clearance: obtained