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# Corporate communication and corporate marketing Their nature, histories, differences and similarities

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# Corporate communication and corporate marketing

## Their nature, histories, differences and similarities

Corporate  
communication  
and marketing

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explicate the natures, histories, similarities and differences of, and between, corporate communication and corporate marketing.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The *modus operandi* of the article is to map these two territories and, by this means, afford assistance to scholars and practitioners within the communications and marketing domains who share the authors' intellectual and instrumental interests in these two territories. As such, the article seeks to provide a general introduction to the nature of these two fields along with their bases and rationales.

**Findings** – Whilst there are significant differences between corporate communication and corporate marketing, the authors also found similarities in terms of the importance accorded to identities (an identity-based view of the corporation can be significant here) and are mindful of the impact of ethics and note common grounds in their analytical focus. Both areas are also inextricably linked by virtue of their foci on corporate-level concerns rather than product-related concerns that have, for the main, predominated *vis-à-vis* traditional modes of communication/PR and marketing.

**Research limitations/implications** – From a theoretical point of view the paper invites to explore the synergies between these two disciplines. From a practical point of view practitioners are invited to rethink their communications under the lens of corporate marketing and corporate communication.

**Originality/value** – The contribution of the paper is to provide an extensive literature review of the two fields that uncovers the theoretical backgrounds of both disciplines, their nature and analytical focus. Also, the value is to compare these two fields one with the other.

**Keywords** Corporate communication, Corporate marketing, Corporate identity, Literature review

**Paper type** Literature review

### Introduction

In this paper we explicate the natures, histories, similarities and differences of, and between, corporate communication and corporate marketing. The *modus operandi* of our article is to map these two territories and, by this means, afford assistance to scholars and practitioners within the communications and marketing domains who share our intellectual and instrumental interests in these two territories. As such, our article seeks to provide a general introduction to the nature of these two fields along with their bases and rationales.

Our aim, here, is not to revisit – or indeed repeat – earlier debates that have, for instance, characterised the marketing and public relations literatures. A good number of these debates were seemingly informed by ideology and sought to privilege one



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domain over another in terms of arguing which area should enjoy ultimate hegemony. We do not wish to engage in or bring about a similar turf war in our examination of the territory.

Equally, it is not our aim to engage in proselytising activities with the aim of converting scholars and practitioners to one or other discipline or functions. Rather, we are spurred on by the scholarly quest of advancing knowledge and, as such, both of us believe this article can be of material benefit to the readership of this journal. Moreover, and to reiterate, our article does not privilege one perspective over another, nor do we seek to accord prominence to the literature emanating from a particular continent: alas, this often underpins and sometimes undermines academic discourse on these and analogous territories, which sometimes denigrates – and, more often, studiously ignores – valuable, seminal perspectives from other disciplines and nations. Ignoring these perspectives may unwittingly – or wittingly – create historiographies and narratives about a particular domain.

Where there is a degree of privilege in our article, this relates to marshalling our own work and comprehensions of these two domains. We believe this gives our article a distinctive voice but we are, of course, mindful that there are likely to be different perspectives and interpretations on the domain.

Alas, the current scholarly *Zeitgeist* tends to privilege the recent literature on the domain, and this leads to no more than putting old wine in new bottles. There is merit in reading reviews of corporate communication, corporate identity, corporate branding, etc., that date from the 1990s and of course earlier: *en passant*, we also note the richness, too, of the literature from the 1950s.

Regrettably, our article cannot adequately – to the degree we would like owing to constrictions regarding article length – meet all of the above concerns, but all the same we do feel that it is incumbent on us to communicate the above points.

Whilst both of us share a common interest in both corporate communication and corporate marketing we are mindful of our backgrounds in these two disciplines.

In our article we explore how these two disciplines are *not* as dissimilar as one might initially think. By providing an overview of these areas' theoretical backgrounds, philosophies, focus, analytical forms and processes, permits us to identify common grounds – along with dissimilarities – that characterise both areas.

Our article begins by providing two definitions of these areas by means of a preamble that seeks to elucidate the natures of these two domains. The article continues by focusing on corporate communications, and this is followed by a section that scrutinises the corporate marketing domain. As such, we detail the natures and histories – including schools of thought – of the aforementioned. We follow this by detailing the differences and similarities between these disciplines. Whilst we identify significant differences in these territories, we also have found similarities in terms of the importance accorded to identities (an identity-based view of the corporation can be significant here) and are mindful of the impact of ethics and note common grounds in their analytical focus. Of course, both areas are inextricably linked by virtue of their foci on corporate-level concerns rather than product-related concerns, which have, in the main, predominated *vis-à-vis* traditional modes of communication/PR and marketing. We also – albeit briefly – detail the management implications that flow from our analyses.

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## Defining corporate communication and corporate marketing

### *Corporate communication*

Definitions abound *vis-à-vis* corporate communication, as the works of Bernstein (1984), Gray and Balmer (1998), Jackson (1987), Cornelissen (2011), Goodman (1994) and van Riel (1995) attest. The following definition provided by van Riel and Fombrun (2007) may be seen to be typical of the way corporate communications is categorised by many corporate communications scholars:

The set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communication aimed at creating favourable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends. Corporate communication consists of the dissemination of information by a variety of specialists and generalists in an organisation, with the common goal of enhancing the organisation's ability to retain its licence to operate (van Riel and Fombrun, 2007, p. 25).

### *Corporate marketing*

Whilst reference to corporate marketing – and the need for a corporate marketing logic – dates back to 1998 (Balmer, 1998) the number of definitions and articulations *vis-à-vis* corporate marketing remains quite small. The following, recent, articulation of corporate marketing does however articulate many of the territory's salient characteristics:

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. The espoused benefits of a corporate marketing logic include the establishment of on-going and bi-lateral positive organisational/customer-stakeholder relationships; the establishment and maintenance of trust, and the acquisition of meaningful and positive corporate reputations; the creation of shareholder and/or shareholder value via the establishment of strong, salient and appealing corporate brands; institutional saliency in its markets (corporate survival and profitability) and the licence to operate in terms of the organisation's societal, ethical and CSR by virtue of the organisation's responsibilities and sensibilities in terms of the aforementioned (Balmer, 2011, pp. 1345-6).

## Corporate communication: an overview

Balmer and Greyser (2003, pp. 139-52) – in their scrutiny of the corporate communications domain – note the foundations of the territory, arguably, can be found in the work of practitioners. Many, of course, have a background in marketing communications and in advertising. According to their analysis, of note is the legendary English practitioner David Bernstein, whose pioneering work (Bernstein, 1984) appears to be influential in moulding the world-view of the first wave of corporate communications scholars such as, for example, van Riel (1995). Balmer and

Greyser, for instance, note the saliency of Bernstein's models and frameworks on the domain as a means of initially understanding the domain. For instance, Balmer and Greyser have updated Bernstein's famous corporate communications wheel so that it has a broader utility for contemporary corporations and reflects contemporary concerns (Balmer and Greyser, 2003, p. 141).

Corporate communication is considered to be a management function having three main overall objectives. Corporate communication is seen to be important in terms of its roles *vis-à-vis* maintaining favourable inter-organisational relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent (van Riel, 1995; Cornelissen, 2011); evaluating social trends and formulating corporate policies that can help the company innovate and proactively adapt to changes in society (Bernays, 1923); integrating all communications under one unique strategy so to support marketing activities (Schultz *et al.*, 1993; Caywood, 1997; Kitchen and de Pelsmacker, 2004). Corporate communications, too, represents the nexus between the corporate identity and corporate reputation (Gray and Balmer, 1998).

Depending on the stream of research and conceptual approach that one takes, it is possible to propose different definitions of the nature and philosophy of corporate communication taking account of theoretical backgrounds, philosophy, focus and analytic forms.

Four distinct approaches can be applied to the area:

- (1) public relations and one way and two ways perspectives;
- (2) integrated marketing communications;
- (3) total corporate communications; and
- (4) corporate communication gaps.

#### *Public relations and one-way and two-way perspectives*

Here, corporate communication is used to evaluate social trends and formulate corporate policies that can help the company innovate and proactively adapt to changes in society (Bernays, 1923). PR professionals have the role to "give to the client an interpretation of the public and give to the public an interpretation of the client; [he/she] shapes the client's action and contributes to shape the public opinion" (Bernays, 1923). In this approach two things are key.

First, it is imperative to find a balance between the one-way and the two-way communication approach (Grunig, 2002). Corporate communication management can be viewed as a one-way – i.e. publicity focussed – activity. Thus, a public information approach characterises this perspective: the aim is to disseminate accurate and favourable information about the company. The two-way approach, in contrast, entails conducting or commissioning research that determines the dimensions that can influence one or more key corporate audiences. As such, research underpins the dimensions that can meaningfully inform two-way company/stakeholder dialogues. Importantly, this perspective takes account of the fact that organisations can – and should – learn from stakeholders.

Second, it is key to understand how public opinion is formed and how the media and other key stakeholders (e.g. activists) have important gate-keeping roles, such as the media operating in their communication behaviour. Following this perspective, communication plays an important boundary-spanning role for companies –

identifying key stakeholders, publics, and issues in order to understand who might create negative consequences and why – so as to avoid corporate crises (Grunig, 1992). Theories of key relevance here for practitioners and researchers are from multiple fields and areas. For example, the situational theory of communication behaviour (Grunig and Hunt, 1984), which sheds light on how stakeholders become an active public having consequences on organisations; the co-orientation theory (McLeod and Chafee, 1973), which helps to understand how individual perceptions become public opinion; the agenda setting theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), which helps to understand how the media influence public opinion; framing research (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981; Snow and Benford, 1992); and corporate apologia research (Benoit and Brinson, 1994), which helps to understand how to shape news and work on persuasion.

#### *Integrated marketing communications*

According to this perspective, corporate communication is seen to be part of the broader marketing function and forms a key part of the classic quadripartite marketing mix. As such, it is one of the four P's of marketing, i.e. promotion (Caywood, 1997; Kitchen and de Pelsmacker, 2004). In this approach it is essential to understand how to integrate all communications under one unique strategy so to support marketing activities. Also, in this perspective it is crucial to understand consumers and suppliers, how their communication and identity is related with the communication and identity of the company, and also deeply to understand consumers' values and affinity with corporate brands.

Here, theories of key relevance for practitioners and researchers are, among others, the theory of diffusion and innovation (Rogers, 2003), which permits an understanding of how to fix communication objectives based on awareness, evaluation, trial and the adoption objectives of marketing campaigns; the theory of social exchange (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959), which permits an understanding of the rewards and costs perceived (i.e. customer loyalty); and theory on personality and brand personality (Aaker, 1997), which permits an exploration of how companies and their products have a personality and how consumers can identify with brands.

#### *Total corporate communications*

A third, somewhat overshadowed, perspective relates to Balmer's notion of total corporate communications. The analogous, albeit narrower, area of total communications (Aberg, 1990) is also significant, as pointed out by Balmer and Greyser (2003, pp. 142-4). However, these perspectives – by adopting a meta-level communications overview – can be highly salient in appreciating the importance of communications in its broadest terms.

For instance, by means of context it was the Finnish scholar Aberg (1990) who noted the efficacy of integrating all communications activities within the corporation: what he called total communications. This is broadly analogous to the integration perspective outlined earlier.

The much broader notion of total communications was expounded by Balmer in some of his earlier work on the territory (Balmer, 1995, 1998) when he noted that everything a company says, makes or does – *de facto* – communicates (one of his identity schools of thought was called “total corporate communications”; see Balmer,

1995, p. 34). Balmer's total corporate communications perspective informs the model of the corporate identity/corporate communications process that appeared in *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* (Balmer and Gray, 1999).

In their article, Balmer and Gray conclude that corporate communication should not merely be viewed as a functional activity but a strategic activity in addition. As such, Balmer and Gray (1999) identified three components of total corporate communication and – as shown in their model – this takes account of the communications effects not only of formal communications channels but also that of products, services, management actions, and corporate behaviour. Account should be taken of all of these and they should be in – all things being equal and positive – coordinated (where possible) and in alignment. It also, importantly, acknowledges the importance of third-party communication. These three modes of corporate communication are subsequently elaborated by Balmer (2001a, p. 253) and Balmer and Greyser (2003, p. 125).

The authors note the importance of and argue for the need to consider both horizontal and vertical modes of communication integration in terms of congruency not only through channels but – sometimes – over time. The three dimensions of total corporate communications are as follows:

- (1) *primary communications* – the communications effects of products, services, management, staff and corporate behaviour;
- (2) *secondary communications* – the communication effects of controlled forms of communications (similar to integrated communications); and
- (3) *tertiary communications* – the communications effects of communication given by third parties such as competitor and media commentary, the media and that from interest groups.

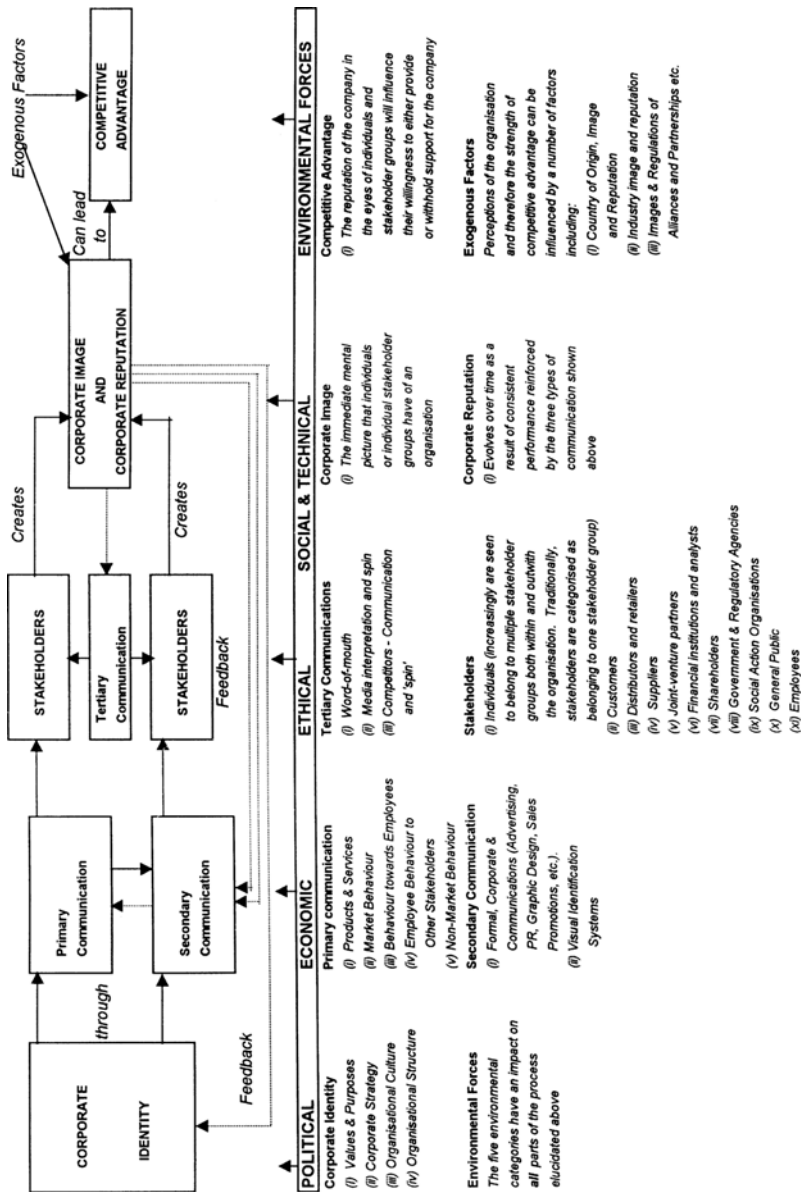
Finally, Balmer and Gray note that corporate communications total corporate communications approach – taking account of primary, secondary and tertiary communication – provides a tripartite bridge between an organisation's identity and corporate image and reputation. In short, it represents the nexus between corporate identity and corporate reputation (Gray and Balmer, 1998) (see Figure 1).

#### *Corporate communication gaps*

This fourth stream of research has the main aim to understand organisations *per se* and all gaps related to its actions and communications. The company is not treated as a black box; the company and its internal and external dynamics are the main focus.

Here, the aim of corporate communication is to include stakeholders' conversations about who the company is within the company (Hatch and Schultz, 2008); also, it is also to assure that no gaps emerge between how the company behaves and its communications, so as to build a strong reputation (Fombrun and van Riel, 2007) and assure that ethical and social responsible decisions are taken (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Birth *et al.*, 2008). In this perspective, employees are considered to be key *vis-à-vis* stakeholder relationships.

Adopting an identity-based perspective, corporate communications is characterised one of a series of significant identity types: the notion of communicated identity (Balmer and Soenen, 1999; Balmer, 2001b; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Balmer, 2009). As such, corporate communications represents one type of institutional reality. However it is a reality that needs to be in alignment with institutional reality, corporate culture,



Source: From Balmer and Gray (1999, p. 175)

Figure 1.  
Total communication

stakeholder perception(s), corporate strategy, and management vision. Increasingly, account needs to be taken of the corporate brand, too, a distinct – and critically important – identity type (Balmer, 2005, 2012).

A variety of theoretical backgrounds of relevance *vis-à-vis* the above and include, for example, stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), which permits an understanding of the business ethics foundations of a company and its interdependence with the various actors in the environment; the social construction of identity (Goffman, 1959; Cooley, 1964), which permits an understanding of the socially construed foundations of corporate communications; social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which permits an understanding of how members of the organisation identify with its core values and beliefs; institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), which permits an understanding of the role of communication in building a company's legitimisation; and organisational communication (e.g. McPhee and Zaug, 2009; Taylor and van Every, 2000) which helps in an understanding that managing the various gaps (identity, communication, reality) in a company entails moving from a transmission communication model to a constitutive model of communication according to which communication needs to be seen as a formative element of a company.

#### *Comparing the four approaches*

In summary, it can be observed that the four main approaches differ in their analytical form and focus. The first stream of research (PR), while having the final aim of covering dangerous gaps of expectations of key stakeholders, finds its form of analysis within the gaps and communication behaviour of key stakeholders such as news media, public opinion and activists. Here the focus is on external actors, campaigns, and the perception and behaviour of these key external actors, while the company *per se* (its dynamics, procedures, etc.) is not analysed.

The second stream of research, (integrated marketing communications), while having the final aim of contributing to corporate strategy, finds its form of analysis within perception and beliefs of key stakeholders (consumers, suppliers) that are key to promote or advertise products or the company for marketing purposes.

The third stream of research (total corporate communications) takes account of the plethora of ways in which communications relating to a firm are conveyed and takes account of the communications effects of corporate behaviours and policies, the performance of products and services and the effect of word of mouth. The temporal dimension is also taken into account.

The fourth stream of research (corporate communications gaps), while having the final purpose of managing companies' stakeholder relationships and expectations, finds its form of analysis within the organisation, its procedures, routines and gaps due to mismanagement and misalignment of managerial actions. Here a number of scholars have the belief that communication cannot be reduced to an informational issue where meanings are assumed to already exist. It takes account of the notion that organisations can and do have multiple identities and, of course, is mindful that certain identities inhabit various perceived identity modes such as stakeholder/company relationships.

#### **Corporate marketing: an overview**

The genesis of corporate marketing as a distinct branch of marketing/management is to be found in Balmer's (1998) article entitled: "Corporate identity and the advent of

corporate marketing” and, in recent years, there has been a discernible growth of interest in the notion of the corporate marketing logic as the recent literature attests (e.g. Aspara and Tikkanen, 2011; Hildebrand *et al.*, 2011; Powell, 2011; Podnar *et al.*, 2011; Karaosmanoglu *et al.*, 2011).

Balmer (1998) argued that the logical destination of practitioner and academic interest in the corporate-level constructs of corporate image, corporate communication, corporate identity corporate reputation, and corporate brands was the ascendancy of a new umbrella marketing paradigm: corporate marketing. To Balmer, this new marketing domain was characterised by having an explicit institutional and stakeholder-focussed orientation. As such, this marked a departure/extension of the so-called product, services and relationships marketing logics.

#### *Product, services, relational and corporate marketing logics*

Corporate marketing’s antecedents are varied (Balmer and Greyser, 2006; Balmer, 2011) and not only include the product (McKitterick, 1957; Levitt, 1960), services (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and relational (Coviello and Brodie, 1998; Gronroos, 1997) marketing logics but also include the various integrative endeavours which have characterised the corporate marketing domain (Balmer, 2009, pp. 569-60).

The corporate marketing logic can also be adapted to institutions having an explicit ethical/CSR remit and this has given rise to the notion of ethical corporate marketing/the ethical corporate identity and the ethical corporate brand (Balmer *et al.*, 2011, 2012).

*Sensory, design, communications, brand, identity and corporate marketing integrations*  
Over time, the focus on sensory integration, design integration, communications integration, brand integration and identity integration may also be seen to have presaged what – to Balmer – is the inexorable rise of a corporate marketing logic (Balmer, 2011).

#### *Corporate marketing: responsibilities of management and responsibilities of organisational members*

While senior management have a critical role in fostering the above in terms of corporate marketing management, day-to-day responsibility for the corporate marketing ethos resides with all personnel. An important dimension of corporate marketing in terms of an institutional philosophy and culture and as a strategic management function are the multiple identities of the firm and, as such, identity based perspectives and approaches are highly germane in this regard (Balmer, 2008, 2009, 2011).

#### *The nature of corporate marketing*

Corporate marketing is best characterised as an organisation-wide philosophy and has an explicit institutional, stakeholder, societal orientation and CSR/ethical ethos (Balmer, 2011). It is a marketing paradigm that is meaningfully informed by the notion of identity-based views of the firm and identity-based views of corporate brands (Balmer, 2008). In order for this corporate philosophy to be actualised it has to be reflected in the organisation’s culture and is, in addition, at the core of a firm’s strategic deliberations (Balmer, 1998, 2001a, 2009, 2011). It is also important at the level of the corporate brand (Balmer, 2005, 2012).

*Defining characteristics of corporate marketing*

The defining characteristics of corporate marketing are as follows (Balmer, 2011, pp. 1340-1):

- it is an explicit corporate-rather than product or service-orientation (as such both the corporate identity and the corporate brand are of critical importance);
- it is a philosophy which has a customer/stakeholder, CSR/ethical and societal foci;
- it is enacted via a corporate-wide culture;
- it is a philosophy that is concerned not merely with the present and prospective future but is mindful of the past (for instance the inheritance bequeathed to an organisation by its owners, founders, etc.);
- it is informed by a corporate-level gestalt (appreciates the meaningful contributions to the corporate marketing by comprehending key corporate-level marketing constructs such as corporate communication, corporate identity, corporate brands, etc.);
- it can be revealed and appraised by adopting an identity based view of the firm and by, in addition, adopting an identity based view of corporate brands;
- it recognises that corporate marketing is multidisciplinary in scope;
- it acknowledges the dissipation of the traditional internal/external boundary divide/s of organisations;
- it is closely aligned to stakeholder theory;
- it accords importance to personnel; and
- it has a broad application: it is applicable to business-to business contexts for example is germane to all entities.

*Comparing corporate marketing with traditional (product) marketing*

To reiterate, there are some fundamental differences between corporate marketing and traditional marketing (Balmer, 2009, 2011):

- Traditional marketing is oriented to consumers and products, while corporate marketing has an explicit organisational focus that includes a wide range of stakeholders and societal ethical issues.
- Traditional marketing has a prospective future orientation, while corporate marketing has not only a future but also present and past orientation, as it focus on societal concerns of all type of stakeholders.
- Traditional marketing has mainly a product focus, while corporate marketing has mainly an institutional focus (in terms of focussing on corporate identity and the corporate brand).
- Traditional marketing has bilateral – and mutually beneficial – exchange relationships with consumers, while corporate marketing has a multi-lateral multi-beneficial exchange with all stakeholders and society.
- The cultural orientation of traditional marketing has an explicit customer orientation, while the cultural orientation of corporate marketing is explicitly toward all types of stakeholders and ethical/societal issues.

- For traditional marketing CSR/ethical concerns are optional, while for corporate marketing these are central.
- Traditional marketing can be viewed as a function under the marketing department, while corporate marketing is viewed as a co-coordinating function at the boardroom level.

### *Corporate marketing mixes*

Since 1998, Balmer has introduced a number of corporate marketing mixes. As with the traditional marketing mix of McCarthy (1960), his aim has been to capture – as well as articulate – the key facets underpinning the domain so that they have a utility for practitioners, scholars and preceptors alike. Unlike McCarthy's mix, Balmer (2011) notes that his corporate marketing mixes are broader in scope, require a radical reconfiguration and are underpinned by distinct disciplinary traditions (including corporate communication).

His 1998 corporate marketing mix continues the traditional focus on the marketing P's and comprises philosophy, personality, people, product, price, place, promotion, performance, perception and positioning (Balmer, 1998). In 2006 he added a further P in order to capture the corporate brand identity – that of promise (Balmer and Greyser, 2006).

Balmer's (2001a) mix marked something of a departure in that seven elements were identified and this formed the acronym HE<sup>2</sup>ADS<sup>2</sup> – in terms of what an organisations Has, and Expresses; being mindful of the Environment; taking account of stakeholder Affinities to the firm; also being mindful of what the organisation Does; along with showing sensitivity in terms of how the entity is Seen and adopting an overtly Stakeholder perspective.

Arguably, it has been Balmer's corporate marketing star (Balmer and Greyser, 2006) that has been the most popular of these marketing mixes. This mix focuses on corporate marketing Cs rather than corporate marketing Ps and the mix accommodates the following dimensions:

- character (what the organisation indubitably is);
- communication (what the entity says it is);
- constituencies (whom the organisation seeks to serve);
- covenant (what is promised and expected from the corporate brand);
- conceptualisations (what the firm is seen to be); and
- culture (what we feel we are).

Balmer (2009) went on to include two additional dimensions:

- context (the wider environmental concerns which must be taken account of); and
- custodianship (senior management stewardship of the corporate marketing ethos and also embraces the notion that the corporate marketing logic is the responsibility of all employees).

### *Corporate marketing in practice*

What was described above shows that from a practical point of view managing corporate marketing requires entailing a complex number of actions as described in Figure 2. The framework inspired in Figure 2 (Balmer, 2011) explains that all the



different eight C's of the corporate marketing mix are strictly interrelated one with the other, meaning that a change in one strictly affects a change in the other C's.

*Corporate marketing in practice: corporate identity and corporate brand alignments*

A significant line of scholarship within marketing/corporate marketing dating back to the 1990s (Balmer and Soenen, 1999; Balmer, 2001a, b; Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Balmer *et al.*, 2011) has stressed the need to ensure that an organisation's rationale and purpose is reflected in terms of ensuring that its activities are meaningful and are evidenced in what it does, and how it does it (corporate identity). It also notes that corporate identity can be shaped by management vision (desired identity) and by an organisation's strategic intent, focussing on a given period of time (ideal identity). This approach, therefore, is informed by the view that corporate identity should be dynamically and broadly aligned with an organisation's corporate communications (communicated identity), and should be calibrated with customer and stakeholder perception (conceived identity).

The approach is informed by an identity-based view of the firm and the need for multiple identities to be dynamically aligned with each other (in order to be meaningful identities need to evolve and change). Recently the importance of culture and the corporate brand *per se* has been noted (Balmer, 2005, 2012), as has the efficacy of temporal alignment.

Of importance, too, has been the widely cited work of the US/Danish organisational behaviour scholars Hatch and Schultz (2002), which was published in *Harvard Business Review*. Their work, focussing on the corporate brand, has a similar, albeit narrower, *raison d'être*, with the authors arguing that vision, culture and image should be in alignment.

*Theoretical perspectives and foundations*

Corporate marketing is informed – as is the marketing discipline *per se* – by a plethora of theories. Taking an identity perspective includes identity-based views of the firm (Balmer, 2008), social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the social construction of identity (Cooley, 1964; Goffman, 1959) and company-customer identification theory (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Of relevance too – since corporate marketing has an explicit institutional focus – is institutional theory (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), core competencies theory (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990) and business concept theory (Norman, 1977). The economic theory of the resource-based view of the firm is also highly salient (Grant, 1991). Moreover, the significance of corporate marketing's stakeholder orientation means that stakeholder theory is highly salient (Freeman, 1984), as is commitment-trust theory (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

The above represents an indicative rather than a comprehensive list of the many theories underpinning and informing the corporate marketing domain.

**Comparing corporate communication and corporate marketing**

Based on the overview presented of main theories, concepts, and philosophy beyond corporate communication and corporate marketing, we are able to identify the following common or different grounds between the analytical form, objectives and focus of these two disciplines, as Figure 3 shows.

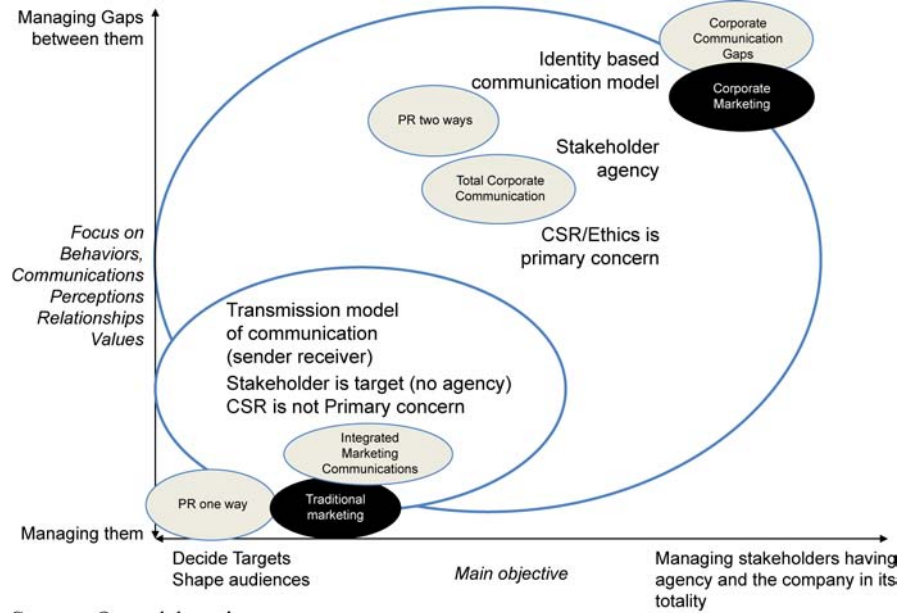


**Figure 3.**  
Corporate communication  
versus corporate  
marketing: analyzing their  
focus and objectives

### Similarities

- They have an institutional focus.
- The accord importance to – albeit to a more significant degree in corporate marketing – corporate identity (an institution's defining attributes).
- They have a clear stakeholder/customer agency.
- They recognise the critical importance of personnel.
- They note the importance of CSR and ethics.
- The provide managers with analytical/instrumental tools, enabling them to take strategic decisions relating to the institution and their multiple identities.
- The stress the importance of identifying gaps between who the company is, who the company wants to be, and how others see the company.
- They focus on both communication and behaviours, with the final aim of reducing the gaps between them.
- They take into account the various ways in which communications relating about a firm are conveyed (content of a message, behaviour, product performance, etc.).
- They take into consideration that everything a company says, makes or does – *de facto* – communicates.

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### Differences

- Corporate communication in the main tends to be viewed as a stand-alone discipline and it is the exception rather than the rule that corporate communications approaches (for understandable reasons) have recourse to marketing or, more particularly, to corporate marketing. In corporate marketing contexts, however, corporate communication is viewed as one component of the corporate marketing mix, albeit a critical one. It is seen as the nexus linking corporate identity with the corporate reputation and the corporate brand.
- Whereas corporate marketing regards identity (corporate identity) as a tangible, legal, and economic construct, the corporate communications domain typically views identity to be socially constructed and, in this sense, mirrors the perspective normally espoused within the organisational behaviour field *vis-à-vis* the organisational identity construct.
- Corporate communication is primarily seen as a management function, whereas corporate marketing is viewed as a corporate-wide philosophy.
- The boundaries of these areas are informed by their respective traditions. Corporate communication is informed by various communications perspectives, whereas corporate marketing is informed by economics, psychology, jurisprudence and sociology, as well as by the communication disciplines.
- Corporate communication, owing to its historical links with PR, gives greater coverage – but not necessarily greater importance – to media, public opinion and activists.
- Corporate communication is a discipline that is much more fragmented than corporate marketing, as it includes many different approaches to communication, from the transmission model to the identity communication model. Corporate marketing, in contrast, following long-standing marketing traditions, aims to synthesise different perspectives, constructs and theories into a whole so that it is memorable, salient, and effective.

### Practical insights

Based on our reflections, we believe that corporate communication professionals can learn from not only being appraised of their own area but also recent developments in corporate marketing too. Professionals may usefully reflect on the precepts of total corporate communications in terms of noting that everything – *everything* – a company says, makes or does communicates.

Thus, for professionals it is important to move away from the conviction that communication is solely the responsibility of the communication department. Corporate communication is – taking a leaf out of corporate marketing – the responsibility of the whole organisation, and that means it is the responsibility of all organisational members.

Also, by reflecting on these two perspectives, corporate communications and corporate marketing practitioners and, importantly, senior managers should realise the significance of uncovering a firm's multiple identities and in particular appreciate the efficacy of uncovering an organisation's distinctive institutional traits – in other words its corporate identity and – appreciating that the aforementioned has to change in order to remain salient. The practical implication here is that managers need to

appreciate that unwanted corporate identity and corporate communications gaps and major misalignments thereof constitute moments of truth for the corporation (Balmer and Greyser, 2003).

Aligning these gaps is a key – indeed strategic – responsibility of senior managers. The vision, culture and image approach of Hatch and Schultz affords one approach and does the various versions of Balmer's ACID test, which requires alignment between corporate reality, corporate brand promise, corporate culture, corporate communication, customer and stakeholder perception, corporate strategy and senior management vision (Balmer and Soenen, 1999; Balmer and Greyser, 2003, Balmer, 2005, 2012).

### Conclusions

This article has explained the natures, definitions, similarities and differences of corporate communication and corporate marketing and has also articulated some of the key similarities and differences that exist between the two. Our aim has not been to reach a conclusion as to which of the two perspectives is stronger, salient or of greater strategic significance, and nor has it been our aim to engage in proselytising activities or to revisit or reinvigorate the turf wars that in the past have visited the marketing and PR/communications fields. What we hope has been shown is that there is merit for scholars and managers in scrutinising and in familiarising themselves with both perspectives. Yes, there are differences, but there are many similarities. Moreover, there is, as both of us have discovered, much to be gained by becoming more closely acquainted with the core precepts underpinning both territories.

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