THE FEATURES OF STUDYING BRANDS IN MODERN SOCIOLOGY

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The development of the commodity production during the last century over-loaded the market with products of mass demand. Realizing that their products do not differ from each other by their functional features producers started to use emotional constituents of products - brands. In the contemporary world, brand is a condition for a product's existence. Therefore, nowadays branding of any product, starting from yoghurt to educational services, is not a whimsy, but a necessity. Preparing competitive strategies of market entry more and more companies focus on creation and development of a good branding strategy as one of the most important factors for gaining a market share because a successful brand can make the product famous, but an inadequate one can fail, even the best product.

Thus, how can companies futurize their brands? How can they create sustainable and robust brands that can act not just as window dressing, but as an engine to drive their business? The rise of the so-called Network Economy[1] or New Economy makes these questions more relevant and more urgent, as today brand is more than just a thing; it is associated with the values and relations. Great brands symbolize something in which people believe and what is sensible. Branding in the twenty-first century demands new theoretical and methodological view for more competitive and sustainable brands building.

Branding is one of the most overused and misused terms today. It is often used euphemistically to mean "sales" or "advertising," and seems to have a different definition to almost every person who utters it. What is needed first is a common language. Any brand is a set of perceptions and images that represent a company, product or service. While many people refer to a brand as a logo, tag line or audio jingle, a brand is actually much larger. As mentions David F. D'Alessandro, a brand is more than just advertising and marketing. It is nothing less than everything anyone thinks when they see your logo or hear your name[2]. Hence, *we define brand as a system of signs and symbols that engages the consumer in an imaginary/symbolic process that contributes tangible value to a product offered.*

Brands are a strong weapon changing the complete industrial landscape. They are a transforming commercial power. "Today brands are everything, and producers of products and services – from accounting companies to restaurants and shoe factories, try to stand out and become a brand".

Therefore, nowadays the problem is that most companies take the traditional view about branding. Ideas of branding remain in one dimension: commercial suitability. Nevertheless, branding in the twenty-first century demands perceptiveness

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[1] **Manuel Castells**, The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, (Ed.), 2004, p. 27.
[2] **David F. D'Alessandro**, Brand Warfare: 10 Rules for Building the Killer Brand, USA: McGraw-Hill, 2002, p. xiv.

and imagination. The multitude of dot-com businesses currently competing for our attention, confirms the view that brands will become more important than ever before. They are too important to be left to the marketing function – or any other single function, for that matter. Presence of a brand enables one to form the image of the product and to create a conception for the product itself. This kind of product becomes a universal communicator and conveys information not only about the material well-being of the owner, but also about his/her taste, social status and behavior. Due to this "One-dimensional branding has to give way to four-dimensional branding[3] (4D Branding model invented by Swedish creative director and brand strategist Thomas Gad)". Branding in four dimensions is concerned with building and sustaining relationships. Relationships are the key to commercial success. As American consultants define, branding "is a creation of mutually acceptable relationships between supplier and customer, which are more than just relationships between isolated operations or single beings". Brands are now pinned around a relationship rather than a product[4].

Today brands have moved from the physical sphere to the mind sphere. A brand is more than just a thing, a product, a company, or an organization. It is a mental construct and exists in the consciousness - of individuals and the public. It touches minds and hearts, feelings and emotions and can best be described as the sum of all human experiences, perceptions and feelings about a particular thing, product or organization.

The perception of brand in the minds of the consumers consists of 4 dimensions, which constitute the base of the 4 dimensional branding model.

The 4-D model consists of:

The functional dimension *concerns the perception of the benefit of the product or service associated with the brand.*

The social dimension *concerns the ability to create identification with a group.*

The spiritual dimension *is the perception of global or local responsibility.*

The mental dimension *is the ability to support the individual mentally[5].*

The Functional Dimension

Functional - for your customers what is the benefit of the product or service you offer?

The functional dimension describes the unique features of a product or service and concerns the perception of the benefit of the product or service associated with the brand. Brand creation begins with providing unique and useful products. In contemporary marketing, this dimension is still important in many fields of business. Significance of functional dimension depends on brand location on life span scale. The role of the technology is to make things easier for the consumers[6]. When the new product is created, it is necessary to name it. As the Chinese proverb says, "The unnamed does not exist", which is definitely true. If the name of the product not only

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[3] **Thomas Gad**, 4-D Branding: Cracking the Corporate Code of the Network Economy, Great Britain: Financial Times/Prentice Hall, 2001, p.16.

[4] **Martin E. Thoma**, In Search of a Common Language: Branding Definitions and Terms, (http://thomathoma.com/files/40/In_Search_of_A_Common_Language.pdf).

[5] **Thomas Gad**, ibid, p. 17.

[6] Ibid, pp. 93-94.

describes it and corresponds to it, but also reflects the functional dimensions of the brand, the result can be startling. When Nike named its patent technology Nike air[43], it was telling not only about the lightness of shoes and the sportsman's run, but also about breath and how good this smart sub-brand of Nike was.

All those who develop brands based on the functional dimension, eventually face the problem of vanishing differences. In terms of functionality, the competition becomes closer and closer. When the imitation grows, brand creators try to find the sphere where they can do something unique.

The Social Dimension

Social - how do you make customers feel as a part of a group?

As the social life and acceptance by the society has a significant role, a creator of a brand starts to think about the social dimension. In all markets, consumer's decisions are subjective and are based on what they feel best describes their social identity. Social dimension reflects relations between a buyer and his/her social group. In social dimension, the trademark or the logo represents a symbol creating a brand. Social dimension is more important than the functional one. It gives an opportunity to be a part of the culture and concerns the ability to create identification with the group. Social dimension is an ability to create a social context for a group and is associated with a high level of social value[7]. The Nike swoosh, for example, is a dream trademark. The symbol is recognized equally well with or without the word. Nike and the bearer are accepted implicitly by other members of that group.

The Mental Dimension

Mental - how do you create value in the mind of your users?

The social dimension well reflects the relationships between a buyer and the social group he/she wants to belong to. Brand is presented as a strong distinguishing feature. The author named the other end of the same axis a mental dimension. Instead of what people think of you, it is about what you think of yourself[8].

The mental dimension concerns personal transformation, i.e. changing and creating a new perception about oneself. That is why Nike introduced a new tone to the world of advertising by telling its customers "Just do it." This was a completely different voice and provided much longer lasting differentiation than a detail in the construction of a shoe.

The best brands are strong not only in social but in mental dimension as well. This dimension is even deeper and concerns personal transformation. In terms of mental and social dimension, one of the examples of strong brand is "Marlboro" with its "lonely cowboy." In social dimension, it represents a symbol of a real man, but in mental dimension, Marlboro struggles against the feeling of loneliness and isolation. Mental dimension gives an ability to create insight or guidance. It is the ability to support the individual mentally giving the opportunity to **"Express Yourself"**, to think that you are a separate individual and have the right to communicate and express yourself.

The Spiritual Dimension

Spiritual - what philosophies other than profit drive you?

Spiritual/idealistic dimension is the biggest part of the system. In this dimension, success is a very difficult objective. In this case, a brand has no way back, as it

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[7] Ibid, p. 95.
[8] Ibid, pp. 95-96.

makes an announcement about its ideals. It must be ready to overcome obstacles of the outside world. The Spiritual Dimension is the perception of global or local responsibility. Understand the spiritual and you will understand the connections between the brand, the product or the company, and the bigger system of which we are all a part. The spiritual dimension is now purposely used to build brands. It is not a token gesture or a fashionable statement. In order to work, it has to be believed and lived.

The spiritual dimension talks about what the brand stands for. The 4-D brand goes right to the core of the customer system of beliefs[9].

These dimensions, combined with an understanding of current positioning and activities, can be used to create a Brand Code[TM]. The Brand Code model itself contains six parts: **product/benefit, positioning, style, mission, vision and values**. The "product/benefit" is what can be offered to the customer. The "positioning" is the reason that the brand is better than or different from the competitor brands. The "style" is the image that characterizes the brand and the "mission" is the role for the brand in society, or its public benefit. The "vision" looks at the future positioning of the brand. Finally, the values are the elements that make the brand trustworthy[10].

Today's reality in terms of great sociologist M. Castells can be described by the Network Society model with its Network Economy[11]. The New Network Economy is all about transparency. The Internet has accelerated a process that was already underway. Consumers have greater access to information than ever before. They are able to observe the internal workings of the companies they do business with. As they become more aware of their new power, they will peer into every nook and cranny. Transparent markets demand transparent organizations. Successful companies will be those that live the brand – because they are the brand.

To understand your brand fully, to live it, and enable customers to live it means creating your own Brand Code. To do so requires using a four-dimensional model to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your brand. The 4 dimensions are: functional, social, mental and spiritual. It is most valuable as a dynamic modeling tool. It can just as easily be used to create a new brand as to analyze the strategic options for established brands. The model enables companies to create their own unique "brand-code" or "mindspace", the unique corporate DNA that can be used to drive every aspect of a business from product innovation to recruitment.

There are numerous research methodologies for each stage of the life cycle of a brand. In the framework of the abovementioned 4 Dimensional branding, from the perspective of brands' evaluation and their structural analysis, it is reasonable to combine the traditional research methods /quantitative (mass surveys) and qualitative (focus-groups, in-depth interviews)/ with identification of the deep, unconscious features of consumer minds using quantitative measures of assessment. Such kind of combination is possible with one of the projective methods of research – the method of semantic differential. **Semantic differential** is a method devised by C. E. Osgood and his colleagues. The method is used in research associated with human's perceptions and behavior, analyzing social attitudes and personal sense. The Seman-

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[9] Ibid, p. 97.
[10] Ibid, pp. 101-102.
[11] Manuel Castells, ibid, p. 3.

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tic differential method presents a combination of controlled associations method and scaling procedures[12].

Formation of the semantic differential method in the framework of a concrete research project consists of the following stages:

1. Forming and testing the list of bipolar adjective statements to describe the tested objects (names, concepts, packaging, brands...). Tested objects are evaluated based on a range of bipolar seven-point scales, the poles of which are presented verbally through antonyms ("good-bad", "strong-weak", "active-passive" ...). The points of scales present various levels of the given quality of the object. Correlating scales are grouped into independent factors forming the semantic space. Along with the verbal ones, non-verbal semantic differentials are also developed. In this case, the opposite poles of scales are presented as graphic oppositions, portraits, and photos.

2. Mathematical processing of the data matrix: object – respondent – scale. As a rule, the factor analysis is used and makes it possible to reveal the latent criteria of evaluation formed from the initial scales. On the latent criteria basis, the semantic space of perception of objects and the map of their mutual disposition are formed. It is important to mention that the unit of analysis is not the respondent but the points he/she gives to the objects. Semantic differential scales do not describe the reality. They are a metaphorical expression of the subject's condition and relationships (the instruction given to the respondents says, "During the evaluation rely on your feelings not on your knowledge").

3. Locating the evaluated objects in the semantic space, analyzing the result. Besides, it is necessary to evaluate the distance between the tested objects and the "ideal object", to define the factors' positive poles. In fact, the semantic space is a research model of the individual consciousness structure. The main task is to define where the observed object is located[13].

Main tasks that can be resolved in branding with the semantic differential research methodology can be formulated as: **evaluation of the criteria of choice** (to what to pay attention while advertising a product); choice **of the right name,** which will reproduce consumer's expectations from the ideal product of that category; description of the **product's positioning** against competitor products in the semantic space (definition of the directions in which the product should be further developed, what should be emphasized and what should not be talked about).

Hence, what can we say about brands in the twenty-first century?

✓ First, they are too important to be left to the marketing function – or any other single function, for that matter. Brands are not only economic but also philosophical systems. They are connected either to money, or to cultural and human values. To brand something is to make it more valuable. Branding adds value. Thus, in the future, the development of a brand will play a principal role in the economic progress. Our generation will witness the transformation of the attitude towards business and the understanding of business: from the chain of creating an added value to the chain of values.

[12] **C. E. Osgood**, **G. Suci**, & **P. Tannenbaum**, The Measurement of Meaning, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1957, pp. 18-30.

[13] **Даудрих Н.**, Психосемантические методы в исследованиях бренда // "Рекламодатель: теория и практика", М., сентябрь 2003. (http://www. marketing.spb.ru/lib-comm/brand/ psychosem.htm).

✓ Second, the use of the semantic-differential method in regulation and creation of new brands is necessary and significant. It is important both for the owner as an important and expensive asset of the company, and for the consumer as a factor which allows identifying a product or a service in the total supermarket system.

✓ Finally, 4-D branding offers a model for understanding brand strengths and weaknesses. The model offers the way in which companies can create sustainable and robust brands that can act not just as window dressing, but also as an engine to drive their business.

ԼԻԼԻԹ ՇԱՔԱՐՅԱՆ – *Բրենդների ուսումնասիրման առանձնահատկությունները ժամանակակից սոցիոլոգիայում* **–** Հոդվածը նվիրված է ժամանակակից աշխարհում բրենդների կառուցակցման և ուսումնասիրման տեսամեթոդաբանական յուրահատկություններին: Արդի աշխարհում` PR հաղորդակցությունների և մանիպուլյացիոն տեխնոլոգիաների զարգացման ժամանակաշրջանում, բրենդները դադարել են միայն գործառական բնույթ կրել` դառնալով հանրային գիտակցության մեջ առարկայական աշխարհի և սոցիալական իրականության արտացոլման հիմնական ձևերից մեկը: Վերջինս էլ իր հերթին պահանջում է բրենդների կառուցակցման և վերլուծության նոր տեսամեթոդաբանական դիտանկյուն` բրենդների ուսումնասիրություն քառաչափ մոդելի համատեքստում, ինչն էլ իր արտացոլումն է գտել ներկայացված հոդվածի շրջանակներում:

ЛИЛИТ ШАКАРЯН – *Особенности изучения брендов в современной социологии.* **–** Статья посвящена конструированию и изучению брендов в современном мире, их теоретико-методологическим особенностям. В период энергичного развития PR-коммуникаций и манипуляционных технологий бренды перестали носить только функциональный характер. Они стали важным способом отразить в общественном сознании социальную реальность и материальный мир. Именно поэтому согласно модели четырехмерного измерения для структурирования и анализа брендов применяется новая теоретико-методологическая концепция.