

Integrative Branding – Brand Management in The Light of Value Co-Creation

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Traditional Perspective on Branding

Traditional branding research perceives brands as being **built and controlled autonomously by the brand owner** (Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009). A brand's function is to identify products of certain firms and differentiate them from those of competitors (Aaker, 1991, p.7). Therefore, brands enable customers to get a comprehensive overview facilitating their buying decisions (Iglesias, & Ind, 2020). Brands consist of bundles of benefits, which differentiate sustainably the brands from competing other brands (Burmam, Riley, Halaszovich, & Schade, 2017).

Whereas many brand concepts are limited to symbols or subjective images in the consumers' minds (e.g. Keller, 1993), the identity-based brand management concept also adopts an internal perspective (Burmam, Riley, Halaszovich, & Schade, 2017). The benefits correspond with the **brand identity** when perceived by the **internal target group** (e.g. employees) and with the **brand image** when perceived by the **external target group** (e.g. consumers) (Ströbel, & Doenicke, 2020). The brand owner **implements and enforces the brand identity**, which represents the offered benefits. The corresponding marketing mix activities of the brand owner **convey the brand identity to stakeholders outside the organisation** (Burmam, Riley, Halaszovich, & Schade, 2017; Ströbel, & Doenicke, 2020) to create the **brand image**.

Consequently, traditional approaches, including the identity-based brand management concept, propose a **firm-centric view leaving the customer in a passive role**. Customers only react to the brand owner's marketing activities (Brodie, Benson-Rea, & Medlin, 2017; Ströbel, & Doenicke, 2020). Brand value is embedded within goods and emerges when goods are sold (Woratschek, Fehrer, Brodie, Benson-Rea, & Medlin, 2019). Therefore, the basic concept is **in line with the logic of sport products**. In contrast, branding is perceived as a **dynamic and social process** in the **logic of value co-creation**.

The Concept of Integrative Branding

The **concept of integrative branding** is a **systemic and network-oriented approach** (Brodie et al., 2017; Woratschek et al., 2019; Ströbel, & Germelmann, 2020). This innovative

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understanding of brand management mirrors the shift in marketing and sport management literature **from a logic of sport products towards a logic of value co-creation** (Merz et al., 2009; Woratschek, & Griebel, 2020; Woratschek, 2020). Firms and other interested actors engage in collaborative branding activities (Merz et al., 2009). Within this brand management concept, brands are sign systems that form a brand's identity. The brand identity is a starting point for various actors to integrate their resources and actively engage in **co-creative processes leading to brand meaning** (Woratschek et al., 2019). Brands develop through the interaction of different actors in a network (Brodie et al., 2017). Therefore, brand owners cannot autonomously build a brand, they can only try to coordinate the actors' activities on the brand platform to develop brand strength and brand value (Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019).

Based on the network-oriented branding perspective, every actor integrates resources, e.g. skills or creativity, on a brand platform, combines them with the brand identity and constantly reshapes brand meaning (Figure 1). Hence, **orchestrating and promoting activities on the brand platform** is an essential task of the brand owner. By sharpening the co-created brand meaning through coordinated branding activities, the brand owner tries to align the different perspectives to a **collective brand meaning**. The brand owner further reinforces this collective brand meaning through its incorporation into the brand communication (Brodie et al., 2017; Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019; Woratschek et al., 2019; Ströbel, & Germelmann, 2020).

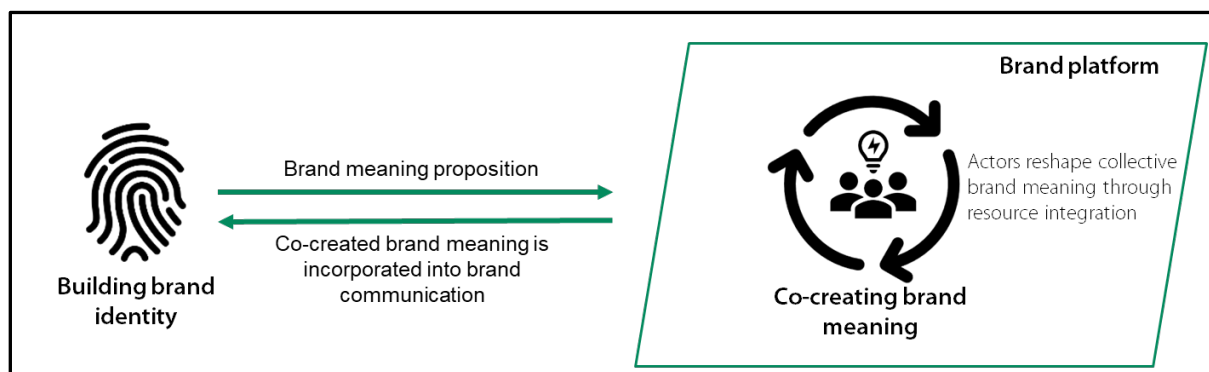


Figure 1: The Concept of Integrative Branding in Its Main Features

Integrative branding consists of two interrelated processes (see Table 1):

1. **Building brand identity:** The brand owner aims to **create a unique brand identity** that distinguishes the brand from other brands. Further, this brand identity needs to be communicated to the various actors of the network through a wide array of communication activities (Woratschek et al., 2019). This step can be understood as a **brand meaning proposition by the brand owner**. For example, the German football club FC St. Pauli conveys its local heritage in the official club logo and emphasizes its social responsibility for the district. Furthermore, the club communicates certain values such as tolerance and

respect. It was the first football club to explicitly refuse right-wing national tendencies in the stadium order (Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019; Ströbel, Hüttermann, Hannich, & Nagel, 2018).

2. **Co-creating brand meaning:** The concept of **co-creation of brand meaning** adheres to the idea of **actors** involved on a brand platform who **reshape collective the brand meaning** through resource integration. Therefore, the brand owner must promote and coordinate co-creation processes within the brand platform's network. However, this process is emergent and, thus, cannot be entirely coordinated (Woratschek et al., 2019). Sometimes **actors might not agree with the proposed meaning of a brand**. In the case of FC St. Pauli, a group of fans adopted the 'skull and crossbones' symbol as their own unofficial emblem as cultural and political reference. For them, the meaning of the brand was not determined by the club (Kolyperas, Maglaras, & Sparks, 2019; Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019). Today, the football club integrates the 'skull and crossbones' symbol into the brand identity and brand communication (e.g. through merchandise sales). FC St. Pauli promotes various possibilities to co-create brand meaning. The club's social responsibility is sharpened, for instance, by the stadium-based FC St. Pauli Levi's Music School, which gives people access to music lessons who could not afford them otherwise. Another example for promoting co-creation processes to develop a collective brand meaning is the fan hall which is managed by the club, but open to fans, club departments or initiatives from the surroundings of the club or the district (Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019).

To sum up, **integrative branding is an interactive process** that builds on brand identity and brand meaning co-created by various actors. Neither can a sport organisation solely create a brand nor is value embedded in the brand. **Brand value emerges** from brand-related **social interactions** and economic exchange between **many different actors**.

To put in a nutshell:

1. **Traditionally, brands** are perceived as being built and **controlled by the brand owner**.
2. The basic concepts of brands are in line with the **logic of sport products** because brands are regarded as **bundles of benefits**.
3. The **brand identity** is a bundle of benefits perceived by the **internal target group**.
4. The **brand image** is a bundle of benefits perceived by the **external target group**.
5. The **firm-centric view** leaves the **customer** in a **passive role**.
6. In the **logic of value co-creation**, **customers** play an **active role**.
7. The concept of **integrative branding** offers a **systemic** and **network-oriented** approach.

8. Two **interrelated processes** lead to brand meaning for different actors in a network: **building brand identity** and **co-creating brand meaning**.
9. The brand owner aims to create a **unique brand identity** as a **brand meaning proposition**.
10. **Many actors reshape** the **collective brand meaning** through brand-related social interactions.
11. The common and divergent **brand meaning is constantly aligned** and incorporated into the communication of the brand identity.

	Building brand identity	Co-creating brand meaning
Task of the brand owner	Communicating with many different actors (spectators, fans, sponsors, media, politicians, players, coaches, leagues, etc.) based on a sporting activity (e.g. professional football).	Providing a platform to facilitate interactions between all actors (spectators, fans, sponsors, media, politicians, players, coaches, leagues, etc.) who have interest in the sport brand (e.g. FC St. Pauli or FC Bayern Munich).
Objectives	Building a unique and distinctive brand identity, which distinguishes the brand from other ones.	Promoting a unique and distinctive, but also diverging meaning for the individual actors in the network.
Resource integration of the brand owner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills, competencies and knowledge to create a unique and distinctive brand - Skills and competencies to convince different actors through brand communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills, competencies and knowledge how to provide efficiently and effectively a brand platform and how to facilitate interactions - Skills and competencies how to balance diverging interests or the knowledge when to allow them to co-exist
Marketing activity	Communicating brand identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting actors' engagement to co-create the brand meaning - Continuous ability to learn from interaction with other actors - Constant alignment of brand meaning, which in turn must be incorporated into the brand identity

Table 1: The concept of integrative branding (based on Ströbel, & Woratschek, 2019 p. 42)

Video

For a deeper understanding of the concept of integrative branding and a closer look at the example of FC St. Pauli, please watch the video on Prof. Woratschek's YouTube channel. SMAB Clip "Integrative Branding in Sports":

<https://youtu.be/rMxkkRja-PE>



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