

Capturing Dimensions of Corporate Brand Identity from Diachronic, Synchronic, and Panchronic Viewpoints

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บทความนี้มุ่งเน้นศึกษาพื้นฐานสำคัญของแนวคิดการสร้างแบรนด์ภายในองค์กร นั่นคือการศึกษาเรื่องคุณลักษณะเฉพาะขององค์กร โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อลดความแตกต่างหลากหลายขององค์ความรู้ในสาขาวิชาดังกล่าว เนื่องจากในปัจจุบันยังไม่มีทฤษฎีที่อาศัยหลักทางวิชาการในการชี้ว่าแนวทางใดเป็นแนวทางที่ดีที่สุดในการสร้างคุณลักษณะเฉพาะขององค์กรในเบื้องต้น คณะผู้ศึกษาพบว่าแนวทางการศึกษาเรื่องคุณลักษณะเฉพาะขององค์กรมีจำนวนสามแนวทางหลัก เมื่อทำการวิเคราะห์

หาช่องว่างของแนวทางการศึกษาดังกล่าวก็พบว่าไม่มีแนวทางหลักใดที่ถือเป็นแนวทางการศึกษาเรื่องคุณลักษณะเฉพาะขององค์กรที่ดีที่สุด ดังนั้นการศึกษาเรื่องคุณลักษณะเฉพาะขององค์กรควรใช้มุมมองอย่างหลากหลายและบูรณาการเข้าด้วยกัน นอกจากนี้แนวคิดเรื่ององค์ภาพทางสังคมของโอลิควาสกีและแนวคิดปรากฏการณ์วิทยาเชิงสัมพันธ์ของนอร์ดียะได้ถูกนำเสนอขึ้นเพื่อขยายมุมมองของการศึกษาเรื่องคุณลักษณะเฉพาะขององค์กรด้วย

คำสำคัญ : อัตลักษณ์ภายในขององค์กร อัตลักษณ์แบรนด์องค์กร อัตลักษณ์ของบริษัท



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Abstract

This paper explores the origin of the internal branding concept—corporate identity studies—in order to overcome the confusion in the field. Each organization has developed its own corporate identity from different perspectives but does not have clear theory-based direction in developing its own corporate identity. Three major sets of perspectives for corporate identity studies are identified. Then a gap analysis is performed and it is argued that each of the three

perspectives is not considered the single best for corporate branding identity studies. Therefore, multiple integrated perspectives to capture different dimensions of corporate identity are proposed. In addition, the sociomaterial assemblage concept of Orikawski and the relational phenomenology of Bourdieu's philosophy are initiated in order to expand the dimensions of corporate brand identity studies.

Keyword : Internal Identity, Brand Identity, Corporate Identity



After Albert and Whetten (1985) inaugurated the concept of brand identity in corporate settings, scholars built upon the idea for organizational studies and internal branding. For instance, many works added to the understanding of the internal micro-meso level branding by amplifying individual-corporate associations and power relations (e.g. Brickson, 2005; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Scott and Lane, 2000), while others proved beneficial for the internal meso-macro level branding by demonstrating organizational adaptation to the changing environment (e.g. Clegg, Rhodes, and Kornberger, 2007; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). With a rapid expansion of the numbers of works concerning the corporate branding identity concept (table 1), the different angles of a researcher's interests (see Brunninge, 2005; Whetten, 2006), and the integration of the knowledge on brand identity from various disciplines (see Brunninge,

2005), the original corporate identity has been modified into numerous different approaches and perspectives and become the basis of many research streams in business administration academia, including organization culture (e.g., Gagliardi, 1986; Hatch and Schultz, 1997), corporate branding (e.g., Balmer and Gray, 2000; 2003), and internal branding (e.g., Keller, 2008; Keller and Aaker, 1998). Studying the concept of identity from different viewpoints acknowledges the dynamic nature of social sciences. Contrarily, it might pose some challenges and ambiguities to scholars in selecting appropriate approaches (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Consequently, this paper aims to prevail over the haziness by exploring major perspectives that have been used in the current literature and by proposing the most suitable approach for corporate brand identity studies in different situations.

Table 1 Number of Works on Corporate Identity

Database/Years	1992-1996	1997-2001	2002-2006	2007-2011
Google Scholar	35	80	153	180
Business Source Complete	11	32	104	150
ABI/INFORM	22	63	142	192

This paper is organized as follows. The first section demonstrates the various major perspectives within the study of corporate brand identity. The second part examines an appropriate perspective in certain scenarios based on the three

views of measuring a construct, namely Diachronic, Synchronic, and Panchronic views. The gaps in which no existing perspectives fit a particular view are also identified. The third part proposes two new perspectives to bridge the gaps identified in

the second section and consequently offers scholars a way to capture the holistic mechanism of corporate brand identity. The final part summarizes the points made and suggests future research.

1. Major approaches in current literature

Corporate brand identity has been studied from many different perspectives. Bouchikhi and Kimberly (2003) discovered that even renowned scholars in the field, like Dutton and Dukerich, were inconsistent in their perspectives on corporate identity (see Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). Although there can be countless perspectives on corporate identity, this paper identifies three major sets of perspectives dominating the current stream of literature—namely, Social actor/Social constructionist, Materiality/sociality, and Identity as a stable property/as a malleable property. Nevertheless, we have no intention in claiming that this list is mutually exclusive or complete.

1.1 Social actor/social constructionist

The major set of current perspectives of corporate identity is social actor and social constructionist (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Most existing work, including that of Baron, Hannan, and Burton (2001), Hannan, Polos, and Carroll

(2006), Scott and Lane (2000), and Whetten and Mackey (2002), proposes that an internal leader develops or clarifies the organizational identity, which is then assimilated throughout. Conversely, some authors, including Hannan, Carroll, Polos (2003), Hsu and Hannan (2005), and Gioia et al. (2010) referred to identity as a construct inherent in collectively shared beliefs and understandings about central and relatively permanent organizational features (see Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). The former denotes a social actor perspective while the latter represents a social constructionist perspective. The two perspectives have different theoretical foundations and lead to different characteristics for the study, as illustrated in table 2.

Although the two perspectives align in that they follow the notion of central, enduring, and distinctive (CED) organizational aspects as defined by Albert and Whetten (1985), the major differences between the two lie in their theoretical foundations, where the social actor perspective has its origin on institutional theory, the social constructionist perspective is based on the social constructivism theory (ibid.). The ontological and epistemological positions of the two perspectives are also distinguishable (see table 2).

Table 2 Social Actor and Social Constructionist Perspectives

Characteristics	Social Actor	Social Constructionist
Theoretical foundations	Institutional theory	Social constructivism
Main ontological position	Strong Determinism	Indeterminism
Main epistemological position	Positivist	Strong interpretivist
Definition of identity	Construct resides in institutional claims, available to members, about CED properties of organizations	Construct resides in collectively shared beliefs and understanding about central and relatively permanent features of an organization (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006)
Key terms	Sensegiving; permanent identity; self-definitions	Sensemaking; relatively permanent feature; shared belief and understanding;
Examples of work	Baron, Hannan, and Burton (2001) Scott and Lane (2000), Hannan et al (2006) Whetten and Mackey (2002)	Hannan, Carroll, and Polos (2003) Hsu and Hannan (2005) Hanna, Polos, Carroll (2006)

Source: Adapted from Ravasi and Schultz, 2006

1.2 Materiality and sociality

Mainstream research generally disregards materiality in corporate brand identity study and emphasizes sociality by relying on the analysis of interactions of human actors (e.g. Baron, 2004; Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Some studies have considered material artifacts to be a critical aspect of studying organizational identity (e.g. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Gioia et al, 2010; Feldman, 2002). Dutton and Dukerich (1991), published the first empirical paper in the field, taking into account visible forms of materiality—such as the physical

structure of bus terminals—to less visible systems—such as security and water systems—in order to explore the adaptation in terms of corporate identity of the Port Authority of New York. The differences between materiality and sociality have long been discussed in many fields within the social sciences (Orlikowski, 2007); however, to our knowledge, they have not been reviewed in terms of corporate brand identity. Accordingly, the differences between the two perspectives are further explored and presented in table 3.

Table 3 Materiality and Sociality Perspectives

Characteristics	Materiality	Sociality
Theoretical foundations	Resource Based View	Social constructivism/ population ecology
Main ontological position	Objectivist	Subjectivist
Main epistemological position	Positivist	Strong interpretivist
Definition of identity	Attributes used by an organization to positively distinguish itself from others	Relational aspects defined by industry, sector, life cycle, or other categories (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001)
Key terms	Defined construct; resource dependence	Relational; legitimate; conceptualizing; set of values/ preferences
Examples of work	Dutton and Dukerich (1991) Gioia et al (2010) Feldman (2002)	Barron (2004) Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) van Rekom and Whetten, (2005)

It is clear that the two perspectives have different theoretical foundations, resourced based view and social constructivism /population ecology which lead at different definitions of identity (see table 3). The ontological and epistemological positions of the two perspectives lie at the two extremes, objectivist/subjectivist and positivist/strong interpretivist. Although it is not clear why the sociality perspective has been more popular and the materiality perspective has generally been ignored in corporate brand identity studies, two possible reasons relate to the abstraction of identity and the absence of material artifacts in organizations (see Haslam, Postmes, and Ellemers, 2002; Whetten, 2006).

1.3 Brand identity as a stable property and as a malleable property

Since the inception of the corporate identity field, academics have assumed that identity is relatively permanent (Ashforth and Mael, 1996; Bartunek, 1984; Gagliardi, 1986; Johnson, 1987). For example, Gagliardi (1986:125) demonstrated the effect on the stability of brand identity by noting that, “Organizations must change in order to preserve [their] identity”. Nevertheless, some current studies discount the notion of enduring and treat identity as organizational properties that are promptly and routinely altered to reflect changes in environment (Aaker, 1991; 1996; Whetten, 2006). For instance, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) studied organizational

response to identity threats in the Bang & Olufsen Company and found that the corporate brand identity has changed over time as a result of many factors, including cultural practices and artifacts; projecting desired images; and external challenges to organizational studies. Gioia, Schultz, and Corley

(2000) concluded that, “organizational identity is characterized by adaptive instability rather than stability.” With the relaxation of the notion of durability, the perspective yields different main ontological and epistemological statuses (see table 4).

Table 4 Stable and Malleable Property Perspectives

Characteristics	Identity as a stable property	Identity as a malleable property
Theoretical foundations	Classic RBV	RBV: Dynamic capabilities (see Teece and Shuen, 1997)
Main ontological position	Essence	Accident
Main epistemological position	Positivist	Interpretivist
Definition of identity	Construct that is central, distinctive, and enduring	Construct that is central, distinctive, and temporally continuous
Key terms	Enduring; resistant to change	Dynamic; temporarily; adaptation; environmental reflection; continuous
Examples of work	Ashforth and Mael (1996) Bartunek (1984) Gagliardi (1986) Johnson (1987)	Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000) Ravasi and Schultz (2006) Whetten (2006)

One of the main criticisms of identity literature is that its depiction of identity is too static (Collins and Porras, 1996; Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000). table 4 demonstrates that by treating identity as a malleable property, the overall structure of the study has changed significantly in terms of research emphasis.

The three major sets of perspectives dominating the current stream of corporate brand identity literature illustrate the field dynamics and can complement the nature of a construct in social sciences. On the other hand, the differences in theoretical foundation, ontological status, and definition of identity may lead to confusion for a

scholar. The next part examines the usefulness and gaps of the perspectives in the different objectives and types of organizational identity studies.

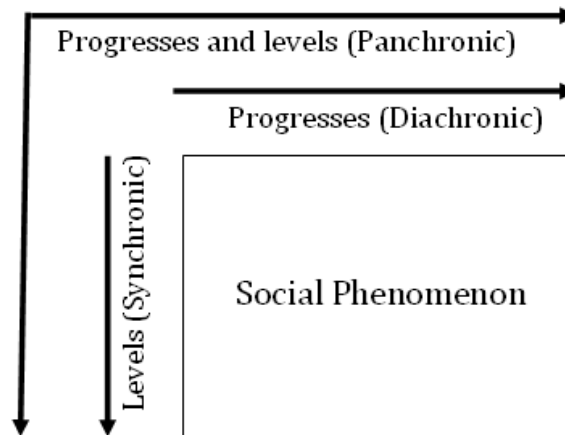
2. Analysis of an appropriate approach and gaps identification

We argue that to understand corporate brand identity, the notion of Diachronic, Synchronic, and Panchronic dimensions are crucial. This section will first examine the details of each dimensions of corporate brand identity and then perform a gap analysis in corporate identity studies.

2.1 Dimensions for understanding corporate brand identity

Several dimensions of corporate identity are presented here in conjunction with diachronic (progresses of a phenomenon), synchronic (levels of a phenomenon), and panchronic (relationships between progresses and levels) views that have been claimed as a way to “best understand social practices” (Clines, 2005; Gutiérrez, 2000). Figure 1 depicts the three dimensions for understanding a social phenomenon.

Figure 1 Three Dimensions of Understanding a Social Phenomenon



2.1.1 Diachrony

Although corporate identity development has never been explicitly identified, scholars studied corporate identity in several segments of the identity development process, including ‘creation—identity

idea generation’ (e.g. Clegg, Rhodes, and Kornburger, 2007; Corley and Gioia, 2004), ‘construction—identity development’ (Brickson, 2005; Coupland and Brown, 2004; Fiol, 2002), ‘maintenance—identity sustainability’ (Albert and

Whetten, 1985 and Whetten and Mackey, 2002), and ‘adaptation—identity refurbishment’ (Dutton and Dukerish, 1991; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006; Corley and Gioia, 2004). Accordingly, this paper employs these four segments in analyzing the diachronic view of corporate brand identity.

2.1.2 Synchrony

Expanding the body of work related to various topics in internal branding involved examining the levels of study—namely micro, macro, and meso levels (see Brunninge, 2005; Whetten, 2006). The micro or individual level of organizational identity study was first mentioned by Albert and Whetten (1985), who formulated the idea of corporate identity through works on individual identity, such as Erikson (1979, 1968) and Mead (1934). Albert and Whetten (1985) stated that people might ask themselves “Who are we?” referring to corporate brand identity as a whole. On the meso or organizational level, scholars focus on organizational social and material artifacts to identify the organizational identity (e.g. Dutton and Dukerish, 1991). On the macro or environmental level, environmental identity has been classified as a key for corporate brand identity (e.g. Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Despite research on the different levels of corporate brand identity, the distinction among levels has rarely been specified; more importantly, the relationship among all three levels has hardly been explored. At most, scholars studied relations between two different levels, such as Brickson (2005) and Czarniawska (1997) for micro-meso level and Hatch and Schultz (1997; 2002) for meso-macro level but,

to our knowledge, nowhere has all the three levels been investigated. This paper will integrate these three levels of study for the analysis of the synchronic view.

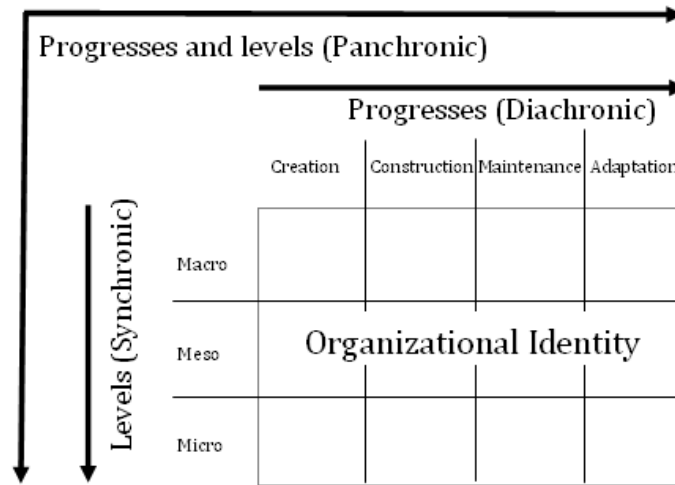
Figure 2 visualizes the dimensions of corporate identity. The identity development process denotes the diachronic view. The levels of study denote the synchronic view. The combination of the two dimensions in a holistic way represents the panchronic view. All of these form the basis of the analysis of the best approaches for corporate identity studies in this paper.

2.2 Gap analysis and best approaches for corporate brand identity study

To identify the best approaches to corporate brand identity studies, the three sets of perspectives of identity in the first section will be critically analyzed here by using the Diachronic, Synchronic and Panchronic dimensions.

From the perspective of the social actor and social constructionist, this paper moves along the attempt of current literature, such as Gioia et al. (2010) and Ravasi and Schult (2006), illustrating the possibility of reconciliation by arguing that each perspective is beneficial for different stages of identity development. Following Ravasi and Schult (2006) and Hannan, Polos, and Carroll (2006), the social actor perspective is more beneficial for the creation stage, whereas the social constructionist perspective might best fit the subsequent stages. Likewise, some authors have explicitly suggested that the mixed use of the two

Figure 2 Views of Organizational Identity



perspectives offers an advantage for a longitudinal study (Ravasi and Schult, 2006: 442). Despite vast benefits, we argue that the two perspectives may suffer from the lack of attention at the macro level, as the unit of analysis generally occurs at individual and organizational levels. The papers adopting these perspectives tend to focus on a particular set of research tools, such as individual interviews (e.g. Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000; Gioia et al., 2010; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006) and organizational archival data (Gioia et al., 2010; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). In sum, with social actor and social constructionist, a researcher can longitudinally understand internal identity at the micro and meso levels, but gaps in organizational study occur when a holistic viewpoint is imposed (see figure 3).

Regarding materiality and sociality, many papers have demonstrated that the perspectives offer advantages in understanding the process of identity development in many levels of study. For instance, Gioia, Schultz, and Corley (2000) analyzed Hewlett-Packard's HP-Way in the context of sociality and found changes in the meaning of its identity over time. Nonetheless, the two perspectives might not be able to capture the creation stage of identity, as an identity is often created based on the individual ideas of an organizational leader or founder (e.g. Ravasi and Schultz, 2006; Whetten, 2003), which has nothing to do with materiality or sociality. Figure 4 demonstrates the gaps in using the perspectives of materiality and sociality.

Figure 3 Gap Analysis from Social Actor/Social Constructionist Perspectives

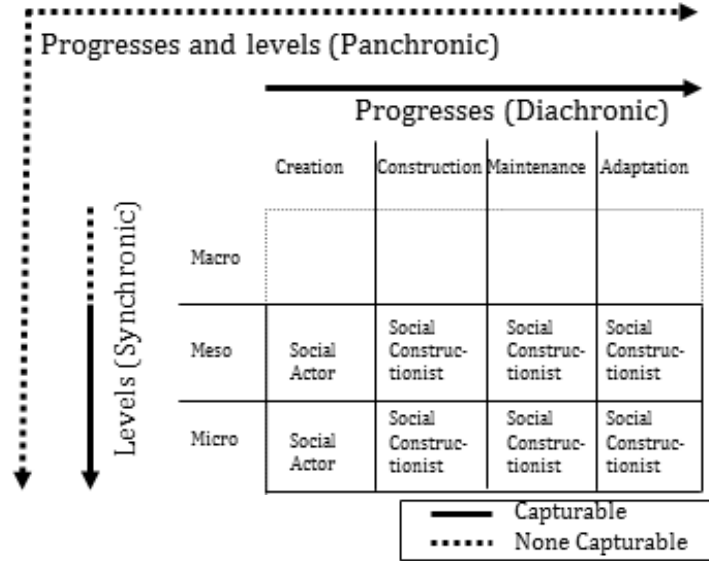
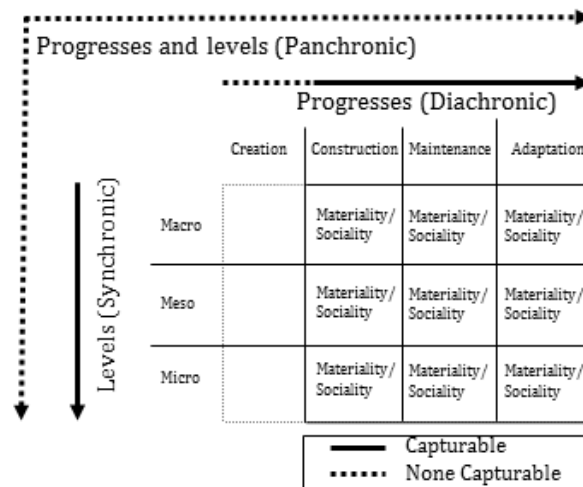


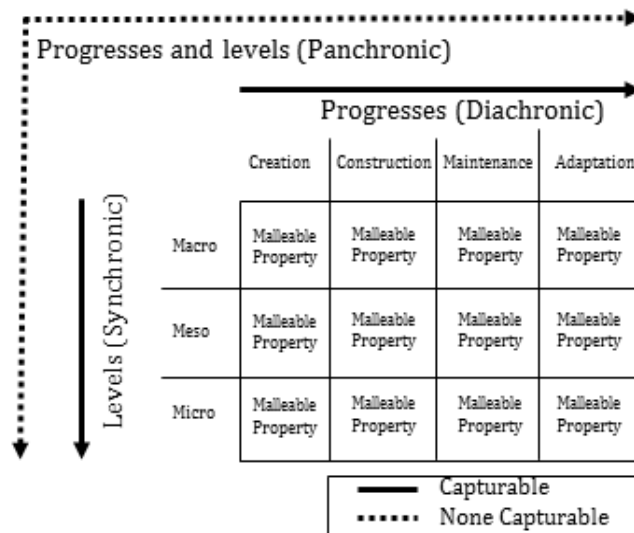
Figure 4 Gap Analysis from Materiality/Sociality Perspectives



Between the perspectives of identity as a stable and as a malleable property, the former proved to be less beneficial from a diachronic view due to its resistance to changes (see Gagliardi, 1986; Johnson, 1987). Consequently, current literature has moved toward the notion of a malleable property (e.g. Bouchikhi and Kimberly, 2001; Corley and Gioia,

2004; Gioia, Schultz, and Corley, 2000; Whetten, 2006). Nevertheless, broad applications of the malleable property perspective cannot satisfy the panchronic view of corporate brand identity due to the lack of focus on the relationship between different stages of development and levels of study (see figure 5).

Figure 5 Gap analysis from identity as a stable and as a malleable property



The three major perspectives complement one another in understanding internal brand identity in meaningful ways. Insights into social actors and social constructionist can capture the diachronic dimension effectively, while materiality and sociality prove beneficial for the synchronic perspective. In addition, identity as a malleable property captures both diachronic and synchronic dimensions. Although none of the approaches fits the panchronic view, we argue that each perspective or the mix of

them is still considered the most suitable approach in different research scenarios. For example, to understand identity creation, the social actor and the malleable property perspectives can capture the complexity of the stage (see figure 3 and 5). However, the gap in holistic or panchronic understanding of organizational identity remains, and additional approaches or perspectives might be needed.

3. Recommendations for additional most suitable approaches for corporate brand identity studies

Many current works on corporate brand identity have sought to consider the relational view of identity by developing a longitudinal study (e.g. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Gioia et al, 2010) and proposing a multi-level study (e.g. Morgeson and Hofman, 1999; Walsh and Ungson, 1991). Nevertheless, no study has fully employed the holistic or panchronic view, which can capture the network of relations among social agencies—both human and non-human—across time and levels of study. Although Bouchikhi and Kimberly (2001) and Morgeson and Hofman (1999) proposed that structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) might be helpful to understand the multi-level study of corporate brand identity, the theory falls short in explicitly capturing the development processes of identity. To confine the holistic view of identity, this paper proposes two additional approaches, based on two well-known expressions of philosophical ontology: entanglement and sociomaterial assemblages (Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) and relational phenomenology (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984).

3.1 Entanglement and sociomaterial assemblages

Orlikowski (2007) and Orlikowski and Scott (2008) suggested a conceptualization of the interactions among all social agencies, and labeled the concept ‘sociomateriality.’ Although Orlikowski

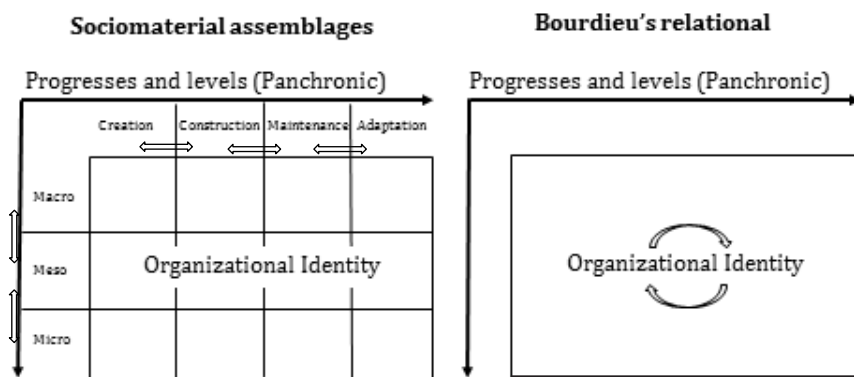
(2007) focused on dealing with material artifacts, the root of the concept that things exist only through their temporally emergent consecutive entanglement (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008) may be useful for non-material constructs like organizational identity.

This paper’s recommendation for studying corporate brand identity through the lens of sociomateriality is based on the concept of sociomaterial assemblages, which was driven by many relational world views, such as Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987), the combination of practice (Pickering and King, 1995), and relational materiality (Law, 2004). The sociomaterial assemblages perspective opposes the separation of social constructs, such as organizational identity, at different points in time. Consequently, the problem of the boundaries of identity development processes and the levels of study dissolve, and then a researcher can see corporate brand identity from a holistic viewpoint. Figure 6 illustrates this paper’s view on the use of sociomateriality for organizational identity research. From the sociomaterial assemblages perspective, the two-headed arrows denote that organizational identity with ‘no inherent property’ is ‘entanglement’ in social life (Orlikowski, 2007; Orlikowski and Scott’s 2008), so the boundaries are dynamic according to a specific context. Therefore, it is argued here that with the key characteristics—no inherent property, and entanglement—of sociomateriality, a scholar is conceptually able to study organizational identity in a panchronic way.

Although depicting such methodology is beyond the scope of this paper—which proposes the most suitable perspective for study—it is important to point out that the corporate brand

identity construct must be treated as a material agent to fully employ the notion of sociomaterial assemblages.

Figure 6 Holistic View of Corporate/Organizational Identity Study Using Sociomaterial Assemblages and Bourdieu’s Relational Phenomenology



3.2 Bourdieu’s relational phenomenology

According to Swartz (1997), Pierre Bourdieu was the first of the post-World War II generation of sociologists to contribute to overcoming the dualism of a social phenomenon by offering a relational phenomenology. In his seminal work, Bourdieu (1977) presented the notions of habitus, field, and capital, as well as the relations between them to demonstrate a new ontology through which a scholar could view the world. More importantly, he proposed the relational phenomenology concept, stating that a social phenomenon is developed by the interactions of agents in the ‘fields,’ evolving a set of roles and relationships in a domain where various forms of ‘capital’ are at stake (Bourdieu

1977; 1984; 1988; 1990). Each agent acts according to his or her own capital and property, formed by internalized relationships and habitual expectations or ‘habitus.’ From this perspective, every social phenomenon is embedded in one construct and should not be separated.

Bourdieu’s relational phenomenology offers great benefits for corporate brand identity research in that it blends all levels of study and processes of identity development to become a single construct rather than a combination of different small constructs (see figure 6). Accordingly, like sociomaterial assemblages, Bourdieu’s perspective can conceptually enable scholars to see corporate identity from the panchronic view.

3.3 Applications for Business Practitioners

This paper clearly aims to communicate to academia rather than business practitioners. Nevertheless, the multiple perspectives to capture different dimensions of corporate brand identity can be expanded to the real cases of businesses. Further analysis in details of each different business case must be diagnosed along with the presented concepts when being applied. It is worth saying the cases of Toyota and Singha Corporation in Thailand can be good representatives of the applications of implementing the integrated holistic approaches since they have clearly employed all those stated three views. The proposed ideal integrated concepts of developing the corporate brand identity from holistic viewpoints can be utilized and implemented to reach the optimum of effectiveness of corporate identity. The expansion of the corporate brand identity view from an incomplete to a holistic one is therefore proposed to be applied in the real business world.

4. Conclusion

Previous literature reveals three major sets of perspectives for corporate brand identity study. However, none of them is considered the single best-fit for corporate brand identity studies. Different objectives of study require different approaches. For example, for understanding the entire development process of corporate brand

identity at the macro level, the social actor and social constructionist perspectives are the most suitable. Ultimately, the panchronic dimension was identified as a gap in the field; the sociomaterial assemblages concept and the relational phenomenology of Bourdieu were proposed to fill this gap. Thus, this paper offered multiple perspectives to capture different dimensions of corporate brand identity.

In addition, two study topics were identified for further research. First, corporate brand identity's construct validity in the three views—Diachronic, Synchronic, and Panchronic—can be explored to distinguish among identity, image, and reputation (see Brown et al., 2006). Second, concrete research methodologies for two new perspectives to study corporate brand identity can be proposed to encourage scholars to develop more empirical work offering a holistic view of corporate brand identity.

In conclusion, this paper confers clear advantages to the field. Researchers can not only effectively use current approaches for certain objectives, but also expand the corporate brand identity view from an incomplete to a holistic one. In addition, to business practitioners, the paper suggests developing the corporate identity based on the holistic approach can yield more effectiveness in the long run.

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