

BRANDS AND COUNTER-BRANDS

What are brands?

A **brand** is a mark (signature or symbol) used to signify the origin and ownership of a product. Thus, brands signify **control** and hence, **possession of power**.

Brands are used by producers to distinguish their products from those of other producers. Thus, brands are also **criteria of distinction** and hence, **sources of value**.

What is branding?

Hart and Murphy (1998) maintain that branding consists of the development and maintenance of sets of product attributes and values which are coherent, appropriate, distinctive, protectable and appealing to consumers. What a brand *is*, what it *does*, and *how much* it is *worth* are things that are continually evolving (or adapting). Although branding is a creative process, the following are usually identified as the key elements constituting a brand: a slogan, an identity, a logo, a company, a source of information, a means of identification, an advertising image, an added extra, an image, a person, a product and a service (Crainer 1995).

Historical Background

The word "brand" comes from the Old Norse *brandr*, meaning to burn, and from these origins made its way into Anglo-Saxon and thereby into English. Historically, the word was used to refer to a mark of identification made with a hot iron or piece of burning wood. Both cattle (animals) and slaves (human beings) were branded in this way.

Despite its ancient origins, brand experts such as Hart and Murphy (1998) and Clifton and Simmons (2003) maintain that the widescale adoption and use of brands is essentially a phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Industrial Revolution, with its improvements in manufacturing and communications, and the consequent development of advertising and marketing techniques, opened up the western world and made possible the mass-marketing of consumer products. Hand in hand with the introduction of brands came early trade mark legislation which allowed the owners of brands to protect them in law. Thus, brands, and the whole economic and legal apparatus supporting their existence, are essentially Western-capitalist in origin.

The Psychological Power of Brands

Mitchell (2000) maintains that brands have traditionally been viewed as **mind cuckoos**, that is, "a packet of information into the consumers' minds to influence their behaviour at the crucial point – feeding time. The cuckoo inserts its egg into another bird's nest to dislodge any other eggs, and to get that bird to feed its baby. Marketers insert the brand – recognition, associations, imagery – into consumer's heads, to dislodge other brands, to get the purchasers to feed their brand by giving it preference in the marketplace." (p.59) Irrespective of whether this simple "stimulus-response" model of how brands work is still correct, it is certainly true that brands are both psychological as well as physical, which means that they are about hearts and minds and closely associated with *experiences*. They work because we tend to perceive things more easily as belonging to categories rather than as unique, individual things in their own right. According to Crainer (1995), "brands are little more than prompts, symbols and representations – concepts which have been used since we

started buying and selling things. Brands are marketing shorthand which companies hope will lead us to purchase their particular products." (p.5) Nonetheless, they are "powerful weapons. Some even force themselves deep into the psyche of entire nations." (p.6) Consistent with this view, Clifton and Simmons (2003) maintain that "the brand is the most important and sustainable asset of any organisation [and] it should be the central organising principle behind every decision and action." (p.2)

Who is in control?

As stated previously, brands signify value/worth and ownership/control. In this connection, it is interesting – some would say disturbing – to note that globally, brands are estimated to account for approximately one-third of all wealth, with American brands being globally dominant. Clifton and Simmons (2003) maintain that brands are economically, socially and politically significant because they are able to "cross borders and potentially to bind people and cultures together more quickly and effectively than national governments, or the bureaucratic wheels of international law ever could." (p.4)

Critics of branding and globalisation, such as Naomi Klein, activist and author of *No Logo* (2000), maintain that the controlling power of brands lies with corporations. This position is supported by some proponents of branding such as Hart and Murphy (1998) who maintain that "branding consists of imposing one's will on the consumer." (p.2) However, this view has been called into question by other pro-branding economists on the grounds that it fails to recognise the central role played by the consumer in determining which brands will attain the status of "power brands", that is, brands that survive and flourish by adapting in a highly competitive environment (Mitchell 2000) (Clifton and Simmons 2003).

It is important to appreciate that the pro-brand (consumers have the power) and anti-brand (producers have the power) camps both take as given that the world system is capitalist in nature. However, from a counter-Racist perspective, the current global system is Racism (White Supremacy) and capitalism is a subsystem within this system.

"Brand White"

According to Clifton and Simmons (2003), a brand is an object by which an impression is formed and branding refers to the process of forming this impression. On their view, "branding needs to start with a clear point of view on what an organisation should be about and how it will deliver sustainable competitive advantage; then it is about organising all product, service and corporate operations to deliver that." Crucially, they insist that "*every organisation* has 'consumers' of some kind [emphasis added]." (p.6) To the extent that nations, such as Britain, Japan and America, can be viewed as organisations of some kind capable of forming impressions, the above statements apply to them as much as to entities such as corporations. More significantly, these statements also apply to that organisation which is the dominant system in the contemporary world – Racism (White Supremacy).

According to the definition given above, and under current conditions of White Supremacy (Racism), **colour – or race – is a brand** since its possession or (alleged) non-possession

signifies worth/value and ownership/control. According to counter-Racist analyst, Neely Fuller Jr., in this system, only white people possess worth, which means that non-white people, since they are subject to white people, are worth less, that is, are worthless. Furthermore, under current conditions of global White Supremacy (Racism), whiteness – or being classified as “white” - is THE “power brand”, that is, THE marker or signifier with the power to determine who possesses value and who does not, who is in control and who is controlled.

Islam and Branding

Brands are marks signifying value/worth and ownership/control and they have been used in the past to identify property including slaves. To the extent that consumers of brands can end up becoming consumed by brands, it follows that brands can be used to *enslave*. This is important because The Qur’an mandates the emancipation of slaves (90:12-13). Furthermore, while The Qur’an does mention individuals who bear marks, it is important to appreciate that these are not physical ‘brands’ but the traces or effects of prostration, humility and adoration on the faces of those who follow the Messenger, Muhammad (*pbuh*) (48:29) The bearers of such ‘marks’ are described as being stern towards the rejecters of truth, and full of compassion towards one another.

The Qur’an identifies the extent to which one preserves one’s ‘self’ (*nafs*) through consciousness of God/Allah (*taqwa*), and not genealogy or tribe, let alone colour or race, as the criterion by which to determine worth or value in the sight of God/Allah (49:13). It also states categorically that treating people with equality (*‘adl*) is a means by which to approach ‘self’ preservation (5:8) and that beyond fair dealing (*‘adl*), one is obliged to compensate for the deficiencies of others in order to promote goodness and beauty in society (*ihsan*) (16:90). This position is consistent with the definition of justice proposed by counter-Racist analyst, Neely Fuller Jr., in *The United Independent Compensatory Code* (1984): “No person is mistreated, and the one who needs help the most, gets the most help.” On this basis, it should be clear that Islam stands in opposition to the THE “power brand” that is Racism (White Supremacy).

“Brand Islamic”

What implications, if any, does an Islamic rejection of the brand of Racism (White Supremacy) have for the emerging world of “Islamic” products which includes food, clothing, books, music, films, financial services, banking etc? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to determine the relation between the world of “Islamic” products – what might be referred to as “Brand Islamic” – and Racism (White Supremacy). Is the emergence of the “Islamic” product a consequence of “Islamisation”, by which is meant an ongoing process of decolonisation and decoupling of the Muslim world community socially, politically and economically from Racism (White Supremacy)? Or is “Islamic” being used in a mere adjectival sense, that is, as a brand or marker distinguishing one set of products from other, rival – presumably, “non-Islamic” – products in the global market?

In short, is “Brand Islamic” about *separation from or integration into* the system of Racism (White Supremacy)?

Counter-Brands

According to counter-Racist analyst, “John Black”,

All these companies/businesses in the rag-trade are there for one purpose ONLY: to make money OUT OF you, not FROM you. It is YOU who wear their “brand”, and so become/are their SLAVES. Remember the “branding irons”? Branding is for animals, criminals, and slaves. Thus, any BRANDED animal is OWNED by its owner. A BRANDED criminal is OWNED by “The State”. The Slave is BRANDED by his (her) “Master”. What “brand” do you wear?

Given the reality of the brand that is Racism (White Supremacy), “Brand Islamic” has no legitimate Islamic alternative other than to reject branding altogether and become a **counter-brand**, that is, a symbol of defiance of the branding mechanism used by White Supremacists (Racists) and mentally (and physically) enslaved non-whites in the ‘fashion’ – which means *manipulation* – industry embedded within the global usury capitalist (RIBA-nomic) system.

Bandung2 is not a brand since it does not compete for talent, funding, supporters and audiences. However, Bandung2 is not an *anti-brand* either since it is not a mere reaction to the existence of brands and the process of branding in the dialectical fashion of an anti-thesis being a reaction to a thesis. Bandung2 is a counter-brand. It is not reactionary because it is not about reaction. It is about action.

The Islamic Statement of Unity (*Kalimat-Tawhid*), “*La ilaaha ill’Allah*” (There is no god/ultimate authority except God/Allah), has two parts: a negation (*nafi*), and an affirmation (*ithbaat*). A Muslim is required to reject *thaaghoot* (or tyranny), and secure his or her commitment to God/Allah (2:256).

Consistent with this position, Bandung2 rejects patents, copyright and trademarks as mechanisms of White Supremacist (Racist) control and domination. Given that the global economic system – consistently, yet incorrectly, referred to as “the capitalist world system” - is fundamentally **RIBA-nomic** in nature, which means that it functions on the basis of usury or unjust increase (*riba*), and given that The Qur’an distinguishes trade (*bay*) from usury (*riba*), it follows that trademarks, for the main part, do not – *cannot* - exist since there is little or no trade going on. This is certainly true for exchanges of goods mediated by money created, out of nothing, by banks in the global system of White Supremacy (Racism), irrespective of whether these are conventional banks or so-called “Islamic banks”. What are taken to be trademarks are, in fact, “RIBA-marks”, that is, control mechanisms of the global system of White Supremacy (Racism).

References

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Further Information

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