Please use proper reference: Kärreman, D., & Frandsen, S. (2020). Identity, Image, and Brand. In A. D. Brown (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identities in Organizations* (pp. 408-423). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198827115.013.33

Abstract

This chapter highlights how organizational images and efforts to manage those images through branding influence the identities of individuals within organizations. The authors discuss the ways in which individuals' identity projects are regulated, challenged, or supported by images and brands. They argue that identity is a particularly important concept for understanding organizing in today's 'brand society', with individuals' identities intertwined with corporate efforts of branding. Managing distinct and attractive images at both the collective and individual levels means that less prestigious, even stigmatized images may be important identity threats that impact individuals' processes of identity work. The authors examine how previous literature has theorized the interplay between individual identity, image, and branding, arguing that the implications of branding for individuals' construction of identity in organizations must be assessed critically.

Keywords

Identity, image, brand, branding, control, identification

Identity, Image, and Brand

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Introduction

The concept of identity is coupled to the questions 'who am I?' and, in an organizational setting, 'who are we?' (Alvesson et al., 2008). The answer to the question 'who am I?' may be linked to our social identities and self-categorizations: whether as a Swede or a Dane, a student or a professor, a woman or a man, or any intersections between dominant categories (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). The answer may also depend on who is asking the question and the social situations in which individuals find themselves (Goffman, 1959). It may also depend on a person's preferred self-narrative, weaving together past experiences, provisional ideas of self, and future ideal identities (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). In organizational life, the answer may be located in managerial discourses regarding the 'appropriate' employee, or it may result from contestation over the meaning of shared values and ways of being (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). As this handbook, among other work, demonstrates, answers to the questions 'who am I?' and 'who are we?' are seldom straightforward; they are always socially, contextually, historically, and discursively situated in complex ways (Ashforth and Schinoff, 2016; Brown, 2015; Caza et al., 2018).

In reading the vast literature on individual identity within studies of organization and management—including this handbook—it may appear as if organizational members approach their work each day as self-reflexive, existentially insecure individuals whose identities are continually open to question. In other words, it may appear that everyday organizational work is heavily intertwined with individuals' own work on their identities. Identity has been linked to sensemaking, power dynamics, culture, strategy, and branding,

among other aspects, and many scholars place identity at the very heart of organizing (Albert et al., 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Alvesson et al., 2008). However, we argue that many organizational 'mysteries' (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007a) may be understood without considering individual identity issues. Life may pass for individual managers and employees without them (us) being constantly occupied by identity. That said, we also argue that there are instances in which identity does have the utmost importance. From our point of view, identity becomes most highly relevant in light of the increasing dominance of brands and images in and around contemporary organizations, what Kornberger (2010) labelled the 'brand society'.

In the 'brand society', image management and branding are important for shaping external perceptions as a means of emphasizing one's own identity endeavours and a positive sense of self. Identity thus becomes most visible when used strategically to emphasize certain images or brands or when individuals and organizations are prevented from doing so in the face of identity threats, uncertainty, or suspicion. At the organizational level, time and energy are channelled into harmonizing organizational images, identity, and culture in the name of branding (Hatch and Schultz, 2002). For individuals, too, potential incoherence between others' images and one's own perceptions of identity may be problematic (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991 Dutton et al., 1994). While organizations and individuals alike strive for the ideals of harmony, alignment and coherence, these are precarious affairs, as identities, images, and brands are far from stable or enduring (Gioia et al., 2000). Their mutual inter-dynamics are located in social relationships. They may often be contested and constantly negotiated, manipulated, and 'managed', and they may spin out of control and take on lives of their own (Bertilsson and Rennstam, 2018; Frandsen, 2017).

Our main interest is to consider images and brands as 'activation points' for identity work. In the following, we examine the ways in which images and brands influence meaning-

making and behaviours of individuals in organizations—and thereby significantly impact contemporary organizing.

Branding, Image, and Identity

In many service-oriented industries, from airlines to banks, corporations have engaged in competitive fights over the positioning of their brands, often centred on the supposed levels of customer service offered by employees. While research on emotional labour has pointed out how such brands have become powerful in 'managing the hearts' of employees (Hochschild, 1983), organizational studies has only recently begun to deepen our understanding of the implications of brands and branding for individuals and their identities in organizations (Brannan et al., 2015; Endrissat et al., 2017; Frandsen, 2015; Frandsen et al., 2018; Hatch and Schultz, 2003, 2008; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; Kornberger, 2010; Müller, 2017; Mumby, 2016; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). In our contemporary brand society (Kornberger, 2010), no longer only the marketing department but everyone engages in communicative labour (Mumby, 2016) preoccupied with branding and being branded by organizations. There is continuous emphasis on the conscious (and perhaps tiring) articulations of answers to questions such as 'who am I?', 'how do I look?', and 'how am I perceived?' among individuals, often in relation to 'who are we?', 'how do we look?', and 'how are we perceived?' as an organization.

Brands belong to the same domain of organizational phenomena previously studied using concepts such as organizational identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006; Scott and Lane, 2000) and organizational image (Alvesson, 1990; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Gioia et al., 2000). Each of these concepts signifies a certain viewpoint of the organization.

Organizational identity refers to the mental associations about an organization held by its organizational members. Organizational identity is often influenced by ‘organizational image’, which refers to how others view the organization, and by the organization’s strategically communicated brand. As such, organizational identity is typically defined as ‘the set of beliefs shared by top managers and stakeholders about the central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics of an organization’ (Scott and Lane, 2000: 44).

One common premise in this literature is that members relate to organizational identity with varying degrees of (dis)identification. In elaborated form, members develop and express their self-concepts in light of organizational identities, which are in turn developed and expressed through members’ self-concepts. Organizational identity is, therefore, more than an answer to the question ‘who are we as an organization?’ (Gioia and Thomas, 1996). It also presents, at least potentially, a partial answer to the question ‘who am I as an individual?’

While the relationship between individual and organizational identities is well studied in the literature on identity (Brown, 2017), and although the influential role of organizational image in this relationship has been noted (Dutton et al., 1994), the role played by brand remains rather under-theorized. Brand is typically seen merely as an organizational signifier, yet recent developments in the literature have bridged organization studies and branding to suggest that brands and branding are interesting in their own right (Brannan et al., 2015; Endrissat et al., 2017; Frandsen, 2015; Frandsen et al., 2018; Hatch and Schultz, 2003, 2008; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; Kornberger, 2010; Müller, 2017; Mumby, 2016; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). In understanding individual identity work within organizations related to organizational-level identity and image, especially in the context of our argument that individual identity work is often ‘activated’ given tensions among organizational identity, image, and brand, we highlight two important concepts: identity regulation and identification.

We first elaborate on these concepts before proceeding to more elaborate definitions of branding and image.

Identity

The term ‘identity’ is used in many different ways and to refer to diverse entities. Consider, for example, ‘corporate identity’ (Cornelissen et al., 2007; Van Riel and Balmer, 1997), ‘organizational identity’ (Albert et al., 2000; Gioia et al., 2000; Scott and Lane, 2000), ‘occupational’ and ‘professional identity’ (Ashcraft 2013; Ashforth et al., 2007; Ibarra, 1999, or ‘social’ and ‘personal’ identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Terry, 2000). Identity may refer to enduring, coherent, or distinctive characteristics—that is, some kind of essence—of certain entities (Albert and Whetten, 1985) or to temporarily coherent, context-dependent, fluctuating, fragile, or even conflicted formations of ‘who one is’ (Alvesson et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 2000; Tracy and Trethewey, 2005). Identity tends to become most visible when it appears or feels problematic, such as when individuals face uncertainty, threat, or suspicion (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001; Elsbach and Kramer, 1996; Petriglieri, 2011; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). In organizational life, uncertainty, threat, or suspicion may arise from outsiders’ perception of the organization, organizational image, or from managerially enforced and strategically communicated brand discourse supposedly signifying ‘who we are’. We may not explicitly reflect upon identity as we go about our daily work. It may instead be activated when individual organizational members try and make sense (Weick, 1995) of the events linked to organizational images (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991) or branding (Brannan et al., 2015, Frandsen, 2015; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; Müller, 2017.

Here we focus on identity as constituted through discourses and practices (Alvesson et al., 2008; Collinson, 2003; Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). This suggests that identities are

continually negotiated and potentially contested (Thomas and Davies, 2005). Identity work thus occurs in interaction with available discourses and accepted practices. Management can regulate employee identities (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) in various ways. To encourage a particular employee identity, it may attempt to engineer a certain organizational culture (Kunda, 2006). Management may also attempt to co-opt identity material relating to consumer culture (Land and Taylor, 2010), ethical orientations (Costas and Kärreman, 2013), lifestyles (Fleming and Sturdy, 2009), or broad societal discourses (Ybema et al., 2009) to establish ties between employee identity and the organization. Such ties may be encouraged through the exercise of aspirational control (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007b; Costas and Kärreman, 2013; Roberts, 2005; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009), that is, by providing aspirational and attractive identity material to the employee self, such as high status, generous compensation, and an elite sense of selfhood (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). As we will see, this kind of identity regulation may also incorporate brands and branding.

Managerial identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) may lead to different results, including identification, dis-identification, ambivalence, alienation, and organizational exit (Collinson, 2003; Costas and Fleming, 2009; Costas and Kärreman, 2016; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009; Kunda, 2006; Pratt, 2000). Identification processes are tightly connected to individuals' identity work, that is, to ongoing activity to construct a 'self' that is coherent, distinct, and positively valued (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Kuhn, 2006). Scottet al. (1998: 305) argued that 'the story we tell of ourselves in interaction (or posit with respect to interaction) is the essence of identification'. Similarly, Kuhn and Nelson (2002: 7) defined identification as 'communicative acts illustrative of one's attachment to one or more identity structures'. Identification thus results when employees organize their senses of self by deploying identity material provided by the organization in positive ways (e.g., Elsbach, 1999; Grey, 1994; Kuhn, 2006). Dis-identification, on the other hand, happens when

employees experience identity material provided by the organization as fake, inauthentic, or morally compromised, thus establishing their identities through alternative discourses that run counter to the dominant managerial discourse (Elsbach and Bhattacharya, 2001; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). Other research has focused on different types of variation in between identification and dis-identification, such as neutral identification (Elsbach, 1999), schizo-identification (Elsbach, 1999; Humphreys and Brown, 2002), ambivalent identification (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004; Lemmergaard and Muhr, 2012; Pratt, 2000), and various pathological forms of under- and over-identification (Dukerich et al., 1998; Galvin et al., 2015).

Contemporary processes of identity regulation increasingly take new forms in which employees' identities are regulated to fit companies' overall brand messages and values (Brannan et al., 2015; Frandsen, 2015; Müller, 2017). Such brand-centred control evokes the external audience—in the form of customers—as a powerful source of normative control, coercing employees to think and act as brand ambassadors not only at work but also outside of it (Müller, 2017). Frandsen (2015) highlighted the potential dilemmas of brand-centred control, particular among call-centre employees, who are expected both to act 'on brand' and to deliver extraordinary service, while at the same time being efficient with their time in short customer interactions. This leads to schizoid forms of identification. Brannan et al. (2015), on the other hand, suggested that in such mundane work environments as call centres, brands may become a source of meaning for employees' identity work. As such, brands and branding are seen to foster both positive identification (Brannan et al., 2015; Kärreman and Rylander, 2008) and more problematic forms of identification and resistance (Frandsen, 2015; Müller, 2017), often with simultaneous, shifting positions between identification and dis-identification (Frandsen et al., 2018). To understand these relationships and responses, we explore brands and branding, as well as organizational image, in more detail below.

Brands and Branding

As concepts, brand and branding have primarily emerged from the marketing literature. Here, the short definition of a brand is a marker that identifies a product or service, whether a name, a symbol, or something else (cf. Keller, 1993). Contemporary marketing literature suggests the brand is also a valuable asset, both strategically and financially. Not surprisingly, a key challenge for scholars has followed: to identify the critical components of successful brands and to develop models and theories concerning brand management. In this context, brand equity, or a brand's overall value (Dillon et al., 2001; Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993), has emerged as a key concept. Indeed, many studies of brand management seek to identify critical components and to understand their operation in order to maximize brand equity.

Scholars have also drawn distinctions between brands used to market certain products and brands used to symbolize an organization, or a 'corporate brand'. The latter is seen as a general strategic resource, a core competency manifesting as attraction for customers, product support, investor confidence, and brand longevity (Balmer, 2001). Hatch and Schultz (2003) see the corporate brand as deeply rooted in organizational culture, a vehicle for expressing unique organizational values. The corporate brand is also used as a symbolic device to distil and visualize various attributes of an organization, clarifying the meaning of the organizational identity for employees (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008).

The perspective of corporate branding acknowledges the importance of internal organizational processes (Karmark, 2005; Hatch and Schultz, 2003, 2008; Schultz et al., 2005). This suggests that, in today's fast-moving, global society, marketing and communications efforts make more sense directed at the corporate rather than the product level. There is a shift from a narrow focus on customers as audiences to a broader focus on all stakeholder groups, especially internal audiences (De Chernatony, 2002; Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Harris and De Chertanoy, 2001; Ind, 2001; Karmark, 2005). This shift is reflected in

popular catchphrases like ‘brand culture’ (Schröder and Salzer-Mörling, 2006), ‘living the brand’ (Ind, 2001), and ‘brand religion’ (Kunde, 1997). Mobilization of employees, it is argued, is key for an organization to deliver its brand promise and align employees’ behaviour with the values expressed by the brand (Olins, 2003). For example, Olins (2003: 75) noted:

> Marketing service brands demands an additional skill, getting your own staff to love the brand and to live it and to breathe it, so that they can become the personal manifestation of the brand when they deal with customers.

As such, branding practices that target organizational members’ values, hope, aspirations, and identities have emerged in the forms of ‘internal marketing’ (Ahmed et al., 2003; Kelemen and Papasolomou, 2007; Lings, 2004), ‘internal branding’ (Bergstrom et al., 2002; Foster et al., 2010; Müller, 2017), and ‘employee branding’ (Brannan et al., 2011; Edwards, 2005; Harquail, 2007). These internally directed brand practices attempt to regulate the behaviour of employees, particular front-line employees, to ensure strong identification with the brand: ‘on-brand’ behaviour.

Recently, the rhetoric around brands has intensified, encompassing still more social and cultural aspects (Kornberger, 2010; Müller, 2017; Mumby, 2016; Willmott, 2011). Brands, it is claimed, are ubiquitous elements of contemporary culture (Endrissat et al., 2017). Their logic supposedly defines key aspects of social life, such as political and religious practices and our senses of self (e.g. Arvidsson, 2006; Banet-Weiser, 2012; Klein, 2000; Kornberger, 2010; Lury, 2004). Although as means of marketing brands are well understood in the marketing literature, organizational scholars have noted that branding can also be seen as means of organizing by communicating or imposing certain meanings upon employees (Kärreman and Rylander, 2008). Research on branding has started to explore the consequences of branding considering managerial efforts to regulate employees’ perceptions,

interpretations, and identities (e.g. Kärreman and Rylander, 2008; Kornberger, 2010; Pettinger, 2004), summarized through concepts such brand ambassadors or brand citizens (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005).

The relationship between branding and being branded is complex. Scholars have observed that organizations may draw on employees' identities and lifestyle preferences rather than persuading employees to adapt to identities provided from the top (Endrissat et al., 2017; Land and Taylor, 2010). Critical scholars of management studies have suggested that this kind of branding is based on immaterial labour, with employees adding to the brand's value without additional compensation (e.g. Arvidsson, 2006). On the other hand, organizational members may be willing to participate in the production of a brand if it provides identity material for their own personal branding projects, defining to some extent who they are or will become. This suggests a dynamic relationship between doing branding and being branded (Vásquez et al., 2013).

Image

Images 'exist' somewhere between a communicator and an audience, and they are often understood as a result of reciprocal or bi-directional projections. That is, images of corporations, products, occupations, and people take shape in the presence of efforts to both produce and interpret impressions (Frandsen, 2017). The production of images is often marked by branding efforts such as slogans. For example, Copenhagen Business School until recently used the motto, 'Where university means business', which conveys an image of university and business existing in harmony. Of course, the impact of this image will vary among people, who often draw information from other sources, such as interactions with the

university as organization, observed behaviour by university staff, academic research, or the media.

Many industries, firms, occupations, and professions are sensitive to image, especially in those sectors captured by concepts such as ‘the knowledge economy’, ‘the knowledge organization’ or ‘knowledge work’. This domain is largely characterized by creativity, problem-solving, and task complexity (Alvesson, 2004; Lowendahl, 1997; Newell et al., 2009). At its core, knowledge work can be understood as the application of ‘esoteric expertise’ (Starbuck, 1992): specific, scarce, and abstruse knowledge deployed in work practices (Kärreman, 2010; Starbuck, 1992). The ambiguities of knowledge, knowledge-intensive firms, and knowledge work (Alvesson 1993) make ‘knowledge’, ‘expertise’, and ‘solving problems’ matters of belief, impression, and negotiated meaning (Alvesson, 2004; Kärreman, 2010). Higher education illustrates this dynamic well. Universities and professors nurture an image of being among the best, as evident, for example, in the fuss and scramble over published institutional rankings (Alvesson, 2013; Huzzard et al., 2017). Put bluntly, image becomes crucial in the absence of tangible material evidence available for inspection, leading individuals in knowledge-intensive firms to construct notionally ‘elite’ identities through affiliation with organizations holding prestigious brands (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006; Brown and Coupland, 2015; Gill, 2015).

An organization’s image may also pose threats to the identities of members of stigmatized organizations (Devers et al., 2009; Helms, and Patterson, 2014; Hudson, 2008; Hudson and Okhuysen, 2009; Paetzold et al., 2008) or occupations (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Kreiner et al., 2006; Lemmergaard and Muhr, 2012; McMurray, 2012; Meara, 1974; Meisenbach, 2008; Tracy and Scott, 2006; Wolfe and Blithe, 2015). Dutton and Dukerich’s (1991) seminal study of the New York Port Authority illustrated that the organization’s image significantly influenced how organizational members interpreted and acted upon key

issues. Their follow-up research highlighted that a negative image often led employees to feel embarrassed and to challenge their organizational identification, while a positive image led employees to 'bask in the reflected glory' of their organization and to experience strong identification (Dutton et al., 1994). Studies of dirty workers (members of stigmatized professions) have also shown how a tainted organizational image motivates employees to engage in taint-management strategies (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Meisenbach, 2008), including dual strategies of both hiding and advertising their affiliation (Wolfe and Blithe, 2015) and various forms of identity-boosting behaviours (Tracy and Scott, 2006), in order to secure a positive identity despite their stigmatized affiliation.

Contemporary Empirical Studies of Identity, Image, and Branding Dynamics

Thus far, we have focused on the conceptual side of identity, image, and branding. In this section, we look more closely at some recent empirical studies of the dynamics of identity, image, and branding. We focus on six studies: (a) Kärreman and Rylander (2008); (b) Frandsen (2015); (c) Brannan et al. (2015); (d) Endrissat et al. (2017); (e) Frandsen et al. (2018); and (f) Müller (2017).

Taking an interpretivist approach, Kärreman and Rylander (2008) showed how the branding practices of a global management consultancy firm strengthen employees' organizational identification. They found that the content of organizational identity—responses to the question, 'who are we?'—are not directly influenced by branding activities but instead are framed and shaped through social interactions in the workplace. However, the brand was important in that it shored up the attractiveness of belonging to the firm, fuelling processes of organizational identification. The brand reminded employees, outlining and

enhancing associations and emotions that derived from previous experiences of social interactions at the firm. Indeed, the primary audience for branding was *not* clients or prospective clients but rather employees and prospective employees. The authors thus highlighted the potential of branding for managing meaning internal to the organization.

Frandsen (2015) studied the ways in which internally directed branding activities seek to produce 'on brand' identities by contrast with the more technocratic forms of control that govern 'the assembly line' type of work of call centre employees. As such, employees found themselves torn between, on the one hand, 'living the brand' and, on the other, following procedures, being effective and being 'on time'. In instances where they took responsibility for customers (as prescribed by the brand values), they could also be reprimanded for acting slowly or inefficiently. The study highlighted that employees, initially drawn to the brand and identifying with it before entering the organization, over time became cynical and distanced themselves from the brand as a coping mechanism that permitted simultaneous embrace and distance from their work roles.

Brannan et al. (2015) focused on interactions around organizational brand involving meaning-making, identity work, and the regulation of frontline service workers, again in a call centre. They showed that the brand helps to mobilize employees and capture their commitment. The elements of prestige, professionalism, and success the brand communicated were important in boosting employees' sense of organizational identification and self-esteem. Brand meanings operated in two distinctive ways, both as material for identity work (making employees feel better about their future selves) and as disciplinary tools. Brand meanings distract from the mundane realities of day-to-day call centre work, making it possible to reframe the work as 'future' skilled service work. The brand helped employees frame their work as offering 'customer service' rather than 'taking calls'. Employees used these meanings to support their identities as notionally 'skilled professionals', which helped them

commit to a future with the firm and sugar-coated the mundane reality of call centre life. Further, managers did their best to push symbolic brand meanings of the firm as 'prestigious', underscoring processes of identity regulation and acting as 'a palliative for a plaintive existence of life on the line' (Brannan et al., 2015: 48).

Endrissat et al. (2017) suggested that, in contemporary capitalism, branding and identity projects are important not only for professional service firms but also for the relatively low-skilled retail service sector. They investigated how branding, employee identity, and organizational identity form mutually constitutive relationships. The advent of job titles such as 'store artist', 'sandwich artist', or 'barista' are trends, in their view, towards building brands by association with art and craftmanship. Tapping into desired identities is a business model for retail service organizations that incentivizes employees with positively valued identity opportunities. The firm offers a space for employees to act out desired identities, and employees provide life stories and lifestyles that support the company brand. Endrissat et al.'s (2017) concept of identity-incentive branding adds to our understanding of how brands exert neo-normative control to alter the focus from existing identities, such as gender and ethnicity, to *desired* identities that are unstable and require social recognition and validation.

Frandsen et al. (2018) highlighted the increased focus on branding in non-profit and public sectors—such as municipalities, hospitals, cities, and higher education—where corporate notions of brands as a competitive resource for organizations have taken hold. Their study of four different business schools found that Deans and marketing professionals seek to engage faculty in their branding efforts but that faculty respond in diverse, often unintended ways. Some engaged in brand endorsement. Others remained more ambivalent in relation to the brand, describing it as devoid of meaning. Still others positioned themselves as cynical towards their business school brand, construing it as a 'façade', 'hype', 'spin', or 'superficial fluff'. The micro-level, discursive methodology in this case illustrated how

faculty members' sensemaking was in constant flux, with individuals' discursive positioning constantly shifting within each interview. This highlights the ambiguous character of brands and the always dynamic, often ambivalent identity work of organizational members who respond to them.

Müller (2017) examined what happens when a brand deeply engages external stakeholders, introducing the concept of *brand-centred control* as a new twist on normative control. Drawing on a qualitative case study of a consumer products company with a strong corporate culture and brand, and with a particular focus on internal branding as an extension of culture management, Müller (2017) showed that brand-centred control, besides internally managing meaning, mobilizes external audiences (customers and the wider public) as an additional source of normative control. In these circumstances, employees are coerced to engage with the brand image held by external audiences, becoming brand representatives both at work and in their free time. By implication, brand-centred control transcends the boundaries between work and employees' private lives, making work and organizational control ever-present. Employees may resist brand-centred control in various ways, but their internalization of customers' idealized image means that even in the absence of face-to-face interactions with customers they come to judge their behaviours and sense-of-self in light of normative brand values.

Future Directions

We conclude this chapter by highlighting three directions for future research. Extant research suggests that we have only scratched the surface of understanding the interplay among brand, image, and identity in contemporary organizations. While the literature on marketing has explored how employees' values, culture, behaviours, and identities are mobilized in support

of brands, the implications of brands and branding for individual-level identity work remains to be fully explored.

First, both Endrissat et al. (2017) and Frandsen et al. (2018) highlighted that people's engagement with brands is often intimately tied to their ideas concerning their own personal brands. The marketization of self and the focus on building personal brands are increasingly prominent discourses in corporate life (Lair et al., 2005), yet the implications and enactment of this discourse remain unstudied in relation to individuals' identity work within organizations. Future research could therefore explore the relationships among corporate branding, personal branding, and identity work.

Second, Bertilsson and Rennstam (2018) highlighted that brands may both create and destroy value for organizations. Building upon their ideas around branding, future research may seek to understand how branding can simultaneously enhance and restrict individual identity work within organizations. Bertilsson and Rennstam's (2018) proposed alternative perspective on branding as a platform emphasizes the co-constructive and intertwined nature of brands and the roles of diverse groups of stakeholders both internal and external to the organization. Understanding how such brand co-construction may tap into the individual identity projects of employees and managers in organizations could offer a new avenue for future research.

Finally, our argument is that tensions, insecurities, and dilemmas related to the interplay among brands, images, and organizational identities create opportunities for individuals to engage in identity work. Yet empirical studies also highlight that responses to instances of perceived misalignment are rarely fixed and straightforward but rather fluctuate frequently, as do the brands and images to which they react. As such, more interpretivist and critical studies are required to understand the complex nature of the interplay among these key

concepts and discourses—including their implications for individual identity work in contemporary organizations.

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