



# Book brand.new

Jane Pavitt  
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## Recommendation

This visually stunning, insightful and clever book was published to coincide with a major exhibition of the same name at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England. The exhibit’s curator, Jane Pavitt, is also the book’s editor. She has selected essays on branding and its impact on consumers and culture that take a challenging look at the phenomenon of international consumerism and how it came to be. With its wonderful illustrations, including photos of products, advertisements and retail outlets spanning the entire 20th century, this richly detailed book will make a beautiful addition to any library, but is far too insightful to be relegated to a mere showpiece. So *BooksInShort* recommends that you don’t stop with the pictures. Read this informative and often irreverent set of essays by critics, historians, scholars, designers and business experts. This exhibit packed between hard covers is an innovative way to view – and truly understand – the power of branding.

## Take-Aways

- Brand names influence all aspects of culture, society and daily life.
- Branding has local and global power.
- Personalities, products and services are branded.
- Personal and social identities are shaped by consumerism.
- In branding, the values of the brand are attached to the product.
- A brand encompasses all of the associations the name has for consumers.
- Brand value is established over time.
- Brand value depends upon successful nurturing of the relationship between the brand’s producer and consumer via investment, advertising and marketing.
- People now live in a brandscape, surrounded by images of brands.
- Consumer proactivity is on the rise, creating avenues for consumers to have an impact on corporations and their brands.

## Summary

# Branding

Brand names consume your visual world and affect your daily life with an undeniable power to influence tastes, preferences, ideas and behavior. Provocative debates continue regarding the global power of the proliferation of branding, including the branding of personalities. How are brand identities constructed? How are goods designed to reflect or reinforce their brand message? How do different cultures and communities respond to so-called global brands such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola? Critics, historians, sociologists, designers and businesspeople weigh in with studies, observations, reports and commentary that show the pervasive influence branding - and consumer reaction to it - has on your personal, social, cultural and political landscape.

“Corporations are now more than ever involved in the manipulation and control of image, over and above the production of ‘real’ things.”

Consumerism and branding shape personal and social identity in this world of commodities where, "In Goods We Trust" might as well be the global motto. Branding is the process of attaching a name and a reputation to something or someone - yes, people can be thought of as brands, too. The most recognizable feature of a brand is a name, logo, symbol or trademark that denotes a product's origin. A person, corporation or institution will own the rights to a brand name that is used as a way of distinguishing one product or service from all others. In branding, the values of the brand are attached to the product, both physically and by suggestion.

“To consume or not to consume? Is that the question?”

But a brand is far more than a name or product. The brand also encompasses all of the associations that the name has for consumers. The brand image or brand value results from the so-called dialogue that takes place between producer or brand owner and the consumer or user. A brand's strength rests upon a close correlation between the image the brand creates and the consumer's reception of that message. Any distortions to that message can result in a weaker brand. For example, a brand that promotes itself as being inexpensive might be interpreted as being of poor quality instead, if the message is mismanaged.

“Brands are like chess pieces - the moves we make with them are an indication of our relationship to others.”

A brand can be the name of a company or product owner and of the particular product or product range. A family of branded products, owned by the same company, may share certain features of their brand image, while each product still has a distinct market character. Yet, despite that individual character, each brand depends upon the image of the parent brand.

“Perhaps the single most important role for brands within a organization is their ability to spawn loyalty; this is akin to a long-term relationship between brand and consumer.”

Brand value is established over time and is the product of a company's successful nurturing of its relationship with the brand's consumers. Branding requires investment, marketing and corporate tending. The most recognizable brands maintain their positions by establishing loyalty and by becoming the market standard. In some cases, the brand name evolves into the generic name for the product, such as Hoover, Coke, Walkman or Rollerblade. Some products started out as brands but their names became so generic that trademarks couldn't protect them. Former brand names include aspirin, yo-yo, thermos and escalator. Their evolution into generic categories demonstrates branding's rise to prominence in the last 100 years. Brands became central to 20th-century culture and mythology.

“The most recognizable brands tend to maintain their position by establishing loyalty and ubiquity, by becoming the market standard.”

Interestingly, in 19 out of 22 product categories, the company that owned the leading American brand in 1925 still has it today, including:

- Nabisco in cookies.
- Kellogg's in breakfast cereal.
- Kodak in film.
- Sherwin Williams in paint.
- Del Monte in canned fruit.

- Wrigley's in chewing gum.
- Singer in sewing machines.
- Campbell's in soup.
- Gillette in razors.

“However successful a brand image might be, significant social and even political shifts can result in a loss of popularity. For brands that trade on heritage or national identity, for example, attempts to reposition them can be dangerous.”

Brands and their histories are often intertwined and mythologized to create a brand image. For example, Coca-Cola and Levi's both exemplify the ideal of American individualism. Levi's has successfully used the image of the American cowboy or rock'n'roll hero in generations of advertising and marketing. Coca-Cola's association with the "Free West" in the post-World War II period began with images of American soldiers drinking Coca-Cola during the war, summing up the idea of America as a land of plentiful consumer products. Coca-Cola may have also reminded homesick soldiers of home, and even of the values for which they were fighting. Coca-Cola successfully used this image again during the Korean and Vietnam War, when the company kept American troops supplied with sodas, even building extra bottling plants in Vietnam to keep up with the demand the company itself created.

“Among all the promises that brands make to consumers, the 'signature' of the designer is seen as a particular mark of distinction.”

A number of familiar companies have promoted themselves as "the brands that built America." The mid-20th century growth of national networks for distributing U.S. goods and the increasing regulation of products combined to create the climate in which brands could flourish. In an increasingly mobile society, the familiarity of branded goods quickly became an important selling point.

## Brandscapes

People now live in brandscapes. Anthropologist John Sherry created that term to describe places where brands are an integral part of everyday existence. Brands are so much a part of the environment that they can go almost unnoticed. Because of their proliferation, you rarely question their nature and function. They are simply present, a part of life. This is a powerful testament to the power and prevalence of branding. If you want more evidence of branding's power, consider that fact that every kind of individual and group imaginable adopted the methods and language of brands to describe themselves and their activities. Celebrities from sports stars to opera singers are routinely packaged and managed as brands. Political parties and even politicians talk of being "re-branded." People even gives brands to other people and to things in their daily personal lives. Consider a woman who chooses to date a man because she sees him as a real "Armani man," or a "Marlboro Man," or the man who would rather evoke the image of Armani or Marlboro than not.

“In an age of global media, celebrities from sports stars to opera singers are also increasingly packaged and managed as brands. We hear of political parties and even politicians being 're-branded'. We may even find that we brand people and things in our day-to-day personal life.”

So strong is brand psychology that if Coca-Cola were to lose all of its production-related assets in a disaster, the company would survive. But, if all consumers were to have a sudden lapse of memory and forget everything related to Coca-Cola, the company would go out of business, or would become just one more faceless competitor in a crowded field.

“The primary reason why brands exist is economic. Brand names and other trademarks are still used to identify a supplier's products or services, distinguishing them from those of its competitors. This, at the very least, makes life simpler and less risky for the consumer.”

Brand images can take many forms. McDonald's main brand image is simply its restaurants and their food. A successful advertising campaign can add images to the brand's image by featuring them in commercials and ads. The values of those images are then equated in the consumer's mind with McDonald's. In this way, global products cultivate specific local images designed to appeal to various demographic groups and cultures. A 1999 British TV ad campaign featured soccer star Alan Shearer at his local McDonalds. With this ad, the values attributed to Shearer as a down-to-earth, Northern working class, English sports hero became equated in the consumer's mind with McDonald's. In this way, the corporate images become more local than global, and therefore more personal. With this ad, McDonalds is saying, in effect, our restaurant is all about you; it's not some impersonal, cookie-cutter product saturating

the globe.

“To what degree are both we as consumers, and the brands we buy connected to and affected by the nature of the spaces in which that buying and selling takes place.”

One of brand management's biggest challenges is controlling and channeling the image, a job that is accomplished with the tools of advertising, PR and marketing. Companies monitor the current brand images that exist in the minds of different segments of consumers while continuously introducing new, positive associations.

## **Counterfeits**

Counterfeits are inferior products that illegally use another company's well-established logo, packaging and reputation to try to fool consumers into believing their product is the real brand. Many people knowingly buy counterfeits, also called fakes or knock-offs. Supply and demand keeps this market alive, but why do people buy counterfeits? Sometimes they believe the product is the real thing. But even when they know it's a fake, people love to think that they're getting a bargain - the status of having a brand name at a fraction of the price. They don't even seem to mind when the quality is much lower than that of the original product. A 1993 U.S. study showed that 38% of consumers would knowingly buy the counterfeit instead of the real brand. In a similar survey in Britain, 40% said they, too, would knowingly buy a counterfeit if the price and quality were acceptable. In those studies people assumed the quality of a counterfeit was higher than the quality of a product that lacked any popular brand name, even when the non-branded product was of far superior quality - such is the power of branding, that it even extends to the counterfeit. When buying fakes, customers believe the logo or name gives them a certain status in the eyes of others.

## **Consumer Proactivity**

Brands have an impact on people, but people can also have an impact on brands. When people chose not to buy a product, enter a store or read an ad, they are still responding to the marketing efforts of organizations, in this case, by rejecting them. People really have more than two choices - to consume or not to consume. People who want to try to "reverse the classic causality of consumption" can engage in consumer proactivity, which questions the traditional assumptions about consumption. In this new relationship, the consumer is the active player and the corporation must decide how to respond.

“The formation of taste is a product of social patterns as much as it is of individual choices.”

Consumers can address many issues, both social and economic, as individuals or in groups, by proactively communicating with corporations. For example, a certain demographic group that buys a brand in great numbers may lobby the corporation that produces that brand to recognize them by sponsoring events, underwriting their causes or changing some policy that affects them. Consumer passivity is transforming into greater degrees of consumer proactivity, creating a new dynamic that companies are trying to figure out how to handle. In this way, consumers exert a power that has been dormant except in isolated instances of boycotting, which is only one tool in the arsenal of consumer proactivity.

Even defacing ads in a subway station, albeit illegal vandalism, is a form of consumer proactivity. The power of this new message comes from the power of the brand and the ad's transformation. While the ad was designed to have an impact on people, now a person has had an impact on the ad. Rather than allowing the brand to have an impact on the market, the market is having a forcible impact on the brand by initiating a two-way communication.

In one example of group consumer proactivity, the Adbusters - a global organization that grew out of anti-advertising activism in Vancouver, Canada - designated November 26 as the annual International Buy Nothing Day. Adbusters' posters promoting the day appeared in cities worldwide. The group publishes a quarterly magazine to raise consciousness about commercial excess and to elevate the environmental movement's awareness about the media. Rather than defacing existing ads, Adbusters produce elaborate spoofs mocking the values of major brands' ad campaigns and the power of the corporations that produce these brands.

## **About the Author**

**Jane Pavitt** is Senior Research Fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the University of Brighton in England. She has written

widely on aspects of design and design history, and has organized a number of major exhibitions. Ms. Pavitt edited *brand.new* and wrote two of its essays.

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