

Management – Culture – Interpretation

RESEARCH

Stephan Sonnenburg
Laura Baker *Eds.*

Branded Spaces

Experience Enactments and
Entanglements

Karlsruhehochschule
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Management – Culture – Interpretation

Edited by

Andreas P. Müller

Stephan Sonnenburg

The book series of the Karlsruhochschule International University explores new ideas and approaches to management, organizations and economy from a cultural and interpretive point of view. The series intends to integrate different perspectives towards economy, culture and society. Therefore, management and organizational activities are not seen as being isolated from their context, but rather as context-bound and dependent on their surrounding cultures, societies and economies. Within these contexts, activities make sense through the allocation, the interpretation and the negotiation of meanings. Sense-making can be found in performative processes as well as the way social meaning is constructed through interactions. The series seeks innovative approaches, both in formulating new research questions and in developing adequate methodological research designs. We welcome contributions from different interdisciplinary and collective ways of thinking and seeking knowledge which focus on the integration of “Management – Culture – Interpretation“.

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Branded Spaces

Experience Enactments
and Entanglements

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Approaching Branded Spaces

Stephan Sonnenburg / Laura Baker

Why is it worth studying branded spaces now? First of all, as brands and branding are radically transforming, brand owners have begun to perceive the relevance and booster qualities of space for branding brands. In a global and fast changing world, branded spaces are becoming icons, cornerstones or lighthouses for brands, for their image and for their relationship to their agents. Space “increasingly becomes (de facto if not de jure) the brand” (Sherry 1998: 112). Even more, as Arvidsson (2005: 236) argues, we are on a way to “end up living in a well nigh all-encompassing brand-space”. Brands are enacted and entangled in space more regularly and must be considered with space in mind to be convincing and successful. Branded spaces emplace agents to have an experience that is in multisensual and multisensory association with a brand. Therefore, brand and marketing research has begun to shift its perspective to spatial dimensions (e.g. Hollenbeck et al. 2008, Kozinets et al. 2002, Ponsonby-McCabe and Boyle 2006, Sherry 1998) and scientists who focus on space have gained interest in relating brands and space (e.g. Kirby and Kent 2010, Klingmann 2007, Moor 2003, Pike 2011).

In this context space has become increasingly important for many people, brand owners and scientists alike, because there is a warranted need to conquer space for brand staging. While it is clear that people are interested in the topic of branded spaces, we are interested in not only how but also to what extent branded spaces are approached in a critical way and to what degree branded space affords success. Hence, in a story-like framework we wonder if people are approaching branded spaces as lovers, friends, mutual acquaintances or even enemies and if there are embraces, open arms, a handshake, the cold shoulder or the knife in the back. We believe that branded spaces can be applied to good uses and bad ones as well as take on the characteristics of being progressive and regressive.

Although theoretical preconditions are given, they are not yet to our knowledge combined in a synergetic way in the literature. Inspired by Soja (1989), space has been studied with renewed interest across social sciences since the 1990s which helps to approach, theoretically, branded spaces from the spatial perspective. On the other hand, brand theory has approached branded spaces through the brand perspective but without sufficient implementation of spatial

science. Up until now, there has been no known attempt to close this gap in order to better understand and apply branded spaces.

We believe that nowadays space and brand are in a productive interdependency which leads to new forms of interaction between brands and people in spatial settings. Consequently, this concept is one of the main theses of this book. It is also worth exploration because a multidisciplinary (additive) approach with a theoretical basis is still in the beginning phase and lags behind the practical, concrete developments although it is quite necessary. One may think of examples, mentioned in this volume, like Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Burj Khalifa in Dubai, Eiffel Tower in Paris or Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg (a branded space still under construction). Additionally, neither brand nor space literature has taken the relationship between brand and space into account through a fundamental much less a higher level transdisciplinary (holistic) approach. If we are allowed creative licence, a love story that needs to be told is definitely emerging here with a relationship between theoretical approach and practical application. Hence, this book will begin with a multidisciplinary approach and leave a transdisciplinary approach as a possible sequel.

By now, the reader might be puzzled as we use the term 'branded spaces' as pre-existing and *en passant*. As far as we know, Elizabeth Moor (2003) uses the term for the first time but not as a spatial manifestation of a brand. She constitutes a branded space as the consumer-body and its everyday movements. Before we continue with our approach to branded spaces, we would like to introduce this term as our identifier and label for the unfolding of brands in space. We have not chosen this term by accident. We purposefully use this term knowing that it is tautological as a space itself is by definition already branded. Without branding in the sense of a marking or localisation, there is no space at all. Branding determines space. Each spatial entity needs to be branded to become and to be observed as a spatial entity. However, to be a branded space the 'basic' branding is not enough. There has to be more. We believe that meaning is necessary as an addition to the basic sense of observing or sensing so that a space becomes a branded space. To speak in metaphor, without meaning a space is nothing more than a container, a meaningless vessel of stone and glass.

Furthermore, there are branded spaces, which can be labeled as branded spaces without any kind of managed brand being involved. One may think of public spaces like streets or squares which gain political importance in times of revolutions like the Tahrir Square during the Arab Spring or city squares on Monday evenings in East Germany in 1989 and 1990 where a series of peaceful political protests against the government of the German Democratic Republic took place. Such spaces are politically branded at least for a specific period of

time. This is the reason why we avoid the term ‘brand space’ or ‘brand land’ (Mikunda 2004), ‘brandscape’ (Sherry 1998), ‘brand store’ (Kozinets et al. 2002) and ‘brand place’ (Ponsonby-McCabe and Boyle 2006). The decision would have been problematic as these terms connote a reduction to consumer brands and, hence, lead to equalization with ‘spaces for consumption’ (Miles 2010). Brand space implicates the misleading assumption that every kind of branded space can be managed. Branded spaces can emerge spontaneously and develop in an uncontrolled manner as well as are owned by no one or the mass.

The core of this contribution, which comprises theoretical guiding principles for branded spaces, is presented in four sections. First, we introduce our understanding of ‘brands’ to make a connection to space possible. Second, we unfold approaches to space in due consideration to the spatial turn. Third and based on the conflation of brand and space, we develop our concept of branded spaces which is a springboard for the contributions in this book that are then introduced. As already mentioned, we would like to emphasize that branded spaces in this volume is considered from different perspectives with an eye towards cultural, social, philosophical, architectural and managerial perspectives to branded spaces with knowledge being drawn from different disciplines although the disciplines stay within their own boundaries for the most part. We regard this as an essential and open-minded multidisciplinary discourse as this book enters unknown territory.

Brand

The phenomenon ‘brand’ has developed into a global key issue as it is nowadays difficult to imagine social, cultural and consumer life without brands. On the one side, brands are cornerstones which provide faith and orientation in the daily jungle of information overload. On the other, almost everything today can be branded like products, services, organizations, people, events, buildings, streets, cities, regions or nations (Coomber 2002). Hence, brands are engraved in our everyday and it is not clear any longer who ‘owns’ the brands.

Brands are omnipresent and made to be interesting. Therefore, it seems logical that more disciplines than just marketing as the original one deal with brands and branding with social sciences and cultural studies leading the way (e.g. Escalas 2004, Hellmann 2003, Holt 2002, 2004, Liebl 2006, Woodside et al. 2008). It is also important to note that the understanding of brands as a trademark has changed over the last decades whereby the following concepts can be observed as influential. Focusing on a managerial and making aspect, brands are regarded as techniques (Domizlaff 1992), personalities (Aaker 1997), or

identities (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). Focusing on an emergent aspect, brands are regarded as symbols (Liebl 2006), archetypes (Holt 2004), social creations (O'Guinn and Muniz 2010), performances (Singh and Sonnenburg 2012) or cultural resources (Arvidsson 2005). From our perspective, brands have a story to tell.

Parallel to the above mentioned developments, it can be additionally observed that there is a shift from the owner's perspective, which means that he/she manages the brand, to the agent's perspective, which means that the agents 'make' the brand. In this regard, we quote Liebl who differentiates between owner and possessor of a brand:

"Brands may legally 'belong' to companies and be 'managed' based on decisions taken by management, yet they are 'in the possession' of consumers, because the latter exploit and experience brands, interpret them in their own way, compare them with other brands, and share their experiences and fantasies with other consumers. And the way a brand is perceived often has little to do with the ideal image of the brand's essence in the heads of the marketing managers." (Liebl 2006: 29)

Before the advent of new media, brands were solely created by the brand owner and mass advertising used to profile a brand image in the agent's head. Brand communication was considered a monologue and people were trapped as a passive recipient of the content. The development of new media has begun to dissipate the boundary between brand owner and brand agents, hence, influencing all kinds of communication from face-to-face to digital. In the course of their increased communicative power, brand agents become an active part in the brand communication. Therefore, brands "are created by interactions of multiple parties, institutions, publics, and social forces" (O'Guinn and Muniz 2010: 133, Ind et al. 2012), which we term 'co-creative'. Consequently, brand owners lose their claim to leadership and are in a 'dilemma' as the brand image dilutes and the brand takes on more a life of its own in the imaginations and in the behaviors of the agents.

It can be stated that new media democratizes brand communication. Particularly, the brand monologue progresses to a brand 'polylogue' (Sonnenburg 2009) or a "process of interagency" (Kozinets et al. 2004: 658) between brand owner and agents. The active role can be described accordingly: Brand agents can be regarded as 'prosumers' (Toffler 1980), 'producers' (Bruns 2008) or 'bricoleurs' (Holt 2002). In the polylogue, they create and swap brand content in conformist and even nonconformist ways. Agents "tend to be tricky wild things who find their own uses for marketed things and brands to be more interesting than those intended by marketers" (Sherry et al. 2006: 18). They are

motivated to engage themselves as brand content carries meaning and gives meaning to their lives and (inter)actions:

“Meaning defines brands, and people make meaning. People make meaning through social means: they make meaning through their interaction, through the institutions they have created and maintained, through accommodation and negotiation with marketers, through rumors, through politics, and often in reaction to a disruption in the social sphere. Brands are meaning.” (O’Guinn and Muniz 2010: 133)

The other way around, meaning helps to structure agents’ physical and mental worlds and their interactions with brands. The relation between brand and meaning is based on a high incidence in current brand theories plus models (e.g. Arvidsson 2005, Holt 2002, Liebl 2006) and resonates as well in authors’ contributions of this volume. O’Guinn and Muniz (2010: 135) put it nicely into a nutshell by using a spatial metaphor which describes a brand as a vessel of meaning. Previously stated in our own words, a brand as a container or vessel carries various content but is only a branded space when meaning is added to the space. Staying with this metaphor, the main ‘role’ of the brand owner is then to pre-structure or design the initial shape of the vessel and fill it with intended meanings to evoke responses from desired agents.

Once again, we have to emphasize that a brand owner can only try to evoke a specific meaning from the agents. The brand permeates the ‘polylogue’ between the brand owner and agent and meaning is created or ‘co-created’ in our terms between the two even if the brand owner did not intend it. Branded spaces are one manifestation to evoke brand meaning. Before we dive into this topic, we would like to approach ‘space’ to better understand the concept of branded spaces in this volume.

Space

It is common sense to say that space has become a common place in many social sciences, with geography leading the way, due to the renewed interest and transformation of interpretation of what a space is. Under the umbrella term “spatial turn” (Soja 1989: 39), a new understanding of space has developed which regards space as a social category: “(Social) space is a (social) product.” (Lefebvre 1991: 30) Following this thought, space is an everyday life phenomenon.

Therefore, space is not only a ‘real’ thing or a container but also, even more, a social construction and an entity for cultural practices and change as well as social relationships. Space emerges and permeates by movement and

perceptions as well as action, interaction and usage of various agents. With regard to cultural practice, Lefebvre (1991: 38-39) formulates a conceptual triad of spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceived space) and representational spaces (lived space) showing the socially constructed multidimensionality of space. However, “if no localization can be determined, the space concept is used only metaphorically” (Löw 2008: 43).

It is, hence, important to mention that we do not want to play physical space against socially constructed space in this book. To the contrary and as a trend for the contributions of this volume, space is neither an absolute given nor a mere construction. Space is an interdependency between the two. This leads to the question how could space be conceptualized to approach branded spaces? The spatial theory of Martina Löw (2008) is a fruitful way as she focuses on the duality of the physical and social dimension treating “spaces as products of action which at the same time have structuring power” (Löw 2008: 33). We briefly introduce her spatial understanding which comprises the two basic and concurrent processes of ‘spacing’ and ‘synthesis’ to create a space.

“*Spacing* means erection, building, or positioning. Examples are the display of wares in a supermarket, the self-positioning of people in relation to other people, the construction of buildings, the surveying of national borders, the networking of computers to form spaces. It is positioning in relation to other positionings. In the case of mobile goods or of people, spacing means both the moment of positioning and movement to the next positioning. Second, the constitution of space also requires *synthesis*, that is to say, goods and people are connected to form spaces through processes of perception, ideation, or recall.” (Löw 2008: 35)

The process of spacing is more related to the physical dimension of space whereas synthesis is more connected to the socially constructed dimension of space. It has to be pointed out that Löw narrows the synthesis to single human beings which means that synthesis is a psychological process. We would like to widen this understanding of space to include social processes, and not just a singular psychological process, by drawing from our ideas of brands and applying them to space. First, we do so by asking you to recall the polylogue and co-creation of meaning between the brand owner and the agent in the previous section. Next, we do so by borrowing from Liebl’s concept of brand, who differentiates between owner and possessor of a brand because the latter exploits, experiences, interprets, compares and shares fantasies about brands with other agents. Likewise, we now ask you to extend these ideas to agents who could co-creatively synthesize space in their interaction. Specifically, we highlight the fact that interpretation is not stressed by Löw. Only through the social interpretation

of space, can agents construct meaning which is a prerequisite for action or interaction.

To summarize briefly and concisely, there are the social processes of co-created synthesis and interpretation to be added to Löw's understanding of space which could be seen as second and third processes, respectively. Spacing, synthesis and interpretation are influenced by physical objects perceived by agents such as buildings, goods or people. "In brief, the day-to-day constitution of spaces involves perceptions that are grounded in both the external effect of social goods and other people and in the perceptual activity of the constituting agent." (Löw 2008: 41) This external effect can be described as an 'atmosphere' which is connected to a specific place. Each place has an atmosphere provoking and instantiating perception and, hence, space-building of diverse agents. Atmospheres are common realities between the perceiver and the perceived (Böhme 1993: 122).

In contrast to spaces, places do not disappear. Places are mainly branded by architecture and design. Therefore, they are prepared for perception and space-building. Places emplace spaces. In other words, if the rhyming is somewhat distracting, places put spaces into position. A concrete place can have different spaces with different practices by different agents superimposed upon it, either one after the other or at the same time as well as in relation to each other or not in relation. While seeming incongruous, there is actually, according to Foucault simultaneity of offerings, a 'heterotopia', that is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (1986: 25). Equally addressing simultaneity, we will add an exaggerated but plausible element for maintaining interest that a place is a vessel for spaces which are vessels for meanings.

Branded Spaces

We will now approach branded spaces for our readers using, first, a qualitative and then a more equation-like method. The first one has been alluded to already and that is the story-like framework. Stories and storytelling are ubiquitous in our world and branded spaces are dependent upon stories and the situations out of which stories emerge. No matter where they are, branded spaces are created in the mind and in communication just like stories. Additionally, meaning is mixed or co-created among brand owners and/or the social milieu and the agents. The next approach is presented as an equation. While it may appear that two ways have been taken in our approach, we see the two as being interrelated. Especially the concepts of spacing, synthesizing and interpreting in the equation lead to