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Additive versus inclusive approaches to measuring brand equity: Practical and ethical implications

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Abstract
To date, there has been little consideration of the ethical dimensions of specific brand management practices. This paper examines different approaches to measuring brand equity and argues that the choice of measurement approach has ethical implications. It contrasts what have been previously defined as additive and inclusive approaches to brand equity definition and measurement. It then argues that inclusive approaches to brand equity measurement are preferable to additive ones because they enable us to work with a much broader concept of brand, and because additive approaches can predispose marketers towards unethical activity.

INTRODUCTION
This special issue of *The Journal of Brand Management* is dedicated to linking branding and corporate responsibility to the leadership of firms. This paper sets out to show that an important, if preliminary, step in this linking effort is to identify elements in existing brand management theory that might be obstacles to more responsible and ethical behaviour on the part of firms. In particular, this paper focuses its attention on brand equity measurement. A number of different approaches to measuring brand equity have been proposed in the marketing literature, both in this Journal and elsewhere.[1–11] These have been critiqued from both theoretical and practical perspectives, and classified into additive and inclusive interpretations of brand.[12–14] To date, however, the specific implications of the choice between an additive and an inclusive interpretation have not been addressed. This paper offers a theoretical analysis of the two alternative approaches and argues that the inclusive approach is more practical if brand building is believed to include much more than just advertising. An argument is also made that inclusive approaches to brand equity measurement are preferable from an ethical perspective.

RATIONALE FOR CONSIDERING ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS
To date, there has been very limited consideration of the ethical implications of brand management practices. Given the damage done to several brands recently by corporate scandals, however, it would seem appropriate to

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put more effort into such consideration.

Sociologists, anthropologists and management theorists have long understood that the structures, processes and values of an organisation have a significant impact upon the behaviour of the members of that organisation. In particular, corporate choices about which metrics to use as indicators of success, and which measurement approaches to take, are likely to influence the behaviour of managers in firms. The decision to track a particular metric is an (at least) implicit statement that whatever is represented by that metric is considered to be significant and is valued by the firm. Such a decision may, therefore, predispose managers towards or against certain behaviour. If there were a possibility of some of this behaviour being unethical, then it would seem to be worth exploring the moral implications of the choice of metric or measurement approach.

Although there has been little investigation of the ethical dimensions of brand management issues, there have been significant efforts made in the broader field of marketing ethics. Questions of marketing ethics have been discussed in the literature at least since the 1960s.[15,16] A number of comprehensive normative guides to ethical marketing have been developed, which include social responsibility,[17] virtue ethics[18] and contextual approaches.[19] These theories have been reviewed recently by Smith,[20] responding to the criticism that marketing ethics has little to contribute because all of its normative guidance can supposedly be reduced to obeying the law and acting according to enlightened self-interest.[21,22] Smith[23] shows that law and self-interest are necessary but inadequate guides to ethical marketing. He offers several examples of this, including the American Marketing Association's Code of Ethics on consumer privacy, which is more stringent than existing US privacy law.
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Nevertheless, marketing is still cited as one of the main sources of ethical violations in business.[24,25] Marketing ethics literature provides extensive study of what marketers should do (normative marketing ethics[26–28]) and what they actually do (descriptive marketing ethics[29–31]). With a few notable exceptions,[32,33] however, there is little published on *why* marketers behave ethically or unethically and what causes them to do so. In the face of strong pressures to achieve short-term results, perhaps some marketers do not see enough benefit arising from being ethical to overcome the temptations offered by expedient, but immoral, options. In general, philosophers tend to present one of three answers to the question 'Why be ethical?'. These answers are:

— because everyone would be better off if all individuals acted ethically (utilitarian theory[34])
— because acting ethically is the rational thing to do (deontological theory[35])
— because acting ethically will make you happier in the long run (virtue theory[36,37]).

These are three different responses, but they are not mutually exclusive. All three can be combined to provide a possible formulation for why marketers would want to be ethical: because

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ethical activity is more likely to lead to an honorable and satisfying career, while at the same time avoiding activity can lead to the destruction of a brand. That said, the purpose of this paper is not to make a conclusive case that marketers should be more ethical, but rather to explore the implications of the choice of brand equity measurement approach, and to include ethical considerations in this exploration.

ADDITIVE APPROACH TO BRAND EQUITY MEASUREMENT

It has been written in this Journal that interpretations of 'brand' tend to divide into two kinds: additive (Ambler[38]) and inclusive (Barwise[39]). The additive interpretation of brand depicts product and brand as separate, with the brand as a mark that is added to a product. The inclusive interpretation, by contrast, portrays product and brand as combined, where the product is included in the brand. Barwise's review of the early years of brand equity research concludes (among other things) that virtually all definitions of brand equity focus on the incremental effect of the brand name, which would seem to imply the additive interpretation. He cites several examples, including the definition of brand equity by Srivastava and Shocker:[40]

> 'A set of associations and behaviors on the part of a brand's customers, channel members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name and that gives a strong, sustainable and differential advantage.'

Barwise[41] cites Keller's[42] definition of brand equity, namely 'the *differential* effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of a brand' as another example. In fact Keller's work on customer-based brand equity appears to hold to this additive interpretation in a particularly forceful way. According to him, if perceptions 'reflect the objective reality of the product, [then] no underlying customer-based brand equity may be present.' In other words, if for a particular brand there is no difference between perceptions and reality, then brand equity may not exist at all.[43] More recent work on brand equity appears to be continuing the trend identified by Barwise, defining brand equity, for example, as 'the *difference* in consumer choice between the focal branded product and an unbranded product given the same level of product features'.[44]

Existing measures of brand equity have been divided into three categories: customer mindset measures, product-market level outcomes and financial measures.[45,46] The focus of this paper is on the second category, measures of outcome. An additive approach to measuring brand equity outcomes attempts to isolate the value contributed by the brand name alone, separate from any value contributed by product attributes. Such an approach seeks to measure only that which cannot be explained by the objectively measured attributes of the product.[47] It *subtracts* from the value of brand equity any value that can be attributed to such objectively measured attributes. An inclusive approach to measuring brand equity, by contrast, focuses on measuring the *total value* of the equity created by the branded product or service, and does not attempt to subtract anything:

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Assume total value of brand A to consumer = x

Additive approach to measuring brand equity:
Value of brand equity of A = x − (value of all the measurable benefits of A)

Inclusive approach to measuring brand equity:
Value of brand equity of A = x

Since definitions of brand equity all appear to favour an additive rather than an inclusive interpretation of brand, it would seem that measurement of outcomes of brand equity at the product-market level should also follow this interpretation. Not surprisingly, then, they have done so. For example, Park and Srinivasan[48] seek to measure brand equity as 'the incremental preference endowed by the brand to the product as perceived by an individual consumer.' Ailawadi, *et al.*[49] measure the brand equity of consumer packaged goods using a definition of product-market-level brand equity as 'the incremental profit that the brand earns over the profit it would earn if it were sold without the brand name.'

There is a non-trivial problem, however, with the additive approach to brand equity measurement: the problem of trying to separate the brand name from the product. While this problem is relevant to all types of products, it becomes more serious as one moves beyond relatively simple products such as consumer packaged goods into more complex products, product-service bundles, or services alone. Barwise[50] explains it as follows:

> In most significant cases we do not know at what price the firm could or would sell the product without the brand (eg Heineken?, Nike?, Mercedes Benz?) and even when we do know (as, arguably with many grocery items) we have little idea of the market share the product would achieve without the brand: what would be the sales of Coke, Tide, Snickers or Green Giant if sold as generics?

According to Barwise, existing sales of generic colas, for example, would seem to be a very imperfect approximation of what market share the Coca-Cola product would achieve if sold without the name. Still less is it possible to imagine how much a generic Mercedes Benz, with the same product attributes as the branded car, would sell for, or how many of them would be sold. Ambler and Barwise[51] develop this concern further by noting the logical difficulties that arise in the idea of separating the product from its image, since actual product quality is interwoven with perceived product quality: 'some product satisfaction arises from brand knowledge and vice versa.'

The difficulty here seems to be: what is included in the 'product' that the consumer buys, that could be cleanly separated from the brand name? For example, is packaging included? Or certain aspects of customer service, such as wait time? What about distribution intensity? Something that is more widely available is more convenient, and such convenience may be part of the brand's value proposition. If attempting to compare brand X against an 'unbranded equivalent', would that equivalent have the same packaging or distribution intensity as brand X? If not, is it really an equivalent? If it would, can these characteristics con-

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tribute to the unique brand equity of brand X? These example characteristics could all be considered to be part of the 'objectively measured attributes of the product,'[52] and therefore none of these should count towards brand equity, according to the additive interpretation of brand. As noted above, according to this interpretation, brand equity includes only that which cannot be explained by the objectively measured attributes of the product. Changes in packaging, customer wait time and distribution intensity can all be considered measurable attributes, and hence do not count towards brand equity. By this interpretation, the main contributor to brand equity is changed perception caused by advertising.

This conclusion, though, creates some conflict with aspects of contemporary brand equity research and practice. For example, one recent paper[53] studies the effect of changes in distribution intensity (among other things) on brand equity. Yet, as noted above, distribution intensity is part of measurable, objective reality. According to the additive interpretation of brand equity, then, it should not contribute to brand equity. Berry, in discussing service brands, argues that a customer's service experience with a brand is an important driver of brand equity.[54] But can the service experience not be considered part of the 'product' attributes? If it is not, then what is? While the utility of a bank visit might be separated from the experience of that visit, what about more 'experiential' brands: what is the value of a visit to Walt Disney World Resorts if it is not the experience itself?

Perhaps the most concrete example of the problem is the Starbucks brand, which, since it does no advertising, could be argued to have no brand equity according to the additive interpretation. Every aspect of the Starbucks experience is part of the objectively measurable attributes of the Starbucks product. This interpretation conflicts with common sense, however. Clearly, the *way* in which Starbucks combines its merchandise selection with its store design, location and service approach creates equity in the brand that is more than the sum of these parts. But how could such equity ever be separated out from the 'product' — what is an 'unbranded equivalent' of the Starbucks brand? Is there such a thing as a generic chain of coffee houses?

The Interbrand list of the world's most valuable brands[55] includes brands such as IBM, Ford, Walt Disney, Amazon.com as well as Starbucks. For each of these brands, separating the objectively measured attributes from the marketing efforts designed to increase brand equity becomes very difficult. In particular, the confusion around whether or not service experience should be considered part of such attributes is a critical one, given the increasing number of companies turning to 'experiential marketing' and 'experiential branding'.

As seen above, the additive interpretation of brand equity defines brand equity as the gap between the value that consumers perceive in the brand, and what is actually delivered. An increase in brand equity is therefore defined as an increase in this gap. A decrease in the gap is therefore a decrease in brand equity. When the gap between consumers' perceptions and reality is eliminated, then it is possible that there is no brand equity left, according to the additive interpretation of brand equity. But there is some-

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thing disturbing about this conclusion: to the extent that the reality of the product is improved in order to meet what consumers perceive and hence expect about the product, to that extent, brand equity is *reduced*, because the gap between perception and reality is reduced. The marketer working hard to improve the fit of the product with consumers' perceptions and needs is penalised by this theory, which accords him lower brand equity as a result.

Admittedly, this is arguing *ad absurdum*: the additive interpretation of brand equity has been taken to an extreme — but nevertheless logical — conclusion, and an absurdity found. In reality marketing managers are unlikely to follow the additive interpretation to this extreme. Even so, why should an interpretation that is logically flawed be persisted with, if an acceptable alternative is available?

INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO BRAND EQUITY MEASUREMENT

An inclusive interpretation of existing brand equity definitions avoids the difficulties identified in the additive approach to brand equity. As noted above, an additive approach to measuring brand equity outcomes attempts to isolate the value contributed by the brand name alone, separate from any value contributed by product attributes. The inclusive interpretation of brand, by contrast, portrays product and brand as combined, where the product is *included* in the brand. Therefore an inclusive interpretation of existing definitions of brand equity understands brand equity to include the value contributed by the brand name as well as *all* product attributes. It seeks to measure the total outcome of the branded product rather than the differential outcome of the brand.

This may seem counterintuitive. If trying to measure the differential effect of brand names upon outcomes, as existing brand equity definitions have done, then should the differential outcome not be measured rather than the total outcome? The response here is that, from an inclusive perspective, the idea of a differential outcome is not defined, and in fact not definable. When the brand name is added to the product, it does not create merely a simple mixture of name plus product. Instead, the name *transforms* the product, and once brand equity is established, the idea of the product attributes without the brand name — of the 'unbranded equivalent' — becomes meaningless for all but the simplest products. Consider the Coca-Cola brand. What is the value of the Coca-Cola brand name without the Coca-Cola secret formula? Coke's famous 'New Coke' experience would seem to indicate that the formula is an essential part of the brand, and therefore that the idea of the brand name alone is problematic.

Critics could argue that brand names are indeed bought, sold and licensed, and hence separated from firms. Typically in such cases, however, the brand name is not the only thing that is transferred. Product specifications, and often also manufacturing plant and equipment, change hands in such transactions. For example, when Hershey bought Nabisco's Ice Breakers and Breath Savers brands, the transaction included not only, 'all intellectual property, inventions, technology, trademarks, trade names, trade secrets, know-how, trade dress, service marks, copyrights, patents, formulations, speci-

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fications and manufacturing know-how and processes, and quality control data ...', but also all existing work-in-progress and finished inventory, and 'all assets utilised in the manufacture and packaging ... including the production equipment'.[56] Even in cases where brand names are licensed for use in new product categories, and therefore where transfer of know-how and equipment may be minimal or non-existent, the owner of the brand name typically retains tight control over the specifications and quality of the new product.

Moran[57] has presented an approach to measuring brand equity by multiplying market share, price premium and durability, where durability is measured in terms of price elasticity. This approach can be considered as an example of an inclusive approach to brand equity measurement. Moran's formula measures brand equity as the total impact of the marketing mix, and not just the differential impact. Even though some of the components are relative measures (price premium, for example, is by definition relative to average market price), these are relative to the rest of the — actual — market, not relative to a hypothetical unbranded equivalent. The problems with determining what is and is not included in the 'product' versus the 'brand' are thus eliminated entirely with this approach.

This inclusive approach to brand equity measurement provides the same benefits as additive approaches to brand equity measurement, while overcoming the theoretical problems identified earlier. If brand equity is being measured in order to track how it changes in response to variations in the marketing mix and competitor performance, then what is of primary interest is its change over time, and not its absolute value. The inclusive approach still allows this change to be calculated. Even if the absolute value of a brand's equity is of most interest, Moran's approach also permits such measurement.

MORAL CONCERNS ABOUT ADDITIVE BRAND EQUITY MEASUREMENT

Thus far, this paper has argued that the inclusive interpretation of brand equity is preferable to the additive interpretation because it does not suffer from the practical problems of the latter. This paper argues now that the inclusive interpretation of brand equity is also *morally* preferable to the additive interpretation. The argument is made here that brand equity measurement based on the additive interpretation of brand equity is more likely to serve as an incentive to deception.

The basic argument is that additive brand equity measurement, in focusing attention upon the *gap* between perception and reality, encourages marketers to try to modify consumers' perceptions to move them *away from* reality (to increase the gap). In doing so, it encourages them to make claims that are more likely to be deceptive. Given that modifying consumers' perceptions is considered to be a legitimate role of marketing, this paper begins by showing what *unethical* modification of perceptions could look like, and how it would be different from ethical modification of perceptions. Then it is possible to see how additive brand equity measurement is more likely to lead to unethical modification of perceptions.

To do this, a distinction is made between puffery, which is legal in most jurisdictions, and deception, which is not. Puffery includes exaggeration of

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facts and also outright falsehood. Falsehood is not considered to be deception unless it is materially misleading to a rationally acting consumer, and to the consumer's detriment.[58,59] For example, the Snapple beverage brand claims to be 'made from the best stuff on earth'. By this the company means that its products (except for diet products) are made from all natural ingredients with no preservatives, artificial flavours or chemical dye, but it probably does not mean that only the very finest fruits are used necessarily, nor (pedantically) does it mean that fruit itself should be considered the best 'stuff' on earth, ahead of all other 'stuff'. So Snapple is exaggerating a bit in this statement, but the exaggeration is only a more colourful way of making its claim, and it seems reasonable to assume that consumers are not misled to their detriment by this claim. By contrast, a weight-control product claiming to make one lose 10 lbs a week without diet or exercise would seem to mislead consumers to their detriment, if they were enticed to buy the product to find that it cannot possibly deliver upon its promise.

It is useful to draw a spectrum from provision of information on one end, through puffery-as-exaggeration, then through puffery-as-harmless-falsehood, and finally to misleading falsehood on the other end. The beginning of the spectrum (provision of information) represents behaviour that is clearly ethical. An example here is Weight Watchers' claim that they have been helping consumers around the world to lose weight for 40 years. This is a clear statement of fact. The next phase on the spectrum is puffery-as-exaggeration. Slim Fast uses the phrase 'stay slim for life'. There may be some exaggeration here, but the underlying meaning is clear and no one is likely to be misled. The next phase is puffery-as-harmless-falsehood. Here an example might be weight-control products branded as 'miracle' products. A miracle is an achievement so beyond human power that it is attributed to the supernatural. Such claims are (probably) false when applied to weight-control products, but again no one is harmed. At the other end of the spectrum (misleading falsehood) is behaviour that is clearly unethical as well as illegal. The claim of 10 lbs a week weight-loss cited above is an example of this.

The middle two phases on the spectrum illustrate the difference between ethical and unethical perception change. Puffery that is mere exaggeration or ornamentation of facts is indeed the stuff of much advertising. Claiming that this beverage is made from the best stuff on earth — or that product will help you stay slim for life — would seem to be an ethical choice for marketers. By contrast, every major ethical system condemns lying as unethical, and therefore it seems likely that puffery that offers falsehood, even if it is harmless and hence legal, should be considered unethical. The difficulty is that, while it is possible to identify the existence of these different phases along the spectrum, the boundaries between the phases are not clear-cut, and can be a matter of judgment. This would seem to be all the more reason to be concerned about a system that encourages movement along the spectrum in the wrong direction.

It is not unreasonable to assume that the greater the gap between perception and reality one attempts to convey, the more likely one is to move across the spectrum towards deception. At the one end of the spectrum where

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one is providing information that is straightforwardly true, perception is equal to reality. By contrast, when deception occurs, at the other end of the spectrum, perception and reality are in direct contradiction, by definition, and therefore perception is furthest from reality at this point. For example, making the claim that this diet product will improve health when in fact it is harmful is an attempt, in effect, to move perceptions as far away as possible from reality. It would seem, therefore, that the continuum from no gap between perception and reality to a large gap between them maps reasonably well to the spectrum from provision of information on one end to deception on the other. Therefore this paper concludes that the more one strives to increase the gap between perception and reality, the more likely one is to be inclined towards deception.

A QUESTION OF EMPHASIS

Brand equity measurement based on an inclusive concept of brand does not have this problem. Instead of focusing on the gap between perceptions and reality, it focuses on the totality of the value of the brand. The marketer, rather than trying to increase perceptions ahead of reality, is instead trying to change the reality of what is offered *along with* consumers' perceptions about that reality, in order to be more competitive.

It could be argued that the two approaches reduce to the same thing. Certainly it would be no great success to increase brand equity if one also increased investment in the brand at a much higher rate. The critic could therefore argue that in the end the inclusive approach to brand equity must still focus at least on increasing the gap between what the consumer perceives he or she is getting, and what the firm is paying to deliver it. This criticism is a valid one. The response is that the difference is one of emphasis. If brand equity is interpreted as a function of the gap between perception and reality, efforts to increase brand equity are more likely to be bent towards increasing this gap, with the attendant risk of deceptive advertising. If, on the other hand, brand equity is understood in an inclusive sense as a function of the total value delivered, then all efforts are instead ordered towards increasing this total value. Clearly, there will still be the normal economising on expenses, but the critical difference is that the focus is now on the total value rather than on the gap.

This difference in emphasis is an important one. At the beginning of this paper it was noted that the structures, processes and values of an organisation can have a significant impact upon the behaviour of the members of that organisation. An organisation that adheres to the additive interpretation of brand equity is likely to be one wherein its marketers are oriented to changing perceptions as far ahead of reality as possible, in order to maximise brand equity as they understand it. The marketers in an organisation that holds the inclusive interpretation of brand equity, by contrast, would be likely to be oriented towards changing the actual value delivered to the consumer, to better meet expectations. Hence, a process for measuring brand equity that reinforces the additive interpretation, and that therefore runs the risk of tempting marketers towards deceptive advertising, would seem to be ethically less preferable to one that reinforces the

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inclusive interpretation. When there exists an alternative process that does indeed reinforce this interpretation, and is able to achieve the same benefits without the ethical risks, it would seem appropriate to prefer this alternative.

BRAND INTEGRITY

This special issue is dedicated to the important work of linking branding and corporate responsibility to the leadership of firms. The particular contribution of this paper is to show how an important part of this linking effort is the close examination of existing brand management theory and practice to identify elements that create a tendency against responsible and ethical behaviour, and to replace them with more supportive elements. In promoting an inclusive perspective of brand and brand equity, this paper is contributing towards developing a concept of brand integrity. By brand integrity, what is meant is the idea that a brand's values are: clearly conveyed in all its communications; realised consistently through its products and services; congruent with the values espoused by the corporation that owns the brand; accepted and adhered to by all members of the corporation; and found to be agreeable and attractive by its customers and the communities within which it operates.

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