


Chapter 1

Brand Identity and Image in Digital Environments

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ABSTRACT

In today's dynamic digital landscape, managing brand identity and image presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities. This chapter explores the conceptual foundations of brand management in digital environments, examining the interplay between strategically crafted brand identity and stakeholder-perceived brand image. As digital platforms become central to brand-stakeholder interactions, it is paramount for organisations to deliver a targeted approach. The chapter explores how brand managers can leverage AI and other modern techniques. It analyses the crisis management of some of the world's iconic brands and the strategies employed. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine how the rise of AI and shifting stakeholder expectations will shape the future of digital brand management. It highlights the essential qualities of digital brand management and emphasises how those best suited to manage a brand may create customer satisfaction. The chapter concludes by examining future trends to help brand managers take a proactive approach.

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, Bud Light faced one of the most significant brand crises in recent history when a single Instagram post featuring transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney led to a 26% decline in sales and widespread boycotts across multiple digital platforms (Rajesh, 2023). This incident exemplifies the unprecedented speed and scale at which brand identity and image can be disrupted in today's interconnected digital

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landscape. The crisis illustrates how a single piece of content can rapidly spread across social media, e-commerce platforms, and digital news outlets, significantly altering consumer perceptions and brand value within hours.

Brand identity represents the deliberate set of associations, values, and characteristics that organisations seek to establish in stakeholders' minds (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2020). It encompasses the visual elements, messaging, personality, and core values that define what a brand stands for and how it wishes to be perceived. Brand image, conversely, represents the actual perceptions held by consumers and stakeholders based on their experiences and interactions with the brand across various touchpoints (Keller, 2020). While brand identity is internally controlled and strategically crafted, brand image is externally formed and influenced by numerous factors beyond direct organisational control.

The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed how brands communicate, engage, and build relationships with their audiences. Digital environments—encompassing social media platforms, e-commerce sites, websites, mobile applications, and emerging technologies—have become the primary battlegrounds for brand perception management (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014). These platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for brand building, but they also present complex challenges for maintaining a consistent identity and a positive image across diverse digital ecosystems.

Contemporary brands face multifaceted challenges in digital brand management. The fragmentation of media landscapes means brands must maintain coherent identities across platforms with vastly different audiences, formats, and cultural norms (Wichmann, et al, 2022). The democratization of content creation has shifted significant control over brand narratives to consumers, influencers, and other external stakeholders. Real-time communication expectations demand immediate responses to crises, complaints, and conversations, leaving little room for traditional deliberative communication strategies. Furthermore, the permanent and searchable nature of digital content means that brand missteps can have long-lasting consequences, influencing brand image years after the initial incidents.

This chapter argues that successful brand management in digital environments requires a proactive, adaptive, and multi-faceted approach to shaping and protecting brand identity and image. Organisations must develop comprehensive strategies that account for platform-specific requirements while maintaining overarching brand coherence. They must strike a balance between authentic engagement and strategic communication, transparency and competitive positioning, and global consistency and local relevance. Most critically, they must prepare for and effectively manage the inevitable crises that emerge in fast-paced digital environments.

The following sections will explore the conceptual foundations of brand identity and image, examine the unique characteristics of various digital platforms, provide

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