

CO-CONSTRUCTING THE BRAND AND THE PRODUCT

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How do brand and product development processes interact? How do brands and branding strategies influence product development? Moreover, does a branding strategy facilitate or impede the development process? So far, research on product development has focused on the development of new products and services, whereas research on marketing and especially branding has emphasized what types of line extensions to create rather than on how to integrate brands and product development processes.

The present models of the product development process mostly distinguish between the process of innovation and that which follows, and also distinguish between the company as a sender and the user as a receiver of the communicated values. In the present study we suggest an alternative understanding of the innovation process: A network process perspective (NPP) as derived from the actor network theory (ANT), is used to explore the co-created relationship between the new product development process and branding.

The network process perspective is used to analyze and understand the innovation process and represents a constructivist theory that departs from an ontological assumption that the 'world' is the relations and networks among heterogeneous human and non-human actors and that these networks are not per se stable, but are created, negotiated and dynamic. This theory is especially suitable for comprehending 'branding' where the 'ing' underscores the dynamic nature of this concept and to explore the dynamics in innovation. The empirical analysis identified four incidents as critical to the co-construction of the product and the brand in two companies. The effects are measured using the framework provided by Kapferer. The present analysis indicates that branding and innovation processes are interrelated in more subtle and complex ways than indicated in prior research on the subject. It further shows that even with well-organized marketing departments, consistent branding strategies and skilled project managers, the product development process is not easily managed. The brand and the branding strategies are non-human actors among other actors in the process, and it requires skill, persistence and energy if the 'brand' wants to become an influential 'actor'. Sometimes, the processes may even be reversed.

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