

# **The Three B's of Branding: Applying the Brand Evolution Process in Marketing Classes**

**Darrin Duber-Smith**  
**Metropolitan State University of Denver**

**April Schofield**  
**Metropolitan State University of Denver**

**Biff Baker**  
**Metropolitan State University of Denver**

*This paper explores the concept of branding and introduces the Brand Evolution Process (BEP) as a comprehensive framework for marketing education. Branding, a pivotal aspect of marketing, has evolved over time and remains critical in today's dynamic business environment. The BEP consists of three stages: Brand Development, Brand Management, and Brand Optimization. It offers a structured approach to understanding how brands are created, managed, and adapted over time. The study emphasizes the importance of brand evolution in marketing and education. Brand Development involves defining the brand's identity, attributes, and positioning, while Brand Management focuses on maintaining and leveraging brand equity. Brand Optimization examines strategies like extensions and repositioning. By organizing these concepts into a cohesive framework, the BEP serves as a valuable tool for marketing educators. Future research may measure the effects of incorporating the BEP into the curriculum and its alignment with employer expectations. This paper underscores the holistic nature of branding and its significance in contemporary marketing education, providing a foundation for the development of future brand managers.*

*Keywords: branding, brand evolution process, marketing education, brand development, brand management, brand optimization, brand equity, curriculum development, brand identity, brand strategy*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Branding, like many other marketing concepts, has evolved over time. Kotler et al. (1991, p. 443) define a brand as “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors”. The concept grew out of the cattle industry in the Old West, as branding one ranch's cows from another ranch's cows was an absolute necessity, especially during the “open range” period before fences were erected to prevent such mixing from occurring. The only way to distinguish your cows from those belonging to other ranchers was by looking at the ranch logo, a visual representation of a particular ranch's product

offering. A brand differentiated your cattle from all of the others on the range; even if the cattle all looked the same. Similarly, for marketers, the distinguishing name or elements can be used to differentiate one product group from all the others. These days, marketers have much more at their disposal than a simple design consisting of intersecting and/or parallel lines. Although the concept of branding has existed for generations, branding methods certainly have changed (Duber-Smith, 2017, p.72).

The objective of this paper is threefold. First, it seeks to underscore the significance of existing research in the domain of branding. Second, it aims to expound upon the pivotal role of brand evolution as an indispensable element within the broader spectrum of marketing strategy. Third, it endeavors to introduce the Brand Evolution Process (BEP), comprising three discernible phases, which serve as a comprehensive conceptual framework for the enhancement of brand strategy. The BEP, in essence, consolidates a wealth of knowledge derived from branding research, making it a valuable resource for instructing marketing courses.

This research is inherently characterized by its dual nature, encompassing both conceptual and exploratory qualitative research paradigms. The ensuing paragraphs delve into an elucidation of core branding concepts, the intricate workings of the Brand Evolution Process (BEP), and its practical application within the realm of marketing education. The primary focus remains directed toward the development of an overarching conceptual framework and the attainment of a profound comprehension of the brand evolution process, devoid of empirical inquiry or experimental endeavors. These narratives are dedicated to offering invaluable insights, definitions, and elucidations, enriching the comprehension of pertinent subjects within the domains of marketing and education. These attributes are congruent with the fundamental characteristics that underpin conceptual and exploratory qualitative research methodologies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of academic literature reveals a few cornerstones. First, brand management is increasingly seen as a key strategic issue. Kotler and Armstrong (2010) note that "...the most distinctive skill of marketers is their ability to build and manage brands." A brand has become the primary battleground in determining a firm's success, regardless of its size or industry (Crescitelli & Figueiredo, 2009, p. 102). For many organizations, brand and image are equally (if not more) important than the product itself (Pinar et al., 2011, p. 724). When the average American consumer is exposed to countless messages a day, brand management is more critical than ever.

There is much academic literature to support the notion that brands are valuable assets for businesses. As early as 1960, branding became a topic of concern for automobile manufacturers; Detroit was almost frantic in its desire to have a brand for everybody (Holloway, 1961). Since then, branding has moved from an occasional dalliance to a major focus for both businesses and society (Swaminathan, et.al., 2020). Keller wrote that "one of the most popular and potentially important marketing topics to arise in recent years has been the concept of brand equity and the important intangible value that brands bring to organizations" (2009, p. 140). This is because brands outlast the company's products, services, and facilities (Pinar et al., 2011, p. 724). The corporate brand defines the business (Rindell & Strandvik, 2010, p. 278), and represents the essence of the company (Pinar et al., 2010). Additionally, brands serve valuable functions for other stakeholders such as investors, manufacturers, resellers, and consumers (Crescitelli & Figueiredo, 2009, p. 102). Internal branding aligns employees with the brand's values and promise, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment, ultimately contributing to the cultivation and preservation of a company's brand equity as a distinctive intangible asset inaccessible to competitors (John, et.al. 2019). Brands add value to each of these groups in a different way, but above all, a brand functions as a powerful differentiator and as a decision-making tool (Keller, 1993).

A broad consensus also exists regarding the current business environment and the need for companies to frequently change and adjust their corporate identity and image. There is a growing body of research that looks at the history of an organization as well, for instance, Regany (2020) focused on how different types of memories are constructed by various actors engaged in the brand heritage-building process. Heritage brands are defined as dimensions of brand identity rooted in track records, longevity, core values, and

organizational beliefs in the importance of their history. Cultural branding scholars emphasize the evolving and collective interpretation of brands as historical artifacts over time. The crafting of historical narratives is an aspect of how audiences perceive and interpret brand messages, as these narratives are inherently subjective, and may contain plots, heroes, and conclusions that shape audience understanding (Regany, et.al., 2020).

The present environment is dynamic, and characterized by often unexpected, rapid changes and stakeholder empowerment due to new technology (Rindell & Strandvik, 2010; Swaminathan, et.al., 2020). The marketing communications environment has undergone tremendous change because of how technology has affected the way the world interacts and communicates.

The customer is increasingly in control, and as a result, traditional branding approaches that emphasize mass media techniques may no longer be as applicable (Keller, 2009, p. 139). The new dynamic between organizations and consumers is very different from traditional processes. Rindell & Strandvik suggest that the key to a dynamic branding strategy is to learn from the ongoing process by recognizing the unrealized strategy and emerging elements and that a corporate branding strategy should look more like a pattern than a plan (2010, p. 282). In addition, advancements in technology, particularly the proliferation of information access and communication, necessitate a critical reevaluation of established brand conceptions. The exponential growth in information availability and its rapid dissemination through accessible and affordable technological interfaces challenges the foundational tenets of traditional marketing perspectives. In an era characterized by abundant and swift information accessibility, the conventional role of brands as primary quality indicators is brought into question. Low search costs and reduced information asymmetry, enabled by widespread stakeholder sharing of brand-related opinions across interconnected networks, shift the dynamics of brand perception. With information readily accessible, consumers now expend less effort on internalizing brand knowledge (Swaminathan, et.al., 2020).

## **BRANDING IN MARKETING EDUCATION**

Most undergraduate marketing degree programs do not require a class in branding; courses such as Brand Strategy and Brand Management are often offered as elective options. If students do not enroll in such electives, much of their educational exposure to branding occurs in an 'Introduction to Principles of Marketing' class. Often, the material consists of a jumble of definitions related to the branding process; processes akin to the 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) that represent the traditional marketing mix, do not exist for branding. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the importance of branding for marketing students. In fact, the branding section of a commonly required Principles of Marketing book begins by stating that "A company lives or dies based on brand awareness" (Grewal & Levy, 2017, p. 229). Brand awareness describes the strength of brands' presence in consumers' memory (Keller, 1993). Despite the lack of emphasis in some marketing degree programs, consumers simply cannot purchase products from brands they don't know exist.

Consumer perceptions of brands hold a central position in brand research, exerting an influential impact on consumer purchase intentions and, consequently, shaping a brand's financial performance. Notably, brand equity stands as a valuable facet of a company's economic competencies and intangible assets. The evolving consumer landscape necessitates a reevaluation of the facets comprising brand equity. Foremost among these facets is brand loyalty and brand relationships in consumer evaluations. Empirical findings also indicate that brand users prioritize quality attributes in their brand assessments, concurrently emphasizing the importance of connectedness and familiarity with a brand (Ruzzier, et.al., 2022).

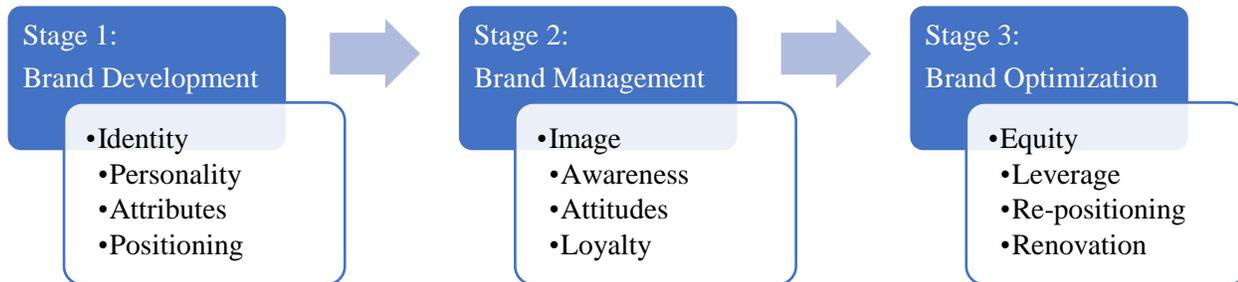
Branding is far more than simply generating awareness, and marketing educators must also focus on the evolving, dynamic nature of brands. Reibstein, et.al., noted that "there is an alarming and growing gap between the interests, standards, and priorities of academic marketers and the needs of marketing executives operating in an ambiguous, uncertain, fast-changing, and complex market space" (2009, p. 1). Brands in the real world are not static, and marketing educators should not teach them as such. The lack of time and opportunity available to marketing educators to teach branding calls for a succinct, organized approach; hence, a comprehensive, cohesive process that emphasizes brand evolution is needed. We will attempt to

answer the following research question: *How can we enhance marketing instruction with a comprehensive, cohesive process?*

**The Brand Evolution Process**

The Brand Evolution Process (BEP) is a practical tool for marketing educators that categorizes branding concepts while emphasizing the importance of brand evolution. The process is illustrated to represent the three stages of Brand Development, Brand Management, and Brand Optimization shown in Figure 1.

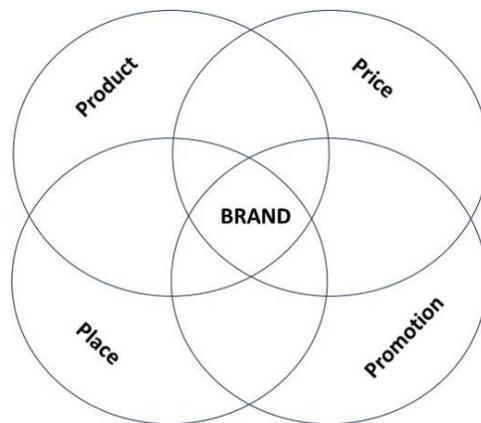
**FIGURE 1  
THE BRAND EVOLUTION PROCESS**



**Stage One: Brand Development**

The brand strategy should stem from the company’s mission statement, which ideally should tell much about the organization’s purpose and scope, and as such provide a foundation for a company’s brand strategy as well as product, price, place (distribution), and promotional strategies. The brand evolution process starts with a clear understanding of what the brand is to represent and how it should be positioned with respect to customers (Keller, 2009, p. 139). Ideally, an organization’s initial marketing mix should be developed at the same time as the brand strategy, with the brand as the foundation (Figure 2). Traditional branding processes viewed brands as an addition to the product, or an identifier, which was one of the last marketing decisions to be made. However, the current environment requires a more holistic approach that focuses more on the brand, which includes much more than just the product. “The brand is considered to be the sum of all elements of the marketing mix; the product is just one element, alongside price, promotion, and distribution” (Ambler & Styles, 1997, p. 10).

**FIGURE 2  
BRAND FOUNDATION OF THE 4PS**



Brand Development begins with establishing a distinct brand identity for the types of products that marketers wish to promote. The individual brand components (such as attributes, names, symbols, colors, fonts, slogans, designs, stories, etc.) are “brand identities” and their totality “the brand” (Keller, 1993, p. 2). Perhaps it is best to think of brand identity in personified terms. People have distinctive personalities and so too should the brands that target them. Such personality attributes help a brand achieve sustainable differentiation as they are more difficult to copy than functional product features (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 5). Prior to establishing the brand personality, marketers must first thoroughly understand the nature of their customers, competitors, and environment. Simply being natural or effective is no longer enough in this hyper-competitive era of branding.

Establishing brand attributes, with a focus on one or two key benefits in an effort to position the brand in the mind of the consumer. Quality, value, performance, ease of use, image, efficacy, service, and convenience are just a few of the many options available to the savvy marketer (Duber-Smith, 2017, p. 72). Of course, the more differentiation a marketer can achieve from competitive offerings and substitute products when engaging in brand positioning—the better. Positioning actively communicates the brand’s identity to the target market. The goal of positioning is to create the perception of a brand in the customer’s mind and achieve differentiation, so it stands apart from competitors’ brands/offerings and that it meets the consumer’s needs/expectations (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 6).

In this hyper-competitive global environment, brand differentiation is becoming an increasingly difficult task, but marketers must nonetheless strive to distinguish themselves in a positive way. If consumers are making purchase decisions between products and services, brands are of critical importance to an organization. When the brand faces aggressive competition in the marketplace, the brand development elements identified (personality, attributes, and positioning) will help distinguish the brand from competing offerings.

- *Personality*: A product or service “personality” refers to the human-like qualities and traits attributed to a brand, product, or service. It involves defining the brand’s character using descriptive adjectives like “fun,” “friendly,” or “innovative.” This personality guides the brand’s communication, visual identity, and values, aiming to connect with consumers on an emotional level. It plays a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions, influencing purchase decisions, and fostering brand loyalty.
- *Attributes*: Attributes refer to the specific characteristics or features of a product or service that can be used to describe and differentiate it from others in the same category. These attributes can include both tangible qualities, such as size, color, design, and performance specifications, as well as intangible qualities like the brand’s reputation, customer service, or the overall experience associated with the product or service. Attributes play a crucial role in how consumers evaluate and make choices among various products or services in the market.
- *Positioning*: Positioning in marketing is how a brand shows its products to stand out from rivals. It builds a unique and appealing brand image for consumers. Effective positioning matches the brand with customer preferences by understanding their needs. It creates a distinct brand identity, making it the go-to solution for consumers, fostering loyalty, and boosting sales.

### *Teaching Brand Development*

Teaching the concepts of brand development, personality, attributes, and positioning in marketing effectively requires a well-thought-out approach. We suggest the following strategies to convey these concepts to students:

- *Active Learning and Real-World Examples*: Incorporate real-world examples and case studies to illustrate these concepts. Discuss well-known brands and their strategies. Encourage students to analyze and present their findings on how these brands have used brand development, personality, attributes, and positioning effectively.

- *Interactive Discussions*: Encourage active class discussions and debates on these topics. Invite students to share their perspectives and insights on how they perceive brand personality and attributes in the brands they encounter daily.
- *Visual Aids*: Use visual aids like diagrams, charts, and infographics to visually represent the concepts. Visual aids can help students grasp complex ideas more easily.
- *Practical Exercises*: Assign practical exercises, such as developing brand profiles, positioning statements, or conducting brand audits for real or hypothetical companies. This hands-on experience can help students apply the concepts in a practical context.
- *Guest Speakers*: If possible, invite guest speakers from the marketing industry to share their experiences and insights on how these concepts are applied in real marketing campaigns.
- *Group Projects*: Assign group projects where students work together to create a brand strategy for a fictitious company. This allows them to apply the concepts collaboratively and gain practical experience.
- *Role-Playing and Simulations*: Use role-playing exercises or marketing simulations that involve creating and implementing brand strategies. Simulations can be an engaging way to simulate real-world marketing scenarios.
- *Readings and Research*: Assign readings from academic sources and industry publications to help students understand the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts. Encourage students to conduct independent research on recent developments in brand strategy.
- *Feedback and Evaluation*: Provide constructive feedback on assignments and class discussions. Encourage self-reflection and peer feedback to improve understanding and critical thinking.
- *Assessment*: Design assessments, such as quizzes, exams, or presentations, that evaluate students' comprehension and application of these concepts. Assessment is crucial for reinforcing learning.
- *Technology Integration*: Utilize technology, including marketing software and tools, to teach practical aspects of brand development and positioning. Many digital tools can help students understand market research, branding, and positioning.
- *Industry Trends*: Keep the curriculum updated with the latest industry trends and changes in consumer behavior. This will help students stay current in a constantly evolving field.

A combination of these teaching strategies, tailored to the specific needs of marketing students, can be the most effective way to convey these marketing concepts successfully. Furthermore, staying current with the latest marketing trends and technologies is essential to provide students with up-to-date knowledge and skills.

## **Stage Two: Brand Management**

Once an appropriate identity for the products has been developed, the marketer moves to the BEP's Brand Management phase. Why is this a distinct stage? Brand management is increasingly seen as a strategic key issue (Duber-Smith, 2017). Identity is what a marketer thinks of the product, whereas brand image is the customer's perception of the brand (which of course, is partially shaped by the marketer through the positioning). The brand image should match the intended identity, and marketers spend countless hours as well as a great deal of treasure conducting focus groups and fielding surveys to assess and minimize any gaps between identity and image.

Marketers should set and expect to meet certain objectives, such as the level of brand awareness among certain segments of the population as well as the intended brand attitudes that marketers expect consumers to develop over time. Establishing brand awareness and attitudes requires an elevated level of marketing spending, and changing attitudes can be rather difficult, time-consuming, and often very frustrating. Nonetheless, it is a very necessary thing to do (Duber-Smith, 2017).

After attaining the requisite level of brand awareness and fostering the desired consumer attitudes, marketers persistently engage in reinforcing the brand's messaging through diverse promotional avenues, encompassing advertising, public relations, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, social

media, and additional mechanisms. The predominant objective in this phase pertains to the cultivation of brand loyalty within a sufficiently extensive consumer base, characterized by their amenability to management and proclivity to disseminate favorable word-of-mouth recommendations, particularly when they wield influence as opinion influencers.

Brand trust leads to repeat purchases and recommendations to future customers (Molinillo et al., 2019). Trust is essential for fostering loyalty and repeat purchases, primarily stemming from satisfied customers. In addition to satisfaction, brand management, particularly through the incorporation of personality attributes, has the potential to engender trust. In situations where communication and brand management emphasize story building, story doing, and storytelling, the reinforcement of personality traits that resonate with customers can cultivate trust and loyalty (Villagra, 2021). Brand loyalty reflects a consumer's favorable attitude toward a brand resulting in consistent purchases over time. Strong brand loyalty affords an organization the potential to charge premium prices, and considerable brand power to support new product and service launches (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 4). From this loyalty, a marketer builds and maintains brand equity, both in the real financial sense as well as the psychological one. Ideally, awareness leads to usage; usage leads to loyalty; and loyalty leads to equity (equity is managed in Stage Three).

Indeed, maintaining a robust market presence in the face of changing conditions requires continuous monitoring of the external business environment (both opportunities and threats as described below) in addition to continuous investment in promotion. An average marketing budget is about 10% of expected revenue, depending on the product category and the stage of the product's life cycle (Duber-Smith, 2017, p. 72). Products in the introduction or high growth stages of the life cycle usually require more investment than those in maturity or decline stages when revenue growth slows and eventually declines. A marketer's job is never finished, and branding is not for the faint of heart (Duber-Smith, 2017, p. 72).

### *Teaching Brand Management*

To teach the various aspects of brand management effectively, instructors can use a combination of teaching methods and resources. Incorporating practical exercises, discussions, group projects, and real-world examples will help students understand the complexities of brand management and apply these concepts in their future careers. Here are a few suggestions for instruction:

- *Brand Strategy*: Use real-world case studies to illustrate how different brands have developed their strategies, including defining objectives, target audience, and market positioning. Encourage students to create their own brand strategy for a hypothetical product or service.
- *Brand Identity*: Show examples of iconic logos, slogans, and brand guidelines, and discuss how these elements contribute to brand recognition. Have students analyze and critique existing brand identities and create their own brand identity components.
- *Brand Communication*: Provide examples of successful and unsuccessful advertising and marketing campaigns. Assign students to evaluate and create marketing strategies for different brands or products.
- *Brand Equity*: Discuss the concept of brand equity and its importance. Analyze brands that have successfully increased their brand equity over time. Ask students to identify strategies for enhancing brand equity for specific brands.
- *Brand Awareness*: Explore the role of advertising and promotional activities in creating brand awareness. Have students design advertising campaigns to increase brand awareness for lesser-known brands.
- *Brand Loyalty*: Analyze customer loyalty programs and their impact on brand loyalty. Assign projects where students develop loyalty-building strategies for existing brands.
- *Brand Extension*: Present examples of brand extensions that succeeded or failed. Encourage students to brainstorm potential brand extension opportunities for well-known brands.
- *Crisis Management*: Use real-life case studies of brands facing crises and discuss their crisis management strategies. Ask students to create crisis management plans for hypothetical brand crises.

- *Market Research*: Teach students how to conduct market research, including surveys, focus groups, and data analysis. Assign projects where students gather and analyze market research data to make informed brand management decisions.
- *Digital Brand Management*: Explore the importance of a strong online presence. Have students analyze the social media strategies of various brands and create digital marketing plans for specific brands.

Of significance, incorporating SWOT analysis into the brand management curriculum is invaluable for students. SWOT, which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, is a strategic framework aiding students in the assessment of both internal and external factors influencing a brand. Its integration into brand management education can occur through several means: real brand case studies allow students to see SWOT's application in assessing a brand's market standing, conducting group exercises where students perform SWOT analyses on various brands fosters critical thinking, and asking students to choose a brand for analysis as a project or assignment encourages them to present findings and recommendations. Additionally, students can explore the competitive aspect of SWOT analysis by comparing the profiles of different brands within the same industry, and its integration into other brand management areas, such as strategy development, marketing campaigns, and crisis management, further enriching their educational experience. This incorporation enables students to develop a structured approach to brand evaluation and strategy development, prompting critical reflection on a brand's market position and areas for enhancement and growth.

### **Stage Three: Brand Optimization**

Brand Optimization involves continuously adapting and improving a brand to remain competitive in a dynamic market. As competition gets more intense, managers face challenges in adjusting their brands to the changed expectations of their customers (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 7). In dynamic markets, brands must continually change and adjust their brands to remain relevant and competitive. In this stage, equity is leveraged through brand extensions, co-branding, and repositioning to maintain brand relevance and maximize value.

Branding enables the process of transforming functional assets into relationship assets (Ghodeswar, 2008); this means that branding allows a company to turn its practical, tangible assets (like products) into valuable assets based on the relationships and connections it builds with customers, which can be more enduring and valuable than the products themselves. Brand equity is a key strategic resource that can either sustain (or weaken) competitive positions or value versus devalue the firm (Crescitelli & Figueiredo, 2009, p. 104). Elevated levels of brand equity within the natural products industry have led to hundreds of billions of dollars in acquisitions over the years (Duber-Smith, 2017, p. 72). Burt's Bees, Tom's of Maine, and most recently Whole Foods Markets are high-profile examples of positive brand equity; they are well-known examples of brands that have a strong, positive reputation and value among consumers. Their brand equity is high because they are widely recognized and trusted for their quality, values, and other positive attributes.

### *Negative Brand Equity*

Negative brand equity occurs when a brand has an adverse effect on positioning; it means that the brand has developed a negative image or perception in the minds of consumers, which can harm its position in the market and the way it is perceived. This typically happens when a brand faces controversies, scandals, or other issues that damage its reputation. Negative brand equity can affect consumer trust, loyalty, and willingness to engage with the brand, ultimately impacting its financial performance.

- Papa John's Pizza encountered a situation of unfavorable brand equity consequent to a widely publicized controversy involving its founder and former CEO, John Schnatter, who was reported to have made inappropriate remarks, including the use of offensive language. These events had a significantly adverse impact on the brand's reputation, leading to negative perceptions among consumers. The public began to associate the brand with these controversies, resulting in a noticeable decline in sales and the tarnishing of the brand's image (Rushe, 2018).

- Similarly, British Petroleum (BP) faced a substantial decline in brand equity following incidents of oil spills that caused significant environmental damage (EPA, 2010). These events damaged the brand’s reputation and its standing among consumers.

Similarly, the halo effect, in general, is a cognitive bias where one’s overall impression of a person, brand, product, or company influences their feelings and thoughts about that entity’s character or properties. In the context of a *negative halo effect*, it means that a single negative experience or perception of a brand can have an undue influence on how consumers view the brand’s other attributes. E.g. if a restaurant chain is involved in a food safety scandal, consumers may subsequently view all aspects of the restaurant’s offerings in a negative light.

- Chipotle experienced negativity following an outbreak of E. coli in its restaurants. This outbreak originated in the Pacific Northwest, and then rapidly expanded to affect individuals in several states (Choi, 2015; CDC, 2015; Schmidt, 2023). This situation led to unfavorable perceptions of the brand and its offerings.
- Training materials obtained from a whistleblower at Coca-Cola announced a course on whiteness, white fragility, and racial justice. The Coca-Cola Company faced major backlash after promoting anti-white rhetoric during the training, including demands that employees “try to be less white” and “be less oppressive,” “listen,” “believe” and “break with white solidarity.” There were subsequent calls to boycott the soda giant (WION, 2021; Eustachewich, 2021; Baker, 2022).

Companies employ different strategies in leveraging their brands namely through line extensions, brand extensions, ingredient branding, and co-branding (Ghodeswar, 2008, p. 7). Regardless of the strategy employed, all brands need to be revitalized on a regular basis in order for them to be kept fresh, vital, and relevant to the contemporary market (Merrilees, 2005, p. 201). Even when a brand has a tremendous amount of equity, such as Nike or Apple, marketers continue to grow and leverage the brand by offering new, complementary products as brand or line extensions. Based on the life cycle, older goods and services enter the decline phase and are eventually deleted, and marketers endeavor to migrate consumers to newer products.

### *Brand Extensions*

The decision to launch a brand extension can have both risks and rewards. Great care must be taken during brand leveraging to avoid any dilution of the brand by offering products that simply don’t fit. Eggo, maker of waffles and pancakes, finally introduced a syrup after decades of ceding the category to Log Cabin and Aunt Jemima among others – that brand extension made plenty of sense. Harley-Davidson leverages its brand through T-shirts, leather jackets, gloves, and other biker necessities. The motorcycle company has such a cult-like following that Harley owners even get tattoos of the company logo. But when Harley introduced perfume and cologne into their showrooms, the products tanked. Such an extension didn’t resonate with the “tough” brand identity, and as such, it was considered a brand dilution (Rafferty, 2017; Pallister, 2023). Proper brand leveraging is a critical component of the BEP.

### *Brand Re-positioning*

When factors such as competition, the economic environment, social trends, or the legal and regulatory environment change dramatically, it may be necessary to find a new position in the market. Brand re-positioning may involve changing certain brand attributes, focusing on different existing brand attributes, or changing the target market, among many other major strategy considerations (Duber-Smith, 2017, p. 72). This strategy aims to create a new and improved image for the brand, making it more appealing to consumers. If a major competitor enters the market at a lower price a marketer might want to shift focus from value to quality; this is a very simplistic example, but it should serve to illustrate the point.

However, re-positioning is an extreme measure and might not be necessary for many products. Whether or not a marketer decides to re-position a brand, changes to the brand are a necessary part of its evolution, what is what we call brand maintenance in the BEP. Brand “tweak”, “facelift”, and “makeover” are terms to describe various levels of re-positioning.

- *Brand Tweak.* A brand tweak is a relatively minor adjustment that casual users might not even notice. It involves making subtle changes to brand attributes to align with current market trends, consumer preferences, or strategic goals. A tweak refreshes the brand without undergoing significant transformation. Collegiate and professional sports teams routinely tweak their respective brands every so often. Such a move helps the brand stay contemporary and spikes merchandise sales (Duber-Smith, 2017, p. 72). Consider how many times Starbucks has tweaked its logo over the years, having evolved from a naked mermaid to a logo that doesn't even have the word "Starbucks" in it. The signature green color, however, has remained unchanged over the decades (Holden, 2018). The removal of the brand name from the logo in the Starbucks example is a bit too drastic to be considered a tweak, and so another term that has been used over the years, one that involves more major alterations, is a facelift.
- *Brand Facelift.* A brand facelift is a more substantial update to a brand's identity. It involves refreshing the brand's visual elements and messaging to a noticeable extent, while still retaining the core recognition of the brand. Pepsi has undergone multiple brand facelifts in its 125-year history, including a new logo rolled out in North America in 2023 and globally in 2024. The logo includes an updated color palette that draws attention to Pepsi's Zero Sugar line - a key part of the company's growth plan (Pepsi, 2023).
- *Brand Makeover.* A brand makeover is a comprehensive and drastic transformation of a brand's identity, including visual elements, messaging, and often core values and business strategy. Such a move might even involve a name change. It's a drastic measure, but a complete brand makeover can be necessary if there has been an inadequate level of equity built up over time, and the marketers want to start from scratch. Apple underwent a brand makeover in the late 1990s under the leadership of Steve Jobs. The makeover involved a complete rethinking of the company's strategy, product offerings, design, messaging, and customer experience, resulting in a substantial shift in the brand's identity and perception in the market (Boardman, 2014).

Teaching students about brand re-positioning is crucial in marketing education, and here are some effective strategies and approaches for each aspect of the process:

- *Change in Brand Perception:*
  - Use Case Studies: Present real-world examples of successful brand re-positioning to illustrate how a brand shifted from one position to another. Discuss the challenges and outcomes.
  - Group Discussions: Encourage students to analyze and discuss brands that have undergone re-positioning and evaluate how these changes affected consumer perception.
- *Reasons for Re-Positioning:*
  - Scenario Analysis: Provide scenarios that simulate changes in the market, consumer preferences, or competitive pressures. Have students brainstorm reasons for re-positioning based on these scenarios.
  - Guest Speakers: Invite marketing professionals who have experienced brand re-positioning in their careers to share their insights and reasons for undertaking such strategies.
- *Market Research:*
  - Practical Projects: Assign students a re-positioning project where they conduct market research, including surveys, focus groups, and data analysis to identify market trends and consumer preferences.
  - Use Real Data: Share real market research data with students and ask them to draw conclusions about the need for re-positioning based on the data.

- *Re-defining Brand Attributes:*
  - Role-Playing: Have students simulate a marketing team meeting where they discuss and debate changes in product features, pricing, messaging, and personality attributes for a brand undergoing re-positioning.
  - Brand Attribute Audit: Assign students the task of auditing and evaluating a brand’s existing attributes and proposing changes to align with the new positioning.
- *Re-branding:*
  - Brand Audit: Show before-and-after examples of brand logos, slogans, and packaging to highlight the visual identity changes during re-branding. Discuss the reasons behind these changes.
  - Design Projects: Challenge students to redesign the visual identity of a well-known brand to reflect a new positioning strategy.
- *Marketing Campaigns:*
  - Case Analysis: Examine marketing campaigns from brands that have undergone re-positioning. Discuss the messaging, channels used, and the effectiveness of these campaigns.
  - Create Campaigns: Ask students to develop their re-positioning marketing campaigns for a brand, including messaging, advertising materials, and strategies.
- *Consistency:*
  - Role of Brand Guardians: Explain the role of brand guardians and how they ensure consistency in delivering the brand promise. Discuss real-world examples where consistency was maintained or lost.
  - Brand Experience Analysis: Explore how customer experiences align with the re-positioned brand and why consistency is essential in maintaining trust.

These teaching strategies provide a comprehensive approach to understanding brand re-positioning, from the initial reasons and research to the practical aspects of implementation. Encouraging critical thinking, analysis of real cases, and hands-on projects will help students grasp the complexity of brand re-positioning in the dynamic field of marketing.

## CONCLUSION

The innovative feature of the Brand Evolution Process (BEP) lies in its systematic organization of preexisting constructs into a cohesive framework tailored for educational purposes. A historical parallel can be drawn to McCarthy’s (1960) introduction of the 4Ps (product, price, place, and promotion) framework that functioned as a practical tool for translating abstract marketing concepts into actionable strategies. As observed by Goi (2009), the marketing mix, including the 4Ps, is more a conceptual framework than a scientific theory, delineating key managerial decisions in configuring product offerings to meet consumer needs. In a similar vein, the components of the BEP furnish marketing educators with a pragmatic resource. The BEP’s tripartite structure—comprising brand development, management, and optimization—offers a more concise pedagogical approach to impart fundamental branding principles.

Branding, as a holistic concept, hinges on the harmonious interplay of numerous variables, converging to establish a consistent and audience-appropriate appeal. A comprehensive grasp of the multifaceted elements across the developmental continuum empowers marketers to adeptly introduce products at apt price points to a receptive target audience. In the realm of consumer goods, this capacity holds unparalleled significance. Thus, we humbly proffer “*The 3B’s of Branding*,” illustrating the evolutionary progression of branding through distinct stages, each characterized by its own pivotal significance and unique contributions to brand strategy.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper presented a conceptual framework for brand evolution, specifically for use in marketing education. The next step is to measure and test the effects of incorporating the process into the curriculum. Subsequent research endeavors may involve the formulation of measurement scales designed to quantify student learning outcomes and their educational experiences, with a potential extension to assess the alignment of these outcomes with employer expectations. The outcomes of these empirical inquiries have the potential to facilitate the development of pedagogical curricula that are directly relevant to the requirements of aspiring brand managers in the professional sphere.

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