Twenty-Five Years of Brand New Thinking

Journal:	*Marketing Theory*
Manuscript ID	MT-25-0246.R1
Manuscript Type:	Commentary Article
Keywords:	brands, branding, critical marketing, cultural branding, consumer culture
Abstract:	Over its first quarter century, Marketing Theory has transformed how we think about brands, and what we think brands are. The journal began by rescuing branding from the clutches of managerial functionalism, reimagining it as a cultural phenomenon worth serious intellectual attention. What followed was a remarkable journey: from brands as symbols to brands as systems, from cultural codes to cultural infrastructures, from messages crafted in boardrooms to meanings negotiated in algorithm-mediated platforms. Along the way, the journal became a home for scholars who refused easy answers, who saw brands as sites of labour and resistance, governance and play, power and possibility. This commentary explores that intellectual adventure, highlighting the conceptual leaps and the scholars who made them, while mapping territory for future exploration. Marketing Theory's peculiar penchant, we suggest, lies in its restless curiosity and its refusal to let 'brand' mean just one thing. As branding continues to evolve, the journal's appetite for theoretical diversity suggests it's just getting started.

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Twenty-Five Years of Brand New Thinking

Abstract

Over its first quarter century, Marketing Theory *has transformed how we think about brands, and what we think brands are. The journal began by rescuing branding from the clutches of managerial functionalism, reimagining it as a cultural phenomenon worth serious intellectual attention. What followed was a remarkable journey: from brands as symbols to brands as systems, from cultural codes to cultural infrastructures, from messages crafted in boardrooms to meanings negotiated in algorithm-mediated platforms. Along the way, the journal became a home for scholars who refused easy answers, who saw brands as sites of labour and resistance, governance and play, power and possibility. This commentary explores that intellectual adventure, highlighting the conceptual leaps and the scholars who made them, while mapping territory for future exploration.* Marketing Theory's *peculiar penchant, we suggest, lies in its restless curiosity and its refusal to let 'brand' mean just one thing. As branding continues to evolve, the journal's appetite for theoretical diversity suggests it's just getting started.*

Keywords:

Brands, branding, Critical Marketing, Cultural Branding, Consumer Culture

The Cultural Turn in Branding Theory

Marketing Theory (MT) emerged in 2001 against a backdrop of disciplinary anxiety. As one of the founding editors, Dawn Burton (2005: 6) observed, marketing faced uncomfortable questions about its intellectual standing: "the lack of theory generation in marketing raises some uncomfortable issues for marketing academics. One is that marketing academics are intellectually incapable of generating theory". Whether or not this diagnosis was fair, it captured a real concern, that marketing scholarship at the time risked becoming derivative, atheoretical, and managerially subservient. Branding was a particularly telling case. Despite, or perhaps because of its commercial significance, branding research remained dominated by managerial frameworks focused on equity measurement and identity management. As Malmelin and Moisander (2014: 16) would later observe, there remained "…a need for more theoretical research on brands." *MT* was founded, in part, as a corrective to these limitations, to create space for more theoretically ambitious work, with branding emerging as a natural focal point. If any topic needed liberating from managerial orthodoxy, it was branding. One might say, with more than a little irony, that branding itself needed to be rebranded.

What unfolded over *MT's* first decade has come to be known as branding's cultural turn, a fundamental reorientation from managerial logic to cultural analysis. In the early 2000s, while much of the field treated brands as managerial assets to be measured and optimised in a purely pecuniary fashion (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991), *MT* flung open its metaphorical doors to scholars with different questions. What if brands weren't just communication tools but cultural texts? What if they revealed as much about power and ideology as about positioning and equity?

Of course, it should be said that while *MT* was very much in the mix of these conversations, it was never alone. The sprawl of such scholarship spanned many journals and disciplines. Throughout this commentary, we draw on both *MT* publications and the wider branding literature to situate the journal's contributions within the broader intellectual currents that shaped them. Part of what made branding such fertile territory was its unusual openness to multiple perspectives. Within marketing academia itself, branding attracted attention from scholars with radically different methodological preferences and theoretical commitments. Positivists measuring brand equity (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991), interpretivists exploring brand meanings (Holt, 2004), critical scholars exposing brand ideology (Arvidsson, 2006), semioticians decoding brand symbolism (Mick, 1986; Floch, 2001), consumer culture theorists studying brand communities (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009). Unlike topics that belong to particular methodological camps, branding seemed to invite commentary from everyone, regardless of their theoretical stance. This universal engagement made branding scholarship abundantly rich but also necessarily fragmented, lacking any settled methodological or theoretical core. What distinguished *MT*, however, was its sustained commitment to not privileging any one viewpoint. It was a broad church that welcomed all. You could be a stuffy traditionalist or an avant garde dilettante. It mattered not. Just so long as you had something novel to contribute. While many mainstream journals like to incrementally build an implacable body of knowledge, *MT*, while not immune to that tendency, generally prefers to cultivate what we might call productive chaos, the generative mess that happens when brilliant people with incompatible worldviews all care deeply about the same thing.

Positioning itself as a deliberately different voice from more positivist-inclined mainstream journals, *MT* became a gathering place for cultural, critical, and interpretive scholarship. Freed from the American 'job market paper' culture with its pressures toward methodological conservatism, it could afford to be intellectually bold. This enabled a wholesale shift from communication to culture. Brands could now be understood as historical constructs, ethical dilemmas, visual systems, and sites of labour (Schroeder, 2009; de Chernatony, 2009; Cova & Dalli, 2009). These perspectives, better yet, also connected to broader intellectual currents such as the cultural economy, the experience economy, and postmodern marketing, to name but a few, and thankfully, *MT* gave them all the attention and legitimacy they deserved. Branding, in short, had been recast. No longer something done just by marketing departments but something that happened out in the world, whether marketing departments liked it or not. It felt, at the time, like the field was finding its theoretical voice. What nobody quite anticipated was how far the questions would travel, from cultural meaning into labour politics, from human communities into algorithmic systems, from branding as something scholars studied to branding as something that studied them back. By the late 2000s, attention began to turn from applying new lenses to asking what held the object of study together. If brands could be analysed in so many different ways, what exactly counted as a brand? This question became increasingly difficult to avoid.

In Search of the Holy Grail

Leslie de Chernatony's (2009) short conceptual paper 'Towards the Holy Grail of Defining 'Brand'' marked a different kind of intervention. De Chernatony, a self-proclaimed philosopher of branding (it says so on his LinkedIn, that great cathedral of personal rebranding), revealed just

how futile the quest for a singular brand definition had become. The title alone signalled the problem: everyone was talking about brands, as though the concept itself were an apotheosis of some kind, but what exactly were they talking about? A logo? A promise? A relationship? An experience? De Chernatony explored an evolutionary spectrum from logo and functional differentiation through to personality, vision, and added value, showing that 'brand' had become a term with too many meanings and no settled definition. This definitional chaos, he suggested, wasn't a bug to be fixed but a feature to be understood. As John Sherry (2005: 41) similarly observed, branding had become "a holistic combination of marketers' intentions, consumers' interpretations, and numerous sociocultural networks' associations, a co-creation and co-production of stakeholders from start to finish." The brand, de Chernatony showed, could no longer be confined to a legal mark or managerial promise. Instead, it operates as a living constellation of values, emotions, and performances enacted by multiple actors. His argument that the 'mature' brand articulates a social vision, or moral promise, subtly shifted the conversation from 'what is a brand?' to 'what work does branding do?' That, arguably, was the real contribution: not another definition to add to the pile, but the liberating suggestion that the pile was precisely the point. By legitimising definitional plurality as something worth theorising rather than solving, de Chernatony opened space for interpretive scholars to work with branding's conceptual messiness rather than against it. And his recognition that brands are co-produced by multiple stakeholders raised an uncomfortable follow-up. Who exactly does the work of enacting brands, and under what conditions?

The Working Consumer

Bernard Cova and Daniele Dalli took up these questions with their 2009 paper, 'Working Consumers: The Next Step in Marketing Theory?'. The brazen title (softened only slightly by its question mark) signalled a decisive deepening of the critical turn. It was the kind of paper that makes half of your audience nod furiously in agreement while the other half shift in visible discomfort. Because what Cova and Dalli were really saying was that every time a consumer shares a post, joins a brand community, or evangelises a product to friends, they are working. Not metaphorically. Not in some abstract, Marxist-theoretical sense. Actually working, producing the symbolic and experiential value that firms then appropriate without so much as a thank-you note or a by your leave. Co-creation, it turned out, was a euphemism for unpaid work. And the discipline, up until that point at least, had swallowed it whole.

Little wonder then that this paper is so highly cited. Cova and Dalli further describe this as double exploitation whereby consumers perform unpaid creative and emotional labour, then pay to consume the brands enriched by their efforts. You build the brand, then you buy the brand. Consider LEGO Ideas, where fans design entire products, campaign for community votes, generate the social media buzz, and then queue up to purchase the sets they essentially created, all for a measly 1% royalty. It is what Varul (2018, p. 736) memorably calls the "expropriation of the brickolariat", a beautifully cynical arrangement, and one that most branding scholarship at the time had either missed or preferred not to see. After Cova and Dalli, it became harder to write about co-creation without asking who was getting paid. Community, participation, and the politics of cultural labour thus became the new focal points.

Co-Creation, Community and Value

The 'This Is Anfield' fan community showed branding theory what happens when you follow consumers into their own spaces. Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder's (2011) netnography of Liverpool FC fans revealed something that should have been obvious but that branding theory had largely overlooked: brand value gets co-created not just between firms and consumers, but among consumers themselves. In the online fan community they studied, meaning didn't flow downward from the club's marketing department. It moved sideways, through fans teaching newcomers the history, defending the brand against rivals, debating what counted as authentic support, and investing emotional labour that no one was paying them for. The club gave them a badge, an overpriced polyester shirt, and somewhere to stand in the rain. The fans, however, gave it soul. The chants, the terrace hymns passed down and reinvented season after season, the collective roar of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' that turns a football ground into something approaching a place of worship, none of which could ever be designed in a boardroom.

Read alongside Cova and Dalli's critique, this work captured the fundamental ambivalence of participatory branding: consumers were both empowered creators and unpaid labourers, often at the same time. After all, as Barbara Stern reminds us, a brand is a product or service with a story attached (Stern, 2006), and what these papers revealed was who was actually doing the storytelling. It wasn't the brand managers. It was the fans arguing at two in the morning about whether a new signing honoured the club's identity. The conversation was gaining momentum, and MT was where it was happening. In the same volume, Cova, Dalli and Zwick (2011) gathered scholars who challenged the celebratory language of co-creation head-on, asking what happens when participation becomes labour and empowerment becomes exploitation. These studies prefigured today's debates about affective labour, influencer culture, and digital fandom, while remaining grounded in a nuanced appreciation of the social life of brands. As this cultural turn gained momentum, *MT* also became a space to theorise branding's organisational and strategic dimensions, extending meaning-making into questions of governance and capability.

Strategic and Organisational Branding

Laurent Muzellec and Mary Lambkin's (2009) work on corporate branding made a deceptively simple point: brand portfolios aren't simply collections of products. They're organising systems. How a corporation structures its brands reveals how it coordinates identities, markets, and stakeholder relationships. Is the corporate brand visible or hidden? Do product brands stand alone or cluster under a master brand? These architectural choices shape organisational coherence and control, determining how meaning flows from corporate to business to product levels.

Rod Brodie, Maureen Benson-Rea and Chris Medlin (2017) pushed this thinking further. For them, branding is a dynamic capability, something organisations get better at over time. Brands that generate competitive advantage do so because they learn, adapt, and coordinate value

creation across networks. Branding becomes less about fixed identity and more about the ongoing work of integrating meaning and relationships. These scholars formalised branding's organisational and strategic dimensions. But the next set of papers unsettled them, asking uncomfortable questions about resistance, critique, and who branding really serves.

Branding as Resistance and Reflexivity

Umit Küçük's (2015) work on consumer-generated antibranding showed what happens when people push back. Through his analysis of digital 'subvertisements,' Küçük demonstrated how consumers use parody, irony, and what he called 'semiotic disobedience' to expose the gap between brand promises and brand realities. Think of the Greenpeace parodies of Shell's Arctic drilling campaigns, or the countless reworkings of fast food logos that circulate on social media. This isn't vandalism. It's creative production that reveals how branding itself is a cultural conversation, not a one-way broadcast. Brands speak, but consumers talk back. And to talk back effectively, they must first have learned the language. The subvertiser who reworks a Shell logo demonstrates a reflexive understanding of how brand meaning is constructed. As Marion (2006: 258) observed in *MT*, "the increasing literacy of how branding operates produces reflexivity that challenges the conventional branding techniques which gradually lose their efficacy." By exercising their branding literacy, consumers are revealing that they understand branding better than branding would like, and that understanding is itself a threat.

Taken together, these scholars revealed branding as something more complicated than either its champions or its critics had allowed. It is contested, ironic, shot through with struggle, but it is also a game that consumers play with their eyes wide open. *MT* became one of the first places willing to sit with that ambivalence, treating anti-branding not as consumer misbehaviour but as meaningful cultural production, and consumer reflexivity not as emancipation but as a more sophisticated form of entanglement. By exploring the moral and political dimensions of brand work, the journal helped establish the intellectual foundation for debates about authenticity, trust, and legitimacy that would intensify in the digital age. Then the ground shifted. As brands moved onto digital platforms, algorithms began mediating what brands meant and who got to see them. A somewhat daunting new paradigm was emerging.

From Digital to Algorithmic Branding

George Christodoulides (2009) saw it coming early. Writing when Facebook was still asking users to poke each other, he recognised that the now redundant term, Web 2.0, was doing something more fundamental than giving consumers a megaphone. It was dissolving the boundary between brand author and brand audience. Consumers weren't just receiving brand messages or even talking back; they were becoming brand hosts, co-creating meaning through participation and networked exchange in ways that made managerial control not just difficult but conceptually obsolete.

What Christodoulides sketched in outline, subsequent scholars filled in with unsettling detail. Obiegbu et al. (2020) reimagined brand loyalty as experiential and affective, rooted in emotion and embodied experience rather than the cognitive processing models that had dominated loyalty research. Then Obiegbu and Larsen (2024) pushed into new territory by theorising what happens when an algorithm mediates the brand relationship. Their work on personalisation reveals something counterintuitive: being 'known' by an algorithm can foster a kind of intimacy and attachment that feels remarkably like loyalty, even though no human relationship is involved. When the algorithm gets you right, recognition breeds trust – attachment, if that is the right word to a system incapable of attachment in return. When it gets you wrong, the misrecognition produces alienation. Brand loyalty, in this framing, is not declared so much as drifted into, each click shaping what appears next, each appearance gently confirming who you are.

Caliandro et al. (2024) provided the broader architecture for these insights by theorising platformisation itself, showing how platform logics now organise visibility, participation and the conditions under which brand value gets created and contested. Taken together, these scholars point toward a paradigm shift that *MT* is only beginning to reckon with: brands no longer just communicate or even co-create; they compute. What a brand comes to mean today depends as much on algorithms and data flows as on the intentions of the people behind it. And the uncomfortable truth is that we don't yet have adequate theoretical language for a world where brand power runs on code.

Over twenty-five years, *MT* has tracked branding as it became something stranger and more unwieldy than anyone expected, an apparatus that nobody fully controls. But intellectual journeys don't happen in the abstract. They happen because particular scholars ask particular questions. The following section highlights those whose work, we think at least, remains essential for anyone trying to understand what brands are and what they do.

Key Scholars to Think With

Rather than offer a comprehensive roll call – anyone who has ever tried to write one will understand why we have not done so – this section highlights key figures and intellectual clusters that have shaped how we understand branding in *MT*. Forgive us if we have excluded your work. We well know the travesty of having a highly relevant paper overlooked, but by necessity we have had to be highly selective.

The Visual Theorists

It is easy to forget, in a discipline seemingly obsessed with propositions and positioning, that brands arrive first as images. Before any message is decoded or any relationship formed, there is the swoosh, the semi-bitten apple, the golden arches, all visual encounters that get under your skin before you've had time to think. Jonathan Schroeder has done more than most to make this insight stick. From *The Cultural Codes of Branding* (2009) onward, Schroeder has repositioned

branding within the domains of representation, aesthetics, and cultural power, showing how brand images draw on conventions of art, fashion, and visual culture to organise meaning around gender, race, class, and beauty. His work provides both the vocabulary and the analytical tools for reading brands as visual economies, and with Buschgens (Schroeder and Buschgens, 2024) he has formalised this into an explicit methodology. The core insight is deceptively simple: brand images reflect culture and organise it, determining who is visible, who is idealised, and how value gets assigned through what we see.

MT has been a home for this kind of thinking from the beginning. Barbara Stern's intervention in the journal's first volume (Stern, Zinkhan and Jaju, 2001) insisted that marketing images demanded their own theoretical apparatus, not borrowed piecemeal from communication theory but built from sustained engagement with visual culture. Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) took the unusual step of making semiotics testable, developing a typology of visual rhetoric in advertising that showed how the more ambiguous and complex an image, the harder consumers work to make sense of it, and the more it stays with them when they do. Beyond the journal, Adam Arvidsson (2006) situated brand imagery within the political economy of media culture, Grant McCracken (2005) sketched the cultural transfer of meaning through advertising's visual grammar, and Liz Moor (2007) documented the institutional rise of branding as a visual practice. What these scholars seem to share is a conviction that images provide much more than the decorative veneer added to brands after the fact. Rather they are the substance of branding itself.

Schroeder can take some satisfaction in having helped build an analytical tradition whose moment may only now be arriving. The visual politics of branding have become vastly more complex than when he began writing. Brand images no longer simply circulate; they are algorithmically managed, filtered through platform logics that optimise for engagement over meaning, and placed in contexts no art director chose or intended. In February 2017, *The Times* revealed that ads for Mercedes-Benz, Waitrose, and Marie Curie were appearing alongside extremist content on YouTube, positioned there not by human decision but by an algorithm optimising for reach (Mostrous, 2017). More than 250 brands withdrew their advertising as a result. The episode showed how quickly a brand's visual meaning can shift when platforms, rather than creative teams, determine placement. In an algorithmic environment, questions of visibility become questions of power: who sees which brand image, in what context, and according to what computational logic? Schroeder's framework was built to interrogate precisely such dynamics, even if the infrastructure has changed beyond recognition. We may have learned to read what brand images say, but we have yet to theorise adequately who decides which images get seen.

The Labour Critics

We have already seen what Cova and Dalli argued. What matters here is where they took it. They perhaps represent *MT's* most enduring critical lineage, scholars who across multiple contributions kept asking the question that made everyone else uncomfortable. With Detlev Zwick, they followed the money, or rather the absence of it, showing how participation, affect, and creativity get quietly captured as labour within what they termed collaborative capitalism (Cova, Dalli & Zwick, 2011). Cova later pushed further still with Skålén and Pace, introducing

the concept of brand volunteering and revealing something faintly grotesque. Even the warmth consumers feel towards a brand, even their sense of belonging, gets put to work as a managerial resource (Cova, Skålén & Pace, 2015). The passion, the identity play, the late-night forum posts defending a brand against heretics. All of it, quietly and without acknowledgement, producing value for someone else. The consumers doing it rarely see it that way. If they did, they'd stop. And that is precisely why it works. To think with Cova and Dalli then is to stay permanently suspicious of any branding framework that talks about 'empowerment' without asking who profits.

The Organisational Architects

Some of the most useful branding work in *MT* does not look outward to consumers or culture at all. It looks inward, at the organisational machinery that makes brands hang together, or fall apart. Roderick Brodie, Maureen Benson-Rea, Christopher Medlin, Laurent Muzellec and Mary Lambkin are "architects" in this sense. They treat branding as something built, maintained, and revised through organisational design choices and coordinated practice, not just projected through communications. Brodie et al. (2017) give this an explicit conceptual form by framing branding as a dynamic capability: a socially complex accomplishment that integrates meaning with identification across networks of actors. The implication is quietly radical. Branding stops being a settled identity waiting to be expressed and becomes an organisational competence. Something you do well (or badly), something that improves (or decays), and something that depends on how effectively an organisation coordinates relationships and learning over time.

Muzellec and Lambkin (2009) approach from a different angle, brand architecture, but arrive at a complementary insight. Their deceptively practical question is this: when a corporation owns multiple brands, how should it arrange them? Should the corporate name sit visibly above everything, lending credibility and coherence? Or should product brands stand alone, free to develop their own identities and audiences? The question sounds practical, but it governs how far a brand's meaning can stretch before it snaps. Get the architecture wrong and you end up with brands that contradict each other, confuse stakeholders, or dilute the equity they're supposed to build. Read alongside Brodie et al. (2017), a picture emerges of branding as organisational craft, the ongoing, unglamorous work of keeping meaning aligned across markets, levels, and audiences without collapsing into incoherence. Granted, it is not the most glamorous corner of branding scholarship, but it may be among the most sincere and well meant. And as Yuen (2021: 58) reminds us, 'a consistent brand can be very dynamic and exciting. It does not have to say the same thing, in the same way, every time.' Think of Nike. An eighty-year-old man jogging across the Golden Gate Bridge. Michael Jordan suspended in mid-air with Spike Lee at his feet. Colin Kaepernick's face and the words 'Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.' Three decades with three completely different images. Nobody ever mistook any of them for another brand. The organisational architects then are the scholars who tried to explain how that trick is done, how a brand can be active and still hold. Though it should be said that consistency is not the only trick in the marketer's toolbox. Ashman, Brown and Patterson (2026) argue that some brands thrive not by resolving their contradictions but by leaning into them. Barbie, their primary exhibit, has been simultaneously adored and abhorred for decades, and its recent resurgence under Greta Gerwig suggests that character, even monstrous character, can matter

more than coherence. If the organisational architects show us how brands hold together, it's worth noting that some brands succeed precisely by threatening, at least, to fall apart.

The Platform Scholars

Every other cluster in this paper examines what humans do with brands, or what brands do to humans. The creative director crafts the message. The consumer resists, co-creates, or performs. The community sustains meaning through ritual and storytelling. Even the labour critics, for all their ambition, are first and foremost interested in human work. The platform scholars face a distinctly different problem. The infrastructure itself has become the object of critique (and no, we haven't forgotten that *MT* has a perfectly good non-representational tradition for thinking about non-human agency, but the platform scholars got there by building algorithms rather than reading Latour). Obiegbu and Larsen (2024) reveal how algorithmic personalisation produces effects, intimacy, alienation, attachment, that no human actor designed or intended. When the algorithm gets you right, when it shows you exactly the product or content that fits, the effect is a peculiar sense of being known by a system that has no capacity to know you. When it gets you wrong, the result is misrecognition that feels personal despite being nothing of the sort. Wei and Geiger (2025) push the argument further, theorising algorithms not as tools but as autonomous market devices that organise, prioritise, and rank without human intervention, turning platform markets into what they call, with perhaps forgivable militarism, *algorithmic battlefields*. Caliandro et al. (2024) provide the broader architecture by theorising platformisation itself, showing how platform logics now organise not just brand visibility but the conditions under which brand meaning gets made. The point they are collectively making, whether they put it this way or not, is that technology is no longer the backdrop to branding. It is part of the machinery. That is a harder theoretical problem than anything the cultural turn prepared us for, and *MT* has only begun to reckon with it.

The Ambiguity Theorists

If Google Scholar's tagline assertion, following Sir Isaac Newton, that 'we stand on the shoulders of giants' is true, then we must, whenever humanly possible, acknowledge our forerunners. On the ambiguity front, one such forerunner to whom many branding scholars must doff their cap is the inimitable Stephen Brown. For him, ambiguity is something of a signature move. In his titanic work on the, erm, Titanic, Brown and colleagues (2013) draw explicitly on William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* to argue that semantic instability isn't a problem brands must overcome but a condition upon which their mythic power depends. The unsinkable ship, they showed, endures precisely because its meanings remain productively unresolved. It is tragic and romantic, hubris and heroism, cautionary tale and aspirational spectacle, all at once.

This sensibility runs through the ambiguity theorists who followed. Küçük (2015), Loacker and Sullivan (2016), and O'Malley, Lichrou and Patterson (2025) draw attention to branding's reflexive, affective, and indeterminate dimensions, the aspects that resist tidy managerial control. Küçük's semiotic analysis of consumer-generated antibranding revealed how digital publics

recode and parody brand meanings through humour, irony, and visual play. Branding's semiotic power, he showed, depends as much on polysemic instability as on managerial intent. Loacker and Sullivan explored the liminality of branding work itself, showing how brand managers and creative professionals perform identity in unstable, morally ambivalent spaces between art, commerce, and self-expression. For them, branding is emotional and ethical navigation as much as strategy. O'Malley, Lichrou and Patterson's (2025, p. 283) study of the *Wild Atlantic Way* crystallises this sensibility by reframing ambiguity as productive rather than problematic. Their work examines a place brand "conjured out of nothing" by Fáilte Ireland - a 2,500-kilometre coastal route that existed only as an administrative fiction until it was narrated into being. The *Wild Atlantic Way* demonstrates how brands can function as open mythic resources, inviting multiple performances and interpretations that keep them culturally alive.

To think with these scholars is to embrace uncertainty, emotion, and play as central to branding's cultural vitality, to understand brands as living, negotiated adventures in meaning rather than controlled strategic assets. What these clusters show is MT's unusual ability to host genuine conversations across intellectual divides. Semioticians learned from organisational theorists. Labour critics engaged with platform scholars. The thinkers we've identified matter not just for what they wrote but for how their ideas keep sparking new work. Branding scholarship moves forward through productive disagreement, not neat resolution.

Topics and Questions for Further Understanding

So where does branding scholarship go from here? We don't have answers, and we don't want to prescribe a roadmap, but here are some territories that seem ripe for exploration. These are areas where the theoretical traditions we've thus far discussed might be extended, challenged, or reimagined.

Algorithmic Branding and Platform Power

Consider two consumers, identical in every demographic respect, searching for the same running shoe at the same moment. One sees Nike prominently displayed; the other sees Hoka. The difference has nothing to do with brand strategy, advertising spend, or cultural resonance. It's the algorithm, trained on different behavioural histories, optimising for different engagement metrics, exhibiting different brand realities for each person. Multiply this by every search, every scroll, every recommendation, and you begin to see the scale of the shift. Algorithms don't just distribute brand messages, they determine which brands become culturally visible and which fade into obscurity. They are, in effect, branding's new gatekeepers. And consumers know it. The Spotify listener who suspects the algorithm is pushing major-label artists rather than surfacing what they actually love. The fashion-conscious shopper who drops a brand the moment the algorithm starts recommending it to everyone, because if the algorithm has clocked it, the suspicion is that it can no longer cool (Geyik and Weijo 2025). These are not irrational responses. They are acts of taste performed against the machine, and they complicate any theory that treats algorithmic visibility as straightforwardly desirable.

This raises questions that existing theory struggles to answer. What does brand identity even mean when it's constantly recalibrated by recommendation systems, when the 'brand' a consumer encounters is a personalised version that no creative director designed? Most of us have felt this in miniature. The algorithm that serves you running shoes minutes after a conversation about running, producing the unsettling sensation that your phone is listening. That small uncanny moment is a theoretical problem in disguise: who, exactly, authored that brand encounter? Building on Obiegbu and Larsen (2024) and Caliandro et al. (2024), *MT* scholars are well-positioned to develop frameworks for understanding algorithms as cultural intermediaries with their own politics, biases, and power. The question isn't whether algorithms matter to branding. It's whether branding theory, built for a world of human authors and human audiences, can survive contact with systems that operate beyond human comprehension, let alone control.

Affective and Atmospheric Branding

Think of the Starbucks playlist that makes waiting feel productive rather than tedious, so carefully curated that curious customers Shazam the tracks, wanting perhaps to carry the mood home with them long after the coffee is finished. Or the way a Lush store assaults your senses from the street, pulling you in through sheer olfactory force. Or even the notification ping from Instagram or WhatsApp that triggers a tiny dopamine hit before you've looked at the screen, a sound so familiar that your thumb is already moving before your brain has caught up. Then there is a boutique hotel's minimalist aesthetic extending from lobby to booking app to email confirmations to Instagram feed. Doubtless, brands play a leading role in cultivating consumer moods and feelings through sensory design, music, scent, interface aesthetics, spatial arrangement, even the emotional tone of their digital presence. By doing so, they increasingly orchestrate how we sense, move, and relate to the world around us.

Sometimes the engineering is sophisticated. Sometimes it is not. As Stewart de Peña (2025, p. 65) puts it in her delightful novel, a brand's "only goal is to make people think of them at every turn. If you see enough pictures of a frosty, refreshing Coke, you will eventually want one." We can describe what brands say and decode what they mean. We are remarkably less articulate about what they make us feel, and how they engineer those feelings so precisely. The interesting puzzle is the bleed between worlds: when the mood of a physical store migrates into an app interface, when a TikTok aesthetic reshapes a retail space, when a brand's emotional signature becomes so consistent across touchpoints that consumers inhabit it like a climate. Following Schroeder (2009) and O'Malley et al. (2025), future research might explore branding as sensory infrastructure, not just the spaces brands occupy, but the atmospheric conditions they manufacture. *MT* has laid some of the groundwork here. Hill, Canniford and Mol (2014) called for attention to affect and atmosphere in consumption spaces, and Steadman et al. (2021) explored how atmospheres are bodily produced and felt at football matches. But this work has largely addressed place rather than brand. The branded atmosphere, the mood a corporation deliberately engineers across every touchpoint, remains somewhat undertheorised. Innocent Smoothies is all sunshine and bare feet, relentlessly cheerful, right down to the chatty little jokes on the packaging. Abercrombie & Fitch once pumped its Fierce cologne through the air conditioning while lugubrious bass shook the walls, an atmosphere so aggressively exclusionary and gloomy that research on ambient scent and spatial density suggested it was inducing anxiety in its own customers (Poon and Grohmann, 2014). When the brand eventually reinvented itself, the first thing it changed was the smell. By the same token, John Lewis reduces half the country

to tears every December without mentioning a single product. Meanwhile, Guinness made you wait for the pint and somehow convinced the world that waiting was the point. Each of these brands manufactures a mood as deliberately as it manufactures a product, yet, for the most part, we have no adequate theoretical language for how they do it, or what happens when they decide to change it. It's a kind of brand weather, the like of which we don't yet have the tools to forecast.

Branding, Meaning, and Existential Care

Scroll through Reddit long enough and you'll find confessions that would unsettle any brand manager paying attention. People crediting Nike Run Club with getting them through depression. Grieving spouses who found their first new community in a Peloton group. Recovering addicts who rebuilt themselves around CrossFit. These aren't marketing success stories, or not only that. They're evidence that brands have wandered into territory once occupied by churches, therapists, and neighbours who checked in on you (Fuschillo et al., 2025). In contexts where traditional institutions of care and belonging have weakened, where churches, civic organizations, and tight-knit communities no longer anchor people's lives, some brands have stepped into the gap, offering rituals, communities, and narratives for meaning and belonging.

This raises profound questions: What ethical responsibilities arise when brands become entangled with vulnerability and suffering? When someone turns to a brand in crisis, what duty of care does that brand carry? How might branding research better account for the psychological and existential stakes of consumer attachment, moving beyond loyalty metrics to understand what happens when brands become life-shaping forces? These questions invite us to consider branding as a form of care and meaning-making that extends far beyond persuasion, experience, or ambience - into territory once occupied by religion, therapy, and community support.

Ethical Co-Creation and the Future of Labour

The romantic, unproblematic promise of brand co-creation in which consumers were once cast as empowered partners is being fundamentally rewritten. Brands, for instance, now rely on influencer labour that blurs authentic advocacy with paid promotion. They harvest user-generated content and brand community participation as sources of value. Generative AI raises new questions about what counts as brand authorship and who deserves compensation. Yet our theoretical frameworks haven't caught up. Brand-building creativity has become simultaneously celebrated and precarious, valued in principle, exploited in practice, and we lack adequate language to navigate this tension.

Revisiting Cova and Dalli's (2009) critique of the working consumer under these conditions becomes urgent. Consider the influencer who spends hours crafting content that builds a brand's cultural capital, only to be dropped when the algorithm shifts. Or the fan community whose collective creativity sustains a brand's relevance while the brand itself offers nothing in return but merchandise. When does participation become exploitation? The line is blurry, which is precisely why it needs theorising. *MT* could lead the way in developing normative frameworks that distinguish genuine collaboration from disguised labour, frameworks with enough

philosophical depth to navigate the hard cases, not just the obvious ones. Because the uncomfortable truth is that brand co-creation was never the democratic utopia its early champions imagined. It was always, at least partly, a more sophisticated way of getting people to work for free. What we need now is the honesty to say so, and the theoretical ambition to imagine something better.

Brands as Governance and Infrastructure

Brands do more than sell products. They coordinate meanings, mediate trust, and structure behaviour across corporations, cities, and entire societies. When Patagonia tells consumers not to buy its jacket, it is simultaneously selling products and performing environmental governance. When Dublin rebranded its docklands as 'Silicon Docks' to lure Google, Facebook, and the rest, it transformed a neglected portside into a gleaming tech quarter, but in doing so reshaped property markets across the entire city, pricing out communities who had lived there for generations. Closer to home, Liverpool's waterfront tells a similar story. The Albert Dock was a derelict warehouse complex until heritage branding turned it into the city's cultural centrepiece (Patterson, 2010). But branding a place into desirability has consequences that the brand narrative rarely acknowledges, rising rents, displaced communities, a waterfront that increasingly belongs to tourists and developers rather than the people who gave it its character in the first place.

This is not unusual. It is increasingly the norm. Brands now occupy spaces once held by public institutions: providing community (Peloton), arbitrating taste (Apple), even structuring civic identity (city brands that determine how places are seen, funded, and governed). Following Muzellec and Lambkin (2009) and O'Malley et al. (2025), *MT* scholars are well-placed to develop richer accounts of branding as a mode of governance, but this will require moving beyond marketing's traditional comfort zone into conversations with political theory, urban studies, and public policy. Nobody gave Tim Cook democratic mandate. Nobody elected Apple. But the power these brands exercise over how people live, what they value, and who gets to participate is real, and growing. The question branding scholars should be losing sleep over is not whether this power exists, but who holds it to account.

The Feminist Reckoning

For much of branding scholarship's history, the critical turn was largely a conversation among men about culture, labour, and meaning. Feminist perspectives arrived late. That began to change under the editorial stewardship of Pauline Maclaran and Liz Parsons, who actively commissioned and championed feminist work, and around them gathered something like a feminist collective of formidable scholars like Shona Bettany, Lorna Stevens, Andrea Prothero and others, who together insisted that questions of gender, power, and representation belonged at the centre of marketing theory, not its margins. Bettany et al.'s (2010) call in *MT* to move 'beyond binary opposition' captured the spirit of this intervention. That informal collective has since become something more concrete: GENMAC (Gender, Markets, and Consumers), founded in 2016 as a feminist academic organisation that now spans three continents, with several of the scholars named above among its founding members, while the Academy of Marketing's

Consumer Research with Impact for Society (CRIS) SIG has created further institutional space for scholarship that takes gender, vulnerability, and social impact seriously. The existence of these organisations is a measure of how far this work has travelled. But when it comes to branding specifically, the work is far from finished. Brand imagery still shapes cultural understandings of gender, beauty, and desirability in ways that scholarship has only begun to unpick. How do branded representations of femininity, masculinity, and non-binary identity circulate and take hold? What role does branding play in normalising some bodies and marginalising others? And now that platforms decide which branded images get seen by whom, these are no longer just questions about culture. They are questions about who wrote the algorithm.

The feminist collective that Maclaran and Parsons helped foster has laid the groundwork. But it is worth asking who, exactly, will build on it. Branding has its own institutional infrastructure, the *Journal of Brand Management*, the Global Brand Conference, the Thought Leaders in Brand Management symposium, but these venues have tended to orient toward managerial concerns: equity measurement, positioning strategy, brand architecture and so on. The scholars doing critical and feminist work on brands have generally published and congregated elsewhere, in *Consumption Markets & Culture*, at CCT, at GENMAC. They are consumer culture researchers and critical marketing scholars who study brands when the question calls for it, not branding specialists per se. This means that feminist critique of branding has been produced in brilliant but isolated bursts rather than as a sustained, cumulative programme. Zanette and Scaraboto (2019) read shapewear as a marketplace icon encoding contradictory gender logics. Middleton and Turnbull (2021) traced advertising's institutional role in producing gender-progressive market practices. Gurrieri and Drenten (2026) have even mapped the full terrain of gender and marketplace scholarship, naming the structural problems that persist. The pieces are certainly there, but they are scattered across journals and sub-fields, and, it must be said, relatively little of this work has appeared in *MT* itself. For a journal that has done more than most to foster critical branding scholarship, that absence is worth noticing, and worth remedying.

Whose Brands? Whose Theory?

Branding scholarship has been predominantly Western in its examples, its theories, and its voices. The field's canonical brands are American. It's Coca-Cola teaching the world to sing, Nike just doing it, Apple thinking different, Disney making dreams come true, and Pringles, once you pop you can't stop. And apparently you really can't. The designer of the Pringles can loved his creation so much that his family had his ashes buried in one, stopping at Walgreens on the way to the funeral home to pick one up in the original flavour. You couldn't make it up. As Patterson and Brown (2007) have argued, American marketing's grip on the dissemination of marketing thought is near total, and branding scholarship is no exception. These are the brands that populate our textbooks, our case studies, and our imaginations, and the theoretical touchstones built around them are overwhelmingly European and North American. The dominance is so thorough it can be hard to see, until someone names it. In *The Morning Show*, Mia Jordan, a Black woman who has risen to the top of her network, asks whether UBA (a fictional media organisation not unlike NBC) is 'a plantation with dental insurance.' It's the question of someone who has succeeded within a system and then started to wonder what that

system was built on. Branding scholarship faces a version of the same uncomfortable reckoning. What gets lost when branding theory is built on such a narrow empirical base? A genuinely decolonial branding scholarship would need to do more than add diverse case studies to existing frameworks; it would need to question whether the frameworks themselves encode particular cultural logics of ownership, identity, and value. *MT's* openness to theoretical plurality positions it well for this work, but openness is not the same as action.

Branding Against the Planet

Every brand that successfully sells 'the good life' is also selling a version of the future. And the dominant version, built on accumulation, novelty, and aspirational consumption, is ecologically catastrophic. Shein adds up to 10,000 new clothing styles to its app every single day, not per season, not per month, per day, training a generation of consumers to treat garments as essentially disposable. Tech brands engineer obsolescence into their products, ensuring that last year's phone feels inadequate even when it works perfectly well. Food brands package single servings in enough plastic to outlast the civilisation that produced them. Even brands that position themselves as sustainable often do so through the logic of more: more ethical purchases, more conscious consumption, more green products added to the cart. The fundamental grammar of branding, desire, novelty, aspiration, renewal, remains intact. The question is whether it can survive contact with planetary limits.

This is not a problem that can be solved by rebranding sustainability as aspirational, though that is where most industry and much scholarly attention currently lands. The deeper challenge is whether branding's fundamental logic, its reliance on differentiation and perpetual renewal, can ever be reconciled with a world that needs less rather than more. What would a branding theory look like that took degrowth seriously? That asked not how brands can make sustainable consumption desirable, but whether the concept of 'brand desire' is part of the problem? These are uncomfortable questions for a field that has historically served the interests of growth, and they deserve harder answers than branding scholarship has so far been willing to give. *MT's* critical tradition, its willingness to interrogate branding's premises rather than simply refine its techniques, makes it one of the few spaces where such questions might actually be pursued with the seriousness they demand.

The Roads Not Taken

The above are all territories where *MT* might lead. But it is worth noting a few where it has been conspicuously absent. Brand anthropomorphism, the tendency for brands to personify themselves and for consumers to respond as though they were dealing with something human, has generated a hefty literature elsewhere. There are dozens, maybe hundreds of such papers to be found in the quant-leaning American marketing journals where the topic has become something of a cottage industry. That work by dint of its number-crunching design would perhaps struggle to find a home in *MT*. But softer, more qualitative and culturally attentive treatments have appeared in other European outlets, and those might well have landed here too. Thus far they haven't. Brand

storytelling, similarly, has become a thriving subfield elsewhere without ever quite settling in these pages as a subject of study. This is not for want of narrative sensibility. Brown and Kerrigan's (2020) special issue of short stories demonstrated *MT's* appetite for storytelling as a mode of scholarly expression, and there is a growing tradition of literary and poetic approaches to marketing research in the journal. But the dedicated theorisation of how brands construct and deploy narratives to consumers has largely happened elsewhere. Perhaps it has not yet found its champion here. Either way, these absences are worth noticing for a journal that has otherwise been willing to follow branding into almost every disciplinary corner imaginable.

Closing Reflection

What stands out about *MT's* approach to branding over twenty-five years? It never tried to settle any questions. Other journals wanted consensus, cumulative knowledge, neat models. *MT* preferred the argument and ongoing debate. It published the semioticians and the labour critics, the organisational theorists and the platform scholars, knowing full well they disagreed about fundamental things. What is a brand? Who does branding work? Where does brand value come from? The journal didn't try to reconcile these perspectives or declare a winner. It let them coexist, clash, and provoke each other. That openness mattered more than it might seem, because the wider field was moving in the opposite direction.

It is one of the quieter ironies of our field that its intellectual movements have themselves become brands. When Arnould and Thompson (2005) coined the term 'Consumer Culture Theory,' they gave a name and an identity to a body of interpretive and critical work that had been flourishing for decades without one. The label stuck, the conference followed, the community solidified, and CCT became a brand in its own right, complete with origin story, loyal adherents, and the boundary disputes that any successful brand attracts (Arnould and Thompson, 2007). Scholars who study how branding organises meaning, mobilises affect, and governs participation have not been immune to those same forces in their own institutional lives. We brand our conferences, our theoretical movements, and increasingly ourselves. Every 'I'm delighted to announce…' post on LinkedIn, every agonised rewrite of a bio to signal the right theoretical allegiances, every strategic conference selfie, performs exactly the kind of identity work we spend our careers analysing in consumers. We are not exempt. The act of writing a retrospective involves deciding which names to mention, which traditions to elevate, and which to quietly pass over, choices that would look suspiciously like brand management if we spotted a company making them.

Perhaps *MT* also understood something fundamental that others missed. Drawing on Nietzsche, Braun (2024: 137) argues that 'brands become organisms in their own right – expressions of values which, once set free, create their own momentum to fulfil what they have the capability to become.' You do not have to accept the metaphor entirely to feel its force. If brands are even partly like this, if they mutate, adapt, and outgrow the intentions of their creators, then trying to pin them down with singular definitions was always going

to fail. *MT's* refusal to impose theoretical unity starts to look less like indecision and more like the only honest response to an object of study that will not sit still.

Earlier in this paper we argued that branding itself needed rebranding. *MT* took that seriously, and in a field increasingly anxious about legitimacy and hungry for managerial relevance, that matters more now than it did in 2001. The challenges ahead aren't small. Algorithms now shape what brands mean and who sees them. Platforms have become the infrastructure through which brand culture flows. Consumer participation has become harder to distinguish from consumer labour. And all of this unfolds against planetary crisis that makes questions about consumption and branding increasingly urgent. These aren't problems that neat models will solve. Which means *MT's* reflexive, critical, theoretically restless approach matters more than ever. The journal proved that branding scholarship gets better when it stays uncomfortable with itself, when it invites challenge rather than consolidation. Twenty-five years ago, branding needed rebranding. Turns out it still does. And *MT* remains the place where that work will happen.

References

Aaker, D. (1991) *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. New York: The Free Press.

Arnould, E.J. and Thompson, C.J. (2005) 'Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), pp. 868–882.

Ashman, R., Brown, S. and Patterson, A. (2026) 'Character over consistency: Telling tales of marketing's 'she-monsters'', *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijresmar.2025.

Arnould, E.J. and Thompson, C.J. (2007) 'Consumer culture theory (and we really mean theoretics): Dilemmas and opportunities posed by an academic branding strategy', *Research in Consumer Behavior*, 11, pp. 3–22.

Arvidsson, A. (2006) *Brands: Meaning and value in media culture*. London: Routledge.

Bettany, S., Dobscha, S., O'Malley, L. and Prothero, A. (2010) 'Moving beyond binary opposition: Exploring the tapestry of gender in consumer research and marketing', *Marketing Theory*, 10(1), pp. 3-28.

Brodie, R.J., Benson-Rea, M. and Medlin, C.J. (2017) 'Branding as a dynamic capability: Strategic advantage from integrating meanings with identification', *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), pp. 183–199.

Braun, T. (2024) *The Philosophy of Branding: Great Philosophers Think Branding*. London: Kogan Page.

Brown, S. and Kerrigan, F. (2020) 'Once upon a theory: Editorial introduction to expressions of interest', *Marketing Theory*, 20(2), pp. 147–150.

Brown, S., McDonagh, P., & Shultz, C.J. II (2013). Titanic: Consuming the myths and meanings of an ambiguous brand. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(4), 595–614

Burton, D. (2005) 'Marketing theory matters', *British Journal of Management*, 16(1), pp. 5–18.

Caliandro, A., Gandini, A., Bainotti, L. and Anselmi, G. (2024) 'The platformization of consumer culture: A theoretical framework', *Marketing Theory*, 24(1), pp. 3–21.

Christodoulides, G. (2009) 'Branding in the post-internet era', *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), pp. 141–144.

Cova, B. and Dalli, D. (2009) 'Working consumers: the next step in marketing theory?', *Marketing Theory*, 9(3), pp. 315–339.

Cova, B., Dalli, D. and Zwick, D. (2011) 'Critical perspectives on consumers' role as "producers": Broadening the debate on value co-creation in marketing processes', *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), pp. 231-241.

Cova, B., Pace, S. and Skålén, P. (2015) 'Brand volunteering: Value co-creation with unpaid consumers', *Marketing Theory*, 15(4), pp. 465-485.

De Chernatony, L. (2009) 'Towards the holy grail of defining brand', *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), pp. 101-105.

Floch, J.M. (2001) *Semiotics, marketing and communication: Beneath the signs, the strategies*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Fuschillo, G., Cayla, J. and Cova, B. (2025) 'Saved by a brand: An odyssey of personal deliverance', *Marketing Theory*, 25(1), pp. 77-95.

Geyik, P. and Weijo, H. (2025) 'How consumer market orientations shape algorithmic appreciation and avoidance in fashion', *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 42(4, Part B), pp. 1187–1202.

Gurrieri, L. & Drenten, J. (2026) "Gender and the marketplace: A feminist dialogical review", *Journal of Marketing Management*, 42(3–4), pp. 262-302.

Hill, T., Canniford, R. and Mol, J. (2014) 'Non-representational marketing theory', *Marketing Theory*, 14(4), pp. 377–394

McCracken, G. (1990) *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*.

Holt, D.B. (2004) *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Harvard Business Press.

Keller, K.L. (1993) 'Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity', *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), pp. 1-22.

Kucuk, S.U. (2015) 'A semiotic analysis of consumer-generated antibranding', *Marketing Theory*, 15(2), pp. 243-264.

Loacker, B. and Sullivan, K.R. (2016) 'The liminality of branding: Interweaving discourses "making up" a cultural intermediary occupation', *Marketing Theory*, 16(3), pp. 361-382.

Malmelin, N. and Mosiander, J. (2014) 'Brands and Branding in Media Management – Towards a Research Agenda', *International Journal on Media Management*, 16(1), pp. 9-25. DOI: 10.1080/14241277.2014.898149.

Marion, G. (2006) 'Marketing ideology and criticism: Legitimacy and legitimization', *Marketing Theory*, 6(2), pp. 245–262

McCracken, G.D. (2005) *Culture and Consumption II: Markets, Meaning, and Brand Management*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Mick, D.G. (1986) 'Consumer research and semiotics: Exploring the morphology of signs, symbols, and significance', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(2), pp. 196-213.

Middleton, K. & Turnbull, S. (2021) "How advertising got 'woke': The institutional role of advertising in the emergence of gender progressive market logics and practices", *Marketing Theory*, 21(4), pp. 561-578

Moor, L. (2007) *The Rise of Brands*. Oxford: Berg.

Mostrous, A. (2017) 'Big brands fund terror through online adverts', *The Times*, 9 February. Available at: https://www.thetimes.com/business/technology/article/big-brands-fund-terror-knnxfgb98?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWEtsqfQN95Zo8yBvDID7iVi3lMYXC6ZfV1m9gvY2TMUs LP_sOVtz_Qn6rlL3IfCsew%3D&gaa_ts=69a6c4a4&gaa_sig=6WNLNvcbTMc1t4LArV_PqEh4 n_L2CLAJ5-kyBmxS2c-MTvRshBLQDzGLr1tYpZ6X8fF3x7WCjzrIGZFsCmvbYg%3D%3D

Muñiz Jr, A.M. and O'Guinn, T.C. (2001) 'Brand community', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), pp. 412-432.

Muzellec, L. and Lambkin, M.C. (2009) 'Corporate branding and brand architecture: a conceptual framework', *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), pp. 39-54.

Obiegbu, C.J., Larsen, G. and Ellis, N. (2020) 'Experiential brand loyalty: Towards an extended conceptualisation of consumer allegiance to brands', *Marketing Theory*, 20(3), pp. 251-271.

Obiegbu, C. J., & Larsen, G. (2025). Algorithmic personalization and brand loyalty: An experiential perspective. *Marketing Theory*, 25(2), 199-219.

O'Malley, L., Lichrou, M. and Patterson, M. (2025) 'Embracing the potential of ambiguous place brands: Illustrations from the Wild Atlantic Way', *Marketing Theory*, 25(2), pp. 283–301.

Patterson, A. (2010) 'Extreme Cultural and Marketing Makeover: Liverpool Home Edition', in O'Reilly, D. and Kerrigan, F. (eds) *Marketing the Arts: A Fresh Approach*. London: Routledge, pp. 240–256.

Patterson, A. and Brown, S. (2007) 'Inventing the pubs of Ireland: The importance of being postcolonial', *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 15(1), pp. 41–51.

Phillips, B.J. and McQuarrie, E.F. (2004) 'Beyond visual metaphor: A new typology of visual rhetoric in advertising', *Marketing Theory*, 4(1–2), pp. 113–136.

Pongsakornrungsilp, S. and Schroeder, J.E. (2011) 'Understanding value co-creation in a co-consuming brand community', *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), pp. 303–324.

Poon, T. and Grohmann, B. (2014) 'Spatial density and ambient scent: effects on consumer anxiety', *American Journal of Business*, 29(1), pp. 76–94.

Schau, H.J., Muñiz Jr, A.M. and Arnould, E.J. (2009) 'How brand community practices create value', *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), pp. 30–51.

Schroeder, J.E. (2009) 'The cultural codes of branding', *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), pp. 123–126.

Schroeder, J. and Buschgens, M. (2024) 'Critical visual analysis: advertising, branding and identity', in *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing*, pp. 105–116. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Sherry, J.F. (2005) 'Brand meaning', in Tybout, A.M. and Calkins, T. (eds.) *Kellogg on Branding*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, pp. 40–69.

Steadman, C., Roberts, G., Medway, D., Millington, S. and Platt, L. (2021) '(Re)thinking place atmospheres in marketing theory', *Marketing Theory*, 21(1), pp. 135–155.

Stern, B., Zinkhan, G.M. and Jaju, A. (2001) 'Marketing images: Construct definition, measurement issues, and theory development', *Marketing Theory*, 1(2), pp. 201–224.

Stern, B.B. (2006) 'What does brand mean? Historical-analysis method and construct definition', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 34(2), pp. 216–223.

Stewart de Peña, A. (2025) *Julius Julius*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

Varul, M.Z. (2018) 'The cultural tragedy of production and the expropriation of the brickolariat: The Lego Movie as consumer-capitalist myth', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21(6), pp. 724-743.

Wei, R. and Geiger, S. (2025) 'Algorithmic agencing in platform markets', *Marketing Theory*, 25(3), pp. 403–421.

Yuen, R. (2021) *Decoding Branding: A Complete Guide to Building and Revamping Brands in the Age of Disruption*. London: Routledge.

Zanette, M.C. & Scaraboto, D. (2019) "From the corset to Spanx: Shapewear as a marketplace icon", *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 22(2), pp. 183–199.