CHAPTER 5.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS,
IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Overview

Companies can no longer ignore being in the public eye. Their journeys are not mere reports in the business pages but are actually public conversations, which they need to have on a continuing basis with various stakeholders. What they do and what they say has to be packaged and communicated in a manner that appeals to the various and relevant publics, creates or strengthens perceptions about the corporation and in the long run makes the audience think about the corporation in a manner that is intended by the corporate planners, communicators and marketers, not forgetting the leadership of the company.

Why is it necessary to have these public conversations? Can a corporation not take a vow of silence and operate within the confines of a factory or a boardroom? Perhaps not. What with the proliferation of media – the digital world, information technology, the web, blogs, the development of a complex set of audiences with a mix of behavior patterns and increasing competition in every field – all of these have ensured corporations emerge from the comfort of their environs and leave the business pages to actually grow into being front page news.
Wally Olins opines the corporation has become the brand for all its audiences and it has to promote itself to them. With competition on the one hand, both curiosity and compliance on part of the audience on the other, there seems to be an intense need and a compulsion for corporations to use facts, emotions, events, products and services, advertising, their loyal customers and media to being liked, admired or respected more than the competition. As Olins says, “helping the organization to win”. Perhaps this is what lies at the genesis of corporate branding and marketing and the creation of various pathways to communicate with a range of audiences across geographies.

A corporate brand is both an essential pivot and a mirror of the corporation. It is from this that emanates a wide assortment of public conversations, which have to be purposive, goal-directed and attempt to create a cohesive and consistent perception about the entity. These conversations do not happen by chance.

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corporate brand and its marketing thereof is a well-intended act or set of acts by the corporation, communication team and its leadership. However, a corporate brand and its creation is an organization–wide challenge and has to be an agenda item for several leadership and audience – facing teams within an organization. They need to do this in order to manage the everyday impressions of life successfully and to a plan.

A corporate brand accompanies a firm for life avers Mary Jo Hatch and Majken Schultz. Van Riel and Balmer opined that a fundamental notion for corporate branding is corporate identity. Corporate identity is a holistic concept that ‘articulates the corporate ethos, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate (emphasis added) the organization within its competitive environment’. Creating a corporate brand is not an easy task and it is complicated suggest Hatch and Schultz. It is the interplay of three variables – vision, culture and image that need to be aligned in order to create a strong corporate brand. Knox and Bickerton state ‘a corporate brand is the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organization’s unique business model’. The brand is expressed through the company’s mission, core values, beliefs, communication, culture and overall design. Balmer argues that at the core of a


corporate brand is an explicit covenant between an organization and its key stakeholder groups.  

It seems therefore that while having a corporate brand is essential, and the overriding themes many, the purposiveness and pathways need to be addressed in equal measure, independent of which concept or approach to the corporate brand is chosen by the communicators and marketers. The need seems to be a well-conceived plan and not merely a set of tactical maneuvers. But what are the challenges of building a corporate brand? Is it more difficult to build a corporate brand than a product brand? Do both use similar principles and work towards identical outcomes?

Simoes and Dibb argue that ‘the entity in corporate branding has a higher level of intangibility, complexity and (social) responsibility, making it much more difficult to build a coherent brand’. Ind goes into detail and defines “A corporate brand is more than just the outward manifestation of an organization—it’s name, logo, visual presentation. Rather it is the core of values that defines it”. Berry and Parasuraman opined the corporate brand is of greater significance for a services company as the intangibility of the service means that the company by default moves into the role of becoming a primary brand.

Building a consistently resonant corporate brandscape is an ongoing journey. Behind successful corporate brands lie conscious actions and a comprehensive

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understanding of the concepts of corporate identity, symbols and artifacts in the organization’s internal and external environments. The journey and success also rests on the ability of a dedicated brand building team that is aware and competent in managing the everyday impressions of life, while *furthering* the company’s reputation amongst relevant stakeholders.

The corporate brandscape is however a vast territory and the diversity of the stakeholders in relation to a corporate brand makes the boundaries of corporate brand building difficult to define and subsequently to manage them. It is an encompassing canvas which endeavors to capture the company’s attributes, the many compelling reasons for positive consideration by the stakeholders, popular perceptions and as marketers would oft cite – differentiators. Within the corporate brandscape is also lying the identity of the brand, the way it manages the everyday journey and the efforts that are made to further and strengthen the *connect* between itself (the brand) and the various stakeholders.

However, deciphering the boundaries for the corporate brand-building task seems difficult to define. And perhaps the boundaries are also ever shifting, ridden with an unusual tinge of transience, given the dynamic nature of the environment in which a corporate entity exists and operates. Added to this is also the prevailing ubiquitous and intrusive nature of media. Given all of these considerations, the task of corporate brand building can become even more complex and emerge as a mosaic rather than a linear presentation of what needs to be done.

Marketers and communication professionals therefore have an onerous task on hand. Diverse elements, multiple stakeholders, no fixed boundaries, an evolving brandscape coexisting with a media that is powerful, intrusive and possessing an expansive reach, makes the task of building a successful corporate brand, a journey where both the thinkers and the doers have to possess deep knowledge of what impacts the stakeholders and their working. While they may have a method and a
plan, success is often determined by a purposive assortment of tools, activities and interventions. This potpourri will no doubt touch the corporate brandscape and the brand’s multiple stakeholders. To make this combination work in unison to a predefined set of goals, corporate planners and marketers have traditionally drawn from the disciplines of psychology, semiotics, organization psychology, sociology and practices that are visible in successful corporations and can be emulated and tailored to the specific organization/need. With this vastness and array also come the demands of understanding the character of an organization. William Bridges seems to suggest that organizations differ in the same way as two individuals do. One can therefore safely surmise from the preceding narrative, that there is no standard way of creating the corporate brand but more a horses for courses approach. And this is what seems to find favor with organizations.

In this context therefore, and given the swathe of interdependencies between various disciplines, areas of impact, available mediums and pathways, the individual organization’s imperatives, urgencies and timings; the corporate brandscape has to be understood in its entirety and not be viewed merely as represented by an organization’s logo or view this logo as the only symbol and identity.

That is where this research came in and embarked upon an explanatory journey of the how -

• How do the corporate brand planner, creator and marketer deftly combine various elements and inputs that are available in their communication and marketing repository?

• How do they deploy organizational symbols: the corporate logo, slogans, stories, actions and nonactions, visual images, and metaphors?\textsuperscript{343}

• Do they make their companies consciously brand themselves as sense givers and consumers (various stakeholders) or sense-takers in the on-going production of meaning?\textsuperscript{344}

• How does the organization recognize that it is more than just a name and it has to create a body of associations as a public object? If the ideas, feelings and attitudes that the various stakeholders have about the brand are crucial to the stickiness and salience of the entity, then how deep is the understanding of the marketer and the communication director?

• What constitutes their symbol kit, which will help them create a consistent body of messages?

These questions and similar imperatives is what we examined through a detailed literature survey (part of the secondary and qualitative research component), a field survey amongst a purposive and self selecting sample of $250+385 = 685$ respondents drawn from both the offline and online spaces through a mixed research design – qualitative and quantitative methods.


5.2: Conclusions

5.2.1: From secondary research

5.2.1.1: No one-way or right way

Knowing how to create a cohesive and well-coordinated symbol-driven corporate brandscape is a challenge for both the communication director and the marketer. Successful creation is possibly premised in the understanding of the prevailing culture, individual’s mental frames, media habits and weightage the media carry in opening up and influencing the perception, images and role models that inhabit the popular imagination and the resultant intersections thereof. It is quite obviously a mixed bag for the corporate planner. The challenges of understanding and constantly gaining knowledge that can in turn be rendered into action and myriad perception creation pathways that help in creating a successful corporate brand are unceasing. There is no one-way or right way to create a favorable corporate brand image. The essential seems to be an untiring and unrelenting commitment to cultivating and nurturing a brand–consciousness that catalyzes the corporate brand creation in the right and relevant direction.

5.2.1.2: Human behavior and their internal world have a role

Walter Lippmann asserted that,

For the most part we do not first see, and then define. We define first and then see. In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and then we tend to perceive that which we picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.

(Ewen 1996:149)
If this were a premise for understanding human behavior and the way we store our internal world, then entities in the public sphere have to possess: an understanding of mass psychology and be cognizant of what drives individuals to behave in a certain, predetermined way; be aware that brands and corporates are defined by their symbolic value for consumers and the brand meaning/s derived from thereof help in differentiating them from competitors in the marketplace; advertisements and communication are discourses aimed at communicating the brand meaning and engaging the consumer /spectator into the brand world.

5.2.1.3: Signals from an organization play a key role

One of the key imperatives for corporate marketers and communicators is to assess the boundaries of the brand world for a corporation, and from thereon work towards creating a corporate image, which Van Riel and Fombrun articulated as a mirror reflecting the identity of the organization. Therefore, there is a need to have a first level cut on what this mirror is and what goes into it to define an appropriate way forward for the corporation. This mirror and image is not merely a logo design or related design identifiers or just confined to them, but in reality and practice is an assortment of factors which determine the signals an organization broadcasts about itself. Beyond the logo and adding to the image of an organization are many factors/signals –some of which are the conduct of the employees, the physical representation of the premises, reputation and messaging of the leadership and more. Most of all as Van Riel and Fombrun point out, the corporate image is influenced by the rational and seemingly irrational ways in which members of the targeted groups interpret the signals they receive.


Signals can be many and they could be communicated through a variety of conduits. The process is multifaceted and it is about the interactions with people, what consumers and stakeholders read in the press, the ease and use of content on the website, the style of advertising, quality of the product, interviews and narratives from the leadership, opinions and blogs of serving and exiting employees, in the way the services are delivered, what competitors say about the company, the visible artifacts in a company and the customers who in a well convinced state of mind actually graduate to becoming advocates of the company’s vision and relevance.

These signals could be pointing towards any of these facets of the company, which Mary Jo Hatch has highlighted as – vision, culture, or the images of the company in the well-known Vision-Culture-Images Alignment - VCI Model.\(^\text{348}\)

5.2.1.4: Corporate identity not limited to logomotion

Logos are not the only ambassadors of a corporation. While they may play the cardinal role of being the opening dialogue for a corporation or establish a sense of reassurance and may also be the identifier, there are many other factors that convey a corporation’s identity which in turn leads up to the creation of the relevant corporate image. Limiting identity to what Wathen calls “logomotion”, however, underestimates the other factors that drive stakeholder identification with a company.\(^\text{349}\)

Drawing from Wathen, three facets constitute the identity mix:

\(^{348}\) Taking brand initiative : how companies can align strategy, culture, and identity through corporate branding. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 11.

A. Communication: Companies reveal their identities through verbal messaging. This is the most tactical tool managers can use to convey identity. Abstract signals are more easily conceived, modified, and transmitted to target groups.

B. Behavior: Companies reveal their identities through the initiatives they support and the behaviors they enact. Action is by far the most important medium through which identity is expressed. A company can easily claim to be “innovative”; it is far more difficult for a company to demonstrate innovativeness. Ultimately, target groups judge a company by its actions.

C. Symbolism: Companies also reveal their identities through the use of visual and audible symbols. Logos, signs, sounds, and taglines can be used to harmonize with other expressions of corporate identity, and create identifiers for what the organization wants to stand for.

Taken together, these forms of expression constitute the corporate identity mix – an expression we use to parallel the notion of “the marketing mix”. They are the means through which a company manifests its “personality” to the world. In fact, corporate personality is “the manifestation of the company’s self-perception”.\textsuperscript{350} The identity-mix can therefore be seen as the outer expression of the company, and crystallizes the underlying personality of the organization. In this way, “corporate image” consists of the interpretations stakeholders make about the company.

5.2.1.5: Values are second nature and they too are symbols

Quoting from an interview of NR Narayana Murthy the ex Chairman of Infosys sums up the importance of organization values-

“One aspect of our differentiation is our emphasis on values. Our values give our customers confidence that we will deliver on our promises, stand by them in every situation, and that we will spare no efforts to make them look good in front of their customers. Still, values cannot be just part of the strategy process; they have to be second nature for everyone in the organization.”

(Harvard Business Review Staff 2011: November 2011 Issue)

5.2.1.6: Company’s mission is also a public conversation

A collective commitment and a movement in a direction that is shared, understood and perceived as being relevant and impactful can make the company’s mission a public conversation. It is not merely a slogan but allows the various stakeholders to mediate the meaning and understand the company in their own mind frame. Collective meaning of the articulation on the one hand, it could also mean the fulfillment of certain expectations and the ability of the corporation to serve, creating relevant constituencies on the other.

5.2.1.7: The meaning - experience journey – a critical component

To survive in the marketplace, corporations need to possess the ability to impart meaning, a deep and comprehensive contextual relevance and allow the receiver to kindle their own experiences while disseminating messages and striking up public conversations. The meaning-experience journey is where the role of symbols and signs comes in for organizations of varying nature and size. Across the corporate landscape it may be essential to possess adequate knowledge of mass psychology and sociology, personal constructs and study of the human mind. All of which could possibly help the corporation to unravel the way symbols and signs are ensconced in the stakeholder’s cultural space and time. The search for meaning from the receiver’s end and the quest for investing the symbol with meaning
beneficial to the corporation from the disseminator’s side best sums up the ongoing efforts in the corporate world and the marketplace.

For a corporation wanting to build a distinctive and cohesive image of itself amongst the stakeholders, it may be important to decode the symbolic significance that accompanies every act of communication. Levy’s seminal thought that marketers are actually selling symbols encourages us to believe that we are doing two things simultaneously: selling practical merchandise and symbols. Applying this principle to corporate branding would mean that vision, mission and values of the company take the place of practical merchandise and the symbolic aspects getting established in the holistic concept of corporate identity.

5.2.1.8: Corporations can adopt an anthropomorphic slant

We attribute emotions to organizations and expect them to respond and engage like humans do with each other. We attribute human characteristics to corporations and institutions. We personify and personalize them, which in turn makes them somewhat akin to us. Like human characteristics draw attention, help mediate the environment, attract criticism so do corporations with an anthropomorphic slant.

5.2.1.9: Meaning making can be aided by many elements

Belonging could also be viewed as making sense or finding meaning and these could be brand-relevant acts of an ongoing nature. It is this process perhaps that not only helps people identify with a particular corporate brand but also strengthen the feeling of oneness with others like them. In a manner helps them at a fundamental level to understand, elicit meaning and forge a mental kinship with the company. Who or what helps them get to the meaning? Possibly, a range of inputs - corporate advertising with its mix of visual identity, brand colors with which the individual is able to recognize the brand, messaging, slogans and even a mission statement.
5.2.1.10: A corporation has a wide repository of symbols

Work done by Dandridge et al. who stated that symbolism expresses the value system of an organization and the study done by the researcher point towards a basket of corporate symbols.\(^{351}\) While Dandridge et al categorized organizational symbols and listed them exhaustively; it is the researcher’s understanding that the nature of their function is resting in the reinforcement of meaning. In alignment with Dandridge et al:

List of corporate symbols:

- Verbal – myth, stories, legend and jokes;
- Actions – repetitious ritual such as meetings and coffee breaks;
- Material symbols which might include logos, awards, and company products.\(^{352}\)
- Corporate logo,
- Slogans
- Stories
- Actions and nonactions
- Visual images
- Metaphors\(^{353}\)
- Organization charts
- Corporate architecture
- Rites


• Rituals.

5.2.1.11: Symbols help in navigation

They act as aids in understanding the messaging of an organization. While doing so, they mediate between the worlds of the stakeholder and that of a corporate in a meaningful and relevant manner.

5.2.1.12: A brand is a sign system

Brands are symbols. They are an accumulation of various signs that form the narrative of the brand/corporation and suitably locate it both in the minds and lives of the stakeholders. Brands and corporations have a symbolic significance and can find a place in the lives of the consumers/stakeholders if they resonate with their culture and codes. For instance, if the prevailing culture and lifestyle is one that places importance on physical fitness then brands that seamlessly blend themselves into that will find acceptance. Similarly, with brands and corporations that are able to seamlessly align themselves with different cultural spaces will stand out with a sense of enviable kinship and as well understood meaning systems amongst the targeted individuals.

5.2.1.13: Signs can be many

The study highlighted the importance and relevance of semiotics. Established the various dynamics and drew form the Saasurean and Piercian schools of semiotics to contextualizing the corporation as a semiotic entity.

Reiterating how Christensen Lars Thøger, Askegaard Søren explained that a sign can, in principle, be anything ± a gesture, a logo, an advertisement, a slogan, a product, a package, a narrative, a written text, a set of behaviors, or even an entire persuasive campaign. Further, the qualitative research drew attention to the relationship -
that the object, which the sign stands for, is sometimes also called the referent ± an equivalent to the notion of the world as it "is" in itself ± in the present context, for example, the so-called personality of a product or the "real" character of an organization. Finally, the interpretant can be thought of as a mental image of the interpreter created or stimulated by the sign ± an image that links the sign to its object or referent. Just as the word "IBM" creates a mental image that links the three letters I, B and M with a large corporation that produces computers. The relation between the three elements in the signifying process is illustrated in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2. Relation between the three elements in the signifying process

5.2.1.14: The sum total of all images is the sign/symbol

In the Piercian theory a sign can be anything – a gesture, logo, advertisement, a slogan, product, package, narrative, written text, a set of behaviors or even an entire communication campaign. The object is the organization and the interpretant is the sum total of all the mental images that are created by the interpreter – an image that links the sign to the object. When we see a logo we get a mental image of the
company, when we hear a speech by the CEO we form an impression about the company, when media shows certain images we form an opinion about the organization or the issue in question.

5.2.1.15: Sign systems need two hands to clap

Creators and receivers – a creator who knows the emphasis on meaning creation and delivery; receivers who are ready to allow the symbols to enter their mental space and in turn impart their own meaning to the symbol. Possibly they are two creators of meaning in the symbolization process – the actual creator of a symbol and the receiver with whose cooperation and predisposition, meaning is transferred onto the symbol. When both these processes of meaning making - from the creator and receiver are aligned, there is a distinct possibility of a coherent and resonant corporate brand.

5.2.1.16: Visual literacy – key trait of a successful corporation

Emblematic corporations seem to have discovered the transformative role of visual literacy. They have not only addressed the visual ingredient extensively, they have even creatively strapped it with words, colors, and visual identity elements that together sometimes even have within them the potential to grow into a thriving philosophy. This means by choice rather than chance a corporation can blend several elements from within the communication mix into a wholesome combination of visuals, which in turn have it in them to morph into items that have a symbolic meaning. Even subsequently leading to the emergence of a philosophy around the visual and symbolic elements.

5.2.1.17: Media is about meaning construction

At one end of this meaning spectrum are the multitudes of social forces, which exist around the mediaverse and find their way into constructing the reality for us. And at the other are individuals, society and everyday lives. Media helps us navigate
with a coherent sense on what is happening around us. We work and live with media-generated images. They construct meaning for us. Value judgments aside, a corporation needs to diligently decode the language of images, symbols and how all of these get mediatized in a purposive manner. For this to happen in a consistent manner we need to be cognizant about the fact that text, images and symbols take on a larger meaning when they get embedded in some larger system of meaning or frame.354

**5.2.1.18: Mass dissemination of ideas is a necessity**

The largeness of our society and perhaps the advent of mass media creates a situation as John Zaller hints at – on the necessity and default requirement of the mass dissemination of ideas which is also the component of propaganda… “To an extent that few like but none can avoid, citizens in large societies are dependent on unseen and usually unknown others for most of their information about the larger world in which they live… “(Zaller 1992: 6)

**5.2.1.19: Propaganda is however different from advertising**

Kimball Young points to –

“Through the techniques of suggestion, advertising attempts to influence the buying habits of the public but the usual reader knows the purposes of the advertiser. This is not so in propaganda. Propaganda may appear to be education. But education, even when it employs suggestion, is not to be confused with propaganda. Education if it means anything not only passes on information and

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teaches skill, it also stimulates critical ability. In this way the most effective education might counteract propaganda.”

5.2.1.20: The world of public conversation is expansive

Public conversations and public opinion are two sides of the same coin. They mutually fuel each other and operate within a fluid framework constituted by the concept of pluralism, the choice of democracy, the advent of a consumer market, the adoption of the free economy principle and the onset of mass media. Right up to the current social situation where the Internet is enabling conversations among human beings that was not possible in the era of mass media. Further emphasized by Rick Levine et al - “people are speaking to each other in a powerful way and these conversations are leading to new forms of social organization and knowledge exchange.” So one would observe that the world of the public conversation enthusiast is a medley of media channels, behavioral concepts, sociological premises and theories and the intense hunger of knowing and sharing of the millennial and the generation y netizens.

5.2.1.21: Media develops issues and provides feedback

The media perform two critical roles in the public opinion process. In their traditional reporting role, they provide running accounts of the developing dimensions related to events prompted by an issue. Second, the media provide both organizational participants and interested publics with a description of how publics are organizing around an issue through a process called polltaking. Polltaking


involves feeding back responses to the organizational communicators, and interested publics.

5.2.1.22: Organizational communicators need to tailor their messages and intensity

The public opinion formation process is instigated by organizational communicators. Once that happens, interested members of the public take notice. They develop impressions of what is happening in public debate that are both (a) based on mass media representations of events and of developing public response and (b) filtered through social interaction.

Studies done by Leuven James K. Van and Slater Michael D. helped in gaining more insights into how publics communicated with each other and how the social interaction meant a constant symbiosis between what the public needs and the communicators’ predisposition to share or frame the story. The thread seems to be a constant assessment of what would help make meaning in the conversations and what are the tools which enable that meaning creating process.

They talk to others (through social media) and may even mobilize their own groups and organizations in response. And, as groups aggregate, consensus and dissensus form around certain dimensions of the issue. Seen this way, the public opinion process is the study of how individuals and groups assemble and use issue relevant knowledge. As this process develops, organizational communicators direct their efforts to different audiences at different points in the process. Both the organizational communicator and the journalist adjust communication style and content to different publics according to their changing assessments of the publics relative importance at each stage.358

Organizational communicators must match the type and intensity of programming to the capabilities of different publics for achieving different levels of communication and behavioral effect.

5.2.2 From the Field Survey

5.2.2.1 Quantitative Research

- Respondent distribution had the largest number in the age cohort - 15-25 years. Offline respondent distribution was even between the cohorts of 26-30 years (26.4 per cent), 31-35 years (24 per cent), and 35+ years (28.4 per cent). One possible reason for the significantly younger cohort in the online survey is that the sample was a self-selecting sample, unlike the offline survey, where the sampling was purposive.

- Fifty seven percent of the female respondents in the online sample were in the age group of 15-20 years, whereas 46 per cent of female respondents in the offline survey were in the age group of 35+, the two arms of the survey showing contrasting profiles.

- No clear pattern in the occupational profile of offline respondents, who exhibit a relatively even spread across various occupational categories. In the online survey however, 60 per cent of the respondents are students, which also explains the concentration of respondents in the lowest age cohorts.

- As a basic understanding that symbols can be a diverse variety of elements and components constitute the symbolism aspect, more than half of the total sample population (offline & online) agreed with the statement.

- There seems to be a well judged majority for a positive response to the question that there could be a different understanding of the same symbols.
amongst the overall respondent population – 56.1 per cent, a sizeable 93.6 per cent offline respondents and a 31.75 per cent online respondents constituted this Yes.

- Income, age, location, education, media/habits/lifestyle and communication/advertising seem to be the major drivers that influence the understanding of symbols across the ranking groups.

- Based on the assumption that the signs and symbols in a corporate marketing and communication context could be many, and their roles diverse, aspects that could possibly into symbols or anchor symbolism were built into a question. Recall of those elements that were present independent of any corporate entity or for that manner an organization were recorded. Symbols at a basic level and what are those aspects showed that while Logo came up as an obvious aspect, Person/Brand Ambassador, Opinion, Office, Employee, Owner/CEO, Work Culture, Advertising and Product/Service too showed substantial proportions of respondents.

- (offline) Pertinent ones and those that reflect the larger corporate identity relevant in corporate marketing and the creation of public opinion such as Person/Brand Ambassador, Opinion, Office, Employee, Owner/CEO, Work Culture exhibited strong presence in top of mind recall and the spontaneous prompts. Advertising and Product/Service are established sign systems so to that extent the results depict their pervasive roles.

- (online) The respondents online while following trend of the obvious logo gave weightage to Color/s of the company, Opinion, Owner/CEO followed by Person/Brand Ambassador. Advertising not showing any response. Leadership and public opinion are an interest area for younger cohorts and netizens.
• Components that constitute symbol/symbols in a ‘purposive’ company context: Colour, Person/Brand Ambassador, Opinion, Office scored the highest indicating that beyond the obvious Logo there were other aspects (lying in the comprehensive corporate identity space), which came up when the context was made purposive for a company and marketing. Employee, Owner/CEO and Work Culture appeared strong on successive aiding of the responses indicating a subliminal/secondary yet necessary role for them if not the first level choices.

• High Communicators constituted the majority – 50.4 per cent of the respondents.

• Sources of awareness and information about corporations: Print medium held sway with 31.8 per cent. Followed by Internet – 19.4 per cent and Word of Mouth – 17.0 per cent. The interesting high is in the Word of mouth source pointing towards a strong public grapevine or perhaps an indication of public opinion that may not always be formed via media.

• Chosen company – aspects constituting symbols/symbolism (offline): Rank the elements in terms of their importance in creating a symbol (offline)
Color, Logo, Person/Ambassador and Opinion were the higher ranking ones. Color and Logo constituting design and aesthetic aspects. Person/Brand Ambassador and Opinion pointing towards the public persona and imageries that is there and understood as being symbolic. Interesting to see that aspects such as Advertising, Office, Owner /CEO also score indicating that these are important aspects. Purposive creation of symbols/symbolism as indicated in Table 9 and here, there seems to be some harmony in the elements/aspects cited by the respondents
• Chosen company – aspects that constituted symbols/symbolism (online)
Rank the elements in terms of their importance in creating a symbol (online)
Logo, Color, Person/Ambassador and Opinion were the higher ranking ones. Color and Logo constituting design and aesthetic aspects. Person/Brand Ambassador and Opinion pointing towards the public persona and imageries that is there and understood as being symbolic.

Interesting to see that aspects such as Office, Employee and Owner /CEO also score indicating that these are important aspects. Leadership and public opinion are an interest area for younger cohorts and netizens.

Purposive creation of symbols/symbolism as indicated in isolation and aligned to a purpose, there seems to be considerable harmony in the elements/aspects cited by the respondents.

• Specific perceptions about symbols/symbolism – specific companies
What symbolizes these organizations?

Reliance - Organization values (23.6 per cent) and Leadership (19.1 per cent) emerged with high proportions. Memorability (7.2 per cent) and Equity cult (6.9 per cent) following.

Infosys - Organization values (24.4 per cent) and Leadership (14.0 per cent) emerged with high proportions. Equity cult (9.3 per cent) and the symbolic aspect of trust made its presence with 7.2 per cent.

Vodafone - Organization values (14.6 per cent) met its equal in the company being symbolized with youthfulness (14.6 per cent) indicating a younger persona of the company. This was followed by Trust (10.7 per cent). Leadership (8.0 per cent), Equity Cult (8.5 per cent) and Leadership (8.0 per cent) more or less remained at par with each other.
SBI – Trust (29.6 per cent) scores the highest reaffirming that one company attribute being symbolic of a bank whose main attribute is to be trusted by people with their monies and assets. Within this aspect what is pertinent is that there is a large percentage of both online and offline respondents aligned to this aspect being important and relevant for symbolizing a banking entity.

- “Mahatma Gandhi” - One symbol many meanings and feelings – understanding a non-corporate symbol.

The Mahatma also comes across differently to individuals. Not everyone has a similar top of mind symbolizing feature while understanding him or feeling for and about him. In a non-purposive and non-commercial context respondents still tend to interpret symbols according to their own perceptions and understanding of the symbol. The personalization of the symbol is located within their individual experiences and insights of the symbol.

A narrative on history (17.5 per cent) was the highest where the Mahatma is coming across as a marker of the nation’s past.

- Opinion creation is resting both on the side of the conventional media and the Internet perhaps with equal gusto if not more.

- Company websites (93.2 per cent), Social media (80.4 per cent) were the important sources pointing towards the need for a well-articulated and purposive stance on the worldwide web about the company and the social media highlighting both the need and the context for companies to be open, participative and two way in public conversations.
• Symbols came across as being much more than being rooted in the design school concept of being only in the realm of logo and associated colors. Respondents associated symbols with a diverse range of elements - Person/Brand Ambassador, Opinion, Office, Employee, Owner/CEO, Work Culture, Advertising and Product/Service.

• There is a notable alignment between what respondents think are symbols seen in isolation or in a corporate context, and what they opine are the symbols when there is a purposive, well rehearsed and orchestrated creation of a communication/marketing programme.

5.2.2.2: Qualitative Research

The qualitative responses provided a seamless articulation in relationship to what symbols are, what do they do and how they get created. To the discerning corporate communicator and marketer, it is visible that when the scope of symbols (what those are) is expanded, there is lot more at their command to devise meaning making communication and lay foundations for premises that have a way of creating mental images, associations and recall anchors that strengthen the persuasive communication, differentiate the company and work smartly towards creating a corporate identity. Thus having a larger implication on the creation and understanding of the role and impact of a comprehensive corporate identity. Symbols also help in positing a unique mental position in order to ensure that the thread of consistency and cohesiveness is maintained in the various public conversations and is buttressed in the way the organization wants it from time to time.

These qualitative findings strengthen the researcher’s premise that meaning making and meaning giving can be created as processes resting on symbols going
significantly beyond the mere usage of logos, or the representations of the design school approach.

Symbolic meaning is intrinsic to many other aspects, which the survey and the rich qualitative responses point out. In addition, this also reinforces the researcher’s own experience in the roles of creating symbols and deploying them in corporate marketing as a practitioner and an avid student of communication and marketing related public conversations, which are in turn instrumental in creating the relevant perception amongst stakeholders.

Symbols as communication anchors, identity creators, quality markers, vision conveyors and more is what come through strongly when one examines the themes emerging from the rich qualitative responses.

The themes that were borne out by the research are as follows:

- **Essential Fabric** - explained as symbols and symbolism being an essential fabric that helped depict the basic process of mediating communication for the individual. Helping in making meaning and bridging the mental processes to contextualize the symbol in use. It also reflects the diversity in meanings for the same symbol and helps gain insights into the ability of visual processing and symbolization processes that are present at a fundamental level in communication and corporate marketing.

- **Vision Conveyors** – Vision and mission which are largely viewed as statements that merely adorn corporate vocabulary and boardrooms also have the potential in getting known, understood, and absorbed, thus becoming conveyors of the leadership’s intent. Symbols and symbolism have an integral role in not just putting words, pictures and designs to the
vision but also help in creating an organization memory, which is essential for corporates to perpetuate their journeys into the future.

• **Branding Beacons** – If brand and branding is what we associate with a particular company, product or service then the role of symbols cannot be ignored. They help at various levels – description, relevance creation, attributing emotions, triggering tangible and intangible experiences, aiding personalization of the meaning making process. The most popular symbols used in the branding journey have the potential in actually growing into becoming part of popular culture. Symbols for a corporate brand are vehicles of meaning – what they stand for, tonality and the persona of the corporation. Symbols are what stakeholders see before experiencing the actual brand in one context and perhaps on the other, this is what they go back to reassure themselves post experience about an event, celebrity, media opinion, employee or product.

• **Story Tellers** – Symbols are storytellers in the hands of an advertising and corporate marketing professional. Images, employees, offices, leaders are all symbols which qualify themselves as storytellers and when they are meshed together in a purposive manner have the ability to form credible and expansive narrative about what the corporation is– what it stands for, its character and the reputation that it intends to create.

• **Differentiators** – Symbols and symbolism has within it the ability to help differentiate one corporation from the other. The meanings, emotions, personas that become associated with the symbols on the one hand and on occasions when the symbols play the pre-assigned role of brand surrogates on the other, help in creating a well differentiated mental position for the corporation. In fact symbols have the power and knack to push the
stakeholder in the direction of making a choice and/or forming a cohesive opinion about the corporation.

• **Culture creators** – The organization behavior school that believes corporate identity is a combination of both internal, external and the associated identities find votaries in the role of symbols and symbolism. Helping create a culture that is common across the corporation and focusing the culture and internal stakeholders towards organization goals is also a trait symbols have in the hands of organization builders and internal corporate communication experts. Symbols when seen in the context of generating corporate folklore, brand myths and artifacts that can help in perpetuating the corporate philosophy and the history only strengthen the premise that in symbols, organizations have both companions and co-travelers. At a functional level symbols can at times say more about the company’s purpose and goals then what a piece of corporate literature or a company official can do as routine.

• **Key Communication Elements** – Symbols and symbolism is key communication element. It is the language of advertising and communication. Advertising agencies, public opinion creation experts, PR and social media practitioners draw on symbols to describe, explain, create an impression and at times even manipulate perceptions and consent. It is also a language of meaning making and meaning giving. The pervasive process of mediatization - with the advent and penetration of TV and cinema has assigned an important space and relevance to symbols.
5.3. A New Paradigm

Building an ongoing, positive and relevant public opinion stream calls for a new paradigm. On that not only draws it foundations from the commonly known and understood corporate image building space, but is able to elicit an understanding from the intersections of corporate marketing, organization behavior, semiotics, corporate strategy, advertising and integrated communications, visual literacy and processing, setting up an expansive and well locked in media agenda. All of these built on the principles of integration, participation and by virtue of possessing an executable and inspiring vision of the corporation.

To make this happen is both a challenge and an ongoing journey for the whole organization. It places the onus of public opinion creation and the conversations thereof on every constituent of the organization.

From the humans who can tell a story, to the inanimate objects or environment which holds a story within. From the experiential facets to the tangible environs of a corporation. From the leader to that customer-facing employee who is at the service end of a corporation. From the boardroom to the drawing room there is always a public conversation, which needs to be moderated by a corporation.

It is this context that the communicators and marketers have to pay attention and guide the process consciously. This is at the crux of a successful corporate marketing programme, which builds the funnel of public opinion and keeps it vibrant and current.
Figure 5.3: Marketing a corporation and creating a positive public opinion and reputation – a symbols based and integrated framework. Source: Researcher
Marketing a corporation and creating a positive public opinion and reputation – a symbols based and integrated framework

The new paradigm envisages two segments – planning and outcomes.

Planning – the first stage in this segment is to understand the drivers of a corporation which may require information gathering both archival and current, analysis and accumulated experience. Here the impacting role of past, present and future come into play in an inextricable manner. It takes into consideration the environment in its totality and from the perspective of what impacts the corporation. The researcher’s considered opinion is that the key drivers for successful creation of public opinion (corporate marketing on a continuing basis and an integrated manner) are Identification of the corporation, Associations that create and strengthen the narrative by factoring in the stakeholder groups, Differentiation that helps a corporation steer clear of competition, Culture of an organization both prevailing and the new one to be created or catalyzed and Line of activity/business which determines the expansiveness, target groups and hints at the existing public perceptions surrounding them.

With these drivers in hand and having understood from both a strategic and tactical angle the corporate marketer can leverage a well-planned and expansive symbol tool kit. This may have an innovative mix of corporate symbols drawn from:

- Verbal – myth, stories, legend and jokes;
- Actions – repetitious ritual such as meetings and coffee breaks;
- Material symbols which might include logos, awards, and company products.359

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359 (Dandridge et al. 1980:77-82)
• Corporate logo,
• Slogans
• Stories
• Actions and nonactions
• Visual images
• Metaphors (Gioia 1986: 49-74)
• Organization charts
• Corporate architecture
• Rites
• Rituals. (Eisenberg and Riley 1988 : 131-150)

The next phase is to use the symbol tool kit to mould and draw up the actions and plans for Culture creation, Communication creation – both internal and external and send out a call for Collaboration in order that the corporate marketing and public opinion process is adopted as an organization wide imperative.

Outcomes - The outcomes broadly defined as public conversations within a preconceived organization-relevant frame. These conversations have their focus as creating and elaborating upon the meaning – experience aspect of a corporation. Meaning making and meaning giving by the various processes of culture creation, communication and collaboration are part of this sub aspect.

The larger role is to ensure that the resulting public conversation is suitably located in the culture of the receiver and it helps in mediating the corporation vis-a-vis the individual’s own experiences and understanding. The other significant aspects of the public conversations are also their ability to possess recall value and trigger brand associations for strengthening the positive outlook of the organization.

At the end of the framework, the final outcome is the positive public opinion, which is an ongoing, and evolving collection of various perceptions, activities and
organization behavior. All of these, in turn helping to create that unique corporate brand.

The suggested framework assumes that beyond the logo lies a whole new paradigm of symbols and symbolism, which helps in marketing a corporation in an integrated manner - where concepts of corporate image creation, identity and reputation coalesce into one whole called public opinion creation. When we discover this insight, a new repertoire of communication tools and ways is bound to emerge in the marketing of a corporation.