

Brand Management as Cybernetic Practices

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> Context • The importance of brands has increased and structured management methods have been established. However, new proposals go beyond conventional brand management, including stakeholders other than customers, treating brand identity as a variable, and taking the development of the concept of brand activism over the past twenty years into account. **> Problem** • The new proposals for brand management are not addressed within the conventional theory of brand management and require a more comprehensive approach. Brand management can be seen as a knowledge-control issue. Hence I examine whether it can be accounted for in terms of cybernetics and if so, what insights can be drawn from this examination. **> Method** • I explain what conventional brand management does using terms described by Heinz von Foerster, Klaus Krippendorff, and Ranulph Glanville. Then I examine the theoretical implications of the new brand management proposals using the concept of trivial and non-trivial machines and the vocabulary of research that relates to the relationship between design and second-order cybernetics. **> Results** • By bringing a second-order cybernetics perspective to brand management, it becomes clear that the focus on stakeholders other than customers, dynamic changes in brand identity, and the rise of brand activism are three different aspects of the same model. It also shows that new brand management can be derived by de-trivializing the company itself. It also yields three insights. First, it enables the integration of ethics into brand management. Second, it facilitates the handling of brands within an ecosystem, considering interactions beyond the company's direct control. Third, it provides direction for managing brands as open-ended processes, adapting to changes and new possibilities. **> Implications** • By connecting brand and cybernetics, I not only broaden the scope of research on cybernetics but also demonstrate that brand management will be valuable as a methodology for amplifying and giving concrete form to the values and social awareness of stakeholders, including customers, through the co-creation of brand identity and action through brand activism. **> Constructivist content** • I propose a model that explains how first-order cybernetics is a particular case of second-order cybernetics without changing the position of the observer in the system, and I explain it in terms of trivial and non-trivial machines. I also develop connections between constructivism and practice by showing the usefulness of the second-order cybernetics perspective in understanding recent proposals for brand management. **> Key words** • Brand, design, first-order cybernetics, Heinz von Foerster, Klaus Krippendorff, non-trivial machine, Ranulph Glanville, second-order cybernetics, trivial machine

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Introduction

« 1 » In this article, I provide an initial foundation for the currently sought-after theory of brand management by introducing the vocabulary of second-order cybernetics. Beyond being a name or symbol to distinguish a product or service from others, a brand is understood to be a system of recognition and perception by customers. Conventional brand management is well established, where a company establishes a fixed brand identity of what it should be, observes and measures the brand image as perceived by customers, and then works to make the brand image conform to the brand identity through communication. In recent years, however, ideas that do not fit into

conventional brand management have been proposed. On the theoretical side, there are two ideas: one is to focus on stakeholders other than customers, and the other is to think about dynamic changes in brand identity. On the practical side, there is the rise of brand activism. In the past, companies could choose which issues they would be involved in. However, companies are now expected to take action on critical social issues. They are not free to decide which issues to get involved in, and what has arisen is brand activism. It is not understood how these new ideas relate to one another nor how they will change conventional brand management. In this article I explore new brand management by bringing a second-order cybernetics perspective to it, given that brand man-

agement is an issue of knowledge control. In doing so, I will answer the question of how new brand management differs from conventional brand management.

« 2 » This article is organized as follows. First, I will explain the basic concepts and terminology of brand management to provide an overview of brand management. Second, I will explain the background and characteristics of brand activism. Next, I will derive two research questions by explaining brand research originating from diverse cultural contexts and clarifying the differences with this research. On this basis, I will propose a model that bridges brand management and cybernetics in terms of both the observed and observing systems (Foerster 1979). The systems will also be

explained in terms of the trivial and non-trivial machines introduced by Heinz von Foerster (1970). I will then show that conventional brand management corresponds to first-order cybernetics, and exploratory brand management to second-order cybernetics, and clarify their characteristics using the terminology presented by Klaus Krippendorff and Ranulph Glanville. Furthermore, I will show that the three recent proposals for exploratory brand management, namely, the focus on stakeholders other than customers, the idea of dynamic changes in brand identity, and the rise of brand activism, are different aspects of the same model when viewed from the perspective of second-order cybernetics. On that basis, I discuss the difference between exploratory brand management and conventional brand management in terms of the de-trivialization of the company itself and open the door to a new brand management theorization that has yet to be methodologically established.

What is brand management?

« 3 » What is a brand, and what does it mean to manage one? In this section, I explain the basic concepts and terminology of brand management to bridge brand management and management practices developed within the context of first and second-order cybernetics. There are various types of brand research, and some have developed independently in different cultural and linguistic spheres. However, while Jean-Noël Kapferer (2001: 3) says defining a brand is difficult, he also says, “Implicitly, all Western thinking about brands has been shaped by companies such as Procter & Gamble and Mars.” Here, I will look at brand management, which began in the United States and has spread around the globe, focusing on the research by David Aaker and Kevin Lane Keller, who have produced various concepts in brand research and whose books and textbooks have been translated and read around the globe.

« 4 » Before academic research began, brands were considered identifiers that helped customers (or, more generally, potential customers) distinguish themselves

from other products and services. Melvin Copeland states that “[a] brand is a means of identifying the product of an individual manufacturer or the merchandise purveyed by an individual wholesaler or retailer” (Copeland 1923: 286) and that “[w]hen a brand has any significance at all, it serves primarily as a cause for recognition” (ibid: 287).

« 5 » Modern brand research started in the mid-1950s when Burleigh Gardner and Sidney Levy (1955) observed that products have not only quality and economic value but also a brand image. This brand image is the perception of the product associated with the brand. They emphasized the importance of viewing advertising as a long-term investment that helps build a positive brand image.

« 6 » With the emergence of the brand equity concept in the 1990s, brands came to be viewed as assets that are accumulated through marketing activities. Aaker defines brand equity as –

“a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or a service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers.” Aaker (1991: 15)

Brand equity consists of brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets. The concepts including brand image are integrated as the dimensions that constitute equity.

« 7 » There is a shared understanding that brand value creation occurs in customers’ minds. Keller (1993: 2) states, “*Customer-based brand equity* is defined as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand.” Brand knowledge consists of brand awareness, related to brand recall and recognition by customers, and brand image, which is the set of associations linked to the brand that customers hold in memory. In other words, it is not only whether a brand is known but also how the brand image is structured that affects the results of a company’s marketing activities.

« 8 » Furthermore, exploring how to create a strong brand led to the emergence of the concept of brand identity. Aaker defines brand identity as –

“a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers from the organization members.” (Aaker 1996: 68)

A brand identity is what a company decides a brand should be or how it should be perceived. Based on its brand identity, the company creates a value proposition that includes functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits and promotes it to customers (Aaker 1996: 68). Customers can get a clue that a branded product, service, or company can solve problems in the broadest sense. Thus, a clear brand identity can differentiate the brand from other brands. It can also be shared within a company’s organization to ensure consistency in measures for customers.

« 9 » Brand management is important because a brand, in the modern sense of the word, is not a company’s property and a brand image does not turn out as the company expects. Brand image is constructed in a way rooted in the past experiences of customers over which the company has no control. An example of how companies learned this is the customer backlash against Coca-Cola’s change of taste, which people have grown accustomed to since childhood, in 1985 (Oliver 1986: 140–165). The limited control a company has over its brand makes brand management difficult, but on the other hand, once a desirable brand image is constructed, it provides a significant long-term advantage for the company. This is because it is difficult for other companies to influence the brand image once it has been constructed.

« 10 » A brand management method has been established as a result of consolidating these concepts and accumulating practices. If we disregard the individual measures involved in brand management and look only at the overall picture, we arrive at the following:

- A As a starting point, a company establishes a brand identity as the desired state of its brand.
- B The company attempts to communicate this identity to its customers through marketing communications.
- C The company examines whether the brand image fits the brand identity by

investigating the brand image through marketing research.

- D If not, the company will communicate with customers through marketing communications to ensure the two fit together.

Then, repeat steps C and D until the brand image and identity fit.

« 11 » In conventional brand management, brand identity is routinely treated as fixed. In other words, the focus is on adjusting the brand image to conform to an unchanging brand identity as an object of control. Marketing communication includes all measures to communicate brand identity and is a generalization of advertising promotion in response to the diversification of media. Marketing research in brand management aims to capture the brand image of customers. When we want to capture customers' brand image as an associative network, we use methods to capture the hierarchical or network structure of brand images, including laddering (Reynolds & Gutman 1988), the Zaltman metaphor elicitation technique (ZMET) (Zaltman & Coulter 1995; Christensen & Olson 2002), and the Brand Concept Map (John et al. 2006).

« 12 » Since the 2000s, different ways of thinking about brand management have arisen. On the theoretical side, there are two ideas: the focus on stakeholders other than customers and the idea of dynamic changes in brand identity.

« 13 » First, the increased interactions among customers and between customers and other stakeholders impact brand image outside the scope of marketing communications by companies. This situation requires companies to consider not only dyadic relationships with customers, but also network relationships with all stakeholders (Jones 2005; Merz, He & Vargo 2009: 337f). Companies will be embedded in an ecosystem of stakeholders, and brands will be considered as co-created within that ecosystem. It is then proposed that resources be invested in strengthening relationships with stakeholders.

« 14 » The second is the idea of brand identity as something that changes dynamically (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry 2003; da Silveira, Lages & Simões 2013). Conventionally, it has been necessary for companies to define a desirable brand identity and main-

tain it as a constant. Considering the dynamic market environment and the growing role of consumers, it is proposed that brand identity should be reconsidered as dynamic, incorporating influences from outside the company.

« 15 » These two ideas are based on contemporary social conditions, including the development of information and communication technology, which has increased people's ability to connect with one another and to express themselves. However, they are neither specific nor comprehensive and are theoretically underdeveloped, whereas conventional brand management is structured to provide a textbook-like framework offering step-by-step guidance (e.g., Keller & Swaminathan 2020).

Rise of brand activism

« 16 » On the practical side, a new approach to brands has been emerging since 2018. It is called brand activism. Christian Sarkar and Philip Kotler define brand activism as follows:

“Brand Activism consists of business efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, and/or environmental reform or stasis with the desire to promote or impede improvements in society.” (Sarkar & Kotler 2020: 24)

« 17 » Companies have responded in the form of CSR (corporate social responsibility) to the demand that companies not only generate profits but also create social benefits. CSR is defined as follows:

“[T]he obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society.” (Bowen 1953: 6)

« 18 » One form of CSR is cause-related marketing (Kotler & Lee 2005: 23), in which companies pledge to donate or give a portion of the profits from product sales to a specific charitable cause, and the aim is to build a positive brand identity by associating with the cause (Kotler & Lee 2005: 97). However, the CSR that companies have been required to carry out has often had a strong

volunteer element and has been somewhat detached from their main business. In other words, implementing CSR may result in expenditures but not profits.

« 19 » In recent years, there has been an increase in companies taking initiatives from the perspective of ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) for the long-term growth of their business and solving social issues through their core business, leading to corporate growth and value enhancement. In this context, the purpose of the company, which expresses the company's existing reason for being, is attracting attention.

« 20 » The effects of purpose for companies were initially discussed from the perspective of corporate organization management. For companies to avoid decline and remain vigorous, it is important to increase employee motivation and engagement and use their capabilities. In order to achieve such an organization, it has been found that defining a purpose is effective, instead of setting a strategy (Bartlett & Ghoshal 1994) or strengthening incentives, management, and supervision (Quinn & Thakor 2018).

« 21 » Furthermore, since investors and shareholders have come to see the value of ESG investment, which is carried out from the perspective of how much value a company can create for its stakeholders and society, many CEOs have been made aware of the importance of defining a purpose. In particular, the publication of “A Sense of Purpose”¹ by the major asset management company BlackRock, in 2018, for business leaders around the globe shows that more and more money is being invested in companies that are conscious of their social responsibilities. In addition, the “Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation”² published by the Business Roundtable, a US business management organization, in 2019, has drawn attention to the importance of providing value to all stakeholders, including customers, employees, and business partners, not just shareholders.

1| Retrieved 22 November 2024, from <https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/investor-relations/2018-larry-fink-ceo-letter>

2| Retrieved 22 November 2024, from <https://opportunity.businessroundtable.org/our-commitment>

« 22 » Moreover, it was found that high growth of a company can be achieved by moving a company's purpose from the periphery of its strategy to its core (Malnight, Buche & Dhanaraj 2019). This is because implementing a purpose-driven strategy helps to redefine the playing field and reshape the value proposition. Aaker (2022) has also proposed purpose-driven branding, which uses the purpose-driven strategy for brands.

« 23 » According to Sarkar and Kotler (2020: 24), brand activism emerged as an evolution of CSR, which had become inadequate for addressing the diverse social contexts and evolving consumer expectations in which brands operate. Brand activism was proposed based on the understanding that purpose-driven approaches only make sense when accompanied by action. At this time, not only actions but also a lack of action can be a signal to customers and society (Sarkar & Kotler 2020: 22).

« 24 » Companies tackle issues that are not controversial in CSR, whereas in brand activism, they tackle controversial issues (Cammarota et al. 2023). This is because brand activism is driven by a fundamental concern for the biggest and most urgent problems facing society (Sarkar & Kotler 2020: 25). In brand activism, companies are addressing wicked problems (Rittel & Webber 1973), and the degree of freedom in choosing the issues to address is lower than in CSR (Sarkar & Kotler 2020: 38f).

« 25 » It has been found that brand activism, in contrast to CSR, tends to lead to increased sales (Warren 2021). However, at the same time, it has also been found that the deviation of a company's stance from the values of its stakeholders lowers the evaluation of investors (Bhagwat et al. 2020). In addition, if consumers perceive a brand's stance as deceptive, they may boycott that brand (Vredenburg et al. 2020).

« 26 » In conventional brand management, a company establishes a value proposition that includes functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits based on its brand identity and then appeals to customers. At this time, the appeal of the brand identity is done through the appeal of the value proposition. In brand activism, however, customers respond to the company's actions, which are not part of

the value proposition. In other words, customers do not construct the brand image based on their experience with the value proposition's appeal but rather by seeing the company's actions that are rooted in the brand identity. It has also been proposed that brand activism can be seen as one dimension of brand identity (Sarkar & Kotler 2020: 29). Brand activism requires companies to demonstrate their stance on important social issues. If the company is not taking any action, the brand will not be supported by customers, even if it is promoting value propositions, as is usually the case in brand management.

Brand research originating from diverse cultural contexts

« 27 » Focusing on stakeholders and treating brand identity as a variable goes beyond conventional brand management. Structural methods have yet to be found. Moreover, while brand activism can be seen as one practical approach to both, it has yet to be theorized. Therefore, it is necessary to explore a new type of brand management that goes beyond conventional brand management. In response to the question of what exploratory brand management is, I will first examine brand research originating from diverse cultural contexts. In taking up brand research that differs from the conventional approach, I decided to focus on cultural contexts where languages and values other than English dominate that are considered relatively independent of brands from the United States and have a certain level of economic scale. In particular, I chose Japan and German-speaking countries, considering that Japan and Germany had followed the United States in the GDP ranking by country for a long period until 2006.

« 28 » Aaker points out the differences in the way Western and Japanese managers approach branding, and says the following:

“Japanese firms, in general, look at brand strategy very differently than firms in other nations. First, they are preoccupied, even obsessed, with their image. Second, they often put their name on a wide variety of products, making their corporate brand the ultimate range brand (the general name

for a brand that ranges over product classes). Finally they are concerned with the internal impact of the brand identity on employees and prospective employees, as well as the external impact on customers and prospective customers.” (Aaker 1996: 110f)

According to Kapferer (2001: 4), Western brand management is mainly concerned with product brands, emphasizing differentiating products from those of others by allocating products to market segments. On the other hand, corporate brands are the mainstream in Japan, and the brand identities of Japanese companies such as Sony and Yamaha “result from an inward-looking approach, where what is important is not an obsession with the other, but respect for one's own values” (Kapferer 2001: 5). According to Aaker and Kapferer, there are at least two types of brand management, and Japanese brands are those that are opposed to Western brands.

« 29 » Based in Japan, Junzo Ishii (1999: 110) points out that the reason why a brand is a brand cannot be understood by reducing it to either consumer desire or the thoughts of the developer and the planner. Exploring how a brand becomes a brand, Ishii says the following:

“A brand is something that creates its own value. There is a moment (a creative moment) when the name of a product transcends the product it refers to and becomes a brand. Brands have the ability to create new realities (meaning worlds) one after another, and these realities have the character of being social entities that are not a collective illusion.” (Ishii 1999: 130, my translation)³

Ishii calls the transformation of a product name from a name that refers to a specific referent to a name that has its own unique value the creative moment, and he sees the uniqueness of a brand in changing the referent into something increasingly diverse, abstract, and philosophical. According to Ishii

3 | ブランドはみずからその価値をつくりだすということである。商品名がその指示対象である商品を超越しブランドとなる瞬間(創造的瞬間)があること、ブランドにはつぎつぎに新しい現実(意味世界)をつくりだす創発性があること、そしてその現実は決して共同幻想ではない社会的実在的な性格をもつ

(1999: 135), brands and brand media in general, including products and their attributes, concepts, positioning, advertising themes, and target consumers, mutually support one another and form a meaningful world in a self-referential relationship in which they are mutually grounded.

«30» Ishii (2022) takes up the issues raised by Aaker (1996) and Kapferer (2001) and discusses the differences between Western-style brands and Japanese-style brands. Western brands are seen as anti-evolutionary brands that deliberately suppress change to allocate to the market segment and facilitate positioning. In contrast, Japanese brands are evolutionary brands that change their characteristics. Ishii (2022: 280–308), relying on Luhmann (1984, 1997), describes evolutionary brands as autopoietic systems (Maturana & Varela 1980). Ishii (2022: 309–353) also states that the reason why such a type of brand was born in Japan is due to the linguistic structure of Japanese, which uses much middle voice, not just active and passive voice. Middle voice is a grammatical category that conveys situations where the subject of a sentence performs an action and is simultaneously affected by it. It occupies a position between the active voice where the subject performs the action on something else and the passive voice where the subject is acted upon. In the middle voice, the subject of the sentence performs an action as in the active voice but also experiences or is affected by the result of that action, either directly or indirectly. Ishii states that the Japanese-style brand is based on the middle voice, which does not distinguish between subject and object and prioritizes the topic.

«31» Japan-based Hiroshi Tanaka (2023: 20–23) states that as society becomes overloaded with data and customers become more socially conscious, marketing communication about brands is beginning to change in two directions: signaling and philosophizing. Signaling is about communicating a single, clear message as quickly and simply as possible, rather than using metaphors to create associations with a brand image, as in conventional marketing communication. On the other hand, philosophizing aims to convey values and purposes that customers cannot perceive from the product or service, in addition to its utility and benefits, as a message. Tanaka

(2023: 24) also states that the evolutionary brand discovered by Ishii (2022) has characteristics similar to brands that communicate through philosophizing.

«32» In German-speaking countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, there is a brand research called Brand Sociology that relies on sociological research (Deichsel 1987; Hellmann 2019; Errichiello 2021; Errichiello & Wernke 2022). In brand sociology, brand is “the result of a social process of information, knowledge, experience, and trust” and is considered to be a social alliance system that structures the behavior of people (Errichiello & Wernke 2022: 2). A brand that is a network of relationships (ibid 2022: 35) is seen as a Gestalt system of alliances, and Oliver Errichiello states the following:

“The brand distinguishes its normative character as intentional (meaning, as a social entity). Only its structural performance explains its trans-cultural and transhistorical function. The norming capacity – in the sense of a brand’s offering of an alliance with the public – is understood by brand sociology under the term Gestalt.” (Errichiello 2021: 236)

The stability of the Gestalt structure is made recognizable across time by being supported by self-similarity, which “is the self-reproducing will to adhere to a recognizable characteristic that manifests itself in perceptible aspects for the public” (Errichiello 2021: 237). When self-similar performances are carried out continuously under a name over a long period, Positive Prejudices are formed in customers, leading to choices such as purchasing behavior (ibid: 238). Errichiello says:

“A brand sociological approach uses the Gestalt approach to try to holistically grasp the causes for the perception of a brand. An advertising campaign, the condition of a delivery car, the friendliness of an employee in the call center, the value of a package, and so on establish an overarching general image in the minds of the public – and this image is independent of the listed elements of experience. The customer does not perceive a brand as a sum of factual and emotional characteristics, but forms a holistic coherence from all the facets of the brand that he perceives and experiences.” (Errichiello 2021: 241)

«33» As a way of managing this type of gestalt system, Errichiello and Marius Wernke (2022: 21–28) propose that brands should be seen as living, autopoietic systems and managed in accordance with the Viable System Model (VSM) developed by Stafford Beer (1981).

«34» The common point between Ishii (2022) and Errichiello and Wernke (2022) is that they regard brands as autopoietic systems. There is a question of why we feel a brand has brand-like characteristics: There is a circular structure in which the brand itself explains the brand’s brand-like characteristics as a distinctive feature of the brand, and by revealing such a structure, it is possible to understand what a brand is. Ishii and researchers in the sociology of brands are approaching this issue.

«35» What Tanaka (2023: 20–23) describes as philosophizing can be understood as being based on purpose-driven branding (Aaker 2022), and even if it does not go as far as taking action to address wicked problems, like brand activism, it corresponds to taking a stance. In other words, the evolutionary brand is similar to the subject of exploratory brand management. Kapferer (2001: 5f) states that Western brands are increasingly being named after the company, while Japanese brands are becoming more and more segmented by product, and that Western and Japanese brand management are converging. If Japanese-style brand management corresponds to exploratory brand management, then the convergence of Western-style and Japanese-style brand management referred to by Kapferer and the recent changes in brand management in the West are the same. In addition, the brand as an alliance system in brand sociology is consistent with considering not only customers but also all stakeholders.

«36» These studies provide insight into understanding exploratory brand management. However, they have limitations when it comes to solving the issues in this study. First, Ishii (2022) looks for the basis of evolutionary brands in Japanese culture. Evolutionary brands may be more likely to be born in Japan. However, if we regard the Japanese language structure as necessary, Kapferer’s concept of convergence cannot be explained. Nor can we explain the similar discussions that take place in German-speaking countries. What

is needed is an understanding that makes the difference between conventional brand management and exploratory brand management something that can be implemented across cultural differences. Moreover, the brands that are dealt with in brand sociology are those that are the subject of exploratory brand management and implicitly include conventional Western brands. As a result, the relationship between these brands and conventional Western brand management is unclear. Also, suppose we focus on the self-referential nature of brands. In that case, it becomes harder to see the mechanism behind why customers respond to a company's stance. There, the emphasis is on the brand as a social entity (Ishii 1999: 130; Errichiello 2021: 236) rather than how individuals construct their perceptions of the brand.

« 37 » What I aim to do in this article is not to clarify the characteristics of brands themselves but to discover new insights into how to manage brands, building, measuring, and sustaining them. Brand activism refers to brand managers behaving in an activist-like manner. In order to understand how they can behave in an activist-like manner and what the implications of such behavior are, it is necessary to take an approach that focuses on the individual. In the conventional approach, brand management is seen as a matter of control by an individual with an agency and as a matter of controlling knowledge about how to influence brand image. In this research, I also see brand management as a form of knowledge control carried out by individuals. If it is a matter of control, it is appropriate to see it as a problem of cybernetics. Moreover, from the perspective of how an individual observer perceives customers and stakeholders, it becomes a problem of second-order cybernetics that considers the system that includes the observer. Then, we can ask what insights can be drawn when considering brand management from the perspective of second-order cybernetics. Based on the above, the following research questions were set for this study:

RQ1 What is the relationship between exploratory brand management, which has emerged in recent years, and conventional brand management?

RQ2 Given that brand management is a matter of controlling knowledge, what insights can we draw from a cybernetics perspective?

Models with different degrees of simplification

« 38 » In this section, I propose models that describe how an individual observer conceptualizes society from within – if the observer includes herself in the process of observation. I do so using general settings that are not limited to brand management. They have different degrees of simplification depending on which variables and processes the observer considers and which are ignored. The model varies depending on what the observer considers the observed subjects to be.

« 39 » First, let us consider the case where an observer models society. In a society, there are various people, all of whom interact with one another to form a network of relationships. And each person is learning and changing her knowledge structure. By learning, each is transformed, which makes the next action toward others different. The observer herself is theoretically included in this model. However, because it includes objects that cannot interact directly with the observer, this model is described from the outside perspective of the system.

« 40 » Next, let us consider the case where an observer makes an observation. The model only depicts the part of society in which the observer is directly involved. This model includes only the observers and the observed, who are directly related to her, and is a subset of the model of society. Here, the perspective shifts from external to from within, and the observer is to ignore all but the parts she can directly observe. Observation of others is usually done to achieve some objective. The observer's actions toward others are circularly causal because the observation results influence the following actions. In this model, the observer's learning by interacting with others will also change the objective.

« 41 » In addition, changes resulting from learning through interaction with one observed subject influence interactions with other observed subjects. Consequently, observed subjects indirectly affect one another, mediated by the observer. As an example, consider the case where the observer is an educator. In this case, the educator observes the student while helping the student actively construct knowledge. Learning from the educational experience with one particular

student changes the educator's knowledge about teaching. It thus influences her teaching of other students. Because of this learning and mediation, the observer cannot be excluded from the model, and the model becomes an observing system that explicitly incorporates the observer's presence. Von Foerster defined the cybernetics of observing systems as second-order cybernetics (Foerster 1979). Since the model here is the observing system with circular causality, it is a second-order cybernetic model.

« 42 » So, what would the model look like if the previous assumptions remained the same and the observer regarded herself as untransformable? The observer's behavior to accomplish the objective, i.e., the action to the observed subject, is again circularly causal since it is affected by the outcome of the observation. However, if the observer does not learn, the causal loop is independent for each observed subject, and we can ignore the indirect interactions between the observed subjects. To use the educator as an example again, this is when the observer-educator considers her pedagogy to be complete and does not think to update it in the educational experience. It is circularly causal because educators change their actions toward students based on their observations as they help students construct knowledge. However, the pedagogy is invariant, so each student can be treated separately. In this case, it is possible to describe the model excluding the observer's presence from the model, since each observed subject can be treated individually and the observer does not change. In other words, the observer can treat the model as an observed system. Since the cybernetics of observed systems are first-order cybernetics (Foerster 1979), the observed system with circular causality here is a first-order cybernetic model.

« 43 » Furthermore, let us consider a model in which the assumptions made up to this point remain unchanged, and the observer ignores the changes in the observed subject. An example would be when an educator gives a lecture without any consideration of the student's response. In this case, whether the observed subject is learning or not does not matter to the observer. No observation is required at this time, and only unilateral actions, not interactions, will take place. The model for the observer becomes

a unidirectional model. The unidirectional model is linearly causal rather than circularly causal, so it is easier to fit to the data, but as a model, it is the result of ignoring many variables and processes.

« 44 » These models can be explained in terms of trivial and non-trivial machines, as introduced by von Foerster (1970, 2003a: 208). Trivial machines are deterministic systems whose input-output relationship is invariant and independent of history and whose outputs for any input observed at least once are predictable. On the other hand, non-trivial machines are deterministic systems with unpredictable outputs for given inputs because the relationship between input and output is not invariant. Trivial machines have only a single internal state. However, non-trivial machines produce outputs dependent on history by changing their internal states.

« 45 » The second-order cybernetic model here is one in which a non-trivial machine, the observer, interacts with non-trivial machines, the observed subjects. The first-order cybernetic model is derived by trivializing the observer. In this case, the model is one in which a trivial machine, the observer, interacts with a non-trivial machine, the observed subject. Furthermore, a unidirectional model can be derived by trivializing the observed subject. The unidirectional model is one in which a trivial machine acts on a trivial machine. Since the observed subject's reaction is predictable, observation becomes unnecessary.

« 46 » Since the non-trivial machine has appeared as the observed subject, we might wonder whether the first-order cybernetic model described here is not a second-order cybernetic model. However, suppose the observer is a trivial machine. In that case, that observer can be excluded from the system and will not be an observing system. Therefore, this model is the first-order cybernetic model.

« 47 » If we consider a more detailed model classification, it is also possible to add a model in which a trivial machine observes a trivial machine in a circularly causal manner as a simpler first-order cybernetic model before the unidirectional model. However, if the observed subject is a trivial machine, then there is no need for observation due to its predictability, and there is no need for

circular causality. Also, even if the observed subject is a trivial machine, if we approach it on the assumption that it is a non-trivial machine for reasons such as not being able to know this in advance, then the model becomes one in which an observer, which is a trivial machine, interacts with an observed subject, which is a non-trivial machine, and this becomes the first-order cybernetic model described here.

« 48 » Here, I am taking an approach that starts with a complex model and then simplifies it, rather than starting with a first-order cybernetic model and then considering a second-order cybernetic model. There are reasons for this. When considering a model, there is an approach that starts with a simple, easy-to-understand model and then makes it more complex. However, in this case, there is a risk that no matter how complex the model becomes, it will not reach a model with explanatory power if the starting point is flawed. In particular, in this case, when starting with a simple model, the question is whether it is possible to include the emergent properties of living organisms and society in the model. When moving from a first-order model that does not consider emergent properties to a second-order model that does, it is necessary to consider why emergence occurs. On the other hand, when simplifying a complex model, it is possible to assume that emergent phenomena are a given, so it is possible to consider the inhibiting factors that prevent emergence rather than the reasons why emergence occurs. Considering the inhibiting factors is more straightforward than considering the reasons for emergence.

« 49 » Another reason is that we can expect more practical implications from simplifying a model than from making it more complex. Humans do not move from living in simple situations to complex situations; we live in complex societies. In response to situations, humans will likely deal with complexities by simplifying or trivializing them in some way. There is an advantage to starting with a situation considered close to a society and then simplifying it, as we can see what we have dropped in the simplification process.

« 50 » In this simplification, the first-order cybernetic model can be treated as a particular case of the second-order cyber-

netic model. The advantage of these models is that we can describe the difference between second-order and first-order cybernetic models not in terms of the observer's position in the system but in terms of the difference in the number of variables and types of processes handled by the observer. Here, we can understand the differences between a first-order cybernetic model and a second-order cybernetic model as the differences in the learning and behavior of the observer. To begin with, we cannot get outside the system. Therefore, the effectiveness of considering first-order cybernetics on the premise that we are outside the system is limited. Based on second-order theory, there is a high level of validity in considering first-order cases where specific variables or processes do not exist.

« 51 » The models proposed in this section are illustrated in Figure 1. These models are made by assuming that the observer has modeled a society that includes herself. In Figure 1, the observer's observation of the observed subject is described as an action from the observed subject to the observer. As shown in Figure 1, the first-order cybernetic model is a particular case of the second-order cybernetic model, and the unidirectional model is a particular case of the first-order cybernetic model. Since we can obtain each model by fixing certain variables, it is possible to view several models as being in different stages of continuity.

Brand management and first-order cybernetics

« 52 » In this section, I will examine what conventional brand management would be doing, corresponding to the model from the observer's point of view that I proposed. In particular, I distinguish between the control of behavior and the control of knowledge and then consider the corresponding model depending on whether the latter has circularity.

« 53 » Brand management is the process of aligning brand image and brand identity through marketing research and marketing communications. In this process, conventional brand management aims to fit the customer's brand image with the fixed brand identity.

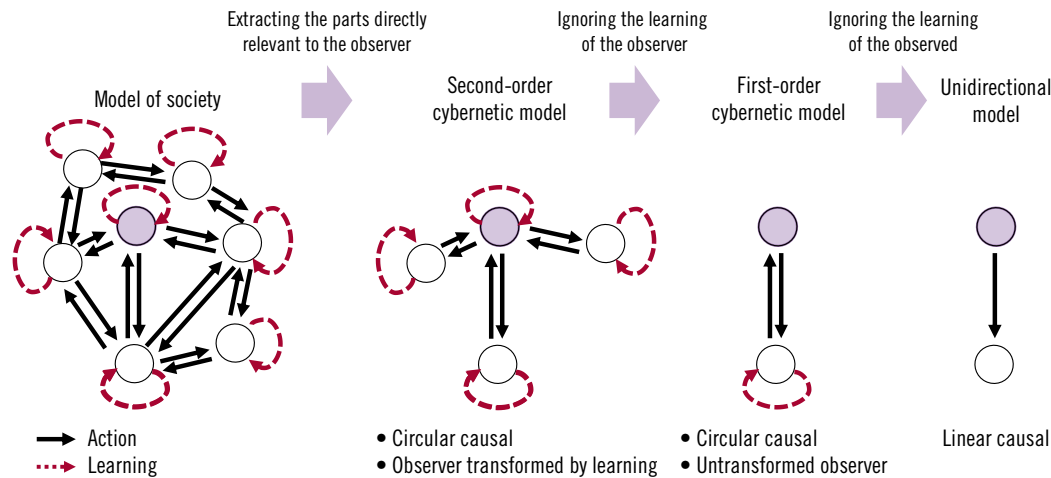


Figure 1 • Models with different degrees of simplification.

« 54 » The characteristics of brand management become clear when contrasted with selling, which can be understood in terms of the construct of selling orientation. In sales research, selling orientation and customer orientation have been commonly assumed and quantitatively measured (Saxe & Weitz 1982). They constitute a one-dimensional scale, with a lower degree of selling orientation corresponding to a higher degree of customer orientation. Customer orientation is a problem-solving approach that attempts to solve customers' problems by providing material to understand the environment and other means. It aims to help customers identify their own needs. Customer orientation avoids exerting a deceptive or manipulative influence on the customer (ibid: 344). On the other hand, selling orientation is an approach that aims to sell through exaggerated explanations about the product or by exerting pressure on the customer. In selling, the company tries to influence the customer in one direction through advertisements and sales without considering customers' circumstances related to needs and their state of knowledge.

« 55 » Companies can observe customer behavior, especially purchasing behavior, and brand image, which is part of customer knowledge. Here, we consider brand management and selling concerning circularity, which is at the heart of cybernetics (Glanville 2014: 64). In both brand management and selling, customer behaviors such as

purchase frequency and quantity are observed. Companies devise actions for customers so that purchase volume matches the target volume. In other words, a circular relationship exists between customer behavior and company behavior. However, there is a difference between brand management and selling in terms of brand image observation. In selling, the brand image is not observed, so there is no circularity. In brand management, on the other hand, the observation of the brand image is a prerequisite, and the key is whether or not the brand image can be influenced to fit the fixed brand identity. At this point, marketing research, which investigates brand image, and marketing communication have a circular relationship. From the perspective of observing brand image, brand management and selling are illustrated in Figure 2. The former corresponds to the first-order cybernetic model, while the latter corresponds to the unidirectional model. In the following, brand management that treats brand identity as fixed will be referred to as first-order brand management.

« 56 » Since the brand identity is fixed, brand management becomes a framework in which the brand image is controlled by first-order cybernetics. On the other hand, in selling, control of customer behavior is intended. Glanville's distinction between enabling control and restrictive control helps us understand the difference between these two types of control. Restrictive control lim-

its the subject and is "essentially aggressive and destructive, e.g., dictatorial" (Glanville 2007: 1180). Deceptive persuasion in selling reduces customer choice and constitutes restrictive control. On the other hand, "the purpose of enabling control is not to restrict, but to guide towards better performance" (ibid: 1181). Promoting the benefits and problem-solving capabilities of products and services helps customers achieve good performance and increases their viability within their living environment. Considering the ethical imperative of "[a]ct always so as to increase the number of choices" by von Foerster (2003b: 227) and the addition of "for others" by Krippendorff (2006: 141), it is clear that control in the context of second-order cybernetics aims to increase the number of choices of the subject. In brand management, a company intends to increase the number of options for customers to recognize and solve their needs and then attract customers' attention to its products and services to execute options. Marketing communication plays a crucial role as a form of enabling control. In brand management, restrictive control, such as deceptive or manipulative influence or coercive attitudes, is not used. The practical reason is that selling practices may increase sales in the short term but will lead to customer backlash and damage the brand image in the long term. Customers act autonomously according to their brand image and react negatively to restrictive control.

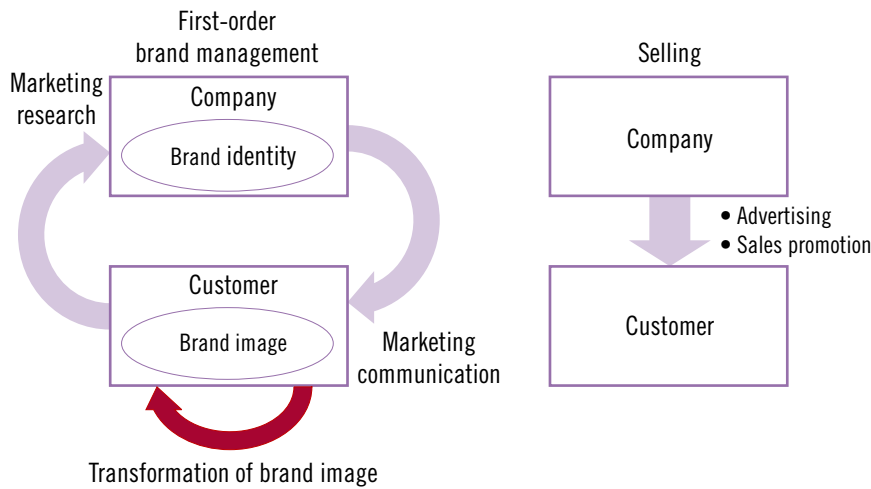


Figure 2 • First-order brand management vs. selling.

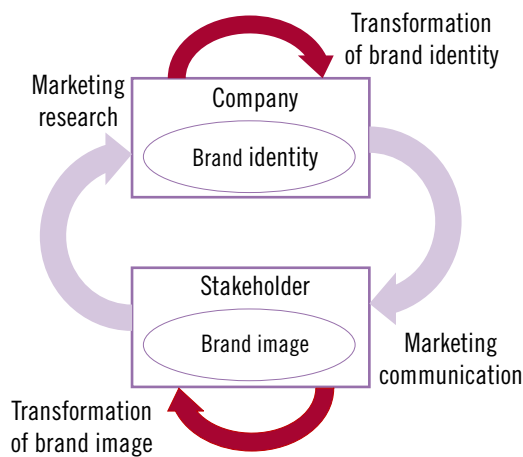


Figure 3 • Second-order brand management.

Brand management and second-order cybernetics

« 57 » We have seen that conventional brand management corresponds to first-order cybernetics. What would the model look like if we took into account the ideas that have been proposed for brand management in recent years? Theoretically, what is proposed for exploratory brand management is a focus on stakeholders other than customers and the idea that brand identity changes dynamically. We can see in Figure 3 that it corresponds to the second-order cybernetic model by extending the first-order

brand management model with variable brand identity. Because the company transforms, the indirect interaction among the observed subjects, including the customer and other stakeholders, cannot be ignored. Then, the company will inevitably become embedded in the ecosystem. In this sense, the focus on stakeholders results from the variable nature of brand identity. In the following, brand management corresponding to the second-order cybernetic model will be referred to as second-order brand management.

« 58 » Second-order brand management does not have a structured method

like first-order brand management. However, second-order cybernetics already has a vocabulary for theoretical consideration. In the following, I explore the potential for theorizing second-order brand management by using the vocabulary of second-order cybernetics.

« 59 » First, I examine the theoretical implications of the observer's presence inside the system. The difference between first-order cybernetics and second-order cybernetics is as follows. In the first-order cybernetic model, the purpose is given from outside the system. Thus, the nature of the purpose is not questioned when control is exercised. In other words, the observer is not held responsible for her actions and can justify her actions by saying, "I was just following orders." On the other hand, if the observer exists inside the system, the purpose will also change within the system. In this case, the observer is free to set her objectives and simultaneously assumes responsibility for those objectives (Foerster 1979, 2003c).

« 60 » In first-order brand management, the problem of how to define brand identity also exists. However, as long as the brand identity is fixed, the setting of the brand identity can be considered separately from the circular process and is separate from the brand management itself. It is possible to shift responsibility by following trends, obeying authority, or passively following the voice of the customer. In second-order brand management, on the other hand, the observer exists inside the system, and the objectives themselves change within the system. The company can no longer say, "I am just following orders," when setting its brand identity.

« 61 » Brand activism requires companies to demonstrate their stance on important social issues, which means that the brand identity setting itself is part of the system. In other words, brand activism is not a stand-alone phenomenon in practice but one aspect of the demand for second-order brand management. When viewed through the lens of second-order cybernetics, it becomes clear that the focus on stakeholders other than customers, dynamic changes in brand identity, and the rise of brand activism are three different aspects of the same model.

« 62 » On what basis is it possible for a company to engage its stakeholders with a socially meaningful purpose? Referring to the difference between morality and ethics, as described by von Foerster (2003c), is helpful when dealing with this issue. If the observer does not change, i.e., exists outside the system, it is possible to appeal to others about how it should be objectively. That which prescribes how we should be toward others is called morality. On the other hand, if the observer transforms, i.e., if the other and the observer are in a relationship of interdependence, then appealing to how one should be to the other can no longer be considered objective. In this case, the observer's only possible action is to provide self-directed guidance on how she should be. This self-directed guidance is referred to as ethics.

« 63 » Appealing to stakeholders about the benefits of a company's products is understood as asserting that they should use them. This case corresponds to first-order brand management that relies on morality. On the other hand, the desire for brand activism to take a clear stance on social issues, which can be controversial, indicates the desire for second-order brand management, which requires ethics rather than morality. Moreover, to view society as an ecosystem means to treat it as a set of agents who can set their objectives rather than as a set of actors who cannot set their objectives. It is too naive to think that morality is valid as long as a company is embedded in an ecosystem of agents with various objectives. Dealing with brands means participating in the ecosystem as a subjective observer, where ethics are necessary.

« 64 » Next, we examine the theoretical implications of objectives' being changeable. There are two issues here. One is the issue of the criteria for terminating the process, and the other is the issue of co-creation between companies and stakeholders.

« 65 » First, let us think about the criteria for terminating the process. When one wants to accomplish a fixed objective, one controls the behavior of the observed subject by providing some input to it, observing the output, and then providing input again when the output does not match the desired state. For example, a thermostat that maintains a constant room temperature activates cooling when the room temperature is higher than

the set temperature and activates heating when the room temperature is lower. In this case, the gap between the set temperature and the room temperature is the output, and activating the cooling and heating to reduce the gap to zero is the input again. The process will stop at zero misalignment, uniquely defined as the state in which the pre-determined objective has been accomplished. Therefore, the process is a closed-ended process with a clear destination. In the case of a closed-ended process with a clear destination, we can measure the degree to which the objective is accomplished by the magnitude of the deviation and use this measurement as the level of goal attainment.

« 66 » If the objective changes, however, it becomes unclear at what point the control is considered to have been achieved. In cases where the objective changes during the circular process, the state of zero displacement depends on the objective at the time. In this case, the process becomes open-ended, and the endpoint cannot be defined. In the case of an open-ended process with a variable objective, the desirability of the objective itself must be considered, so whether the objective is accomplished or not cannot be used as a criterion.

« 67 » In brand management, if the brand identity is fixed, it is a matter of influencing the brand image through marketing communications. Therefore, first-order brand management is a closed-ended process. On the other hand, if the brand identity changes, the target that the brand image fits will change. Therefore, second-order brand management is an open-ended process.

« 68 » So, what does it mean to implement open-ended brand management, and what is required to do so? Just as first-order cybernetics has the closed-ended process of control engineering as its practice, second-order cybernetics is considered to have the open-ended process of design as its practice (Pask 1969; Glanville 2007; Krippendorff 2007; Sweeting 2016; Fischer & Herr 2019). Thus, when considering second-order brand management, the research findings on the relationship between design and second-order cybernetics are directly relevant.

« 69 » A certain level of goal attainment is required in decision-making for products and services to be sold and marketing initiatives to be implemented. In first-order brand

management, the level of goal attainment is defined as the minimal discrepancy between brand image and brand identity. In second-order brand management, the level of goal attainment cannot be defined. However, it is difficult to implement measures without some milestones in business. Without any milestones, how can we judge when a product or service is ready for sale? Or, how can we judge when a marketing plan is complete enough to be implemented? Therefore, the question is what can be used as a criterion for setting milestones in second-order brand management.

« 70 » One answer to this question is given by Glanville (2007). Design is the activity of proposing the new and the unprecedented, that is, the unachieved and, therefore, unobservable, as opposed to science, which relies on what is observable. Designers seek to accomplish future-oriented goals and are constantly engaged in an open-ended process that has no final answer. The design process is described as follows:

“The design process may be terminated when it reaches a self-reproducing (stable) state: but further judgements about it, and even about when to stop, are not judgements of absolute rightness or truth, but of honest recognition and beauty.” (Glanville 2007: 1197)

Ethics and aesthetics are the criteria by which designers stop the process. The same can be applied to brand management. By seeking ethics and aesthetics, we can conduct second-order brand management.

« 71 » Next, let us consider the issue of co-creation between companies and stakeholders. In first-order brand management, the misalignment between brand identity and brand image is an error determining how a company conducts its marketing communications. Therefore, enabling control is implemented for the customer, while restrictive control is implemented for the company. On the other hand, in second-order brand management, the misalignment leads to a change in brand identity, thus enabling control to be implemented for the company to promote learning. Therefore, marketing communications increase customers' possibilities, and marketing research uncovers new possibilities that the company has yet to anticipate. When brand identity and brand

image change together through this mutually transformative circular relationship, it is more appropriate to say that the brand is co-created than that the company has control over its customers. Furthermore, co-creation spreads throughout the entire ecosystem since the same applies to all stakeholders, not just customers. At this point, it would be appropriate to treat the brand not only as a tool for generating the results that companies desire, typically profits, but also as a construct that results from communication and accelerates collaboration.

Trivialization and de-trivialization

« 72 » Let us examine the differences between selling, first-order, and second-order brand management. Here, the concepts of trivialization (Foerster 2003a: 208) and de-trivialization (Foerster 1984: 13) are applicable. Selling is the action from a trivial machine to a trivial machine. First-order brand management corresponds to the interaction of a trivial machine with non-trivial machines, and second-order brand management corresponds to the interaction of non-trivial machines with non-trivial machines. In other words, first-order brand management is the de-trivialization of the customer from selling, and second-order brand management is the further de-trivialization of the company.

« 73 » Regarding trivialization, von Foerster states the ethical imperative of “[a]ct always so as to increase the number of choices” (Foerster 2003b: 227), and then goes on to say the following:

“[W]hen we begin to trivialize one another, we shall soon not only be going blind, we shall also become blind to our blindness. Mutual trivialization reduces the number of choices, hence goes counter to the ethical imperative I voiced in the beginning. The task at hand is: de-trivialization.” (Foerster 1984: 13)

« 74 » In brand management, what does it mean for a company to de-trivialize its customers? What assumptions do companies make about customer knowledge when managing their brands? In brand management, companies want to influence custom-

er knowledge, but they know it is difficult. As mentioned earlier, the 1985 Coca-Cola failure is a major lesson for companies (Oliver 1986: 140–165), and brand management is important because customers actively construct brand images based on their own experiences. For customers, brand image is the knowledge that helps them discover the functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits of products and services and the knowledge they need to obtain products and services to survive in their living environment. In brand management, it is assumed that customers have the ability to construct knowledge, and that is why brand images are variable. Brand management, which recognizes the agency of customers that is not recognized in selling, acknowledges customers’ dignity. This is the implication of de-trivialization of customers in brand management.

« 75 » The two basic principles of radical constructivism are as follows:

“[K]nowledge is not passively received but built up by the cognizing subject; the function of cognition is adaptive and serves the organization of the experiential world, not the discovery of ontological reality.” (Glaserfeld 1995: 18)

In brand management, the premise is that customers actively construct knowledge. Therefore, even if the brand manager is not a constructivist, they are at least agreeing to the principles of radical constructivism concerning the knowledge construction of customers.

« 76 » The transition from first-order brand management to second-order brand management corresponds to companies de-trivializing themselves. Conversely, conventional brand management means that companies have trivialized themselves. Regarding trivializing oneself, von Foerster says the following:

“While our pre-occupation with the trivialization of our environment may be in one domain useful and constructive, in another domain it is useless and destructive. Trivialization is a dangerous panacea when man applies it to himself.” (Foerster 2003a: 208)

This argument can also be read as saying that the emergent properties are lost when the controllability is overestimated.

« 77 » In first-order brand management, assuming that brand images can change corresponds to acknowledging the customer’s dignity. It takes into account the customer’s agency and active construction of knowledge. So, what are the implications of assuming that brand identity is changeable in second-order brand management? The assumption that the brand identity within the system will change acknowledges that the company has the agency to determine its objectives. Therefore, implementing second-order brand management means acknowledging the dignity of the company. This goes hand in hand with the responsibility that companies have to assume as well as the need for them to be ethical and aesthetically conscious in their own respects. This is the implication of de-trivialization for companies in brand management.

« 78 » In first-order brand management, brand identity is something that can be determined. In contrast, in second-order brand management, brand identity is something that should be observed. In other words, in second-order brand management, companies need to understand themselves. Many methods exist to understand customers’ brand images (Reynolds & Gutman 1988; Zaltman & Coulter 1995; Christensen & Olson 2002; John et al. 2006). Marketing research that measures brand image is just performing what Krippendorff (2006: 65–70) describes as second-order understanding. Measuring brand image means understanding customers’ understanding of the brand. Moreover, the brand image corresponds to the UCM (user conceptual model) described by Krippendorff, who defines the UCM as –

“a network of operational concepts assumed to tell its beholder how an artifact could work, when to do what with it, and what to expect consequent to any actions taken.” (Krippendorff 2006: 105)

A brand image is the set of associations linked to the brand that consumers hold in memory, and a company aims to describe a network of concepts connected by associations in its customers’ minds.

« 79 » On the other hand, there needs to be an established method for companies to understand themselves. According to Glanville (2007: 1200), “In the case of design, the

	Selling	First-Order Brand Management	Second-Order Brand Management
Theory	Linear causal	First-order cybernetics	Second-order cybernetics
Company	Trivial machine	Trivial machine	Non-trivial machine
Customer	Trivial machine	Non-trivial machine	Non-trivial machine
Brand Identity	None	Fixed	Variable
Brand Image	Not considered	Variable	Variable
Concept of Possibility	Reduces customer choices	Increases customer choices	Increases choices for stakeholders and company
Type of Control	Restrictive	Enabling	Co-creation
Reliance	Exaggerated claims and pressure on customers	Morality	Ethics
Company Dignity	Not recognized	Not recognized	Recognized
Customer Dignity	Not recognized	Recognized	Recognized

Table 1 • Features of the three models.

central act of designers is claimed to be a form of conversation that takes place largely with the self, via paper and pencil.” Building one’s own conceptual model is the first step in structurally implementing second-order brand management as an extension of this kind of activity. Table 1 summarizes the features of selling, first-order brand management, and second-order brand management that have been examined thus far.

Conclusion

« 80 » The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1 What is the relationship between exploratory brand management, which has emerged in recent years, and conventional brand management?

RQ2 Given that brand management is a matter of controlling knowledge, what insights can we draw from a cybernetics perspective?

The answer to RQ1 is that exploratory brand management corresponds to second-order brand management, and conventional brand management corresponds to first-order brand management, with the former being a de-trivialization of the company compared to the latter. The answer to RQ2

is as follows: First, it enables the integration of ethics into brand management. Second, it facilitates the handling of brands within an ecosystem, considering interactions beyond the company’s direct control. Third, it provides direction for the management of brands as open-ended processes, adapting to changes and new possibilities. As discussed in this article, if we consider second-order brand management, brand management will be valuable as a methodology for amplifying and giving concrete form to the values and social awareness of stakeholders, including customers, through co-creating brand identity and action through brand activism.

« 81 » With this article, I not only contribute a new theoretical foundation for brand research but also provide a practical example of applying cybernetics to a socially impactful area, demonstrating its relevance and utility, and highlighting the ability of cybernetics to handle ethical considerations, suggesting the potential for ethical business practices.

« 82 » Further, we can consider some research programs as an extension of this article. In this study, I attempted to understand brand management carried out by individual observers by combining the findings of marketing and consumer research with the find-

ings of von Foerster and design cybernetics (Pask 1969; Glanville 2007; Krippendorff 2007; Sweeting 2016; Fischer & Herr 2019). As mentioned, it has been proposed in brand sociology that brands as autopoietic systems should be managed using Beer’s VSM (Errichiello & Wernke 2022). If we were to conduct research on brands as systems as an extension of this study, we would expect to find a new relationship between design and the findings of management cybernetics, as typified by the VSM. More practically, by following the relationship between design and cybernetics, we can theorize about the desirable way to manage brands that involve many stakeholders.

« 83 » In addition, marketing research, which aims to understand the brand image held by customers, corresponds to the process of trying to understand the contents of a non-trivial machine through interaction with it. There is an argument (Nizami 2020) that interaction with a non-trivial machine corresponds to the process of trying to understand the contents of the Black Box (Ashby 1956: 86–117). Then, it will also be an issue for the future to reconsider the methods of marketing research based on the findings about the Black Box (Glanville 1982, 2009). I would like to make these issues the subject of future research.



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The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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