

Origination: the geographies of brands and branding

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Origination: The Geographies of Brands and Branding, by Andy Pike, RGS-IBG Book Series, Chichester, UK, Wiley & Sons, 2015, (paperback)

Brands are increasingly recognised as prominent entities imbued with meanings that stem well beyond signifying a consumable object. Associations evoked by and assigned to a given brand can be interpreted, deconstructed and reconstructed to form an array of ideoscapes that permeate and at times drive transformation of the lived experiences of consumers and fabrics of societies (Eckhardt and Mahi 2004; Schroeder and Salzer-Mörling 2006; Izberk-Bilgin 2012; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013). Among these, brands' place associations – i.e., meanings construed through a brand's links to actual or imaginary locations one conjures up in mind (Papadopoulos et al. 2011) – continually receive much attention from marketing research. However, whilst acknowledging the complexity of the notion of place concept, majority of the extant research so far focused on national place associations and their role in consumer-brand relationships (for examples see Heslop and Papadopoulos, 1993; Askegaard and Ger, 1998; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2003; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004, 2008; Herz and Diamantopoulos, 2013a, 2013b). In *Origination: The Geographies of Brands and Branding*, Andy Pike masterfully unpacks this gap in our understanding of brands and their meanings and offers the concept of origination as means for a more critical theorisation and study of multifaceted spatial dimensions of brand meanings.

Origination is a carefully-constructed study of the paradoxical nature of brands' geographical narratives. Chapter 2 presents a broad, multidisciplinary review of the existing research concerned with the role of place associations in brands and branding practice. It unravels brands as the intersection of economic, ecological, social, cultural and political worlds through synthesis of past studies uncovering key themes, characteristics, practices and elements of brands' place meanings and providing practical examples of these meanings articulated in brand identities. Pike demonstrates that just as the multiple worlds brands intersect are overlapping and intertwined, spatial associations of brands mobilised and constructed by those interacting with brands are, too, multiple. Most importantly, while showing that geography is an inescapable dimension of brands and branding, at the same time Pike poses a convincing argument for eroding 'nation=place' connotation, showing the bound and unbound, fluid and fixed, real and imagined place meanings a brand's geographical narrative can include.

Chapter 3 develops the concept of origination defined as "attempts by actors – producers, circulators, consumers and regulators inter-related in spatial circuits – to construct geographical associations for goods and services [...] to connote, suggest and/or appeal to particular spatial references" (Pike 2015, 17). By juxtaposing the literature on the consequences of globalisation (e.g., Bauman 2000; Beck 2000) and on socio-spatial biographies of commodities (e.g., Morgan, Marsden, and Murdoch 2006; Appadurai 1986) with the country-of-origin concept Pike affirms its' declining applicability, offering origination as a more coherent approach to conceptualising and studying the role of place in brands and branding. By outlining the rise of internationalised manufacture, transition to service-dominant economies and weakening of the nation-state-bound brand identities as the key factors obscuring country provenance in construction and interpretation of brand meanings, he posits origination as a 'post country-of-origin' concept (Varman and Costa 2013). Indeed, it has been long recognised that complexity of globalised organisational operations in international markets resulted in many products being "designed in one country, manufactured in another and assembled in yet a third" (Lim and O'Casey 2001, 121), or

manufactured under the same brand name in a number of countries (Samiee 1994; Liefeld 2004). According to Pike, the rising importance of the service components (i.e., customer support, aftercare etc) in brand identity of almost every product, serves to further erode the notion of its national associations since establishing origins of product and service components across the global value chain is a difficult task. Finally, Pike illustrates brand place narratives mirroring the parallel dynamics of de-territorialisation, territorialisation and hybridisation sociocultural trends (see Craig and Douglas 2006) by using examples of: a) de-association from nation state identifiers (i.e., flags, state name) by established brands to assume global, place-less identities (British Petroleum re-branded as BP, British Airways re-branding as BA 'the world citizen'); b) the rise of new brands with real or fantasy national links (Singapore Airlines, Neutrogena); and c) hybridisation of brand identities whereby association with a specific city territory as brand's origin is integrated with manufacture and use of materials from a range of national territories (Prada's labels stating 'Prada, Milano and Made in Japan/India/Scotland/Peru').

Addressing the concurrent fragmentation and complexity of brands' place narratives, Pike theorises ten key categories which actors interacting with brands can use and integrate in varying combinations when constructing and/or interpreting brand geographical narratives: 1) place of brand birth; 2) place of brand innovation; 3) place of brand development; 4) place of brand refinement; 5) place of brand's headquarters; 6) physical or virtual place of brand provision; 7) place of brand manufacture/assembly; 8) place of brand sales/supply; 9) place of brand service/support; and 10) place of brand recycling/disassembly. These categories underpin demonstration of origination's application as a research framework for a systematic, multi-layered analysis of place meanings of three brand case studies: Newcastle Brown Ale, Burberry and Apple (Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively). Utilising socio-spatial biography method, Pike triangulates research of these brands' histories from secondary sources with interviews of actors who interact(ed) with them: producers, circulators, consumers and regulators. Such an in-depth, focused engagement with place associations deployed in (re)construction and appropriation of these brands' meanings unearths the fluid and multi-dimensional use of place associations in each case. Specifically, the 'local' origination of Newcastle Brown Ale is shown to undergo transformations as brands' spatial circuits shift through time. Originally drawn from strong attachment to a city (Newcastle upon Tyne, England) as a place association, the meaning of this brand is subsequently reframed to a more general place association with England in response to contextual changes in the market and consequent pursuit of different consumer segment in the USA. Conversely, the 'national' British origination of Burberry is shown to remain preserved in 'Britishness' as a core meaning frame, with other place associations used only to indicate the internationalised level of brand's manufacture and presence. Finally, the 'global' meaning of Apple is shown not to be place-less; rather, it is firmly situated in the mythology and ethos of Silicon Valley as a place of innovation and modernity.

The case studies of three brands are effective in demonstrating the two core arguments that run through *Origination*: 1) place associations in brands and branding are inescapable; and 2) place associations are multi-layered, contextually situated and fluid. Chapter 7 discusses implications of origination phenomenon from the territorial development perspective. Whilst its' positive implications are clear, its' limitations require greater study to be told more explicitly. Indeed, brands with strong geographical associations can serve to promote places and contribute to their sustainability by attracting tourists, businesses and investors. At the same time however, these very same associations, if linked to declining, failing brands, can pose significant risks: Pike uses the example of Kodak and its association

with the city of Rochester to illustrate the negative implications of brand origination for territorial development; another example is the difficulties posed to Detroit by its' strong associations with the General Motors, Ford and Chrysler as these represent failure through over-reliance on one industry (New York Times, December 8, 2013). The concluding Chapter 8 considers the broader implications of origination for the study of political and cultural aspects and impacts of brands and branding. These considerations also provide fruitful directions for future research with the underpinnings of origination concept.

Overall, *Origination* presents a promising conceptual and research framework capable of revealing the multiple facets of brand geographies. Obtaining these insights presents ample opportunities to enrich consumption, markets and culture research by extending our knowledge on how brand place meanings are mobilised from perspectives other than national or global, incorporating called for supra-national, regional, city, and community lenses (Demangeot et al., 2015). Place meanings evoked in the marketing and consumption discourses on specific brands can provide greater understanding of sociocultural, political and economic dynamics of market contexts these brands are situated in. By taking account of each actor's voice and perspective in creating and interpreting brand place meanings and of the shifts these meanings undergo spatial and temporal changes, origination addresses the limitations of the country-of-origin concept in understanding the role of place in brands and branding. By acknowledging the complexities of how place meanings are formed and evolve in the contemporary post-modernistic milieu, *Origination* addresses the recent critique of the COO theory and practices (see Varman and Costa 2013), and marks the start of the 'post-country-of-origin' era of research.

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