ORIGINATION

THE GEOGRAPHIES OF BRANDS AND BRANDING

Andy Pike

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Origination

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List of Tables

List of Figures

Contents

Chapter One
Introduction

Introduction: Where are goods and services commodities from and why does it matter?

From the regional heyday of producing a quarter of the world's ships in the opening decade of the twentieth century (Hudson 1989), Tyneside in north east England established a reputation for engineering innovation and manufacturing prowess. The 'carboniferous capitalism' of coal, iron and steel underpinned specialization and international technological leadership in heavy engineering in Britain's imperial markets (Tomaney 2006). Industrial pioneers such as William Armstrong, Charles Parsons and George Stephenson in concert with skilled and unionized urban labour meant 'Made in Tyneside' was commercially meaningful and valuable (Middlebrook 1968). During the 1950s and 1960s, Historian Paul Kennedy described this time and place as:

> A world of great noise and much dirt... [where] ... There was a deep satisfaction about making things ... among all of those that had supplied the services, whether it was the local bankers with credit; whether it was the local design firms. When a ship was launched at Swan Hunter [Wallsend, North Tyneside] all the kids at the local school went to see the thing our fathers had put together and when we looked down from the cross-wired fence, tried to find Uncle Mick, Uncle Jim or your dad, this notion of an integrated, productive community was quite astonishing (quoted in Chakrabortty 2011: 1).
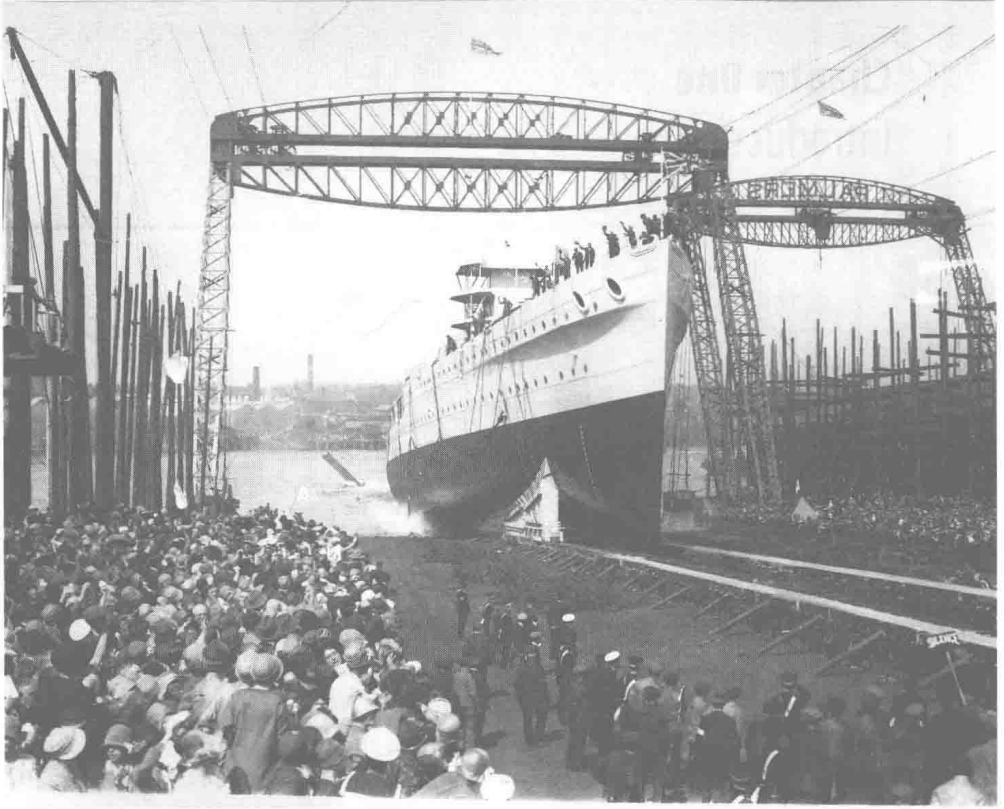
Figure 1.1   HMS York. Source: Newcastle Libraries & Information Service.

Vessels, such as HMS York (Figure 1.1), were made in the shipyards of Hebburn, Walker and Wallsend, and, once departed from the slipway, travelled the world as functional commodities embodying the meaning and commercially valuable reputation of where they were from and who built them.

Although Tyneside has since been ravaged by waves of deindustrialization and a highly socially and spatially uneven transition to a service-dominated economy (Pike *et al.* 2006), the geographical associations in what a place is known for live on in certain specialist market niches. In the kinds of connections, for example, made in the corporate logo of Tyneside Safety Glass, including a silhouette of the Tyne Bridge, and the marking of some of its products with the slogan 'Tyneside Toughened'. Tyneside Safety Glass is a privately owned specialist glass processor established in 1937 with its headquarters in the Team Valley south of the river Tyne in Gateshead. It employs around 200 people and operates three factories in north east England. The company articulates authentic claims to provenance as part of its creation and communication of meaning and value for its customers in international architectural, automotive, defence and security markets. There are no intrinsic ties that mean such goods and services commodities could not technically be produced

elsewhere beyond Tyneside in north east England. But commercial advantage is being sought by the owners through the company name, logo and slogan making strong and geographical connections to the historical traditions, character and reputation of the place of Tyneside for engineering ingenuity, technological innovation and manufacturing precision.

As Tyneside Safety Glass demonstrates, where goods and services commodities are from and are associated with – and, crucially, are *perceived* to be from and associated with – and why is important. Raising such issues encourages reflection upon how we understand and explain critical spatial concerns about the geographies of economy and their organization and dynamics: the call centres, design studios, factories, laboratories, logistics hubs, market stalls, offices, shops, trading floors, warehouses and the investments, jobs, incomes, livelihoods and identities in cities, localities, regions and countries with which they are entwined. Such concerns make us think about how, why, where and by whom goods and services commodities are associated with specific and particular geographical attributes and characteristics of spaces and places as part of attempts by myriad actors to create meaning and value.

Longstanding connections and connotations are evident especially where the geographical associations of goods and services commodities are strong, enduring and decisive commercial and trade advantages. Well known examples include 'Danish furniture, Florentine leather goods, Parisian *haute couture*, Champagne wines, London theatre, Swiss watches before digitization, Thai silks, recorded music from Nashville … Hollywood films' (Scott 1998: 109). The list could go on. For over four decades, researchers in the discipline of marketing have recognized this phenomenon and call it the '*Country* of Origin' effect (Bass and Wilkie 1973). By this, they mean the consumer views of the different capabilities and historical reputations of countries for particular goods and services. These perceptions influence consumer assessments of attributes such as quality, style and taste, and interpretation of meaning and value that shapes their purchasing decisions (Phau and Prendergast 2000). Importantly, these geographical associations and reputations tend to be sticky, slow changing and, once accumulated, can become difficult to change or dislodge. As Harvey Molotch (2002: 677) puts it, 'perfume should come from Paris not Peoria, watches from Geneva not Gdansk'. Such geographical associations are powerful in the ways in which they create – and potentially destroy – meaning and value through what they explicitly demonstrate or imply for specific goods and services commodities in particular spatial and temporal market contexts.

The origins of brands and branding

Historically, goods and later services commodities bore marks or brands as means of distinction from competitors and signs of quality and reliability (Room 1998). Artisanal producers in ancient Greece and Rome marked their goods such as pottery with distinctive signs to communicate their origin and quality (Lindemann 2010). Individual marks or seals that identified particular craft producers or traders were evident c.300 BC. Merchants initially used generic symbols to communicate the

business in which they traded, including 'a ham for butchers, a cow for creameries' (Chevalier and Mazzolovo 2004: 15). Makers' marks began evolving into brands and became more evident and important during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This development involved especially craft goods such as furniture, porcelain and tapestries, particularly when travelling for sale beyond face-to-face transactions in localized markets (Room 1998). As David Wengrow (2008: 21) argues, 'commodity branding':

> has been a long-term feature of human cultural development, acting within multiple ideological and institutional contexts including those of sacred hierarchies and sacrificial economies of a certain scale. What *has* varied significantly over time and space is the nexus of authenticity, quality control, and desire from which brand economies draw their authority; the web of agencies (real or imagined) through which homogeneous goods must be seen to pass in order to be consumed, be they the bodies of the ancestral dead, the gods, heads of state, secular business gurus, media celebrities, or that core fetish of post-modernity, the body of the sovereign consumer citizen in the act of self-fashioning (emphasis in original).

Industrialization and mass production in the nineteenth century underpinned and reinforced the commercial value and meaning of branding, especially for packaged goods: 'Through industrialization the production of many household items, such as soap, moved from local production to centralized factories. As the distance between buyer and supplier widened the communication of origin and quality became more important' (Lindemann 2010: 3). The naming of 'Platt's *Brand* Raw Oysters' and the explicit use of the term brand in the advertising of 'Jackson Square Cigar – America's Standard 5¢ *Brand*' as particular kinds of commodities demonstrate the early and explicit incorporation of the term 'brand' into product names and their circulation and promotion (Figure 1.2). Mass production and distribution generated economies of scale and lowered production costs, but required mass markets and the communication and demonstration of superior quality to dislodge local consumer preferences for local producers.

The etymological roots of the word brand as a noun lie in several linguistic traditions. These refer commonly to a fire or flame as well as firebrand, piece of burning wood and torch: the Old English of *brand* and *brond*; the Old Norse *brandr*; the Old High German *brant*; the Old Frisian *brond* and the German *brand* (Collins Concise Dictionary Plus 1989). Historically, from around the 1550s, as a noun a brand was defined as an identifying mark to signify ownership burned on livestock as well as criminals and slaves with a branding iron. With the emergence of craft production and later industrialization, brand became defined as a type or kind of good or service from a specific company sold under a particular name, often referred to as its 'brand name' and encapsulating a particular design, identity and/or image. As a verb, from the 1400s, to brand meant to mark, to cauterize – often wounds – and to stigmatize typically criminals and slaves. From the 1580s, the meaning of the verb evolved to refer to the marking of property and ownership.
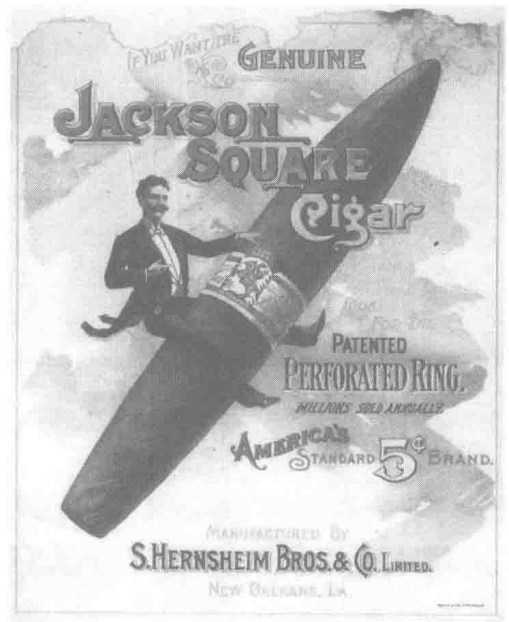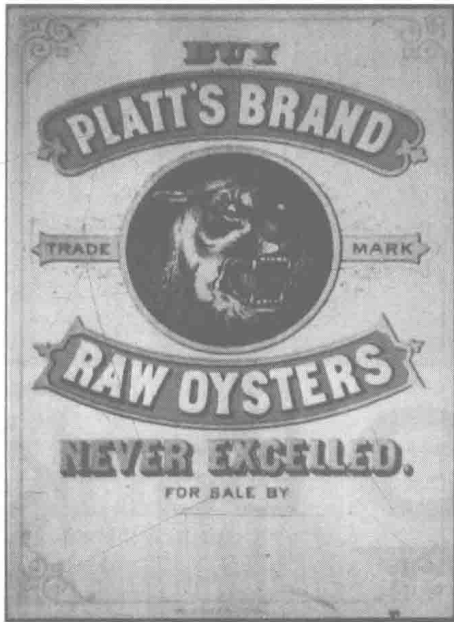
Figure 1.2 'Platt's Brand Raw Oysters' and 'Jackson Square Cigar – America's Standard 5¢ Brand'. Source: Historical images from Baltimore Museum of Industry.

Branding emerged as a process that tries to articulate, integrate and enhance the attributes embodied and connected in brands in meaningful and valuable ways. Jan Lindemann (2010: 3) describes how:

> Although the initial purpose of branding was to demonstrate the origin of an animal it quickly grew into a means of differentiation. Over time a farmer would establish a certain reputation for the quality of his cattle expressed by the branded mark on the animal. This enabled buyers quickly to assess the quality of the cattle and the price they were willing to pay for it.

Branding developed rapidly to become part of connecting meaning and value through associations across a wider range of goods and services. Branding has underpinned the process of brand extension by actors into certain spatial and temporal market settings. Examples include Italian fashion house Prada's excursion into the mobile phone business with LG, and UK supermarket Tesco's development of Tesco Bank financial services (Figure 1.3). In the era of industrialization and mass production and consumption, branding sat within Raymond Williams' (1980: 184) broader definition of advertising as 'a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies, but rather strangely co-existent with a highly developed scientific technology'.