

Organizational Deviance as Evidenced in Brand Vulgarity: The Impact on Employee Incivility

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Abstract

Brand vulgarity is an emerging form of organizational deviance being practiced across a myriad of business industries. Primarily utilized as a profit-driven strategy to break through the clutter and reach customers, companies are increasingly employing the use of expletives and profanity in naming products, services, and in some cases, the company's brand name.

This paper explores brand vulgarity as a form of organizational deviance that may negatively impact employees by enabling workplace incivility. We first explore the concept of naming in the process of creating a distinguishable brand name. Keller (2008, p. 2) defines a brand as a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or any combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition." A company's brand is universally known to be one of the most valuable assets it has, and the name is one of the most easily recognized aspect of a company.

We then discuss the concept of brand vulgarity, highlighting several industry sectors in which the practice is growing in prevalence. Brand vulgarity refers to profanity and obscenity in name, design and symbols used to identify a product or service. Some companies utilize vulgarity in product names and have created product lines extending the name. For example, New York wineries Joseph Victori Wines and Chatham Imports have lines of wine with the brand name 'Bitch.'

In the third section of this paper, we review organizational deviance and employee incivility drawing on the management and organizational psychology literatures. Organizational deviance is typically conceptualized in terms of employee behavior negatively impacting the firm (Berry, Ones, & Sackett, 2007). Our emphasis is not employee deviance behaviors which are in violation of institutionalized norms that threaten the well-being of the organization or its members (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Rather, in the context of brand vulgarity, we examine organization deviance as it relates to the use of vulgar product and service brand names, motivated by marketplace aggrandizement.

We then present a theoretical model of brand vulgarity deviance and posit that this form of deviant organizational behavior increases employee deviant behaviors. We further propose that brand vulgarity facilitates a "free to be nasty" environment

which increases workplace incivility. We conclude by identifying a range of empirical questions and recommend directions for future research to extend our understanding of this growing marketplace practice.

References

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

This work has significant relevance for brand managers, marketers and researchers with an interest in understanding organizational deviance and the changing dynamics of organization social and citizenship behaviors. Branding and naming strategies are an important facets in creating and communicating organizational identity. The effects of brand vulgarity in fostering a corporate culture of incivility must be both understood and its long term implications as a marketing strategy considered..

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TRACK: Marketing Strategy