

# Building an empire with relationships

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Discussion Paper 2017/01  
April 2017

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*“I found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble”.*

*Augustus*

Rome attracts over 8.5 million visitors per year and the factors that drive this tourism originates with ancient Rome which had controlled the Mediterranean for centuries (Neild, 2016). With a rich and complex history, many different factors drove the success of Rome, which had established itself as the controlling military force in the region. Arguably order and governance played a vital role in the success of the city and its ability to project power far beyond its city walls.

In the late first century BCE, Rome was a place torn by decades of civil war and political violence which had disrupted its very foundations. It was *Augustus* who brought peace and marked a key turning point for Rome and the beginning of the Roman Empire, the remnants of which are a main driver of the tourist industry in modern Rome today.

Augustus was born Octavius, but he used his name to build connections, adopting the name Caesar after his successful adoptive father to leverage that connection. Later marking his effective leadership in government and religion he was bestowed the name “Augustus,” meaning the holy one. Augustus was called the saviour of Rome, the bringer of the golden age of prosperity and stability, even being called *pater patriae*, father of the fatherland. His rule marks the beginning of *Pax Romana*, or the Roman peace, a “peaceful” period of about 200 years.<sup>1</sup>

After decades of civil war, Augustus mended frayed relationships by using poets to weave himself into the story of Rome, tying himself to the city and gaining the affection of the populous. Being from the lineage of the founder of the Roman people alone, however, would not have been sufficient so he also fashioned himself to be the saviour and restorer of Rome through critical infrastructure projects.

Within a company, brand extensions must relate to the existing or core of the business to fit consumer perceptions and maintain a level of consistency within the brand. The same

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<sup>1</sup> Rome was still constantly at war expanding the edges of the empire; however, Romans were no longer fighting Romans, something which violated the core of Roman culture and hence Pax Romana.

concept can be applied to leadership, relationship marketing (RM) more specifically, or countries more broadly as they evolve forward, adapting to change but the core of the culture must remain the same (Park et al. 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Park, MacInnis, and Eisingerich, 2016) for if it does not war and revolution are often the result.

When we look at Rome, the core belief was that all citizens were equal in the eyes of the laws of the city and the gods. Being Roman held such great prestige that in the first century BCE a war was fought by Italian allies to gain Roman citizen rights, demonstrating the sacred and practical importance this citizenship held (Hornblower, Spawforth, and Eidinow, 2012). Unlike Julius Caesar's attempt to bring about change and remake the republic by force, Augustus focused on both key segments of the citizen population.

Augustus opted not to adopt any outward symbols of his distinct position and heritage, which created an illusion that he was equal to those he ruled (Eder, 2009). This distinction allowed for his remaking of Rome using relationships to establish emotional connections with the populous, because the threat to culture, which had previously been felt when Caesar had made a similar attempt, was removed.

Two different relationship strategies were undertaken to target the two segments of the Roman population – the *Patricians* and the *Plebeians*. Both were important to build a solid relationship with as the Plebeian class had grown in power with the rise of populism, but segments of the Patrician class had organised the assassination of Caesar and the resulting civil war against Marc Antony.

The Patricians he approached with art, using the elements of enticement and enrichment to build these relationships through propagandist poetry. One work, Vergil's *Aeneid*, served a basic function of telling the story of the founding of the Roman people and created links to the divine lineage of Augustus, establishing validity in his power and removing uncertainty behind his rule. Although it did go further than this basic function, it was written in dactylic hexameter, the same meter Homer's epic poems were written in. This meter indicates serious poetry and evokes the awe of the audience and a traditional sentiment, which was a significant value driver to this class and must not be underestimated. The poem's subject, the Trojan War, evoked nostalgia through the connection to the history of Rome and a feeling of respect towards Augustus because of this tie into tradition. Hundreds of other

poems were composed, educating citizens with the goal of enhancing their trust and loyalty (Bell, Auh, and Eisingerich, 2017; Bell and Eisingerich, 2007; Eisingerich and Bell, 2008), lauding the efforts and history of Augustus, encouraging citizens to become proactive participants in society (Eisingerich, Auh, and Merlo, 2014; Merlo, Eisingerich, and Auh, 2014) which created love and respect among the class that had the luxury and ability of reading these works.

Augustus took a different approach to the Plebeian class, using instead very practical projects to build, sustain, and strengthen relationships over time. The investments that Augustus made to infrastructure projects were immense. Symbols of this relationship building still exist within the city today – from aqueducts to theatres, which benefited the ancient Romans and, today, bring tourists, benefiting the Roman economy.



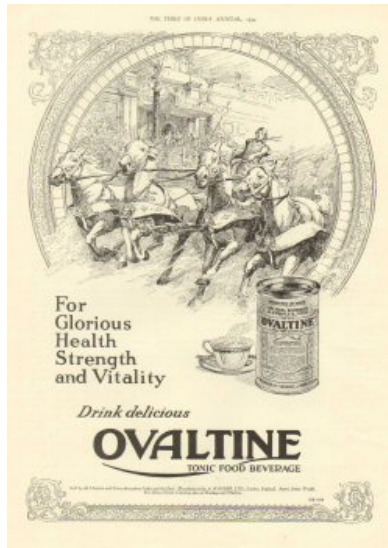
The Trevi Fountain would not be the tourist destination it is today without the water supplied by the *Aqua Vergine* which was built under the reign of Augustus.

Augustus contributed to the beatification of Rome, which brought enrichment through a nostalgic connection to the tradition, important to the Patricians; however, functionality was one of the most important attribute to the Plebeian audience. For the Plebeians basic survival was the most important aspect of their lives, and Augustus used his key projects in the city to make people feel safer through neighbourhood improvements. He also set up police and fire forces, which decreased the crime and likelihood of losing all in a fire (Eder, 2009) and founding charities for the poor (Eisingerich and Bhardwaj, 2011; Eisingerich et al.,

2011). In the spirit of *panem et circences* ("bread and games"), Augustus ensured that the Plebeians not only felt safe, but that they were entertained too. People who are busy enjoying themselves eating, drinking, digesting, or watching gladiators fighting for their lives are less likely to plan a revolution and even less likely to start one. But Augustus not wanting to take any chances also founded, and relied on, the *Praetorian Guard*, a small unit of elite soldiers in the Roman Army. To differentiate itself from other units, the Praetorian Guard not only employed special equipment, logos, and recruitment efforts but also focused on the careful selection, training, and continuous indoctrination of members (Park et al., 2013, 2014). As the most loyal, best equipped, and most determined of all army units, the Praetorian Guard offered close, personal protection to Augustus, accompanied him on every single war campaign, and served as secret police gathering invaluable intelligence for Augustus and his advisors.

At a minimum Augustus did not want to give people a reason to revolt. People tend not to love taxes. He reformed the Roman tax system, making it simpler and more transparent, hence more trustworthy (Liu et al., 2015). Of course people still did not love paying their taxes but at least they had seemingly less to moan about. His investments in infrastructure projects (roads, water pipes, sewage systems in the cities, etc.) not only made people's lives easier (access to clean water, easier to get from point A to point B), it also meant that it was easier for economic exchange (trade) to flourish, expanding the empire and strengthening it from within (Eisingerich et al., 2008; Eisingerich, Bell, and Tracey, 2010). Through his actions of rebuilding Rome, Augustus was able to build trust, love, and respect with the people. The people provided public support and were important connections to have to maintain peace and future prosperity.

Augustus used relationships to establish stability and peace, which in turn allowed an opportunity to resume expansion into neighbouring regions, fully showcasing the Roman military might. The success of his relationship building resulted in Rome being synonymous with power and strength, a connection still seen today.



Ovaltine (1934) uses a Roman charioteer to make a connection with the product to strength.

The attributes of ancient Rome have been employed as tools in marketing campaigns to apply the connection with strength and power to the featured product. These companies use the same connections that Augustus applied to stabilise and build the empire.

The decades before Augustus' ascent to power were tumultuous and the future of Rome was unclear. Rome was fundamentally changed by Augustus. His efforts to appeal to both *Patricians* and the *Plebeians* distinguish him from his predecessors. He set the foundations for expansion through leveraging different targeting strategies to play to the needs of each segment and remained true to the foundational message of Rome. After Augustus, all citizens were clearly no longer equal; there was now one ruler, namely Augustus himself. But through effective relationship marketing, he was able to change Rome while keeping an illusion that the core culture remained unchanged. Through this tactic, Augustus was able to set up Rome for future success, a legacy which continues to be celebrated 2000 years later.

**Questions to consider:**

The *what?* Which actions made Augustus stand out (vis-à-vis his predecessors)? What is it that makes Augustus stand out?

The *so what?* What difference did Augustus' action make? How did Augustus secure the support from the people?

The *now what*? What are some of the key takeaways for current leaders, businesses, people who want to bring about change? Who is the *Augustus* of today? Anyone who you think comes close? How does she/he do it?

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This paper has been produced by the Department of Management at Imperial College Business School

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ISSN: 1744-6783

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