The Nonprofit Brand Value Chain – Just black boxes or real insights?

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Background and objectives

Brand Management as a management technique has become an empirical phenomenon within the nonprofit sector and its research community (Laidler-Kylander, Quelch and Simonin, 2007). With an increasing number of NPOs facing a decrease in funding and donations and competition for volunteers and customers (Stride and Lee, 2007), brands are “now developed deliberately by nonprofit managers” (Ritchie, Swami and Weinberg, 1999). According to this development in everyday business of NPOs, scientific research started to analyse concepts and effects of brand management in NPOs in the 1990s (Tapp, 1996; Wray, 1994). In this paper we ask what we already know about nonprofit brand management and what we are still far from understanding. Therefore we created a systematic approach analysing existing nonprofit research literature on brand management in order to generate a state of the art of nonprofit brand management research.

According to this purpose the objective of this paper is threefold:

1) To present a systematic review on existing brand management research in the nonprofit sector and to provide an overview of different research streams.

2) To analyse and evaluate identified papers according to the brand value chain defined by Keller and Lehmann (2006).

3) To develop a research agenda for future research.

Methodological approach

To gain a holistic overview on past and ongoing research on nonprofit brand management a structured literature review according to Tranfield et al. (2003) was conducted. First scholarly journals of the nonprofit research community as well as top ranked marketing journals were searched for articles containing key words like “nonprofit”, “brand” and “brand management”. In addition two research databases (EBSCO and JSTOR) were scanned. Furthermore papers cited in identified articles were included and searched using the defined key words. The work for this paper is in progress. Next steps to be taken are: further definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria and strict quality assessment of included work (e.g. Popay, Rogers and Williams, 1998). These research steps lead to a categorization of research streams in nonprofit brand management and to an identification of relevant criteria for structuring the existing research evidence according to the brand value chain defined by Keller and Lehmann (2006).

Preliminary Results
For the purposes of this research we have adopted the De Chernatony and McDonald (1998) definition of a successful brand as it incorporates a holistic view on branding objects:

“A successful brand is an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely.” (De Chernatony and McDonald, 1998).

Sargeant (2009) enriches the brand concept for the nonprofit context by stating that brands are in essence a promise to the public that an organization possesses certain features or will behave in certain ways (Sargeant, 2009). Wray (1994), Tapp (1996) and Dixon (1996) were about the first to introduce brand management as a concept for nonprofits, although the idea of applying marketing techniques to the public and nonprofit sector already evoked since at least the 1970s (Kotler and Levy, 1969). Since Kotler and Levy’s (1969) broadening of the marketing concept authors evaluate the applicability of the brand management concept for nonprofits in an explorative and descriptive way (Ritchie, Swami and Weinberg, 1999), analyse how nonprofit brands are built (Grounds and Griffiths, 2005; Griffiths, 2005; Chapleo, 2007), measure brand personalities of nonprofit organizations (Smith, Graetz and Westerbeek, 2006; Voeth and Herbst, 2008) and search for correlations between the brand orientation of an NPO and certain effects on giving behaviour (Sargeant, Ford and Hudson, 2008) or on the overall performance (Napoli, 2006).

Through our systematic literature review we could identify 517 papers from 1989 until today containing the defined key words. 55 of the identified papers fulfill the inclusion criteria (defined according to Tranfield et al. 2003). So far the systematic overview of research fields in nonprofit brand management can be illustrated as follows:
As a next step in research the authors will further categorize and evaluate the identified research papers. To gain an insight on nonprofit brand management research we will use Keller and Lehmann’s (2006) brand value chain to conduct an in-depth analysis on what we know about nonprofit brand management and what we still can consider as a black box. Keller and Lehmann’s (2006) brand value chain provides a systems model of brand antecedents and consequences that show how brand equity develops and which cause-and-effect links must be taken into consideration. Figure 2 shows the brand value chain of Keller and Lehmann (2006) and nonprofit brand management literature that is already exploring different process steps.
With respect to the specific characteristics of NPO we will modify this value chain in terms of underlying concepts and definitions. For example research on customers' behavior and reactions will have to be analyzed according to a broader understanding of customers in the nonprofit context (Helmig and Thaler, 2010). Moreover all identified research will be evaluated in terms of its contribution to shed light into the process of creating, managing and evaluating a nonprofit brand. After the completion of this analysis we state clearly what we already know of nonprofit brand management and will further develop a research agenda for future research.

References:


Popay, J., Rogers, A. & Williams, G. (1998). Rationale and standards for the systematic review of qualitative literature in health services research. *Qualitative Health Research, 8*(3), 341.


