BRANDING IN THE CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Branding is a topic which is usually only used in relation with consumer products and traditionally with the PO sector. Branding in the NPO sector still has sometimes a not so attractive side to it. Especially small NPO's in different genres (for example the cultural sector) are very hesitant to use this concept as it has for them always a negative touch of commercialization. On the other hand the cultural sector stand in competition with the PO creative economies so the question arose if they do not have to stand up to the challenge and make branding one of their important topics.
Aim of the research
Based on these thoughts the aim of the research was to see what importance branding has in the cultural NPO field and if there are differences to the for profit oriented creative economies.
[Branding, Marketing, strategic management, creative industries]

1. INTRODUCTION

Branding in the cultural and creative sector is a topic which is upcoming and important. This research has been done to analyse if the cultural and creative sector are building brands in a different way then other sectors. It was also research how important the branding issue is for them and how they use their brands as an instrument to enhance their daily efforts. This article is a shorter version of a longer research which includes a thorough theoretical part, an qualitative interview research and a case study approach. Here only the results of the different researches will be given and concluded in recommendations and findings. The theoretical part is not included into this article. The described research gives some first insights into the area researched and shows where future research should go deeper.

2. METHODOLOGY

The research was done in two parts – first with qualitative interviews with experts and then with case studies. Here described are the methodological basics for the expert interviews.

Research focus:
The focus is intended to be a reflection of the acquired theories with expert opinions from various fields of branding research / practice.

Research goals:
To examine theoretical definitions and models as practised by individual experts.
To consider branding theory / development perspectives from various angles.
To illustrate the complexity of the branding process by a range of experts
To compile recommendations and challenges to provide assistance and inspiration

The following principal research questions were therefore developed:
What constitutes a brand (definitions, examples, indicators)?
Which future trends and problems are envisaged?
What are the success factors?

Interview participants were required to meet the following criteria: be capable of considering the theme of brand development from a variety of perspectives, be established as experts in their own field and be able to demonstrate a certain affinity with cultural and creative industries.
Efforts were thus made to glean perspectives from higher education institutes, agencies, training providers, governments and advisors in start-up companies. The following groups were identified:
A trainer for brand communication, a professor for brand development, a professor for social media communication, two general managers of a brand agencies, a lawyer for branding rights, the responsible person for the initiative for creative industries Germany, the general manager of a consulting agency for entrepreneurs in the creative industries.
A semi-standardised questionnaire was chosen as a tool which, on the one hand, enabled an element of comparability, and, on the other, allowed for individual questions and trends. This was considered essential due to the great diversity of the experts interviewed.
The specialists were given the same set of basic questions which were geared towards the research questions as follows:-
How do you define the concept of branding?
Which brand works well / does not work?
What future challenges do you envisage for brand development in creative industries?
What recommendations are you able you make?
What do you consider to be the top three success factors in implementing a branding strategy?
Name one of your personal favourite brands

In addition, each specialist was also asked several questions specifically relating to their own field of expertise, e.g. training providers were asked how they taught and conveyed brand awareness.

The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were recorded. Approved texts were then drawn up from the transcribed interviews.
During analysis and evaluation, the opinions were clustered in this case, and recommendations and opinions were derived therefrom.

SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

However diverse the perspectives of the experts involved may be, the commonly shared opinions on and indications of strong brands became consistently clear as they were regularly combined from all thematic points of view. Below is a summary and discussion of these essential opinions.
For analysis, the individual subject areas for research questions will now be clustered into opinions, and the main points of individual discussions will be summarised and consolidated.
The three research questions / areas are:-
What constitutes a brand (definition, examples, indicators)?
Which future trends and problems are envisaged?
What are the success factors?

These statements are also used as the basis for the questions and criteria development in the case studies. For clarity's sake, statements were clustered under various umbrella terms.
Brand
What constitutes a brand and how to recognise if a brand works well or not. This question was consistently attested by each expert with the following indicators:-
Authenticity
The brand must be authentic and associated with the institution's conduct, programmes, activities and communication. This applies in particular when there is a deviation from the norm as described by the professor for brand development; this, too, must be conveyed as authentic, with change being hailed as the norm.
Distinctiveness
The brand should tell a story which makes both the brand and the institution distinctive. Here, it becomes clear that establishments that make the point that they are open to all and are therefore not conducting any special brand development often use this argument as an excuse. The institution must be and remain particularly distinctive and unique in the expanding market and amidst the multitude of offers in order to be open and responsive to all.
Consistency, clarity, comprehensibility

The stories and images associated with branding must be intelligible. This applies not only to existing and potential customers, but also for employees – a brand can only be clearly conveyed to the public if it is clearly understood, both internally and externally. This also then leads to consistency because understanding leads to a stronger penetration of the brand among staff.

Continuous, clear communication

The need to continuously communicate the brand was emphasised by all participants in the discussion. It is not enough merely to have a clear slogan which is communicated only once. The image portrayed by the institution must be continuously kept in mind and communicated. This communication must again be effected, both internally and externally.

Transferability of the brand to staff

An important point was made by the training provider: the brand must be transferable to staff, at least if the latter are to represent, promote or sell the brand to the public. Optimum results can only be achieved when the brands and their stories are understood by sales staff and may be authentically represented externally.

Tool consistency with brand essence

The above named transferability also applies to methods used. Social media as a topic must also be adapted for the respective target market. If the latter is not media savvy, social media tools cannot be purposefully used. By contrast, the professor for social media also highlights the fact that a complete about-turn into the digital marketing world may make sense if the target market is media savvy. The choice of methods and communication channels must be selected in accordance with the relevant target markets and goals established. Moreover, there is close association between employees, the target market and the marketing tools. Authenticity can only be achieved if employees are able to handle the target-market oriented tools professionally and naturally.

Keep a clear vision of target markets

Everything is interlinked since an institution cannot realistically address its target audience if it has no clear image of the latter, and will experience difficulty in choosing the right tools. This will often culminate in an indefinable mass of opinions, tools and marketing in initiatives which fail to create a recognisable image of the institution, both internally and externally. Just because a company wishes to be open to all, it does not mean that it cannot be conveyed to a specific target market.

Longevity

Communication and design framework or a single core message?

The professor for brand development speaks in favour of a framework with established design and communication policies, but also some leeway for various slogans and images. The professor for social media, meanwhile, advocates a clear core message which is continuously re-communicated. Both methods have their pros and cons, and either could be effective, depending on the institution. The crucial factor seems to be a resolute, clear and well-reasoned approach to this topic and a decision which may be continuously implemented in brand communication.

Creating a customised market

The consultant for entrepreneurs' experience in this area is interesting, but many start-up companies refuse to believe it – namely that there is a customised market for their product. They do not have an understanding of such a market. Consultant for entrepreneurs' motto is clear: even if you do not have a customised market, you need to create one. This also means that brand communication and development represent important factors of this customised market.

The budget

Brand communication and development are always a question of money – which service providers can be hired, what must be managed in-house, which agency is affordable, etc. This is recognised by almost all experts; nonetheless, it may also be clearly stated that the absence of a budget cannot be blamed for the absence of a brand, because even when the funds for market research and / or market development are available, the results must be accepted and implemented internally. This means that the attitude of staff and, particularly, of the management play a crucial role in the success of such measures.

Image and identity are crucial

This has become clear through the points already covered. The consultant for entrepreneurs' exciting concept in this context retrospectively ask what came first: the identity of the institution, or the difference that lies between the institution and the market. Where do the definition and characteristics of a cultural institution's identity stem from: itself, or market considerations?

The bottom line for the brand is that an integral organisational approach is required, where the management, employees, product / service providers and customers work closely together. Only when the theme is dealt with in a holistic fashion can it be successfully established and navigated.
From the authors' point of view, the following points can be set as recommended courses of action:
Recommended course of action 1:
A company must know how far-reaching the statements given by its own brands are. There must be an overriding appreciation that the issue will only succeed when the necessary resources are in place for it (time, money, capacity and expertise).
Recommended course of action 2:
There cannot be clear brand positioning in the absence of clear goals and an awareness of what your company and its products / services represent. Thus, any brand development should be a process of developing mission statements, or at least of enhancing existing company goals.
Recommended course of action 3:
A brand is turned in to something exceptional by a company, institution, product / service provider. This exceptional feature must be authentically represented within the company, internally and externally. It is a very clear aspect of the staff and company's identification with the product / service. Such an identity is formed through an intensive analysis of the product / service.
Challenges
The challenges mentioned were also reiterated through the eyes of the respective experts. Thus, various points can be applied here:
Agency collaboration
With regard to working with agencies, two important challenges were identified:
Firstly, in today's climate, with a choice of advertising, PR, online agencies, etc., it is no longer clear which specialist agency is actually managing the brand development process... According to the professor for social media and one of the manager of a brand agency, communication and expertise issues may also arise from this problem, since not all agencies are capable of developing a brand in conjunction with an institution.
Secondly, it is a question of the actual work of the agency and the path they choose to pursue. The professor for brand development and the professor for social media both point out independently that the standard agency approach – i.e. developing something without always consulting with the client after the initial briefing – is unfruitful in the arts and creative industries. An agency must enter the process with no personal agenda in order to then collaborate with the institution to formulate a brand and its standards. If this does not happen, the company's own creative essence will not be taken seriously.

Competition and the choice of products in offer is constantly increasing
Cultural and creative enterprises are in ever tighter competition with each other. At the same time, they are also competing with the selection of products offered in other sectors too. Due to the speed and transparency of communications, the public is always well informed, and competition between individual establishments is mostly for the equally scarce leisure time of the same target market. Community theatres and many other large and small profit / non-profit establishments relating to sport, culture and edutainment activities are also in competition with each other. Consumers / the public are by principle indifferent to which legal form, funding or cultural definition prevails within the individual establishment. They are more concerned with the appearance and whether the image projected externally corresponds with their own image. According to experts, the younger generation in particular is voicing loud opinions regarding the arts and culture in the same way they would judge clothes, footwear labels or drinks brands – the same criteria are being used for purchasing choices. This means that the measures in place for consumer branding are also valid for arts branding.
Brands must be taken seriously within institutions
Those who wish to take on the competition and who deem it important that their content and brief meet ever higher quality standards need to take the brand and its significance seriously. This means that it must be made a higher priority by the establishment's management and staff.
Brand as an overall, shared responsibility
If the brand is taken seriously, then it stands to reason that all staff must be involved with it, and that the brand is regarded as a shared responsibility. The professor for social media in particular highlights the point that it is important not to leave only those in charge of the brand within the institution to manage it, but to adopt a more cross-departmental approach.
Loss of control through social media
It has been clearly indicated by several sources that the deployment of social media can lead to a certain loss

of control in relation to the brand. The agency manager emphasises the 'bottom up' approach pursued by social media, and highlights crowd sourcing as an important factor. The professor for social media observes that people are tending towards becoming brand watchdogs rather than brand coaches through the use of social media, and that brands can no longer hide due to the transparency of the World Wide Web. The consultant for entrepreneurs expands with the important trend of prosuming – a combination of production and consumerism, where customers help determine key product design and development issues – this is another classic bottom up system, geared strongly towards demand.

Time window for brand development

In science, a full decade has to pass by before findings from basic research may be presented to mainstream media and thus committed to mainstream memory. According to the responsible for Germanys initiative for creative industry, this time is not given to brands, even though penetration of a market alone requires time.

Differences / similarities between NPOs and POs

In this area, there is also widespread consensus amongst experts that there are no fundamental differences observed between an NPO or PO institution's style of brand development. However, the consultant for entrepreneurs clearly states his feeling that professionalism and finance issues fall by the wayside when dealing with NPOs, highlighting the urgent need for change in this area. The professor for brand development also stresses that NPOs and POs are judged on a level playing field in terms of brand development.

Space branding

Space branding has been big news for a number of years when it comes to major consumer brands – car manufacturers invent entire themed landscapes for themselves. In the arts, it is easier since in most cases the space is already defined – the building where the art or cultural work is being presented. The consumer / visitor automatically comes into this space and identifies the institution with it. There are still further possibilities in this area to expand and address this identification and associate it with the brand.

Conclusion

Some key points may again be drawn up from the challenges. Even in cultural and creative industries, with their many micro-enterprises, the question that is often raised is that of budget, and the cost of brand development and maintenance. "Agency" and "Social media" are certainly topics that are also often discussed. Agencies cost money - a cost which many institutions are loathe to set aside, while social media promises wide media coverage without any initially visible, appreciable costs.

The following recommended courses of action may be derived from the results:

Recommended course of action 4:

The decision of whether one is willing and able to work with an agency should not be determined by budgetary issues alone. It is vital to check the expertise already available in-house and, more importantly, which requirements an agency could actually fulfil. Once this issue is clarified, the institution / company must have clear ideas in terms of what they expect the agency to deliver. Handing over total responsibility for branding to an agency may lead to difficulties if done without due prior consideration. Nevertheless, collaboration may be highly suitable, even for small companies.

Recommended course of action 5:

The use of social media is appealing, but must be well-planned. In this field, the same level of company expertise and resources must be available as when using classic marketing tools – social media is not self-maintaining. On the contrary, there must be a precise idea in place in terms of communication (audience, themes). Another important point to consider is the potential loss of power which can arise through social media and the corresponding increase of consumer power.

Conclusion

In spite of the experts' differing viewpoints, it has been possible to compile clear indicators for successful brand development. The most important is clearly the long term, consistent approach that needs to be applied to brand development. Brands in the arts sector and creative industries are subject to the same indicators and market conditions as brands from other sectors. The brand is a shared responsibility which should not depend on funding issues and must be taken seriously by the institution in order to be successful.

4. CASE STUDIES

In order to complete the research for the theme, it is necessary to consult not only specialists from various fields, but also to relate to real-life case studies.
Thus, four case studies were selected in order to highlight the full spectrum of this topic.
The aim of the case studies is not to offer generic statements regarding how brands are developed in creative and cultural industries, but conversely, to indicate the different potential paths that lead to successful brand communication, and how various brands may be seen and defined by companies / institutions.
As a result, the following were selected:
A small non-profit cultural organisation – der kulturpalast Hamburg
A large non-profit cultural organisation – das Konzerthaus Dortmund
A small company in the creative industry– Zone 2 Connect GmbH
A large company in the creative industry – Cellular GmbH

These institutions / companies were asked to complete a questionnaire with open-ended questions and make material available to explain their brand development. The questionnaire was either answered in group discussions (Hamburg Culture Palace, Dortmund Concert House and Cellular) or in writing. In the former case, the questions were posed during the discussions, whereas in the latter case the authors answered afterwards by telephone.
The questions in the partially-standardised guidelines were compiled using the theories and specialist statements. The questions are as follows:
What do you associate with the concept of branding with regard to your company?
Briefly describe what your target market looks like?
Where does this knowledge stem from – is it a feeling or supported data?
What opinions would you like to hear from a member of your target market in relation to your institution? Give a brief description.
Is there a story behind your brand that you tell? A living environment that you create?
To what extent does this story change with the use of social media?
Who is responsible for this issue in your company (a designated person, management, or everyone in the team?)
How important is the subject of branding for the institution's management on a scale of 1-10 (1 = not important, 10 = very important)?
How do you convey the value and the story of your brand to your colleagues / team members?
Do you work with an agency or was an agency involved in designing your logo? What are / were your experiences?
Do you have role models in relation to this topic?

5. SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES

The analysis and evaluation of the observed case studies provides interesting insights into the real world and the implementation of brand development. The following points offer an overview and were deemed particularly important:

The theoretical models were not implemented in practice, at least not in those cases examined. Insight and strategic implementation have little in common with the abstract models described. In reality, an amalgamation of personal insights into branding, collaboration with agencies and the daily development of the business is to be seen, rather than a rigid and strict adherence to theoretical models.

The branding process is followed through by all four companies with some modifications and varying intensity. This strategic procedure is in keeping with company processes, particularly in the foundation stage.

There are no rules that state that organisations from the public and intermediary sectors should be less brand-focused than profit-making companies in the private sector. The four cases clearly demonstrate that branding takes a different priority, depending in the nature and character of the management and on the company's alignment to product choice and demand. There is no observed difference between NPOs and POs in these cases.

It is easier to compare companies that are oriented towards product choice and demand-orientated companies, and B2B and B2C businesses. These aspects exert a great influence on the importance of the branding issue for institutions and companies. Demand-orientated companies establishing themselves in the B2B market must make their brands much stronger than those of B2C companies through testimonials, networking and a demonstration of personal ability (see example of Zone 2 and Cellular). These must be communicated in detail due to nature of multi-faceted target markets and also more widely established in the overall brand layout and communication (examples of Dortmund Concert House and Hamburg Culture Palace).

The four cases studied highlight the recommended courses of action for companies and institutions in the cultural and creative industries developed in section 5: based on the most accurate possible observations of the market and target groups, authentic, value-oriented brand development from within is a good idea. In terms of depth and breadth, the cost of research and development must flow within a corresponding framework. The design of the external appearance should also be geared towards respective parameters. However, it is only by having a professional corporate design that a company image can be managed effectively.

The role of branding identification for various groups of stakeholders becomes clear in the case studies. In the non-profit-oriented cultural enterprises this branding role applies in equal measure both internally and externally; in companies in the creative industry it is more often internal and oriented towards staff.

Social media also plays a varied role in the brand management of the institutions or companies observed. In cultural enterprises, this medium is used more for interacting with external target markets / the public in order to communicate the offer more widely via the multipliers. Cellular uses social media in the context of employer branding.

The most important factor for brand development within institutions or companies and the stringent enforcement of an internal and external branding strategy still remains the approach adopted by those in charge. If there is sensitivity for and commitment to the theme, then the 'brand spirit' is palpable throughout the whole company. In addition, it is vital to recognise that brand development is at no time 'finished', but is always a continuous, long-term process which accompanies the development of a company or institution (see the case study for the Culture Palace). The task of branding can, however, also indicate trendsetting impetus for the future expansion of the company and the reality of being one step ahead.

7. CONCLUSION

The objective of this research is to promote an awareness of the topic of branding in the cultural and creative industries. A combination of theories and practice has been created by blending theory, expert appraisals and reflections on selected case studies, enabling the topic to be explored from various angles.

Branding is not an exact science. The framework may be fixed, but ultimately each enterprise must choose its own path. The importance of the topic for the company's success becomes obvious, as does the success that may be achieved by engaging in branding.

The topic must be taken seriously, including putting the necessary resources in place to manage it successfully.

There are clearly exceptional examples of branding in the creative and cultural industries in both profit and non-profit enterprises.

The people who accept the topic are crucial. The success of an institution cannot be extended through branding unless its management team embrace the topic and incorporate it into the vision for the company. The brand per se cannot create the vision, but it can provide assistance and support as part of the vision.

Brand development and brand management can help set a company apart, a particularly useful function for the multitude of micro-enterprises within the creative and cultural industries.

The conclusion is therefore made with the recommendation that every establishment takes this theme seriously and investigates the level of brand development intensity required for their own company.

If the reader is interested in the overall study and its theoretical framework, please contact the author.

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