BRAND IMAGE OF MERGING BRANDS: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MERGING OF TWO ORCHESTRAS AND A MUSIC UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT
The paper investigates stakeholder perceptions of brand image in the case of merging brands. The context of the study is the Helsinki Music Center where three prominent existing brands formed a new joint brand. Using extant literature on brand alliances and brand mergers as theoretical approaches, the study categorizes ways in which consumer view the new merged brand. The paper is based on quantitative empirical 418-respondent survey among stakeholders. Principal component analysis with the varimax rotation method is used to examine consumers' brand perceptions, and the consumers are categorized using the cluster analysis method. The results identify five distinct factors representing different views that stakeholders had towards merged brands and the new joint brand. Moreover, three distinct groups of consumers were identified based on these views. Overall, the value of the study lies in revealing the key factors underlying merged brands and the new joint brand.

Brand image, joint brand, arts management, factor analysis, cluster analysis

INTRODUCTION
Increased cooperative efforts in the field of arts management have influenced also the importance of brand alliances and strategic decisions regarding brands. Various brand alliances may leave cultural managers dealing with complex brand portfolios (d'Astous et al, 2007; Basu, 2006; Laforet Saunders, 1994; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000b), brand architecture (e.g. Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000b; Basu, 2006; Laforet and Saunders, 1994; Kapferer, 2004; Uggla and Filipsson, 2009; Harish, 2008) and brand image (e.g. Keller, 1993; Aaker and Jochimshaler, 2000a). However, the previous studies have mainly focused on how the changes in brand architecture, such as brand alliances or extensions, effect the consumers' evaluation of the changes and brand equity (e.g. Aaker and Keller, 1990; Washburn et.al., 2004). In spite of increasing interest in brand portfolio management very few studies are addressing the consumer perceptions as a basis for brand architecture in the field of arts management.
In the paper we aim to investigate how consumer perceptions of brand image can provide important information for the creation of new brand architecture and brand relationships. We argue that the strategic decisions on brand architecture and brand relationships should be based on the positioning of joining brands (cf. Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000b). Instead of focusing merely on the functional attributes of different brand images, information about consumer perceptions should include more comprehensive dimensions of brand images when creating brand

alliances. Hence, the paper provides a holistic framework for the analysis of brand images and its dimensions in the process of joining brands. We focus in particular on the formation of brand architecture in prior to new alliances and joint operations in the field of classical music.

The empirical context of our study is the Helsinki Music Center that joins three prominent brands under a joint entity. The Helsinki Music Centre houses three important actors of Finnish classical music: Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Sibelius Academy. The data is based on a quantitative 418-respondent survey among the key customers of the three music institutions. The study was conducted in May 2011 that was three months before the new music centre was opened. Principal component analysis with the varimax rotation method was used to examine the consumers' brand perceptions. The consumers were categorized using the cluster analysis method.

The theoretical contribution of the paper builds on elaborating the discussions on brand image and brand architecture highlighting in particular the role of existing customer expectations in building new brand architecture. The results point out five distinct factors representing different views that stakeholders had towards the distinct brands and the new joint brand. Three distinct groups of consumers were identified based on these views. Overall, the value of the study lies in revealing the key factors underlying merged brands and the new joint brand. Even if the consumers' images of distinct brands share similar functional attributes and customer niche, the customers seem to be loyal to each brand and committed to the individual brands. This highlights the importance of going beyond the positioning and functional attributes when making strategic decisions on brand architecture. These results both contribute to the discussion on brand image and provide implications for cultural managers to create successful brand alliances and brand architecture within the cultural field.

THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

Brand Architecture

Brand has been defined as a name, signal, term, symbol design or a combinations of the above, by which a product or service or organization can be identified (e.g. King, 1991; Keller, 1998; Balmer, 1995; Balmer, 2001). Branding is a process of designing, planning and communicating the essence and identity of a brand in order to influence and manage the image and reputation of it (Anholt, 2007). Brand portfolio includes all the brands and sub-brands attached to product-market offerings (see e.g. Harish, 2008; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000b) whereas brand architecture is the design and management of a brand portfolio. Hence, the brand architecture provides an organization and a structure for the brand portfolio by specifying the roles of brands and the nature of relationships between brands and various product-market contexts (Harris, 2008; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000a; see also Basu, 2006). The purpose of brand architecture is to build a coherent whole of the strategically important brand identities. One of the most established brand architecture tools is the Brand Relations Spectrum (BRS) introduced by Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000a; 2000b). The BRS reveals four main brand architecture strategies: 1) House of Brands, 2) Endorsed brands, 3) Sub-brands, and 4) Branded House Strategies.

Researchers have identified also other strategies of brand architecture. In Kapferer's (1997) *Branded house* (or umbrella brand) existing competing brand(s) will be unified under an umbrella or a supporting brand. The idea behind an umbrella brand is that the same brand can be used to market various products, and the image of the brand will transfer to the other products. *The house of brand* builds on having independent brand names, separate from the joining organization. In the case of supporting brand the joint brand name would be at the background, yet providing the organizations and their products a certain quality assurance and legitimation. The relationships between the brands can vary in different branding strategies such as a network or ladder structures (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000a; 2000b; Basu, 2006).

The brand architecture states also the power of relationships between the brands. The brand with a stronger position is considered to be an endorser brand and the sub-brand an endorsed one (see e.g. Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000a, b). In order to understand the relationships between the brands as seen by the customers it is important to know how they define their relationship with the brand, what kinds of meanings and benefits they attach to the brand and what is the degree of loyalty towards a brand. This would indicate how customers might react to changes within the brand architecture. The following figure summarizes the main brand architecture strategies. (Figure 1)

FIGURE 1. THE MAIN BRAND ARCHITECTURE STRATEGIES

Adapted from Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000a; 2000b

Dimensions of Brand Image

Brand identity can be seen as a set of associations that the brand strategist seeks to create or maintain whereas the brand image is the current associations seen by the consumers (e.g. Uggala and Filipsson, 2009). The research on brand image is vast and it has been studied in wide variety of contexts. Brand image has been defined through various dimensions such as 1) brand loyalty, 2) brand attitude 3) perceived quality and brand associations, and 4) behavioral expectations and finally 5) brand personality (see e.g. Aker, 1991; Keller, 1993), see also discussion on brand equity e.g. Aaker, 1996). Each of these dimensions explains different aspects on the brand image and on the consumers' behavior relating to the brand. In the following we will discuss these dimensions in relation to brand alliances and more specifically on brand architecture. The dimensions relevant for the study are: 1) brand loyalty, 2) brand attitude, 3) behavioral expectations, 4) perceived quality and brand associations, and 5) brand personality. The awareness and brand knowledge dimensions have been recognized in several studies (e.g. Keller, 2008) but it was withdrawn from this study because the informants were expected to have good level of awareness and knowledge of all the four brands studied. Hence, the selection of dimensions proposed is appropriate when studying the current customer base and their reactions to brand changes. The behavioral expectations and attitude dimensions were considered relevant because in different merger situation a new brand portfolio and offering are introduced to consumers.

Aaker (1991) states that brand loyalty indicates the attachment that a consumer has for a brand and how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, i.e. higher the loyalty lower the vulnerability of consumer base for competitive action. In line with this, Oliver (1999) sees loyalty as a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. In merger situation the loyalty towards a brand needs to be maintained or transferred to the new brand created.

Brand attitude refers to the consumer's evaluation and judgment of the brand. Usually the brand attitude is either positive or negative. The brand attitude then reflects on the consumer's behavior (see e.g. Janonins et. al., 2007, Peter and Olsen, 2005). In merger situation a positive attitude needs to be maintained and the negative attitude might be avoided by creating a new brand for the merged product or service. *Brand association*, according to Aaker (1991), is anything linked to a memory of a brand. The link will be stronger when it is based on many experiences or exposures of communications and it is supported by a network of other links. Aarker & Joachimsthaler (2000) emphasize the importance of being aware of the brand associations in product positioning for example, healthy food merged with delicacies might not be joinable in the consumers' minds. The *perceived quality* is related to a consumer's opinion on the extent to which a particular product will be able to meet one's expectations (e.g. Gill and Dawra, 2010). Here again, the quality is linked to brand positioning; whether a high quality product or service should be linked to low quality one. *Behavioral expectations* refer to the persons own idea of expected behavior, for example how likely they see the probability to purchase the brand. When merging brand that are in consumers mind in extreme end in this dimensions, a house of brand strategies might be beneficial (see e.g. Venkatesh et. al., 2008; Warshaw and Davis, 1985). *Brand personality* refers to the set of human characteristics associated with the brand (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Gill and Dawra, 2010). Gill and Dawra (2010) emphasize that it is important to understand brand personality, as consumers use brand personality to express themselves. The brand personality is also important as merging brand with differing personalities might be challenging, or require a house of brands strategy. Figure 2 summarizes the five dimensions to analyze brand image in the study.

In the following figure the dimensions of brand image relevant to this study are summarized:

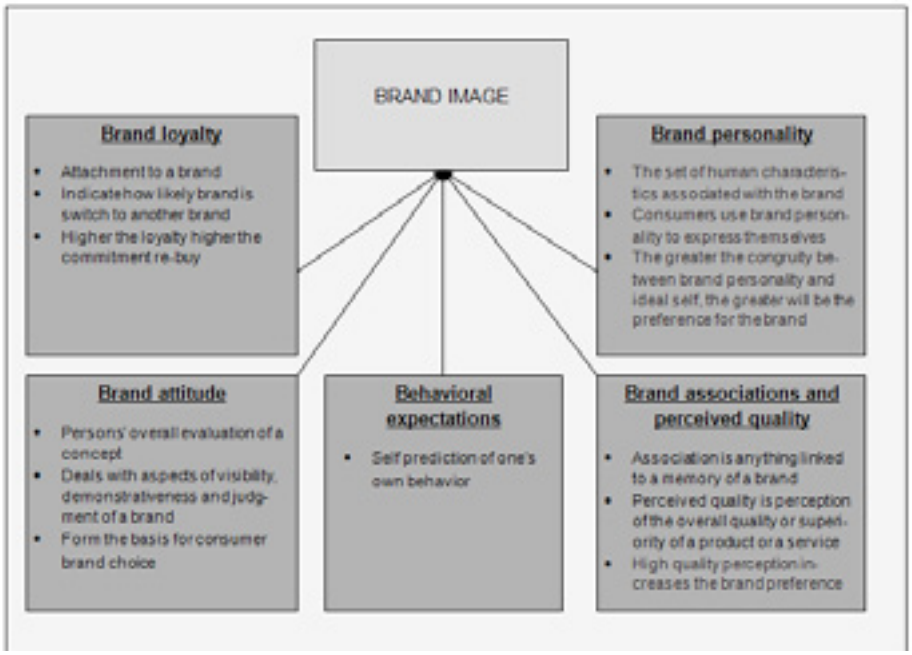

FIGURE 2 BRAND IMAGE DIMENSIONS

To summarize, consumers' perceptions of brand relationships should be taken into account when brand architecture is formed, in particular in a merger situation. However, Basu (2006) states that a brand architecture strategy needs to be grounded in and driven by desired customer perceptions rather than any particular brand management structure. In the study, brand image was chosen as an indicator of brand architecture and relationships since a brand architecture strategy needs to be grounded in and driven by desired customer perceptions rather than any brand management structure. Based on the stakeholders' perceptions of image dimensions, the assumptions of brand relationships and how brand architecture is formed in the eyes of stakeholders will be analyzed in the paper.

METHODOLOGY

The context of the study is the Helsinki Music Center (HMC) that joins three prominent existing brands under a joint entity: Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra (HPO), Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (FRSO), and the Sibelius Academy (SibA), the leading music university in Finland. The data collection was carried out among customers and other stakeholders of respective organization through an Internet survey in 2011, three months before HMC was opened to the public. The link to the survey was sent by email and the questionnaire resulted in 418 responses. 67 % of the respondents stated to be customers of FRSO. The second largest customer group was that of HPO (23%) and almost 8 percent stated that they were customers of SibA. Almost 20 percent of the respondents were other stakeholders of these organizations than customers.

The variables explaining the brand image dimensions were adapted from previous studies (Table 1). The responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, and the measures obtained were treated as interval scaled.

BRAND IMAGE DIMENSION	NUMBER OF ITEMS	SOURCE
1. Brand attitude	11	Hieke (2010)
2. Brand loyalty	10	Punniyamoorthy and Prasanna (2007), Washburn et.al (2004)
3. Brand associations and perceived quality	7	Washburn et.al (2004), Gill and Dawra (2010)
4. Behavioral expectations	6	Warshaw and Davis (1985)
5. Brand personality	24	Aaker, J. (1997)

TABLE 1. OPERATIONALIZED BRAND IMAGE DIMENSIONS.

RESULTS

The factor analysis method was used to examine the respondents' views on studied brands. To conform to the assertions of Costello and Osborne (2005) concerning the exploratory factor analysis, principal components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was used (Hair et al., 2006). There are several views on the minimum number of cases required for the factor analysis. Generally, recommended minimum number of cases range from 100 to 300 (e.g. Gorsuch, 1983; Hatcher, 1994; Norušis, 2005, p. 400). Moreover, there should be at least five times as many observations as the number of variables to be analyzed (Bryant and Yarnold, 1995; Hair et al., 2006, pp. 112-113). As the data of the present study consists of 418 cases and the factor analysis had 34 variables this subjects-to-variables ratio equals 12.29. Furthermore, the The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .94 in the present study and thus exceeded the recommended level of .50 (Hair et al., 2006, pp. 114-115). Overall, it is likely that the results of the factor analysis have sufficient explanatory power.

The results of the study indicate that with 34 variables included in the factor analysis results in 5 factors. These five underlying dimensions revealed in factor analysis explain brand image and its dimensions perceived by the respondents in the context of HMC. The results indicate strong dimension of loyalty towards individual HPO, FRSO and SibA brands, which is not surprising since the merger had not yet taken place. This result demonstrates that these three brands have a strong customer base. The findings also indicate some negative expectations towards HMC brand.

The respondents were further categorized into three groups using the cluster analysis method. In general, the objective of cluster analysis is to group objects based on their characteristics so that there is a greater similarity among units within groups than there is among units in different groups (Klastorin, 1983, p. 92; Everitt, 1993; Hair et al., 2006, pp. 555-628). Cluster analysis begins by formulating the clustering problem and by defining the variables on which the clustering will be based (Hair et al., 2006, pp. 555-628). In the present study, these variables were based on the preceding factor analysis. The clustering method that was used was K-means reassignment method, which splits a set of objects into a selected number of groups by maximizing between-cluster variation relative to within-cluster variation (Punj and Stewart, 1983; Steinley, 2006). It is a non-hierarchical clustering method where the number of clusters has to be determined in advance. The cluster analysis was conducted based on the factor analysis.

The results of the cluster analysis indicate that there are three different stakeholder groups based on their brand attitudes. The largest group was the loyal customers of the familiar product brands that have mixed feelings towards the new HMC brand. Again, it is shown that HPO, FRSO and SibA brands have a strong customer base. Nevertheless, in general attitudes towards the HMC brand are more positive than negative. Negative behavioral expectations and willingness to try the new offering of HMC might also indicate that there are not yet much to expect and the new offering of the HMC is unclear. The results might also demonstrate some level of resistance towards change caused by the merger. Those having most negative attitude is a very small group compared to the other two and therefore, any generalizations should be avoided. This said, the results correspond with the factor analysis and support the assumption of shared brand dominance.

The results of the factor analysis and cluster analysis should be seen as preliminary results as we continue on analyzing the data. We expect our final results to provide a comprehensive picture of the attitudes towards the studied brands.

CONCLUSIONS

The study aims at revealing the underlying dimension of brand loyalty and a group of loyal stakeholders towards HPO, FRSO and SibA brands. This is explained by that these product brands have long history and strong customer base that HMC don't yet have, yet a small group already enthusiastic for the forthcoming HMC could also be identified. The dimensions of brand image found from the factor analysis were corresponding with the dimensions identified from literature. (Aaker 1991, 109; Keller, 1993; Arslan and Altune, 2010) However, a more functional dimension linked to band image was also found, the visual dimension of the brand. Brand visuality has been discussed in recent studies and merits more attention (see e.g. Karjalainen, 2010)
The results indicate that no clear dominance of either product or corporate brand can be found. The brands rather form a shared dominance where product and corporate brands are endorsing one another. As mentioned earlier in the study, in brand endorsement and independent brands are endorsed by another brand, usually an organizational brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000a, 110-111; 2000b; Harish, 2008). However, it was found that the personality of the HMC brand is constructed through the personalities of HPO, FRSO and SibA brands. The similarity of the brand perceptions also refer to that there would not be strong brand conflicts perceived by the stakeholders after merger. In this case the product brands have longer brand history and stronger customer base than the corporate brand. It was found that the product brands endorse the emerging corporate brand by having loyal stakeholders'. The endorsing power of the corporate brand is based on the positive attitudes and behavioral expectations of the stakeholders. Thus, the results show that also the product brands have endorsing power towards the corporate brand.
These architectures with shared brand dominance are very common and most often used in organizing the brand portfolio (e.g. Laforet and Sounders, 1994; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000b; Harish, 2008). It needs to be kept in mind that the results here are tight to the context of the case study and they indicate stakeholders' perceptions of the brand relationships. However, the results support the findings of Jyrämä and Vilén (2011) that Helsinki Music Centre can be conceptualized as a strategic alliance although no formal merger or acquisition is taking place. In strategic alliance voluntary arrangements between firms involving exchange, sharing, or co-development of products, technologies, or services are conducted (Gulati, 1998). The results of this research can be used as a guideline when strategic decisions of brand architecture formation in the HMC are made to avoid brand conflicts in the stakeholders' minds. Thus, we propose that studying the brand images prior to mergers gives useful tools to manage the joining brands and their brand architecture.
The results presented in this paper should be seen as preliminary as we continue on analyzing the data. However, the prelimiary results include several interesting findings, and we expect our final results to provide a comprehensive picture of the attitudes towards the studied brands.

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