



Components of art exhibition brand equity for internal and external visitors

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore determinants of brand equity for cultural activities from the perspective of internal as well as external visitors. Our analysis advocates four elements for brand equity in artistic and cultural activities (loyalty, brand image, perceived quality and brand values) and assesses them for the case of an itinerant art exhibition staged over the past twenty years in a region of Spain. Building on extensive literature, a model of the relationship is developed and empirically tested using survey data collected from 406 visitors. Data are analysed through Partial Least Squares. Findings suggest that external visitors attach greater importance to brand image as a determinant of value than do internal visitors, whereas for the latter brand values are the main source of value.

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1. Introduction

Image, brand and brand equity are becoming increasingly important concepts for arts and cultural organizations. Until fairly recently cultural organizations shunned the idea of engaging in any kind of marketing, preferring to focus their efforts on the custodial and educational side of their work. Today, however, such institutions are very much aware that visitors are led by the image they associate to the brand, and that a positive link may prove a key strategic asset and provide competitive advantage. Clear examples of the value attained by certain brands are found in museums such as the Tate Gallery, Guggenheim or MOMA. The Guggenheim museums, to quote one instance, are a prime example of a bold initiative to create a universally recognised and clearly distinguishable museum brand based on a distinctive and prestigious architecture and style.

Since arts and cultural organizations merge non-profit social goals and commercial objectives linked to attracting visitors, the study of brands in such institutions ties in with literature in both the non-profit as well as the tourist sector. Until recently non-profit organizations were fairly reluctant to create and promote their own brands due to the risk of being considered over-commercial (Richie, Swami, & Weinberg, 1998) or immoral (Sargeant, 1999). This lack of interest is mirrored in the scant amount of research which has thus

far addressed the topic. The works we have examined focus on assessing corporate image as a driver of brand equity in non-profits (Johnson & Zinkhan, 1990; Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005; Webb, Green, & Brashear, 2000), exploring the link between brand personality and brand image and how these institutions attract donors (Faircloth, 2005), and analysing the positive impact which ascertaining equity has on revenue, reputation and increased numbers of sponsors for these organizations (Quelch, Austin, & Laidler-Kylander, 2004).

For the area of tourist marketing, however, the brand image of tourist destinations has been the subject of research for over thirty years (Hunt, 1975; Gallarza, Gil, & Calderon, 2002; Pike, 2002; amongst others), as has tourist loyalty – repeating visits or the intention to recommend the tourist destination (Bigné, Sánchez, & Sánchez, 2001; Oppermann, 2000). More recently, research has started to take an interest in the brand equity of tourist destinations (Konecnik, 2006; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

If we focus on the issue of brand equity in the area of cultural marketing and museums, virtually no research has been conducted (a notable exception being Caldwell, 2000). Yet, despite this lack of attention, the role of the brand in engendering value and creating preferences as well as loyalty towards the brand is no doubt of interest to the managers of cultural institutions, museums and exhibitions. Our study therefore addresses brand equity from the standpoint of visitors to cultural organizations and, more specifically, art exhibitions. In recent years, museums and other arts and cultural organizations have begun to show particular interest in staging temporary exhibitions focusing on a particular artist, school or period. These exhibitions, which may eventually become blockbusters, very often become the cornerstone on which the activity of certain museums is founded. According to Heilbrun and

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Gray (1993, p. 185) these events increase the availability of art to the viewing public through both a “concentrating effect” (the viewer is able to see a great number and selection of works in one place) and a “distribution effect” (the collection may be taken to different locations).

In our work we pursue a twin objective. Firstly we aim to explore which factors help create brand equity in cultural organizations in the mind of the visitor (perceived quality, brand values, loyalty and brand image), and secondly we seek to determine to what extent these factors are relevant for various kinds of visitors, whether external visitors and internal visitors. We performed the study for the specific case of the *Ages of Mankind (Las Edades del Hombre)* exhibition which has been displaying different artefacts representative of the artistic, cultural and religious heritage of Castilla y León (Spain). This exhibition has been characterized by its itinerant nature and by the success it has enjoyed at both national and international level during the 14 editions it has been staged.

The work is structured as follows. We firstly review the literature addressing the main constructs of the research: brands in non-profit organizations and brand equity, focusing particular attention on its determinants and drivers, and we specify the hypotheses of the model reflecting the interrelations among the proposed variables. We then present the case study, the *Ages of Mankind* exhibition, tracing its history since it began in 1988. The following section details the method applied in the empirical work and describes the measuring scales used. The findings for a sample of 424 visitors to the latest edition of the *Ages of Mankind* exhibition, the conclusions and practical implications make up the final sections of the work.

2. Brand equity and its components in cultural organizations

From a consumer oriented perspective, brand equity implies accepting that consumers have a high perception of the product's quality, recognise the brand in relation to its competitors, link it to a series of desirable attributes that make up its positive image, and see themselves as loyal consumers of the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993).

This brand equity equates to a range of benefits for the organization (Aaker, 1996; Washburn & Plank, 2002). For cultural organizations, the intention to repeat a satisfying experience at a future date emerges as one of the most immediate consequences and may even be taken as a measure of brand equity (Fuentes, Luque, Montoros, & Cañadas, 2004; Taylor, Celuch, & Goodwin, 2004). In addition to future loyalty, a further indication of brand equity in the case of cultural organizations or art exhibitions such as the ones we assess is performance. Perceived value allows premium prices to be established (Aaker, 1994) and has a direct impact on performance (Buzzell & Gale, 1987). Brand equity is also used as a means to publicize initiatives such as fundraising activities. Frumkin and Kim (2001) evidence that those organizations which spend more on their brands increase revenue. Faircloth (2005) also stresses that donors will give more generously if they feel that the institution in some way stands out from the rest – brand personality – and if it has a sound organizational image – brand equity.

With regard to measuring brand equity, marketing literature posits the multidimensional nature of the issue. In the for-profit sector, the most widely accepted proposal is Aaker's (1991), who suggests five dimensions to measure brand equity: brand loyalty, brand recognition, perceived quality, brand image and other assets owned by the brands (patents, registered trademarks, and so on). For non-profits, Faircloth (2005) highlights the lack of research devoted to exploring brand equity in this sector. Most authors particularly underscore brand image as a driver of value (Johnson & Zinkhan, 1990; Webb et al., 2000). As non-profits provide intangible

services, they generate brand equity by developing a strong corporate image suited to the interests of their stakeholders. Another important dimension is brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Faircloth, 2005; Venable et al., 2005). Brand personality refers to the uniqueness that allows consumers to distinguish a non-profit brand from competitors. Whereas Aaker's (1997) measure of brand personality consisted of five dimensions (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness), Venable et al. (2005), after conducting a series of qualitative and quantitative studies in non-profit institutions, advocate that brand personality or corporate image is founded on two further dimensions: integrity and nurturance. Integrity refers to commitment, honesty and the positive influence these organizations have over the community. Nurturance covers areas such as love, compassion and affection.

Based on these studies, we consider four dimensions to measure brand equity for art and cultural exhibitions: brand loyalty, perceived quality, brand image and brand values.

2.1. Brand loyalty

Oliver (1999, p. 34) defines loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product or service in the future, by a consistent purchase of a particular brand, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour”. In the profit sector, numerous empirical works evidence that loyalty has a positive impact on brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Atilgan, Aksoy, & Akinci, 2005; Gómez, 2007; Keller, 1993; Taylor et al., 2004). In the case of cultural goods, visitor loyalty may be accounted by rational addiction theories (Stigler & Becker, 1977). The rational addiction model explains the positive impact of consuming cultural goods in the past on present consumption. Previously accumulated cultural experiences become cultural consumption capital which, in turn, increases productivity of present cultural consumption to meet cultural needs (Lévy-Garboua & Montmarquette, 1996).

2.2. Perceived quality in previous exhibitions

Perceived quality is defined as “the consumer's personal judgement about the overall quality or excellence of a product or service” (Zeithmal, 1988). When referring to perceived quality in a cultural organization (museum, cultural exhibition, etc.), we are analysing the assessment made by a visitor comparing expected services with those actually delivered (Rojas & Camarero, 2008). Thus, the quality offered by a cultural organization or art exhibition is reflected in its capacity to offer visitors an author, genre or period which fulfils their leisure or cultural expectations. However, it is far more than just this, as getting both the moment and the location or setting for the exhibition right are also key factors. Organizations consider perceived consumer/visitor quality as a powerful strategic weapon (Atilgan et al., 2005) which is viewed as a determinant of brand equity. Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000) state that a high level of perceived quality means that through a long term association with a brand, consumers are able to recognise and differentiate its superior quality.

2.3. Brand image

Image may be defined as “perceptions of the brand that reflect consumer associations in the mind of the consumer” (Keller, 1993, p. 3). Brand image is an organization or cultural activity's hallmark that sets it apart from others. Cultural organizations and museums in particular are currently aiming to forge a unique and efficient image and identity that will encourage people to visit the museum and hopefully make them regular visitors. According to Caldwell

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