# REBRANDING: THE EXAMPLE OF A CULTURAL INSTITUTION

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**Abstract:**

The objective of the paper is to emphasize the influence of rebranding on the awareness of a museum brand as well as on single brand elements. By means of an analysis of brand awareness a comprehensive research study was carried out in two evaluation phases before and after the implementation of the rebranding. These comprised visitors as well as non-visitors. In detail the concept and results were intended to resolve if brand elements are plausible, if people are acquainted with them after a short period and if they can be remembered and attributed correctly. It was possible to indicate an effect on brand awareness after a short but intensely promoted introduction period of the new brand to the public.

**Keywords:** *rebranding*; *brand awareness*; *recognition*; *recall*; *cultural sector*

# MODIFICACIÓN DE UNA MARCA: EL EJEMPLO DE UNA INSTITUCIÓN CULTURAL

**Resumen:**

El objetivo de este artículo es enfatizar la influencia de la modificación de una marca en la conciencia de una marca de museo así como en los elementos de marca única. Se ha llevado a cabo un estudio comprensivo de investigación mediante un análisis de notoriedad de marca en dos fases de evaluación, antes y después de la implementación de la modificación de la marca, incluyendo tanto a visitantes como a no visitantes. En concreto, el concepto y resultados trataron de dar respuesta a si los elementos de la marca resultan plausibles, si las personas están familiarizadas con ellos tras un corto período y si pueden ser recordados y atribuidos correctamente. Fue posible mostrar un efecto en la notoriedad de la marca tras un período de introducción de la nueva marca al público breve, pero acompañado de una intensa promoción.

**Palabras clave:** *modificación de una marca*; *notoriedad de marca*; *reconocimiento*; *rellamada*; *sector cultural*

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## 1. Introduction

Within the extremely rich and diverse landscape of cultural, educational and leisure time offerings in general, any institution can only succeed if it develops a particular attractiveness and uniqueness. For attaining visibility among an abundance of competing offerings and triggering a demand pull it can be regarded as helpful if cultural institutions or offerings in general burn into the memory of the public. The labelling and accentuation of an offering as brand can contribute to this cause (Günter 2008).

AMA views a *brand* as a "[…] name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers". The term *corporate brand* can be defined as an image of a corporation which is anchored or burned into the mind of a customer. In contrast to product brands, corporate brands refer to the whole offering range and their shared attributes or benefits, people and relationships and programs and values (Barich and Kotler 1991).

The construct *brand awareness*, which is defined as the "consumer's ability to identify a brand" (Keller 2008, p. 7) can thereby principally adopt the form of *brand recognition* (aided recall) and the one of *brand recall* (Holden 1993; Laurent et al. 1995). Brand recall implies –as the consumer is not aided by having the name provided– that the brand holds a stronger brand position in his or her mind (Radder and Huang 2008). The more often one is confronted with the advertising of a brand, the higher might be brand awareness and the entrenchment of a brand in consumer's mind (Keller 2008). Since the customer decides on a particular brand prior to the visit to a museum, hence in advance to the actual act of purchasing, brand recall is of particular importance for cultural institutions (Baumgarth 2008).

Brand development, branding and brand management provide an opportunity to sustainably set oneself apart from a wide range of offerings in the cultural sector (Aaker 1996; Günter 2008; Günter and Hausmann 2012,) as well as a chance to place oneself within the *consideration* set or even better within the *evoked set* (Howard and Sheth 1969; Mcdonald and Sharp 2000) when it comes to the decision of using cultural offerings.

Summing up, a brand can fulfil different functions (Keller and Lehmann 2006). In case of a museum, a brand can contribute to the uniqueness and to the identification of the concrete institution and thus facilitates visitor retention and word of mouth communication as well as it may constitute a signal for a good reputation (Günter and Hausmann 2012). In case of a cultural institution, different brand elements such as brand name, spelling of the name, logo, slogan or other design elements can contribute to the implementation of brand strategy and market positioning (Baumgarth 2008).

Under certain circumstances a modification of a brand identity may prove to be reasonable. The term rebranding can therefore be defined as "the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them for an established brand with the intention of developing a differentiated (new) position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors" (Muzellec and Lambkin 2006, p. 804). A fundamental difference can be drawn between different causes for rebranding. Among such causes, we can mention, for example: i) changes in ownership and management structure; ii) corporate strategy (e.g. variations in the current positioning); or iii) competitive conditions or the external environment (Muzellec and Lambkin 2006).

Different causes require varying rebranding strategies which can be classified according to the degree of change of either all or in some cases only single brand elements (Muzellec and Lambkin 2006; Merrilees and Miller 2008). In terms of the dimension of time, in the extreme case an abrupt change can be carried out or gradual changes of brand elements could be realized with or without collateral (explanatory) communication activities.

Moreover, in the reviewed case strategic considerations regarding the positioning of the institution with the aim of gaining higher brand awareness proved to be the cause for rebranding. This leads to an abrupt, yet moderate alternation of multiple brand elements (variation in the spelling of the name, design of the logo etc.) with collateral but without explanatory communication activities.

For assessing the effect of rebranding on the desired target positioning, which in this case was intended to result in a reduction of the discrepancy between current and target positioning through a higher degree of brand awareness, it is necessary to measure the appeal of brand to a public. Collecting data before and after a rebranding allows for an optimal information supply. In this sense, this research is quite innovative because such a type of longitudinal analysis with *ex ante* and *ex post* surveys has not been carried out before concerning rebranding in the cultural sector.

In the survey a difference should be made concerning the nature of respondents because it must be presumed that visitors and non-visitors will judge differently about the brand image and its alternation. Because certain barriers to using cultural offerings currently apply for non-users, surveying brand awareness seems to be of a special interest for making a contribution to lowering barriers in the course of the rebranding process.

## 2. The rebranding process in the Museum Kunstpalast

The study was conducted in collaboration with an international and well known museum of fine arts, the Museum Kunstpalast, located in Dusseldorf (Germany). In the case presented, the long-term objective of the new brand image was to build up a strong and sustainable umbrella brand through a continued brand management as well as boosting brand awareness. The newly developed brand strategy should reasonably embrace the heterogeneous offerings of the museum and put the permanent exposition in the foreground. The existing corporate design should be remodelled on the basis of the new brand strategy putting an emphasis on brand recognition and recall. For ensuring brand recognition a picture frame was chosen as the central design element of corporate design which is uniformly employed across all advertising media.

The objective to put the permanent collection at the foreground again as tradition and future of the institution is reflected in the alternation of the composition and spelling of the brand name and the revision of the logo. To be precise, the new logo focuses on the word "museum" instead of the three equally prominent terms "museum" , "kunst" and "palast" in the old logo.

At the same time, the formerly often wrongly reproduced spelling was altered from "museum kunst palast" to the traditional spelling "Museum Kunstpalast". The elements of the logo were adapted to balancing the proportion between the formerly predominant image elements of the logo and the word elements (see Figure 1).

The rebranding was accompanied by an increased intensity of a variety of communication activities. For instance a brand image campaign using guerrilla marketing elements was realized, which besides traditional visitors of a museum specifically tried to address young target groups.

## 3. Study methodology

Standardized interviews within the context of a questionnaire-based verbal survey were conducted to analyse the impact of the rebranding at two points in time: before and after the implementation of the rebranding.

So, the first point in time before the implementation of the rebranding was in the month of January 2011 ($t_1$) and the second was several months after the rebranding in the month of November 2011 ($t_2$). For ensuring the comparability of results, the location of the survey was maintained in both points in time as well as questions were kept almost identical. The questionnaire used in $t_2$ additionally comprised questions in regard to the perception and evaluation of the new brand.

**Figure 1.** Old and new logo of the "Museum Kunstpalast"



Old logo
(in force until May 2011)

New logo
(in force since May 2011)
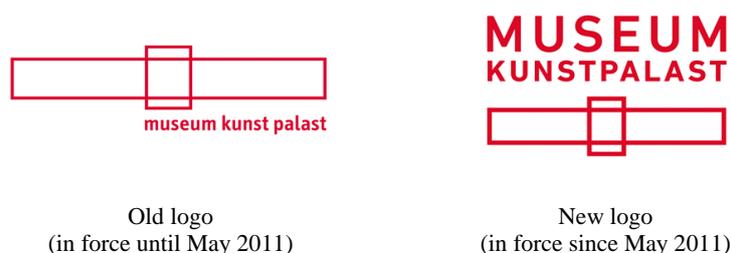
Source: own elaboration based on Museum Kunstpalast's designs available at official website http://www.smkp.de/ in May and November 2011

Culturally interested people of 21 years of age and above were defined as the population for the survey, which again can be subdivided into *visitors* and *non-visitors* of the museum. Respondents who stated that they had visited the museum within the recent 3 years before the survey were classified as *visitors* while respondents who either did not know the museum or had not frequented it within this period in time were defined as *non-visitors*.

With the objective of achieving a relatively representative sample, quota sampling mode was used. Within the limits of this survey quota characteristics such as (classified) age and gender were applied. For *non-visitors* these characteristics were based on the population within the administrative District of Dusseldorf in Germany, and in case of *visitors* they were chosen according to previously conducted visitor surveys by the museum. The combined total of conducted interviews was identical for both survey phases and respectively added up to $n = 517$, which can be subdivided in sample sizes of $n_1 = 203$ for the *visitor* sampling and $n_2 = 314$ for the *non-visitor* sampling.

## 4. Survey results

For the purpose of an identification of general brand awareness subjects were asked to name at least three arts museums in North Rhine-Westphalia within an unaided question.

According to the results from both data collection phases shown in Table 1, the contrast of the situation at both points in time ($t_1$ and $t_2$) allows to identify that unprompted awareness (recall) of *visitors* as well as of *non-visitors* of the museum has increased following the rebranding and the associated communication measures ($\Delta t_1,t_2 = +16.3\%$ in case of *visitors*; $\Delta t_1,t_2 = +24.7\%$ in case of *non-visitors*). Additionally an increased awareness in $t_2$ is also reflected in a higher presence in the perception of respondents ($\Delta t_1,t_2 = +9.7\%$ in case of *visitors*; $\Delta t_1,t_2 = +4.8\%$ in case of *non-visitors*). Taken into account all arts museums mentioned an improved ranking position within the competitive environment can be concluded.

In addition to the general awareness of the Museum Kunstpalast, the respondent's brand recognition at both points in time was also tested in regard to single brand elements (spelling, colour, logo). The subjects were confronted with each 4 different spellings and logos, out of which they had to choose the right ones. Among these were the new as well as the old version and there were two fictional alternatives with the aim of reducing the likelihood that respondents identify the correct logo respectively the correct spelling just by chance.

Concerning the level of knowledge of the respondents it can be noted that the level of 40.4% in $t_1$ could almost be maintained (level of 38.9%) despite the alternation of the spelling ($\Delta t_1,t_2 = -1.5\%$). Nonetheless a fraction of 18.7% still decided for the old spelling of the museum.

Referring to *non-visitors* an evident improvement of accurate attributions from 32.3% in $t_1$ to 45.9% in $t_2$ could be attained ($\Delta t_1,t_2 = +13.6\%$). Concerning the identification of the proper logo, it can be noted that in $t_2$ the old logo was still relatively present for both groups. While 75% of respondents properly attributed the old logo in $t_1$, the corresponding percentage level was lower for the new logo in $t_2$ ($\Delta t_1,t_2 = -45.9\%$).

Given the relatively short usage of the new logo already 30% of *visitors* succeed in classifying it accurately. In 36.5% of all cases however ($t_2$) the old logo was erroneously chosen, which obviously still was comparatively present in the minds of *visitors*. Among *non-visitors* 37.6% were already able to properly identify the new logo shortly after its introduction. Hence in this case the difference to the first phase is significantly lower in comparison to *visitors* ($\Delta t_1,t_2 = -14.0\%$). Here as well however the second most mentioned logo wrongly was the old one in 28.2% of cases.

**Table 1.** Contrast of unaided awareness for *visitors* and *non-visitors*

| Total sample ($n = 517$) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Visitors* ($n_1 = 203$) | | *Non-visitors* ($n_2 = 314$) | |
| First interview ($t_1$) | Second interview ($t_2$) | First interview ($t_1$) | Second interview ($t_2$) |
| 37.9% | 54.2% | 23.1% | 47.8% |

Regarding the association of the colour, the results were quite similar for *visitors* in both phases: a total figure of 41.6% of them associated the colour red to the Museum Kunstpalast in $t_1$, while in $t_2$ the level was almost maintained with a value of 39.4%. For *non-visitors*, results indicate that in both points in time about a third of respondents (27.4% in $t_1$; 31.8% in $t_2$) could not assign a colour to the museum without support. At the particular point in time $t_1$, 37.9% assigned the colour red, while this value is considerably lower in $t_2$, with only 23.5%.

For measuring the recognition value of the corporate design respectively its contribution to the distinctness of the own brand image from the brand images of relevant competing institutions from a *visitor*'s point of view the respondents were confronted with compendium of 6 different posters and asked to choose a corresponding selection from them under the pre-setting that giving multiple answers was allowed.

While the posters of competing institutions were kept unchanged over time the museum was represented with 3 posters, which were adapted from the old corporate design in $t_1$ to the new corporate design with the picture frame as a conjunctive brand element in $t_2$. In total, an improved assignment of posters by *visitors* as well as by *non-visitors* could be observed. In $t_1$ the most frequently mentioned poster of the museum was only assigned by 37.9% of *visitors*, in contrast to 72.9% in $t_2$.

A similar trend resulted for the remaining two posters of the museum with a parallel decrease in the level of misattributions of competing institutions' posters. *Visitors* and *non-visitors* alike showed an increased ability to associate posters with the museum after the redesign, albeit lower target accuracy was indicated for this group.

For the purpose of capturing the brand image of the Museum Kunstpalast, respondents were asked to further characterize the institution by means of 11 pairs of opposites using a 7 point bipolar scale with labels on the extreme poles (Figure 2).

In order to establish profile courses for the subsamples first of all the arithmetic mean for each pair of attributes was calculated on the basis of single ratings. Then it was plotted graphically and transferred to a multi item profile (polarity profile) by means of a conjunction line. As the central result of the first data collection phase it can be noted that except for the item *"leisure time vs. educational institution"* no significant differences exist between *visitors* and *non-visitors* in terms of the brand image of the museum.

Therefore in the majority of cases the null hypothesis of identical mean values of both samples cannot be refused at a level of significance of 5%. In total the result implies that a frequentation of the museum has not lead to a significant shift in regard to the brand image.

At least for the researched period of time the characterization of the museum from the *visitor*'s angle did not vary over the course of time by means of an influence of rebranding (see left side of Figure 2).

The *t*-tests carried out confirm the assumption that an alternation of the brand image has not lead to a significant change of average item values in the majority of cases. While *visitors* thus possess a relatively time-invariant impression of the Museum Kunstpalast which seems to be affected only slightly by the alternation of the brand image (significant differences of the arithmetic average in almost one half of all cases), *non-visitors* show an absolute slightly modified characterization in $t_2$ in comparison to $t_1$ yet still maintaining similar profile courses (see right side of Figure 2).

**Figure 2.** Characterization of the Museum Kunstpalast in $t_1$ and $t_2$ by *visitors* (left side) and *non-visitors* (right side)
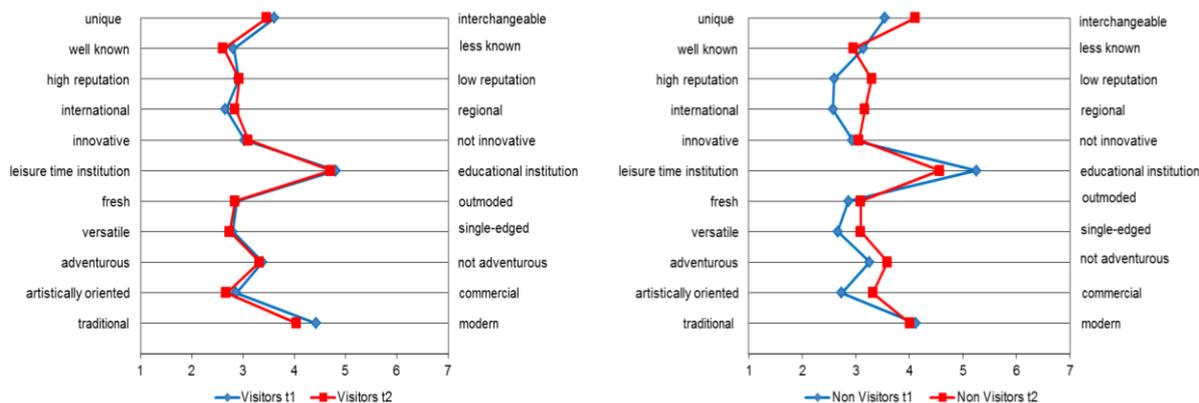
## 5. General discussion

In a general sense, the rebranding process has led to an increase in overall brand awareness for both *visitors* as well as *non-visitors*. However it must be presumed that this is not only due to the rebranding but also to the collateral communication campaign (Radder and Huang 2008). Moreover, it must be taken into account that this rise in awareness is a rather short term effect and might therefore decrease again after the termination of the campaign.

So, a further survey in $t_3$ would be necessary to validate the effect. Similarly to the study by Radder and Huang (2008), in particular for *non-visitors* it must furthermore be tested if the increased brand awareness leads to a higher level of involvement and vice versa.

In this sense, and due to a stronger presence in the perception of considered target groups, it can be implied that, on the one hand, current visitors can be retained, while, on the other hand, new target groups can be developed.

Concerning the brand recognition in relation to single brand elements, it is noteworthy that firstly the respective brand elements are "burned in" more strongly and secondly brand knowledge is less revisable for *visitors* than for *non-visitors*.

In addition, a combination of several altered brand elements is harder to memorize in case of both groups than an isolated variation of one element only. For the present case this results in lower target accuracy for the revised logo in comparison to the revised spelling.

For individuals a transfer from the rather unconventional old spelling *("museum kunst palast")* to the more conventional new spelling (*"Museum Kunstpalast"*) appears to be relatively easy to learn. Yet an alternation of two brand elements, in this case a combination of the logo and the spelling, leads to a comparatively slow adaption of brand knowledge.

By means of the frame as a newly established corporate design brand element which is intended to be employed for all advertising media, a generally improved attribution of advertisements to the museum was achieved. This leads to the conclusion, that the use of a conjunctive brand element serves both the identification as well as the differentiation of this museum (Radder and Huang 2008).

In analogy to the results concerning brand knowledge, rebranding has not lead to significant changes in respect to the characterization of the museum from the *visitor*'s point of view. This is contrasted by some variations in the course of the profiles for *non-visitors*, and such evidence supports the thesis that brand knowledge is less solidified among *non-visitors*.

Nevertheless, the high correspondence of the profile curves initially leads to the presumption that an existing association towards a museum can be difficult or even impossible to change by means of a visit to the museum. This suggests that associations are based on attitudes and subjects therefore possess a relatively stable mental image towards museums.

Furthermore, it may be assumed that the above discussed characterization of subjects does not directly refer to the Museum Kunstpalast. It rather concerns associations that generally apply to comparable arts museums. So *visitors* and *non-visitors* develop and stabilize a comparably consistent picture of a museum or other cultural offerings as well. As previously indicated, these attitudes are possibly relatively stable over time.

This assumption likewise needs to be tested empirically in the course of further research projects. Even if in this case the moderate and hence little provocative change in the brand image eludes from a conscious perception for 75% of all respondents, the results for single brand elements definitely show that the rebranding lead to a change in brand awareness.

Altogether, despite some limitations in regard to representativeness and sustainability, the above depicted results and their respective interpretations show important evidence in regard to dealing with brands and the so called rebranding in the cultural sector.

Limitations of the study and its informational value appear mainly due to the sampling design and the temporal proximity of the survey to the introduction campaign. As well the restriction of the supposedly heterogeneous group of visitors by means of the criterion of a frequentation within the recent 3 years could be subject to a critical debate.

## 6. Conclusions

The purpose of the case study was to emphasize the influence of rebranding on the awareness of a museum brand as well as on single brand elements. By means of an analysis of brand awareness, a comprehensive research study was carried out in two evaluation phases before and after the implementation of the rebranding, including visitors as well as non-visitors.

To be precise, the concept and results should resolve if brand elements are plausible, if people are acquainted with them after a short period and if they can be remembered and attributed correctly.

If the purpose of rebranding in the cultural sector is based on the intention of retaining currently existing visitors as well as to attract new ones, it is recommendable to maintain at least the brand core or certain brand elements for creating a connection to the new brand in case of existing target groups while simultaneously addressing the needs of new potential visitors.

The present case equally shows that a communication campaign accompanying the rebranding is always useful to generate attention.

Furthermore, the high correspondence of the profile curves of visitors and non-visitors leads to the presumption that associations towards a museum are relatively stable attitudes and can be difficult or even impossible to change by means of a visit to the museum.

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