RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism Applicability in Theatre

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to confirm Kapferer's brand identity prism applicability in the theatre area and, at the same time, to identify and reveal the brand identities for the main players from the local theatre market, from the audience's perspective. In order to attain this goal, a qualitative research has been conducted, the target being regular theatre attenders. The results of the research have shown the fact that the main local theatres possess a strong individual brand identity, which leads to clear points of differentiations and thus, to a well-established positioning on the theatre market. The main axis on which these theatres may be mapped is the traditional – modern axis. The traditional extreme is reserved to National Theatre of Bucharest, the most ancient theatre of this city, well-known for its classic plays, notorious actors and wide variety of plays. At the other side of the axis stands Green Hours, an underground theatre, promoting taboos as the plays' subjects, young actors and unconventional settings. Overall, for theatres, being aware of their brand identities represent a first step in knowing themselves better, and equally in deeply understanding theatre attenders' perception over them and their positioning on the market. The next level is each theatre to develop coherent strategies, in line with these findings, that will award them more credibility among the theatre audience and will strengthen their very essence.

Keywords: *Brand identity, Brand image, Positioning, Performing arts, Theatre.*

Introduction

Brand identity is quite a recent concept in the relevant literature, its appearance being traced back to 1986 in a Kapferer's paper [1]. From that point on, different perspectives and theories about the concept started to appear, that of Aaker's [2] being as well of great importance both for theoreticians and practitioners. So far, a unitary perspective regarding this concept has not been reached as several questions remain under the sign of incertitude: Is brand identity the equivalent to brand image? And if not, which is their sequence? Is brand identity preceding brand image or vice versa? Is brand positioning a component of the brand identity or more likely its consequence? What should brand personality consist of, as part of brand identity?

Regarding the areas in which the concept is applied, they cover both the consumer-to-consumer and business-to-business segments. Still, according to the author's knowledge, brand identity is not a common concept in the performing arts area. Therefore, throughout this paper, the author attempts to prove this concept's usage and utility in the case of theatres. In order to do this, first of all, the author will review the relevant literature regarding the brand concept in general, and brand identity in particular. Secondly, it will be presented the research methodology chosen to attain the paper's goal, as well as, the results of the exploratory study. In the end, conclusions will be drawn in order to validate or not the accomplishment of the paper's purpose and make several recommendations.

Literature Review

Attributing a complete, generally accepted definition to the notion of "brand" is still a complicated demarche to be carried on, as experts' perspectives from this field seem to be rather difficult to be harmonized. And this situation makes even more difficult the process of measuring a brand's strength [1]. However, several experts [3,4,5] relate themselves to the definition proposed by the American Marketing Association meaning, a brand is a "name, term, design, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" [6]. As this definition states, one of the brand's role is to offer a point of differentiation among the seller's competitors. Still, the role of a brand does not stop here. The brand also indicates the source of the product or service, giving the consumer the possibility to attribute a certain level of responsibility to the seller and, thus, to compare products that satisfy the same need, but labeled under different brands; it is an assurance of the product's quality making the consumer to return; and, as well, an enhancer of the seller's benefits in terms of: handling and tracking, awareness on the market, legal protection of a

product's unique feature, identifying the most or least successful brands [4]. But a brand is more than a term or a design. A brand carries meaning and associations [7,8], featuring consumer's perceptions and feelings regarding to a product/service, namely what it represents for the consumer [3]. A brand has a social dimension as it has the power to bring people for a common purpose and still remain relevant for eachindividual, and a psychological one, as a brandmaymay influence our beliefs, opinions, attitudes, perceptions, either by confirming or changing them [7]. A brand is also a vision, meaning a promoter of new products and A brand is also a vision, meaning a promoter of new products and services' creation. And this very vision, comprising the key belief and the core values of the brand, is what gives the brand direction, purpose and meaning, and thus its brand identity [1,2]. The issue of brand identity has been explored by a variety of experts [1,2,9] and although their perspectives regarding its components are generally different, their points of view agree on the fact that the identity of a brand impacts consumer's perception [10]. As regarding the exploration of what stands behind this concept, Kapferer [1] opts for the six facets of brand identity: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection and self-image, comprised in the so-called "identity prism" (Fig.1).
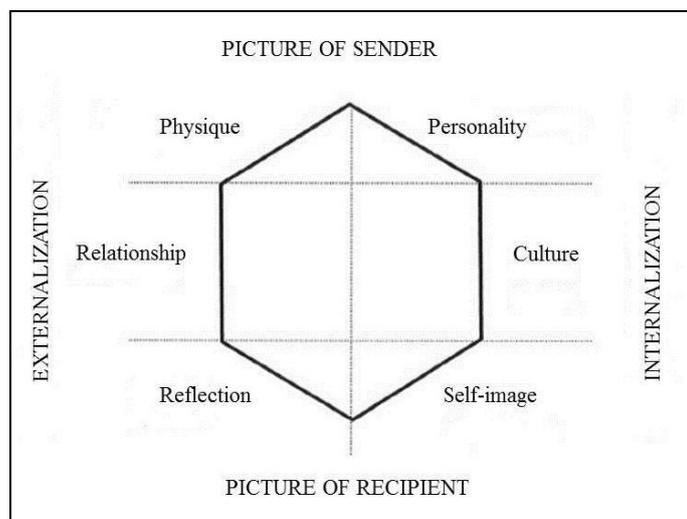

Fig.1: Brand identity prism, according to Kapferer [1]

When referring to the brand's physique, Kapferer [1] alludes to the brand's backbone, its tangible value and its prototype, meaning the product relevant for the brand's qualities. Brand's personality is actually a result of the brand's communication and consists of those traits of human personality that could be attributed to the brand [11]. The culture of a brand is the set of values by which all its actions are driven and what makes strong brands become real cult brands, enhancing their differentiation points vis-à-vis their competitors [1,11]. The relationship facet is about the brand's style of behavior and conduct, which emerges from the way the brand acts, delivers services and relates to its consumer [1,11]. Reflecting the consumer is different than describing the target, as the target

refers to both the potential and actual consumers, whereas the consumer should be reflected as he wishes to be seen after using the brand [1]. Self-image is the consumer's internal mirror, how "I feel, I am" in relation to the brand [1].

Kapferer [1] has grounded his brand identity prism starting from the communication theory according to which, in each communication there is one who communicates, one that builds representations of who speaks, of who receives the message and the relationship that establishes between them. And the brand fits in this theory as the brand itself is a source of communication. Thus, the physique and personality facets have the role of defining the sender (the brand), while the reflection and self-image facets that of defining the recipient (the consumer). Relationship and culture fill in the gap between the sender and the recipient. Nonetheless, the brand identity prism presents a vertical division, as well. Hence, the left-side facets (physique, relationship, reflection) represent the social expression of the brand, meaning brand's visible components, while the right side (personality, culture, self-image) regards brand's inner world, its spirit, being an echo of the other side [1]. However, Kapferer's model is not the sole one used in revealing the brand's identity.

Aaker's perspective is also of reference in the relevant literature. A certain particularity regards the way Aaker [2] defines brand identity, as a structure having two distinctive levels: the core level and the extended one. The core brand identity is the very essence of the brand, its fundament that should remain constant no matter what strategies should involve the brand (e.g. entering new markets, launching new products under the same brand). The extended brand identity consists of elements that provide texture and completeness, adding details in order to help portray better what the brand stands for. Moreover, in order to ensure brand's identity texture and deepness, according to Aaker's model [2], brand identity should be decomposed into four dimensions: brand as product (including product scope and attributes, quality/value, uses, users and country of origin), brand as organization (organizational attributes, local versus global), brand as person (brand personality, brand-customer relationships) and brand as symbol (visual imagery/metaphors and brand heritage).

Still, some questions have been raised [1, 11] regarding the brand's personality definition, as it is not considered a part but a whole "set of human characteristics attributed to a brand" [12]. This fact comes in contradiction with Kapferer's model, as brand personality would also include other three facets of the brand identity prism: physique, culture and reflection of consumer, which are also human characteristics. However, widening the concept of brand personality beyond the line established by psychologists, who refined the term of personality through time, is mostly a flaw that should not occur in any scientific demarche [11].

Another model, proposed by de Chernatony [9], states that brand identity consists of six dimensions: brand's vision, culture, positioning, personality, relationship, presentation. However, including the positioning of a brand in its identity is rather a controversial matter, being in contradiction with the above models [1, 12].

"A brand position is the part of brand identity and value proposition to be actively communicated to the target audience and that demonstrates an advantage over competing brands" [2]. According to this definition, positioning a brand means selecting which associations to build upon and which to remove, in order to influence consumer's perceptions and decision making process [13], namely manipulating what already exists in his mind [14]. So, brand positioning is actually the next step following the brand's identity assessment. But differences go even beyond. Positioning is mostly focused on the product itself, which is a drawback in case a multi-product brand is brought into discussion. Nonetheless, positioning fails to uncover a brand's richness, as it is limited only to certain associations, and it also fails to reflect anything about the way of communication and its spirit. Moreover, while brand positioning is mainly competition-oriented and may change over time according to the market dynamic, brand identity is more stable, being a long-term player as it represents the foundation of the brand [1].

Another hot issue is the difference between brand identity and brand image, as at times it is raised the question whether or not these two concepts are the same? Brand image refers to the way in which the brand is perceived by certain groups (e.g. brand's target) [2], standing on the receiver's side (e.g. consumers) [1], while brand identity belongs to the opposite site, the sender's and how he wants the brand to be perceived [1,2]. Also, brand image is passive and mainly focused on the past, whereas brand identity is an active part of the game, looking towards the future; and this fact makes brand image be tactical and brand identity strategical [1].

Still, another question should be brought forward. Since the two concepts are not equivalent, which is their sequence? Does brand identity precede brand image or vice versa? On one hand, according to Kapferer [1], brand image is the result of brand identity's interpretation in terms of decoding messages and extracting meanings. And so, brand identity should precede brand image, as it is common sense to be aware of the message that should be conveyed to the receiver, before sending it. On the other hand, Aaker [2] states that brand image is a useful and necessary source of information for developing brand identity. However, brand image should not be taken for granted and substitute brand identity, regardless of the lack of resources and expertise, but treated as valuable information that may help bring brand identity to life. And what is more, consumers should not be dictating how the brand is; brand identity means more than finding out consumer's opinion [2].

In the author's view, both perspectives are valid, but in different situations. Ideally, things should happen as Kapferer sustains. This would be mostly the case of a new brand preparing to enter the market. For this new brand strategists may start develop its brand identity, having clearly in mind what is the brand's core and what should be communicated further. But what happens if the brand already exists on the market, but strategists failed to start its "history" with building its identity? This is where Aaker's theory comes in. At this point, being aware of the brand's image offers a starting point in building the identity itself. Of course, this should not be the end of brand identity, namely it should not be replaced by the already formed image although it is the easiest way, but its beginning. And this is the case of the theatres that will be subject to discussion hereinafter.

On the whole, brand identity is rather a new concept even in the specialty literature, not to mention the performing arts. Therefore, further in this paper, the author will reveal how such a concept should work for theatres, in particular, with the help of Kapferer's brand identity prism.

Methodology

In order to attain the above goal, the author appeals to qualitative research tools. The reason for this is that qualitative research succeeds in providing in-depth insights and understanding in the problem setting [15], going beyond any statistical, quantitative data. More precisely, the focus group is chosen as the ideal method of investigation in this case, due to its particular advantages over other qualitative tools. Focus group is a discussion between eight to twelve people who have in common certain characteristics related to the discussion topic [16], led by a moderator on a particular subject, the purpose being to learn and understand what people wish to say and why [17]. What is the main advantage of the focus group is that it usually recreates a more closed to reality environment, a permissive one, in which participants are more relaxed and eager to share their beliefs and perspectives, without being under the pressure of voting or reaching a consensus [16].

Therefore, the author conducted several focus groups (8 people per focus group) with 20 – 30 years old people that attend theatre plays at least three times per season and who, in the past, have attended, at least once, each of the following theatres: National Theatre of Bucharest, Bulandra Theatre and Green Hours.

Results and Discussion

In general, the concept of "theatre" is spontaneously associated with three different dimensions: rational, emotional and pragmatic. The rational dimension refers to the visible part of a theatre experience which implies a "stage" where the play should be performed, actors who bring the play to life, "costumes" that help the audience enter into the atmosphere, a "curtain" that delimitates the two worlds – that of reality and

that of imaginary, and "applauses" that mark both the end of the theatre experience and the audience's gratitude towards the actors' performance. The emotional dimensions regards the "feelings" and the "passion" that can be transmitted through a theatrical performance, the "rummage" that may make people return to their inner world and discover who they really are and what they are meant to be, while the pragmatic dimensions refers to the obvious advantages implied by attending theatre, namely a way of spending free time, socializing and enhancing a certain status. When approaching each theatre in particular, certain specificities come to light, making each of them be special in certain ways.

National Theatre of Bucharest (NTB) is the most ancient theatre from Bucharest, founded around the year 1852, placed in a central area, namely the "0 kilometer" of the country. It is the largest theatre from Bucharest having, at this moment, four different auditoriums fit for sustaining performances. Due to this fact, NTB it may allow itself having a large repertoire that comprises different genre of plays, mainly written by classic authors. Nonetheless, its notoriety derives from the well-known actors who gave and give great performances on its stage resulting in brilliant acting careers. So, it is not surprising that the audience is filled with trust and respect, since a long-term experience stands behind NTB. This makes the audience feel more certain about the decision of attending a NTB play and assured about the fairness of this decision. Nonetheless, NTB is perceived as an accessible theatre not only for its central location that makes easier for everyone to get to, but also due to the variety of plays from which the audience may choose according to their preference. Also, being classic plays, both to the way they are performed and their authors (e.g. Shakespeare, Cehov, etc.), the audience feel safer as they are already acquainted with the subject's play and do not need to put up a great deal in understanding the play's substratum, but indulge themselves in the easiness of watching.

Therefore, it is no wonder that the NTB's audience presents such a great variety, being impossible to be labeled, as NTB's plays address to all kind of audience, regardless of age, lifestyle, social class or level of education, which is mainly the way NTB's audience feels about them, as regular people who just want to see a play. However, this is a two edged sword situation. On one hand, it makes NTB be perceived as appealing to everybody, thus sociable, which makes the audience feel comfortable. On the other hand, it may be perceived as unstable, not having a clear vision, not being focused on a certain kind of plays and, also, too benevolent trying to please everybody around, which makes it look like it is in the search of revenue, as if selling more and more tickets is its ultimate goal and not the audience's satisfaction. So, it seems that the values NTB is

driven by have both a bright side (e.g. tradition, classic) and a darker one (e.g. being commercial, gaining more money from more and more spectators). A summarized representation of NTB's brand identity may be found below (Fig.2).
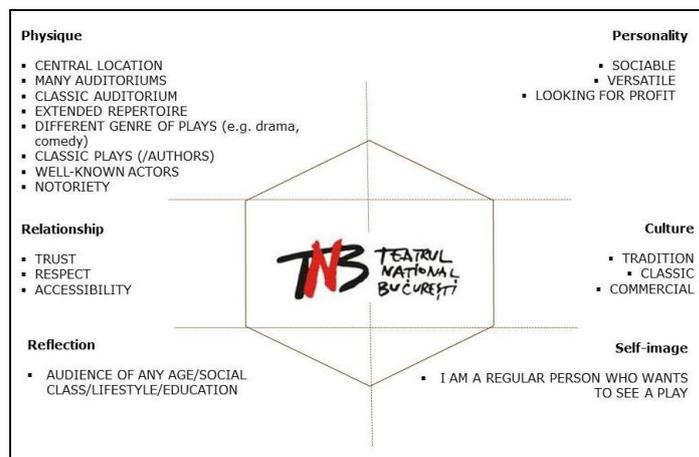

Fig.2: National theatre of bucharest's brand identity, adapted according to Kapferer's model [1]

As regarding Bulandra Theatre, this theatre remarks itself mainly through the good-quality performances offered to the audience, in terms of actors, directors and plays. Therefore, its notoriety among the theatre audience comes as a natural consequence, as well as the gaining of their respect and trust. Nonetheless, this perceptions and opinions are also enhanced by Bulandra Theatre's membership to the Union of European Theatres.

But beyond the trust and respect the audience feels regarding Bulandra Theatre, it is the sense of superiority that tends to dominate this theatre's relationship with the audience.This superiority derives from the theatre's way of excelling in any conducted action, of selecting carefully all the ingredients of a theatrical performance and thus its audience, of cultivating theatre good-taste, and these actions work in two directions. First, this teacher-student relationship works well for that part of the audience who enjoy having their taste being refined.
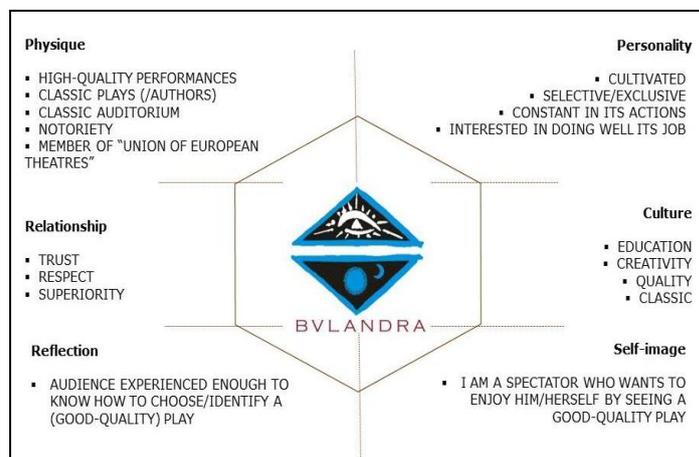

Fig.3: Bulandra theatre's brand identity, adapted according to Kapferer's model [1]

But for others it might be considered as a cold relationship, making the audience more reluctant to attending this theatre on regular basis. Still, Bulandra Theatre's intentions seem to be honorable, as its values are mainly about education, creativity and quality. In consequence, Bulandra Theatre's audience is perceived as being educated enough to choose and appreciate good plays, which is mostly their goal, namely that of enjoying themselves while watching a good-quality play (see Fig.3 for Bulandra Theatre's summarized brand identity).

Last but not least, Green Hours is the main exponent of the underground theatre in Bucharest, as it uses an unconventional venue for staging the plays – a basement bar, which means that it mixes two opposite ingredients, at first sight – having a drink and at the same time watching how actors play among customers. Moreover, it is about promoting young, unknown actors who do not have the chance to play in an institutionalized theatre (for various reasons that should be not discussed within this paper), giving them a launching platform, and also about approaching less desirable, uncomfortable topics regarding the nowadays society known as taboos, through contemporary texts.

Bringing the art "down to the street", literally among the audience, in a place where they usually hang out, helps in establishing a cordial relationship between this type of theatre and its audience. It is about friendship and comfort in such a relationship with a kind of theatre that is fun and opened to its audience, a theatre that acts differently, in a more modern way, in contrast with the rigid and traditional way conventional theatres choose to treat their audience.

The main belief of Green Hours is that theatre and entertainment must not exclude one each other, but co-exist, and make theatre more accessible and enjoyable. Green Hours' audience is perceived as consisting mostly of young, cool people, the rebel type who enjoys experimenting new things. However the audience itself feels like it is about desire of enjoying another kind of theatre, which is closer to people, through small distance between actors and lack of traditional satge and environments familiarity (See fig. 4).
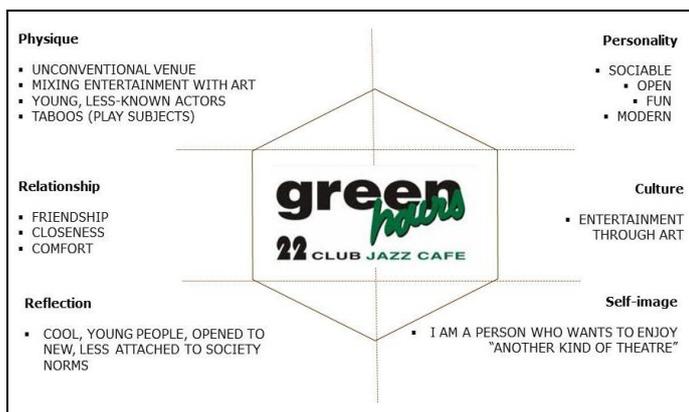

Fig.4: Green Hours' Brand Identity, adapted according to Kapferer's model [1]

Mapping these three theatres according to the type of plays they perform, used venues and the relationship between the audience and the actors generates an axis with two poles: traditional versus modern. Doubtless, the extremes of this axis are represented by the National Theatre of Bucharest as a symbol of tradition, while at the other side stands Green Hours for modernism. Although, Bulandra Theatre mostly stands for tradition, it differs from the National Theatre of Bucharest through its belief of not making compromises in what regards the performances' quality and that of educating the audience in this respect, instead of delivering performances of uncertain quality for the sake of its own gaining.

Conclusions

The above results have demonstrated that brand identity is a concept that can be applied in performing arts, namely in theatre. Theatres as well can be treated as brands having certain characteristics that succeed in differentiating one theatre from another. The theatres that are subject to this exploratory study have never passed through a process of exploring their brand identities. Therefore, these results may be considered as a beginning point, an alarm signal towards their managers.

Although, not to be taken for granted, as these brand identities are a reflection of the audience's opinions and perceptions, they may contribute to the actual building of these identities. What is especially needed is an open-minded manager understanding that in these brand identities lays the very essence of the brand, what he wants to communicate further to the theatre's audience and how he wants the theatre to be perceived and regarded by its audience. And above all, to subordinate all of the theatre's strategies and actions to the theatre's brand identity in order to assure an overall coherence to the theatre–audience relationship.

Otherwise, ignorantly, the theatre managers will find themselves in the position of being unable to answer to strategic and existential questions such as: Does the advertising campaign suit the theatre/brand? Are new productions (e.g. theatre shows) inside the brand's boundaries or are they rather alienated from what defines the brand's inner world? How can the theatre change its communication style with the audience, while remaining true to itself and the audience? Facing a cul-de-sac and possibly the audience's confusion and reticence, the theatre managers will be obliged to turn their faces towards instruments, such as the brand identity prism, that may help them understand better the context in which they take decisions and the impact of these decisions.

Based on the results of this paper, the author would like to formulate several recommendations for theatre managers that might help them in dealing better with the brand identity issue.

First of all, the board of the theatre should take some time and discuss about how they want the theatre to be perceived by its audience, the values the theatre should transmit through its actions/communication/performances to its target and, nonetheless, define exactly which is the target of that theatre, with whom they want to communicate. During this process, the usage of Kapferer's brand identity prism is highly recommended due to the clarity it provides over the essential matters the board should take into consideration (e.g. values/culture/image/target).

After filling in the gaps from the brand identity prism, the theatre manager should explore, through a qualitative research, the perception of its audience over the theatre itself, thus to assess the theatre's brand image. Comparing the results of such a study with the information from the brand identity prism, it will give him/her a pretty clear idea on whether or not the reality reflected by the audience matches the theatre's desires.

Depending on the results, the theatre manager will further decide if the established brand identity will remain as initially agreed or it will suffer several changes based on the insights provided by the audience. Ideally, the theatre manager should remain true to the brand identity and operate changes on it only in case the changes are relevant enough and bring added-value to the theatre's identity.

Nevertheless, any further act of communication or performance, or any decision taken by the theatre manager should definitely subscribe to the theatre's brand identity because this is what ensures the coherence of his/her decision, as well as coherence in the eyes of the theatre's audience.

Acknowledgements

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