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# A report on museum branding literature

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**Abstract:** Recent social, financial and technological developments have changed dramatically both the NPOs' and museums' activities and orientation. Today, museums striving for their viability are urged on marketing and branding orientation. Despite its importance, still museum branding is a neglected research field. This is the first paper to remedy this problem by classifying the recent research by 2016 on museum branding. Drawing on a review of 33 papers this study categorizes the available research relating to the NPOs & museum branding. Therefore, the findings should make a major contribution to research on NPOs and museum/cultural marketing by serving a classification of the recent literature and by recommending both new research venues and profitable managerial recommendations to museums practitioners and scholars.

**Keywords:** Museum Marketing, Museum Branding, Cultural Marketing, Tourism & Destination Marketing

## Introduction

Belonging to NPOs' world, today museums face several challenges deriving not only from economic downturn (McLean, 1994; Cole, 2008), such as reduction of financial support, need for reliance to private sector, growing competition both within NPOs industry and leisure FPOs industry (Cole, 2008), but also from social and technological variables (Kolb, 2013; Cole, 2008; Griffin, 2008 ; Kawashima, 1998; McLean, 1995a) emerged the marketing and branding orientation as the only mean to achieve viability (Wyners & Knowles, 2006; Sargeant&Wymer 2007).

Despite the importance of branding in museums, according to Belenioti & Vassiliadis (2015), "scholars have paid far too little attention to brand equity models and customer based equity models" (2015:2). Moreover, no previous research has categorized the available literature for museum branding. This is the first paper that enhances our understanding by serving as a starting point for researchers in such area. Based on a literature review analysis we identify that the available studies by 2016 in museum branding emerge the following streams:

- Harnessing the branding notion within NPOs and museum industry
- Success factors, drivers and impediments of museum branding

## **Review: The current state of knowledge**

### **Harnessing the branding notion within the museum industry; to brand or not to brand?**

Recently, museums have redefined their activities harnessing branding tools. Precisely, to Vassiliadis & Belenioti, ‘‘the growing competition within NPOs and FPOs leisure industry, the financial squeeze along with the need for a more customer focus orientation (Cole, 2008; McCall & Gray, 2014), the need for broadening the museum’s audience (Kawashima, 1998; Rentschler & Gilmore, 2002) and the technological advances have compelled museums to include active experience shifting to the experiential notions of edutainment, artertainment and Disneyfication’’ (2015:6).

However, branding has been a controversial issue in this sector. On the one hand, brand enthusiasts view branding as a beneficial cycle sources of resources (human, financial, social) that leads to build new partnerships and boost the viability (Kylander & Stone, 2012). Especially, vast researchers call for the need to brand the culture (Rentschler & Osborne, 2008; Griffin, 2008; Kotler et al., 2008; Bradburne, 2001). Vassiliadis & Belenioti (2015) also praise the multidimensional benefits of branding in terms of financial performance, enhancement of the audience attachment, enrichment of both educational and the social role of museums, expansion of audience in line with the branding supporters (Bradburne, 2001; Byrnes, 2001; Caldwell, 2002; Kawashima, 1998; McLean, 1994; McLean, 1995; Rentschler & Osborne, 2008; Ames, 1988; Kotler & Kotler, 2000; Kolb, 2013; King, 2015; Williams, 2011; Griffin, 2008; Cole, 2008). In the same vein, Ciasullo, et al. (2015) and European Commission (2016) extol the beneficial role of ICT tools and the internet towards the digital preservation of museums. Europeana project exemplifies the above initiative presenting a major contribution of Greece (Commission, 2016b).

On the other hand, brand sceptics express their disregard and ethical concerns towards the marketing orientation (Byrnes, 2001; Mitchel, 2004; Kylander & Stone, 2012). Sargeant (2008) based on Liao et al. (2002) ends this debate by presenting the modest solution, the compromisers’ view; although marketing and branding is indeed applicable it should be eliminated when it becomes the only and one reason d’etre.

To our opinion, marketing is indeed the backbone of museums’ sustainability and branding is the heart of the future museum. The advantages of branding appear to overcome the disadvantages. Nevertheless, due to the specific attributes of museums managers urge to apply brand strategies always-showing diligence. As noted by Williams (2011), branding is definitely a catalyst of museum performance. Likewise, Vassiliadis & Fotiadis (2008) confirm the contribution of segmentation to the successful museum branding.

### **Components, Drivers and Models of museum brand orientation**

According to Bridson & Evans (2007), “Brand orientation is defined as the degree to which the organization values brands and its practices are oriented towards building brand capabilities” (2007:2). A number of scholars have explored the brand orientation (Bridson & Evans, 2007; Bridson et al., 2009; Evans, et.al., 2012; Caldwell & Coshall, 2002; Kotler & Kotler, 2000; Massi & Harrison, 2009; Rentschler & Osborne, 2008; Williams, 2011). First, Caldwell & Coshall (2002) confirmed that although museums adopt slowly brand orientation they lag in creating strong brand identity and associations. Then, Bridson & Evans (2007) conclude four criteria of a museum’s brand orientation. Moreover, they accentuate the reciprocal benefits of branding, both for the museum and the audience. All dimensions are explained analytically in the table below (Table1).

**Table 1:** The four criteria of museum brand orientation based on Bridson & Evans (2007)

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Distinctiveness</b> | The ability of a brand oriented museum to be perceived as unique cultural asset, to be differentiated from its competitors by adding a competitive advantage and serving as a decision making factor for visitors. |
| <b>Functionality</b>   | To which extent a museum communicates, attaches visitors with the artifacts and enhances the museum experience via additional feature  |
| <b>Augmentation</b>    | To which extent a museum delivers a long term relationship with its audience and communicated a superior brand image   |
| <b>Symbolism</b>       | To which extent a museum brand effects the audience perception of their selves and boost their social identity. To which degree the museum is established as a distinctive cultural icon.                          |

As regards the drivers of museum brand orientation, Evans, et.al. (2012) list various factors such as the increasing demand of commercial and curational assemblage management for the sake of museum viability, the leadership style, the in-strictic need of museum for bigger recognition and brand uniqueness. As regards the barriers of museum brand orientation, a number of scholars agree that disregard towards branding and limited financial resources are the main impediments of branding. (Bridson & Evans; 2007; Evans, et.al., 2012). Some years later Evans, et.al. (2012) add the funding perspective as another important barrier. Vassiliadis & Fotiadis (2008) also acknowledge the importance of segmentation to the successful museum branding.

Relating to the conceptual models of museums’ brand orientation, the literature emerges two models. Evans, et.al. (2012) introduce a six- dimension model that treat museums brand “as an organizational culture and compass for decision-making and four brand behaviors (distinctiveness, functionality, augmentation and symbolism)” (2012:13). Internal and external variables are the moderator factors that will establish the notion of brand first at the philosophical level and then at the whole brand museum behavior level. Given this model, Evans, et.al. (2012) discover that a strong curational orientation decreases the brand orientation due to the implied suspicion and disregard of leadership style. Conversely, as a link between the commercial and curational management a strong commercial orientation boosts the brand orientation and improves the museum experience.

Furthermore, Massi & Harrison (2009) show important differences in branding application – in terms of consistency- between Italian and Australian museum managers. Their study depicts two different approaches of branding: The classic model (applied in Europe) and the modernist model (applied in Australia). Within classic model cultural brand is mainly associated with the renowned history and heritage of the museum. In this case, the brand has been already built via the unique heritage. Museums perceive branding rather as a secondary enhancing tool because museum experience is cultural driven and non-entertainment driven. Hence, branding process is limited, traditional and implicit and managers show a very low degree of consistency and coherence in their branding. On the contrary, modernist model perceives branding as the second *raison d'etre* of museum. Here, museums usually built the identity on a story instead of history. Thus, branding is applied to its full potential and consistency is the backbone of the museum's viability.

In addition, Kotler & Kotler (2000) recognize the need for managers to improve the museum experience via branding but without distorting the core mission of museums, its curational role. Similarly, Bridson et al. (2009) urge managers to strive for the combination of curational and commercial orientation to achieve a distinct brand that will entail to financial boost. To Bridson et al. (2009) and Massi & Harrison (2009) consistency across all functions of the museum is the critical success factor. Moreover, Tsourvakas, et al. (2016) conclude that marketing innovations indeed boost NPOs' financial performance but they still have a limited influence on the NPOs' cultural performance.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

Drawing on a review of 33 papers this paper extends our knowledge by classifying the available bibliography in two main strands. First, although branding offers vast benefits to museums at financial and societal level, museum branding is still a neglected and controversial issue. Second, the study revealed that the curational orientation should merge with the branding orientation. For each of these aspects the study reveals scant literature in empirical studies. This may be explained by the infancy of branding adoption in museums stemming from the differences between FPOs and NPOs.

Overall, his study provides valuable theoretical and practical implications. The principal theoretical implication of this study is that it will provide a valuable theoretical starting point for researchers in such area by the classification of the current the state of museum branding literature. Moreover, this is the first study that categorizes the most important aspects of museum branding literature. Overall, this study strengthens the importance and necessity of branding application in NPOs and precisely museums. Consistent to the brand advocates, we view branding as a driver for both NPOs and museums' sustainability and growth. In terms of practical implication, as branding is a structural element of viability especially within the today's perpetual financial instability, we firmly encourage museum practitioners to deploy branding tactics to assure sustainability. Therefore, a key policy's priority

should be to combine carefully the commercial and curatorial perspective to enhance museum experience and boost museum identity, image and recognition.

## Limitations and Further Research

These findings may be somewhat limited by the literature review analysis. Furthermore, as several questions remain unanswered at present the present study warmly welcomes further research in this field. Finally, there is abundant room to explore the influence of social media & integrated marketing communications (Belch & Belch, 2008) further use in museum branding.

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