



Corporate rebranding: effects of corporate visual identity changes on employees and consumers

Wendy Bolhuis^a, Menno D.T. de Jong^b and Annette L.M. van den Bosch^c

^aNykampNyboer, Hengelo, The Netherlands; ^bFaculty of Behavioral, Management & Social Sciences, Department of Communication Science, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands; ^cPrivate consultant, Utrecht, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Many organizations invest periodically in a new corporate visual identity (CVI). This study investigates the main effects of CVI changes in four organizations, taking into account three independent variables: stakeholder type (employees vs. consumers), the specific organization, and communication about the CVI change. The results show that CVI changes had positive effects on CVI appreciation and identity/image. However, the effects were different for employees and consumers and differed between specific organizations. Furthermore, adequate communication about the new CVI appeared to be important for people's appreciation of the CVI. The implications of these findings are discussed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 9 April 2015
Accepted 22 June 2015

KEYWORDS

Corporate visual identity; corporate identity; corporate image; design; logo; rebranding

Introduction

A corporate visual identity (CVI) contributes significantly to the external representation of an organization (Baker and Balmer 1997; Balmer and Soenen 1999; Bromley 2001; Foroudi, Melewar, and Gupta 2014; Park et al. 2013; Stuart 1998; Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving 2005). When an organization or its environment changes, the CVI is an ideal tool to demarcate and draw attention to such a change. Therefore, many organizations occasionally consider a corporate rebranding and are willing to invest large amounts of money in developing and implementing a new CVI. Considering such large investments, organizations must expect important benefits from a CVI change. Some evidence for such beneficial effects is available from case studies analyzing specific rebranding processes (e.g., Melewar, Bassett, and Simoes 2006; Melewar, Hussey, and Srivoravilai 2005; Merrilees and Miller 2008; Van Riel, van der Ban, and Heijmans 2001). The research in this article aims to broaden these insights by analyzing the internal and external effects of corporate rebrandings of four different organizations.

Corporate visual identity

A CVI consists of a name, logo, typography, color, slogan, and, often, additional graphic design elements (Melewar and Saunders 1998; Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving 2005). The name and logo are the most recognizable elements of an organization's visual identity (Poon and Fatt 1997). Research suggests that logos can communicate corporate identities (Van Riel, van der Ban, and Heijmans 2001) and thereby affect corporate images. Furthermore, a CVI may help in differentiating organizations from competitors (Melewar, Hussey, and Srivoravilai 2005), making organizations recognizable (Kohli,

Suri, and Thakor 2002), crossing international boundaries (Kohli, Suri, and Thakor 2002), and building employee identification (Baker and Balmer 1997; Van Riel and van Hasselt 2002). A CVI is therefore an important management tool for organizations (Van Riel, van der Ban, and Heijmans 2001).

On average, organizations change their visual identity once every decade (Roos 2000). Common reasons for a CVI change are a change of the corporate strategy (Van Riel and van Hasselt 2002), a merger or acquisition (Rosson and Brooks 2004), a change of the corporate identity (Melewar and Akel 2005), a need to build a new positive image (Stuart and Muzellec 2004), and a desire to modernize or rejuvenate the organizational appearance (Müller, Kocher, and Crettaz 2013). CVI changes can be highly visible and are therefore an important tool to signal organizational changes, both internally and externally. Organizations use a CVI change to improve their self-presentation, but it may also cause damage to a brand (Gotsi and Andriopoulos 2007).

Identity and image

Internal effects of a CVI change involve changes in an organization's identity, while external effects may come to light in changes in its image. There are many different perspectives on identity and image in the literature (e.g., Balmer 2001; Melewar 2003; Stuart 1999; Van Riel and Balmer 1997). For this study, the corporate and the organizational perspective on identity and image are particularly relevant. The corporate perspective is primarily instrumental: identities are manageable entities, which organizations may strategically adjust to optimize their effectiveness among relevant stakeholders. A CVI is then a well-considered visualization of an organization's strategy, and therefore, one of the instruments that communicate an organization's desired identity to internal and external stakeholders. The organizational perspective involves the way an identity or image actually develops among relevant stakeholders and thus highlights the less manageable side of both concepts. Irrespective of the managerial intentions with a CVI, internal and external stakeholders develop their own feelings and beliefs regarding the organization and its CVI (Hatch and Schultz 1997).

Both perspectives are strongly related. The corporate identity desired and formulated by an organization's top management affects, within reasonable boundaries, the organizational identity and organizational image among stakeholders. Many researchers assume a relationship among identity, image, and CVI and have constructed models that connect them (Alessandri 2001; Birkigt and Stadler 1986; Foroudi, Melewar, and Gupta 2014; Melewar and Jenkins 2002; Stuart 1998, 1999; Suvatjis and De Chernatony 2005; Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving 2005). They all assume that CVI visualizes the identity and that identity affects the image of an organization. Combining the corporate and the organizational perspective on identity, the visual identity both represents and affects an organization's identity and image among stakeholders.

Internal effects of a CVI change: effects on identity

Identity refers to a set of characteristics that, according to employees, are typical for an organization. It is often defined as employees' perceptions, feelings, and beliefs regarding the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Hatch and Schultz 1997). All models incorporating identity, image, and CVI assume a relationship between CVI and identity. This relationship is not perfect: apart from CVI, there are other factors that will also affect identity. These factors may lie outside the organization: societal developments or developments regarding the branch in which the organization operates. They may also have to do with the organization's image among external stakeholders (Brown et al. 2006). Many studies have shown that an organization's perceived external prestige – the way employees think that people in the outside world think about their organization – affects employees' identification (Smidts, Pruyn, and van Riel 2001; Bartels et al. 2007; Bartels, Pruyn, and de Jong 2009). Apart from CVI, there are two additional factors within the organization: communication and behaviors. The external factors relativize the potential effects of a CVI change on employees. Furthermore, there are reasons to assume that communication and behaviors will have a more profound effect on employees than an organization's CVI, as they are less static and more vividly present in everyday working life. On the other hand, CVI is the factor that is best manageable, stable, and univocal.

In contrast to what the models seem to suggest, the relationship between an organization's CVI and its identity is not necessarily a causal, one-directional one. In practice, an organization's actual identity will affect, or at least set boundaries to, the design of a CVI. Ideally, a CVI reflects a balance between what an organization actually is and what it tries to be. In many design processes of CVIs, employees are therefore asked for their input and feedback. This also limits the possibilities to bring about drastic changes with a new CVI.

Despite these limitations, it seems plausible that employees may gradually perceive their organization differently after a CVI change. So far, only one study investigated this effect quantitatively. Peyrache and Levin (2001) demonstrated that the CVI change of France Télécom had a positive effect on employees' perceptions of their organization. After the CVI change, employees judged it to be more modern, friendly, and warm.

It is important to involve employees in organizational changes like a CVI change (Melewar and Akel 2005; Melewar, Hussey, and Srivoravilai 2005; Miller, Merrilees, and Yakimova 2014). Several authors (e.g., Stuart and Muzellec 2004) emphasized that internal communication about a CVI change is crucial for employees' identification with their organization, but provided no empirical evidence.

External effects of a CVI change: effects on image

Image refers to the total of external stakeholders' perceptions and impressions of an organization (Chun 2005; Hatch and Schultz 1997). The models incorporating identity, image, and CVI also assume a relationship between CVI and image. This relationship may be partly mediated by identity, but a CVI is equally visible for external stakeholders as it is for employees, so there may also be a direct relationship (He and Mukherjee 2009). The same restrictions as mentioned under internal effects may apply here. The CVI is most likely not the only factor that affects the image an organization has among its external stakeholders. And the design of a CVI may also be a balance between the actual and the desired image. Furthermore, the engagement of external stakeholders with an organization and its CVI may be considerably lower than the engagement of employees. Again, these factors should relativize the potential of a CVI to make drastic changes to an organization's image.

Still, the CVI is the most visible and tangible element of an organization's external representation. It is an important tool to make an organization familiar and recognizable among its external stakeholders (Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving 2005). Peyrache and Levin (2001), for instance, showed that the introduction of a new CVI of France Telecom not only led to higher appreciations among consumers but also to an improved image of the organization (in terms of modernity, vitality and friendliness). Müller, Kocher, and Crettaz (2013) reported similar results: They showed that a visual rejuvenation of brands had a positive influence on perceived brand modernity and brand attitude. Walsh (2010) also found that a CVI change influenced the attitude toward a brand. Consumers who evaluated the new CVI less positively compared to the old CVI also evaluated the brand less positively, whereas consumers who evaluated the new CVI more positively also evaluated the brand more positively. However, this effect was strongly affected by consumer commitment to the brand. Together, these studies indicate that an organization's image may be affected by a new CVI.

Only one study so far incorporated the role of external communication in CVI changes. Van Riel, van der Ban, and Heijmans (2001) examined evaluations of a bank's logo before and after the launch of a new CVI. They showed that evaluations were more positive and associations matched the intentions of the bank better after the launch of the new logo. They attributed this result partly to a large-scale advertising campaign about the new visual identity.

Between communication and assimilation

The literature on the CVI so far predominantly highlights the communicative value of CVI elements such as logos and typeface. Experimental research, most often with fictitious or unfamiliar organizations and CVI elements, indeed shows that visual cues can be powerful means of communication. Henderson and Cote (1998), for instance, showed how the characteristics of logos may shape people's impression of the brand or organization behind it. Cian, Krishna, and Elder (2014) investigated the effects of logo

dynamism (the impression of movement) on brand attitudes and showed that dynamic logos evoke a sense of modernity and thus work well for modern brands, but have opposite effects for the more traditional brands. Hagtvedt (2011) showed that incomplete typeface logos have an unfavorable effect on perceived trustworthiness, but a positive effect on perceived innovativeness. Grohmann (forthcoming) demonstrated that type fonts have a strong and persistent effect on brand gender perceptions. Doyle and Bottomley (2006) investigated the communicative power of typefaces, using a framework of three possible connotations: potency, activity, and evaluation.

Despite this communicative potential, it is important to note that there is also a reverse relationship between a brand or organization and its CVI in practice: an assimilation process in which people's prior experiences with a brand or organization affect their interpretation of CVI elements. This is a relationship that has been underexposed in the literature. Van Riel, van der Ban, and Heijmans (2001), for instance, showed that respondents' associations with a logo increased when they were confronted with the company name behind the logo and showed how people's interpretation of a new logo changed over time due to an advertising campaign. Doyle and Bottomley (2006) argue that visual cues may have figurative and abstract meanings of themselves, but also have learned arbitrary associations (114), which refer to assimilation processes.

The relationship between a brand or organization and its CVI thus develops as an alternation between communication and assimilation processes. In the communication process, the CVI gives meaning to the brand or organization. In the assimilation process, the brand or organization gives meaning to the CVI.

Research questions

Our study aims to shed more light on the effects of CVI changes on internal and external stakeholders' appreciation of the CVI and on the identity/image of the organization. The study complements earlier case studies by investigating the CVI changes of four organizations using the same research instrument. The main research question of this study is as follows: What are the internal and external effects of a CVI change in organizations? In addition, three specific sub questions address factors that may affect the effects of a CVI change (see Figure 1):

- To what extent are there differences between internal and external stakeholders regarding the effects of a CVI change?
- To what extent do the effects of a CVI change depend on the specific and idiosyncratic characteristics of organizations and their CVI change?
- To what extent does communication about the new CVI affect the effects of a CVI change?

Method

The study used an *ex post facto* survey among employees and consumers. Respondents in both groups answered questions retrospectively about the effects of a CVI change that had already taken place. Below the participating organizations, the selection of respondents and the research instrument will be described.

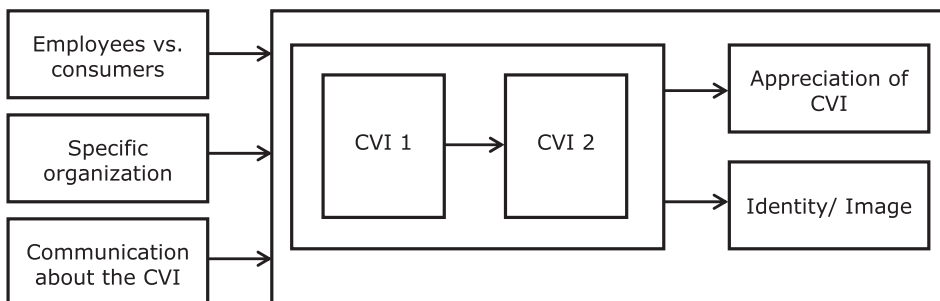


Figure 1. Overview of the research.

Organizations

In order to provide more generalizable insights into the internal and external effects of CVI changes, the research had to comprise different types of organizations and rebranding processes. Two requirements guided the selection of organizations. First, to make sure that people could still remember the rebranding, it was important that the rebranding had not taken place more than four years before the data collection. Second, to ensure that the number of (internal and external) respondents would suffice, the participating organizations had to be large and well-known organizations.

Four different organizations were selected that met these criteria and were willing to cooperate with the research. The four organizations – two nonprofit and two for-profit – that participated were a national political party (organization 1), a public broadcasting station (organization 2), a large telecommunications company (organization 3), and a bank (organization 4). The participating organizations all had more than 400 employees and were known by the majority of the Dutch population. Their headquarters were in The Netherlands.

The four organizations had changed their CVI between eight months and four years before data collection. Organization 1 had changed its CVI to reflect its changed identity. Organization 2 had changed its CVI to create more uniformity. Organizations 3 and 4 had changed their CVI to reflect a strategy change. In addition to these primary reasons for changing their CVI, all four organizations indicated that a secondary purpose was to modernize their self-presentation.

Organizations 2, 3, and 4 had informed their employees about the reasons for and meaning of the new CVI, but only organizations 3 and 4 had introduced the new CVI extensively with, among other things, a specially organized event. The latter two organizations had also introduced their new CVI to external stakeholders using an advertising campaign.

Respondents

The internal effects of the CVI change were measured among the employees. There was only one restriction for participation in the study: Because they had to retrospectively evaluate organizational changes, respondents had to be employed by their organization at least one year before the CVI change. Employees were invited to participate by e-mail. In two of the organizations, an additional announcement of the research was made on the intranet.

In organizations 1 and 2, all employees who met the abovementioned requirement were invited to participate. In organizations 3 and 4, a random selection of employees was invited to participate. In total, 329 employees participated. Most participants worked for organization 1 (57%), whereas the numbers were almost equal for organization 2 (18%) and organization 3 (17%). The fewest participants worked for organization 4 (9%). The sample consisted of 233 men (71%) and 96 women (29%), and respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 68 years old ($M = 42.3$, $SD = 11.48$). Of the respondents, 42% worked full-time for their organization.

The external effects of the CVI change were measured among consumers. People who participated in the study were members of an online opinion panel, comprising a representative sample of the Dutch population. The sample consisted of customers and noncustomers of the participating organizations. In total, 442 respondents participated as follows: 28% for organization 1, 27% for organizations 2 and 3, and 18% for organization 4. In this sample, 242 men (55%) and 200 women (45%) participated. To ensure that respondents were familiar with the organization they evaluated, they were asked to indicate their knowledge of the organization beforehand. Respondents who indicated that they had no knowledge of the organization were excluded from participation.

Research instrument

Identity and image

Changes in employee and consumer evaluations of the organizations were examined using the identity and image constructs. Because identity and image are strongly related, the same questions were used for employees and consumers. Respondents had to answer the identity and image questions twice:

for the organization before and the organization after the CVI change. All items were measured using seven-point semantic differential scales.

Two types of constructs were measured. The first involved respondents' overall judgment of the organization. In total, four questions were asked (Cronbach's alpha = .91 on T1, and .89 on T2). The four semantic differentials referred to overall judgments rather than specific characteristics of the organization, using the following adjectives: positive, appealing, interesting, and sympathetic.

The second type of construct involved more specific characteristics of the organization. Three constructs were measured, which were based on existing measurement instruments for identity and image research (Aaker 1997; Chun 2005; Davies and Chun 2002; Fombrun 1996; Van Heerden and Puth 1995): modernity (four items, Cronbach's alpha = .81 on T1, and .80 on T2), familiarity (three items, Cronbach's alpha = .78 on T1, and .76 on T2), and distinctiveness (three items, Cronbach's alpha = .90 on T1 and T2). The selection of these three constructs was based on their relevance for CVI changes, and their distinction was confirmed by an exploratory factor analysis (with some overlap between familiarity and distinctiveness).

CVI evaluation

The respondents were asked to evaluate the old and the new CVI. To control for possible order effects of the measurement of logo evaluations, half of the respondents evaluated the old logo first and the other half evaluated the new logo first. Before judging each of the two CVIs, the respondents were presented with the respective logo of the organization. In total six questions were asked, all using seven-point semantic differential scales (Cronbach's alpha = .87 on T1, and .86 on T2). The semantic differentials comprised the following adjectives: appealing, attractive, distinctive, beautiful, recognizable, and conspicuous.

Communication about the new CVI

The communication about the new CVI was measured using two questions about the respondents' knowledge of the new CVI: 'I know the meaning of the new logo', and 'I know what the organization wants to express with the new logo' (Cronbach's alpha = .81). Both questions were asked using seven-point Likert scales.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using a repeated measures analysis of variance, with the 'old' scores of CVI and identity/image on T1, and the new scores on T2. Three between-subjects independent variables were included in the analysis: (1) the type of stakeholders (employees vs. consumers), (2) the organization (organization 1–4), and the respondents' knowledge of the new CVI. For the latter variable, we used a median-split to subdivide the participants into two groups. As the CVI knowledge differed significantly between employees and consumers – with mean scores of 4.28 and 2.68, respectively – we used two separate median splits for both groups of respondents.

Results

The first analysis presented is the multivariate tests of within-subjects effects, which is decisive for the main effects and interaction effects to be examined in the univariate tests. The results of the multivariate tests show which independent variables (the within-subjects CVI change variable and the three between-subjects variables) have a significant effect on the complete set of five dependent variables (CVI appreciation and the four identity/image constructs). Only the effects that are significant in the multivariate test will be considered in the univariate tests, which focus on the question for which of the dependent variables significant effects were found.

Multivariate test results: Which independent variables matter?

As shown in Table 1, the CVI change variable corresponded to a strong main effect (as indicated by the high η^2). In addition, all three between-subjects variables appeared to have a significant one-way

Table 1. Multivariate test results for CVI effects.

	Wilks's λ	F	df	Significance	η^2
CVI change (within-subjects)	.720	44.185	5, 568	$p < .001$	.28
CVI change \times stakeholder type	.921	12.723	15, 1568.4	$p < .001$	.10
CVI change \times organization	.728	9.800	5, 568	$p < .001$	.08
CVI change \times communication	.953	5.586	5, 568	$p < .001$	.05
CVI change \times stakeholder type \times organization	.837	6.976	15, 1568.4	$p < .001$	.06
CVI change \times stakeholder type \times communication	.984	1.841	5, 568	$p = .103$	
CVI change \times organization \times communication	.968	1.230	15, 1568.4	$p = .241$	
CVI change \times stakeholder type \times organization \times communication	.981	.720	15, 1568.4	$p = .767$	

interaction with CVI change, which means that they affected the difference between the scores on T1 and T2. The η^2 scores are considerably lower here, but still refer to practically meaningful effects. Finally, one significant three-way interaction was found: between CVI change, stakeholder type, and organization, with a more or less similar η^2 . No other two-way or three-way interaction effects proved to be significant.

Univariate test results 1: main effects of CVI change

Table 2 provides an overview of the main effects of CVI change on the five dependent variables. On average, the CVI change resulted in significantly higher CVI appreciation scores (4.9 vs. 4.4). Moreover, the CVI change corresponded to significantly higher scores for the three identity/image characteristics of the organizations: modernity (4.8 vs. 4.1), familiarity (5.6 vs. 5.4), and distinctiveness (4.8 vs. 4.6). No significant effects were found for respondents' overall judgments of the organizations. The effect sizes (η^2) all refer to considerable and practically meaningful effects.

The results thus indicate that a corporate rebranding may have positive effects on people's appreciation of the CVI, and on perceived organizational characteristics that are closely connected to the CVI, in particular modernity. The latter, of course, is not surprising, as all four CVI changes partially aimed at making the visual appearance more up-to-date. The more surprising finding is that the other two characteristics, which might at first sight be at odds with a rebranding, also showed improved scores.

Univariate test results 2: interaction with stakeholder type

Table 3 presents the results regarding the interaction between CVI change and stakeholder type (employees vs. consumers). Four significant results were found, for the same dependent variables as those with main effects. The η^2 scores indicate a small effect on three variables (CVI appreciation,

Table 2. Univariate test results for CVI change.

	F	df	Significance	η^2
Appreciation of CVI	30.868	1	$p < .001$	.05
Overall judgment of the organization	1.897	1	$p = .169$	
Modernity of the organization	180.764	1	$p < .001$	.24
Familiarity of the organization	28.857	1	$p < .001$	.05
Distinctiveness of the organization	14.068	1	$p < .001$	.06

Table 3. Univariate test results for the interaction between CVI change and stakeholder type.

	F	df	Significance	η^2
Appreciation of CVI	6.758	1	$p < .05$	.01
Overall judgment of the organization	.003	1	$p = .954$	
Modernity of the organization	38.168	1	$p < .001$	.06
Familiarity of the organization	4.986	1	$p < .05$	.01
Distinctiveness of the organization	11.328	1	$p < .005$	.02

familiarity, and distinctiveness), and a considerable effect on modernity. In all cases, the interaction boiled down to the fact that the CVI change had stronger effects on employees than on consumers. The scores on modernity of the organization form the clearest example of this: among employees, the modernity score went from 4.2 to 5.2; among consumers, the scores were 3.9 and 4.3, respectively.

The results thus indicate that the effects of a CVI change will be stronger on employees, for whom the organization is to some extent the center of attention, than they will be on consumers, for whom the organization is just one of many. The results do not indicate that effects of a CVI change are structurally in a different direction for employees and consumers.

Univariate test results 3: interaction with organization

The results regarding the interaction effect between CVI change and organization can be found in Table 4. Significant and practically meaningful interaction effects were found for all five dependent variables. Paired *t*-tests shed more light on the effects of the CVI change for the four organizations. Table 5 gives an overview of the results. Three situations may be distinguished. The most frequent is the situation in which significant positive effects were reached for one or two organizations, while the other organizations had nonsignificant results. This was the case for the overall judgment, familiarity, and distinctiveness. The second situation involved modernity: all four organizations reached a significantly positive effect, but the magnitude of the effect varied considerably. The third situation regarded people's appreciation of the CVI: three of the four organizations showed a significant improvement, but for organization 2, people significantly preferred the old CVI. Overall, the pattern of the five possible effects differed between all four organizations, and none of the organizations reached positive effects on all five aspects.

These results emphasize the idiosyncratic nature of CVI changes. They underline that the effects of a CVI change at least partially depend on the characteristics of the specific organization and/or its old and new CVI. Higher scores on modernity seem to be the most feasible effects, followed by a higher appreciation of the CVI. Higher scores on overall judgments of the organization seem to be particularly hard to reach. Looking at the scores of the four organizations, organizations 1 and 4 seem to have successfully implemented their new CVI. Organization 3 only reached limited effects. And organization 2 seems to have completed a less successful rebranding effort. This may be related to the purpose of its rebranding: the CVI change was meant to create more uniformity, which may be at odds with the needs and preferences of the two stakeholder groups.

Table 4. Univariate test results for the interaction between CVI change and organization.

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance	η^2
Appreciation of CVI	13.671	3	$p < .001$	.07
Overall judgment of the organization	9.322	3	$p < .001$	.05
Modernity of the organization	12.756	3	$p < .001$	.06
Familiarity of the organization	14.177	3	$p < .005$	.07
Distinctiveness of the organization	7.902	3	$p < .001$	.04

Table 5. Effects of the CVI change per organization.

	Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4
Appreciation of CVI	+	–	+	+
Overall judgment of the organization	+	o	o	o
Modernity of the organization	+	+	+	+
Familiarity of the organization	+	o	o	+
Distinctiveness of the organization	o	o	o	+

Notes: + = statistically significant positive effect, – = statistically significant negative effect, o = no statistically significant effect (paired *t*-tests, $p < .05$).

Univariate test results 4: interaction with communication

Table 6 presents the results regarding the interaction effects between the CVI change and the quality of the communication about the CVI, measured by questions about participants' knowledge about the new CVI. Only one statistically significant and practically meaningful result was found: the quality of the communication affected people's appreciation of the CVI. No effects were found for all the variables that focused on the organization instead of the CVI.

This finding underlines the importance of communicating to relevant stakeholders about a new CVI. The lack of a significant three-way interaction effect with stakeholder type underlines that this communication may be equally important for internal and external stakeholders. The lack of a significant three-way interaction effect with organization shows that the importance of communicating about a CVI is important in all organizational contexts.

Univariate test results 5: interaction with stakeholder type and organization

Table 7 shows the results of the last univariate test, focusing on the only three-way interaction found – between CVI change, stakeholder type and organization. Statistically significant and practically meaningful results on all five dependent variables. Repeated measures analyses of variance per organization, with stakeholder type as a between-subjects variable, were used to further make sense of this finding. Table 8 presents the main outcomes of these analyses. For two of the organizations (organization 3 and 4), employees were significantly more positive about the effects of the CVI change than consumers. These organizations are in line with the general tendency in the two-way interaction between CVI change and stakeholder type. However, the other two organizations do not (entirely) follow the same pattern. For organization 2, there were, with the exception of one variable, no significant differences between employees and consumers. For organization 1, consumers were generally more positive about the effects of the CVI change than employees.

Table 6. Univariate test results for the interaction between CVI change and communication.

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance	η^2
Appreciation of CVI	26.358	1	$p < .001$	.04
Overall judgment of the organization	.903	1	$p = .342$	
Modernity of the organization	.077	1	$p = .781$	
Familiarity of the organization	1.153	1	$p = .283$	
Distinctiveness of the organization	.095	1	$p = .758$	

Table 7. Univariate test results for the three-way interaction between CVI change, stakeholder type, and organization.

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	Significance	η^2
Appreciation of CVI	7.792	3	$p < .001$	.04
Overall judgment of the organization	12.627	3	$p < .001$	.06
Modernity of the organization	10.583	3	$p < .001$	.05
Familiarity of the organization	6.189	3	$p < .001$	.03
Distinctiveness of the organization	17.311	3	$p < .001$	.08

Table 8. Differential effects on employees and consumers per organization.

Aspect	Organization 1	Organization 2	Organization 3	Organization 4
Appreciation of CVI	Only consumers positive			Employees more positive than consumers
Overall judgment of the organization	Only consumers positive		Employees positive, consumers negative	
Modernity of the organization		Employees more positive than consumers	Employees more positive than consumers	Employees more positive than consumers
Familiarity of the organization	Consumers more positive than employees			Employees more positive than consumers
Distinctiveness of the organization	Employees negative, consumers positive		Employees positive, consumers negative	Employees more positive than consumers

Note: Statistical differences tested using a repeated measures analysis of variance ($p < .05$).

Not all differences, however, are problematic. In more than half of the cases of a difference between the two stakeholder types, both were positive, and only differed in the extent to which they were. In two cases, only one of the two types of respondents showed a significantly positive score, while the other was neutral. The more puzzling and troublesome results are the three cases in which one stakeholder type was positive and the other was negative. These cases all concern variables that are a little more distant from the CVI: overall judgment of the organization (which may depend on many more internal and external events) and distinctiveness (which also depends on events among competitors).

Nevertheless, these results warn against too mechanical interpretations of the two-way interactions found. Organizations and contexts differ, and this may affect the effects of a CVI change. It appears to be hard to equally satisfy internal and external stakeholders. It is important to have the input of both stakeholder groups in corporate rebranding processes.

Discussion

Main findings

CVI change processes are major operations for organizations. This applies to the investment side, in terms of money and efforts, but also to the possible effects of such operations. This study underlines that organizations may gain much by a well-considered and well-designed CVI change. The effects may not be limited to stakeholders' appreciation of the CVI, but may also involve their view on the organization. In this respect, the results corroborate earlier studies by Müller, Kocher, and Crettaz (2013), Peyrache and Levin (2001), and Walsh (2010). In principle, it is realistic and feasible when organizations use a CVI change to improve their visual self-presentation as well as their identity and image.

However, in contrast to the earlier research, the results also give rise to a more nuanced view on the effects of a CV change. Considering the differential results, it seems relatively easy to positively affect people's impression of the modernity of an organization and their appreciation of the CVI. Improving the familiarity and distinctiveness of an organization may also be within reach. However, people's overall judgment of an organization appears to be much harder to improve by means of a CVI change.

Furthermore, the findings shed light on the role of three variables during CVI change processes. The first involves the different stakeholder groups organizations have. In this study, only two types of stakeholders participated: employees (as a very important example of internal stakeholders) and consumers (as a large external stakeholder group). The results give rise to two observations. First, a CVI change will generally have larger effects on employees (who are more systematically exposed to the new CVI and for whom the organization is a more central element in their lives) than on consumers (who may be confronted with the CVI more sporadically, and for whom the organization is not much more than just an organization). Second, the perspectives of internal and external stakeholders on a CVI change may vary considerably in specific cases. The results thus demonstrate that it is important to thoroughly consider the perspectives of different stakeholders during the design and implementation of a new CVI.

The second variable involves the specific organization and its characteristics, including those of the old and the new CVI. The results of this study clearly show that mechanistic conclusions about effects of a CVI can never be justified. A CVI change can lead to the desired effects, but whether it will do or not strongly depends on the specific organization and the quality of the CVI design and implementation process.

The third variable is the communication about the new CVI. Earlier research already showed that knowledge about the CVI affects employees' willingness to comply with the CVI guidelines in their external communication (Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving 2004; Van den Bosch, Elving, and de Jong 2006). This study showed that such knowledge is also important during and after CVI change processes. Both employees and consumers appreciate a new CVI higher when they are better informed about its purpose and background. These results support the findings of earlier studies that confirmed the importance of involving employees in and informing them about important organizational changes (Melewar and Akel 2005) and the importance of communicating a new CVI to external stakeholders (Merrilees and Miller 2008; Van Riel, van der Ban, and Heijmans 2001).

Implications of the findings

Although our findings generally support the potential positive effects of a rebranding, our findings more than anything underline the importance of a systematic and realistic rebranding process. Positive effects of a rebranding can be reached, but depend strongly on the specific organization and the communication around the rebranding.

The significant influence of organization in our findings boils down to the combined influence of strategic, organizational, and design characteristics during the rebranding process. Strategic characteristics involve the inherent quality of the rebranding decision, including the process that led to the decision: Was the rebranding really necessary, and is the new direction for the organization the right one? Organizational characteristics involve the specific characteristics of the relevant stakeholder groups and the strength of the original (visual) identity: Is there resistance toward the change among stakeholders? Design characteristics involve the quality of the visual elements: Is the new design appealing and convincing? The distinction reflects the strategic, operational, and design level of CVI research (Van den Bosch, de Jong, and Elving 2004). On the basis of our coarse-grained results, we cannot decide which specific factors played a significant role in the differences between organizations, but the differences between organizations must be attributed to these specific factors.

The significant influence of communication had a clear, but limited focus in our research: It focused specifically on stakeholders' knowledge about the motives and background of the new CVI, which merely reflects the outcome of communication. In practice, however, the communication factor will be more comprehensive than in our research.

Given the importance of organizational and communicative factors, our research provides general support for earlier studies in which systematic and well-considered rebranding processes are described and proposed (Merrilees and Miller 2008; Miller, Merrilees, and Yakimova 2014) and for more general advice on organizational change (Lewis et al. 2006). All three articles draw attention to the crucial role of communication before, during, and after rebranding and change processes. The communication should not be limited to sending, but should also include receiving and interacting activities. In addition, both Merrilees and Miller (2008) and Miller, Merrilees, and Yakimova (2014) stress the importance of a systematic, research-supported, and well-considered re-visioning of the brand. Merrilees and Miller (2008), in particular, discuss the need to balance the old and the new, the core value and the innovation.

Limitations

Several limitations of the research design must be considered when interpreting the results. They can be captured under the overall observation that an experiment would be necessary to make strong causal inferences, whereas the orientation on real-life organizations and real CVI change processes made a true experimental approach impossible.

A first limitation involves the possible influence of external variables. The research focused on a period of eight months to four years. It is obvious that many things may have happened in such time frames – both in relation to the CVI and unrelated, both within the organization and in the outside world – that may have affected the dependent variables in this study. It seems to some extent defensible to infer causality when considering the effects of CVI change on respondents' appreciation of the CVI. However, for the identity- and image-related variables, in particular, the overall judgments of the organization, it seems plausible that other factors may also have had their influence.

A second limitation involves the nature of the data collection. In this study, respondents filled out the questionnaire on one moment, when the CVI change had been fully implemented. They judged the CVI and the organization before and after the CVI change. This may have affected the results. It is imaginable that respondents judged the new CVI and the present organization more positively because they had gotten used to the new situation and had grown detached from the old situation. The research should therefore not be interpreted as an objective comparison of the 'before' and 'after' scores. For such an interpretation, a longitudinal design would be necessary, with data collected in the old and in the new situation. The research should instead be interpreted as a retrospective account of

a CVI change. In practice, such retrospective accounts often determine the interpretation of success or failure of organizational changes like a CVI change.

Directions for future research

Future research into the effects of CVI changes could develop in three directions. A first direction would be a longitudinal study, with measurements before, just after, and some time after the implementation of a new CVI. Such a research design would produce findings that incorporate the perspectives stakeholders had during the process of CVI change. The influence of external variables can still not be excluded in this research design, which, just like this study, will necessarily cover a relatively long period of time, but can be incorporated by means of interviews and content analysis of relevant messages.

A second possible direction is an experimental approach, with an artificial organization. This would require a careful design of materials and of the CVI 'intervention', and a longer involvement of participants. With the current research infrastructure at universities, including online research technology and test participant pools, an experimental imitation of real CVI change processes seems both feasible and challenging. However, in that case, the main methodological concern will be whether the commitment of the test participants resembles that of employees and consumers in real life.

A third direction would involve a more qualitative longitudinal approach, including in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders, particularly focusing on the question how their perceptions of the introduction of a new CVI interact with other events inside or outside the organization.

Conclusion

This research reported in this article highlights the potential contributions that a CVI change may make to an organization. At the same time, the research made clear that such contributions are only reachable when the CVI change is well considered and when the process of designing and implementing a new CVI is of high quality. Two general features of a high-quality process stand out. First, organizations should incorporate the input of internal and external stakeholders in the process. Second, organizations should communicate well about the new CVI, both to their internal and to their external stakeholders.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Wendy Bolhuis holds an MSc degree in Communication Studies and Psychology from the University of Twente (The Netherlands). She works as a consultant for NykampNyboer, specialized in rebranding and CVI Management.

Menno D.T. de Jong is a full professor of Communication Science at the University of Twente (The Netherlands). He specializes in corporate, organizational, and technical communication. He has co-authored more than 100 academic articles on a wide variety of communication related topics.

Annette L.M. van den Bosch received her PhD on CVI management from the University of Twente (The Netherlands). She currently works as an independent consultant.

References

- Aaker, J. L. 1997. "Dimensions of Brand Personality." *Journal of Marketing Research* 34: 347–356.
- Alessandri, S. W. 2001. "Modeling Corporate Identity: A Concept Explication and Theoretical Explanation." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 6: 173–182.
- Baker, M. J., and J. M. T. Balmer. 1997. "Visual Identity: Trappings or Substance?" *European Journal of Marketing* 31: 366–382.
- Balmer, J. M. T. 2001. "Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding and Corporate Marketing – Seeing through the Fog." *European Journal of Marketing* 35: 248–291.
- Balmer, J. M. T., and G. B. Soenen. 1999. "The Acid Test of Corporate Identity Management™." *Journal of Marketing Management* 15: 69–92.
- Bartels, J., A. Pruyn, and M. de Jong. 2009. "Employee Identification before and after an Internal Merger: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 82: 113–128.
- Bartels, J., A. Pruyn, M. de Jong, and I. Joustra. 2007. "Multiple Organizational Identification Levels and the Impact of Perceived External Prestige and Communication Climate." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 28: 173–190.

- Birkigt, K., and M. M. Stadler. 1986. *Corporate Identity. Grundlagen, Funktionen, Fallbeispiele* [Corporate Identity. Foundation, Functions, Case Descriptions]. Landsberg am Lech: Verlag Moderne Industrie.
- Bromley, D. B. 2001. "Relationships between Personal and Corporate Reputation." *European Journal of Marketing* 35: 316–334.
- Brown, T. J., P. A. Dacin, M. G. Pratt, and D. A. Whetten. 2006. "Identity, Intended Image, Construed Image, and Reputation: An Interdisciplinary Framework and Suggested Terminology." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34 (2): 99–106.
- Chun, R. 2005. "Corporate Reputation: Meaning and Measurement." *International Journal of Management Reviews* 7 (2): 91–109.
- Cian, L., A. Krishna, and R. S. Elder. 2014. "This Logo Moves Me: Dynamic Imagery from Static Images." *Journal of Marketing Research* 51 (2): 184–197.
- Davies, G., and R. Chun. 2002. "Gaps between the Internal and External Perceptions of the Corporate Brand." *Corporate Reputation Review* 5: 144–158.
- Doyle, J. R., and P. A. Bottomley. 2006. "Dressed for the Occasion: Font-product Congruity in the Perception of Logotype." *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 16 (2): 112–123.
- Dutton, J. E., J. M. Dukerich, and C. V. Harquail. 1994. "Organizational Images and Member Identification." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39: 239–263.
- Fombrun, C. J. 1996. *Reputation. Realizing Value from the Corporate Image*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Foroudi, P., T. C. Melewar, and S. Gupta. 2014. "Linking Corporate Logo, Corporate Image, and Reputation: An Examination of Consumer Perceptions in the Financial Setting." *Journal of Business Research* 67 (11): 2269–2281.
- Gotsi, M., and C. Andriopoulos. 2007. "Understanding the Pitfalls in the Corporate Rebranding Process." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 12: 341–355.
- Grohmann, B. *Forthcoming*. "Communicating Brand Gender through Type Fonts." *Journal of Marketing Communications*. doi: 10.1080/13527266.2014.918050.
- Hagtvedt, H. 2011. "The Impact of Incomplete Typeface Logos on Perceptions of the Firm." *Journal of Marketing* 75 (4): 86–93.
- Hatch, M. J., and M. Schultz. 1997. "Relations between Organizational Culture, Identity and Image." *European Journal of Marketing* 31: 356–365.
- He, H.-W., and A. Mukherjee. 2009. "Corporate Identity and Consumer Marketing: A Process Model and Research Agenda." *Journal of Marketing Communications* 15 (1): 1–16.
- Henderson, P. W., and J. A. Cote. 1998. "Guidelines for Selecting or Modifying Logos." *Journal of Marketing* 62 (2): 14–30.
- Kohli, C., R. Suri, and M. Thakor. 2002. "Creating Effective Logos: Insights from Theory and Practice." *Business Horizons* 45: 58–64.
- Lewis, L. K., A. M. Schmisser, K. K. Stephens, and K. E. Weir. 2006. "Advice on Communicating during Organizational Change: The Content of Popular Press Books." *Journal of Business Communication* 43: 113–137.
- Melewar, T. C. 2003. "Determinants of the Corporate Identity Construct: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of Marketing Communications* 9: 195–220.
- Melewar, T. C., and S. Akeel. 2005. "The Role of Corporate Identity in the Higher Education Sector. A Case Study." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 10: 41–57.
- Melewar, T. C., K. Bassett, and C. Simoes. 2006. "The Role of Communication and Visual Identity in Modern Organisations." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 11: 138–147.
- Melewar, T. C., G. Hussey, and N. Srivoravilai. 2005. "Corporate Visual Identity: The Re-Branding of France Télécom." *Journal of Brand Management* 12: 379–394.
- Melewar, T. C., and E. Jenkins. 2002. "Defining the Corporate Identity Construct." *Corporate Reputation Review* 5: 76–90.
- Melewar, T. C., and J. Saunders. 1998. "Global Corporate Visual Identity System. Standardisation, Control and Benefits." *International Marketing Review* 15: 291–308.
- Merrilees, B., and D. Miller. 2008. "Principles of Corporate Rebranding." *European Journal of Marketing* 42: 537–552.
- Miller, D., B. Merrilees, and R. Yakimova. 2014. "Corporate Rebranding: An Integrative Review of Major Enablers and Barriers to the Rebranding Process." *International Journal of Management Reviews* 16 (3): 265–289.
- Müller, B., B. Kocher, and A. Crettaz. 2013. "The Effects of Visual Rejuvenation through Brand Logos." *Journal of Business Research* 66: 82–88.
- Park, C., A. B. Eisingerich, G. Pol, and J. W. Park. 2013. "The Role of Brand Logos in Firm Performance." *Journal of Business Research* 66 (2): 180–187.
- Peyrache, M. C., and A. Levin. 2001. "France Télécom: Branding to Promote Close Relations." In *Proceedings of the 5th European International Design Management Conference, The Netherlands, 2001*. Amsterdam: Design Management Institute.
- Poon, J., and T. Fatt. 1997. "Communicating a Winning Image." *Industrial and Commercial Training* 29 (5): 158–165.
- Roos, E. 2000. "Onderzoek naar de opvattingen over huisstijl en beleid ten aanzien van huisstijloperaties in organisaties in Nederland." [Research into the Opinions About Visual Identity and Organizational Policy Regarding CVI Processes in the Netherlands]. Master's thesis, University of Twente, Enschede, The Netherlands.
- Rosson, P., and M. R. Brooks. 2004. "M&As and Corporate Visual Identity: An Exploratory Study." *Corporate Reputation Review* 7: 181–194.
- Smidts, A., A. Th. H. Pruyn, and C. B. M. van Riel. 2001. "The Impact of Employee Communication and Perceived External Prestige on Organizational Identification." *Academy of Management Journal* 44: 1051–1062.

- Stuart, H. 1998. "Exploring the Corporate Identity/Corporate Image Interface: An Empirical Study of Accountancy Firms." *Journal of Communication Management* 2: 357–373.
- Stuart, H. 1999. "Towards a Definitive Model of the Corporate Identity Management Process." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 4 (4): 200–207.
- Stuart, H., and L. Muzellec. 2004. "Corporate Makeovers: Can a Hyena Be Rebranded?" *Journal of Brand Management* 11: 472–482.
- Suvatjits, J. Y., and L. De Chernatony. 2005. "Corporate Identity Modelling: A Review and Presentation of a New Multi-dimensional Model." *Journal of Marketing Management* 21: 809–834.
- Van den Bosch, A. L. M., M. D. T. de Jong, and W. J. L. Elving. 2004. "Managing Corporate Visual Identity: Use and Effects of Organizational Measures to Support a Consistent Self-presentation." *Public Relations Review* 30: 225–234.
- Van den Bosch, A. L. M., M. D. T. de Jong, and W. J. L. Elving. 2005. "How Corporate Visual Identity Supports Reputation." *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 10: 108–116.
- Van den Bosch, A. L. M., W. J. L. Elving, and M. D. T. de Jong. 2006. "The Impact of Organizational Characteristics on Corporate Visual Identity." *European Journal of Marketing* 40: 870–886.
- Van Heerden, C. H., and G. Puth. 1995. "Factors That Determine the Corporate Image of South African Banking Institutions: An Exploratory Investigation." *International Journal of Bank Marketing* 13 (3): 12–17.
- Van Riel, C. B. M., and J. M. T. Balmer. 1997. "Corporate Identity: The Concept, its Measurement and Management." *European Journal of Marketing* 31: 340–355.
- Van Riel, C. B. M., A. van der Ban, and E. J. Heijmans. 2001. "The Added Value of Corporate Logos. An Empirical Study." *European Journal of Marketing* 35: 428–440.
- Van Riel, C. B. M., and J. J. van Hasselt. 2002. "Conversion of Organizational Identity Research Findings into Actions." In *Corporate and Organizational Identities. Integrating Strategy, Marketing, Communication and Organizational Perspectives*, edited by B. Moingeon and G. Soenen, 156–174. London: Routledge.
- Walsh, M. F. 2010. "Do Logo Redesigns Help or Hurt Your Brand? The Role of Brand Commitment." *Journal of Product and Brand Management* 19 (2): 76–84.