

Identity-driven Touch-point Design
A Process-Framework for resonant Branding

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Abstract

This research aims at developing and testing a process framework, called “Identity-driven Touch-point Design” (ITD), that helps entrepreneurs and executives to translate an intended organisational brand identity into multiple coherent touch-point experiences to generate a highly resonant brand gestalt. ITD represents the first process framework that considers the dynamics of organisational brand identity development based on touch-point experiences of important stakeholders, who exchange their views and negotiate the brand gestalt in interaction.

Key words - organisational brand identity, brand-driven identity development, brand constituents, customer journey, touch-point experiences, brand gestalt

1. Introduction and Objectives

More recent approaches to brands and branding conceive brands as bundles of socio-cultural meanings (Wider, von Wallpach, & Mühlbacher, 2018; Botschen et al., 2014) or brand manifolds varying over time among a multitude of constituencies (Berthon et al., 2007, Popper & Eccles, 1977; Popper 1979; Popper 1994). Diamond et.al. (2009) conceptualize this interacting collection of elements as a gestalt system of distributed points within the brand resides or from which it emerges. Powerful sensory, emotionally and cognitively resonant brands result from multiple, consistent and attractive multi-sensory touch-point experiences of a continuous multiplicity (Hillebrand, Driessen, & Koll, 2015) of stakeholders (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Westenberg, 2010; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) generated by the dynamic interactions between all relevant constituents over time.

The current research aims at designing and testing a process framework that helps managers to translate an intended organizational brand identity into multiple coherent touch-point experiences of important stakeholders in order to generate a highly resonant brand gestalt (Wasib et al. 2014) along extended stakeholder relationships (Court et al. 2009).

The development of the process framework called “Identity Driven Touch-Point Design” (ITD) applies the design science research approach proposed by Hevner et al. (2004). The authors test the usefulness of the framework in an intervention research project with Neuburger, a middle-sized Austrian manufacturer of a branded consumer product. The case illustrates how ITD leads to increasingly consistent resonant touch-point designs that result in a gestalt of organizational identity highly attractive to consumers, employees and retailers. This paper focuses on the first cycle conducted during 6 months: the collaborative analysis of the status quo and the development of the intended organisational brand identity which will be presented at the time of the conference.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Organizational Brand Identity

There are numerous definitions of brands, reaching from the name to differentiate a product from others (Aaker, 1996) to brands as complex social phenomena (Hemetsberger & Mühlbacher, 2009). The latter suggest calling this concept developed by

the management of an organisation “intended brand identity” and to differentiate it from “enacted brand identity” as a phenomenon continuously emerging from social interaction among all stakeholders. Intended organisational brand identities are particular combinations of socio-cultural meanings (McCracken, 1986) companies would like to represent driven by organizational values, purpose, core competences and an envisioned future (Botschen & Wegerer, 2017; Collins & Porras, 1996).

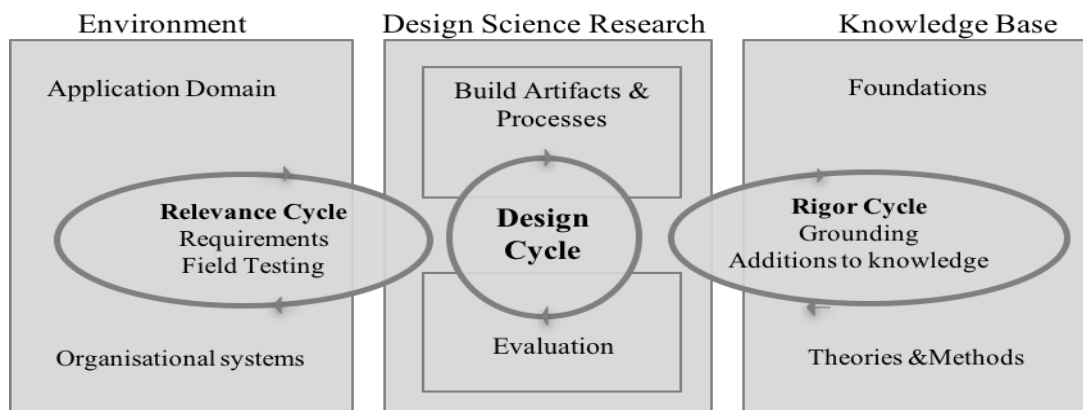
2.2 Touch-Point Experiences

The organisational brand identity intended by top management needs to be materialised at relevant touch-points to become subject to experience of affected customers, employees and other relevant stakeholders. According to Brakus et al. (2009) touch-point experiences result from (1) sensory stimuli, when the organisational manifestation makes a strong impression on the senses of the stakeholder; (2) emotional stimuli, when the manifestation conjures strong feelings or sentiments; and (3) cognitive stimuli, when the manifestation makes stakeholders reflect or induces them to think in a specific way. The accumulated and reciprocal influences of actual and memorized touch-point experiences determine the overall stakeholder resonance or brand gestalt, that best explains the attracting power of brands (Diamond et. al. 2009). The more positive and coherent these experiences, the stronger the organisational brand generation, the more tense the gestalt of the brand and the stronger the enduring positive resonance (Brown & Blackmond, 2005; Keller 2008; Tipler & Mosca, 2009; Wasib et al. 2014; Rosa, 2017).

2.3 The Identity driven Design of Touchpoint Framework (IDT)

Following the design science research approach suggested by Hevner et al. (2004) innovative processes to resolve real-world problems can be developed by combining three interrelated cycles (Figure 1). The development of a new organizational process model starts with a thick description of the organisational problem at hand. In the following rigor cycle the researcher searches for suggestions for problem solution existing in literature. If there is no prefabricated process model or framework to be found, the first activity in the design cycle is to build a model of the process based on existing academic knowledge and empirical evidence that can potentially solve the problem. Then, the suggested model is rigorously evaluated by testing its usefulness and is improved based on empirical evidence and resulting learning (March & Storey, 2008).

Figure 1: Design Science Research Cycle



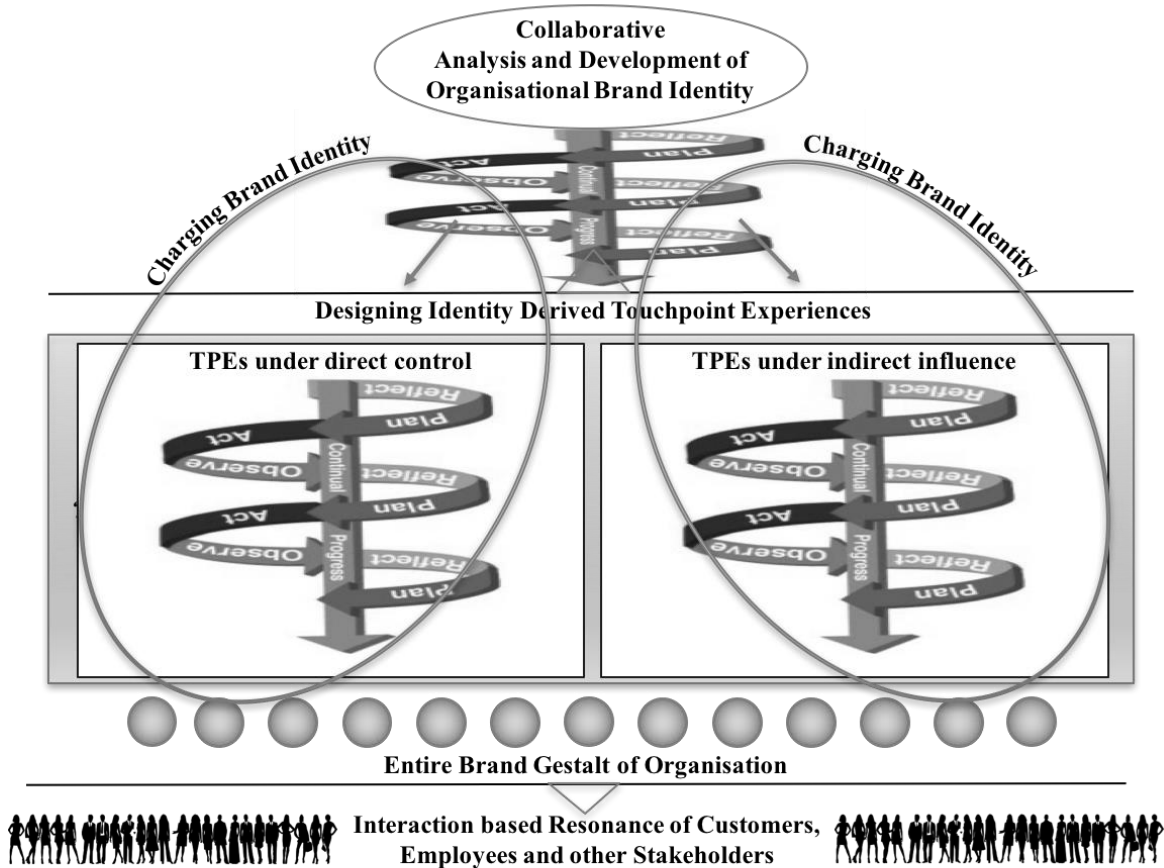
Source: Adapted from Hevner et al. 2004

Researchers assist these managers by specifying a way of how an intended

organisational brand identity can be developed and consistently translated into attractive touch-point experiences. As the review of literature in the field has shown, no adequate model exists covering the requirements of a satisfactory solution.

Figure 2 depicts a newly developed process framework termed “Identity-Driven Touch-Point Design” (ITD).

Figure 2: Process Framework of Identity-Driven Touch-Point Design (ITD)



The framework respects the existence of several stakeholders to be considered in brand building (von Wallpach et al., 2016), of a number of touch-points under direct control or indirect influence of brand management (Goodman et al., 2013), and of ongoing brand-related interactions between stakeholders (Wider et al. 2018). The framework also accounts for the need to start the process from a processization of brand identity intended by management based on organizational purpose, core competences, values, and envisioned future (Collins & Porras, 1996), and the fact that organisational brand development can be considered foremost as an internal project that unites employees around a shared strategic vision (Schmidt, 2007).

As shown in Figure 2 the process model starts with the determination of the intended organisational brand identity in a microcosm of the involved organisation, which then becomes translated into leveraging touch point experiences ideally along the main stages of the stakeholder journey. Assurance of enduring brand resonance among affected stakeholders demands continuous refining of existing respectively identifying and realising new touch-points experiences.

3. Method

3.1 Action research

To test a process framework in its application domain, evaluate its effectiveness, learn what needs to be improved or changed and to restart a new cycle of testing, evaluation and improvement (Hevner et al., 2004), action research appears to be a well suited method (Lindgren et al., 2004). Action research consists of a rigorous iterative process in which researchers and concerned actors define an actual problem, develop a theoretically based model of the factors influencing the problem, plan action on these factors to resolve the problem, take according action, evaluate the outcome, and use the newly gained insights for starting another cycle in the process (Davison et al., 2004; Iversen et al., 2004). In addition to jointly test a theoretically developed framework in its domain of application, action research allows managerial actors and researchers to observe the change process intended by the application of the model (Street & Meister, 2004).

3.2 Project setting and expected results

To develop and test a model of organizational processes that allow revealing the current enacted identity of a company and defining the intended organisational brand identity as basis for the design and implementation of coherent touch point experiences with relevant stakeholders the researchers established a long term collaboration between Neuburger, a middle-sized family-owned producer of meat loaf¹.

The resulting action research project encompassed a great number of cycles of diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, and deriving new knowledge (Baskerville & Wood-Harper, 1998) over a period of 18 months. This paper will provide information concerning the first cycle conducted during 6 months: the collaborative analysis of the status quo and development of the intended organisational brand identity which will be presented at the time of the conference.

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¹ * Meat loaf is a specialty found in the Southern Germany, Austria and parts of Switzerland, similar to meat pie. It consists of beef and pork, bacon, water, salt and spices, and is made by grinding the ingredients to a very fine mass which is then placed in an oblong casserole and baked until it has a crunchy brown crust. Traditionally, meat loafs are sold under the name of the product category, cut into thick slices and served warm with bread and mustard.

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