

The measurement of journalists' brand power and the influence on success

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Abstract:

Digitalization has disruptively changed the way news media is consumed. This puts the industry under enormous pressure with declining printed magazine and newspaper sales. This innovates traditional business models as most media outlets now sell single articles online to consumers and advertisers and distribute them through secondary marketing platforms. Thus, the value of single articles becomes more relevant. Additionally, brand effects are changing. The journalist as a human brand is now more visible and consequently more relevant. Also, the rise of social media has enabled journalists to develop and build upon their personal brands outside the news media outlet.

In order to be better able to manage journalists and journalists' brands, in this paper, we develop a model to measure journalists' brand power, which sets a basis for future empirical investigations.

Keywords: journalists as human brands, brand equity, PLS

Track: Product and Brand Management

1. Introduction

Digitalization has disruptively changed the way news media is consumed. News media now unpacks bundled content into single articles and sells them online to consumers and advertisers. Further, they distribute single articles through secondary marketing platforms such as Blendle, the Facebook News Stream or Google News. On the one hand, this leads to innovated business models and on the other hand changes brand effects. Now, the journalist as a human brand, is more visible and influential, no longer hidden behind strong media brands. This development goes back to several incidents arising at the same time:

1. *Need for differentiation*: Within an individualized society and a diversification of interests (e.g., Hohlfeld, 2005) tech-savvy players such as Facebook or Google pack content into consumer-driven services, which makes it more difficult for news media outlets to attract audiences solely on the basis of functional attributes (e.g., Kim et al., 2010) such as the pure information. Diversified brands and individualized functions become distinguishing success factors.

2. *New distribution channels with personal profile logic*: The rise of social media platforms such as Twitter or Snapchat has allowed not only news media outlets to promote their brand (e.g., Greer & Ferguson, 2011), it has enabled journalists to develop and build upon their personal brands and sell articles outside the news media outlet (e.g., Brems et al., 2016). Further, new journalistic formats where the journalist plays a leading role (e.g. podcasts) arise.

3. *Societal and communication changes*: A loss of trust in established media forces transparency and authenticity (e.g., Agarwal & Barthel, 2015). Where once the media brand lowered the uncertainty for customers before consuming experience goods such as news (e.g., Clement et al., 2006), within an article based offer, this is what the journalist does. Within social media channels journalists have preference forming influence (e.g., Thomson, 2006) on their followers.

4. *Change in business models*: Business model crisis has led to a lot of job losses. Thus, freelance positions in the media industry and competition for jobs, coverage and awareness through self-promotion (Meyen & Springer, 2009) has increased. „Entrepreneurial Journalism“ (Vos & Singer, 2016) gave individual journalist the possibility to start upon their own media business or finance themselves and their projects via crowdfunding (e.g.,

Aitamurto, 2016). Further, journalists become a leading role in new business models (e.g., Podcasts, Live-Events with journalists as moderators).

These developments lead to a greater influence of journalists' brands. This makes it necessary to measure and manage their brand power on a regular basis. First, publishers should be interested in the brand value of their engaged journalists to better manage according to value-based brand management approaches, where brands are one of the most important assets for companies (Sattler, 2005). Second, journalists should be interested in their own brand value to have a better position when contracting with publishers and other clients (for an example from the music industry see Chisholm, 2004).

2. State of Research

Research has intensively engaged in approaches to measure general brand power (e.g., Sattler, 2005). Besides physical products or services (e.g., Keller 2002), only some focus on humans as brands (Thomson, 2006; Clement et al., 2008). Few studies observe “personal branding” of journalists (Molyneux, 2015; Hanusch & Bruns, 2017). Most of them are derived through theoretical or qualitative research and miss brand theoretical foundations and quantitative measurement approaches.

Though, the importance of personal branding among journalists becomes more urgent. A direct transfer from the classical brand model for products and services to the journalistic context is not trivial, because human brands differ from product and service brands through their dynamic character. Journalists, musicians or actors do change during their lifecycle (Clement et al., 2008). This is only reasonable, considering humane aging (Engh, 2005) or change of values and attitudes through different experiences in life. Thus, journalists influence their image through private actions. Consequently, such dynamics have to be included in measurement models and further, they require a constant controlling (Clement et al., 2008).

According to Hanusch and Bruns (2017) journalists are aware and increasingly act on building their personal brand. However, our literature review shows that the phenomenon remains understudied (also Molyneux & Holton, 2015). Measurement approaches of journalistic brand power do not exist yet. We also do not find empirical studies examining the influence of journalistic brand power on success. Though, the potential benefits for journalists building personal brands and news media outlets to manage their deployed journalists as brands are manifold.

3. Objective

Our study develops a measurement model for journalistic brand power using an extensive literature review and discussions with experts. We base our research on the concept of Keller (1993) and therefore contribute to general brand concepts. We clarify the dimensions and subdimensions that form the brand power of the journalist and their importance for the behavior of the consumer. Our approach to brand power measurement is based on a behavioral brand understanding that reflects the power of a brand in the perception of consumers (Keller, 1993). Thus, we can diagnose causes for the power of the journalists' brand and how to control them.

Thus, our research improves brand building success for journalists. Further, it improves brand and portfolio management of news media outlets. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to focus on journalists as human brands from a marketing management perspective.

4. Conceptual Framework and Operationalization

4.1 Journalists as Human Brands

Journalism does not depend on the media channels (e.g. online platforms, printed newspapers, TV or radio) it is distributed on or in which different business models and forms of organization it is exercised (e.g. freelance or employed). Thus, we define journalists as involved in the dissemination and publication of mass media for the purpose of providing guidance to the public, committed to safeguarding and promoting democracy, and to ensure that the journalistic principles apply (such as independence, impartiality, timeliness, relevance, accuracy, control, general understanding) (Kaltenbrunner et al., 2018; DJV, 2018).

Journalists as "human brands" offer the opportunity to build satisfaction, trust and attachment (Thomson, 2006) along these principles. This argumentation is mostly based on attachment theory, which focuses on emotional relationships between humans. These emotions are "learned" when we are young (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2001). Over time, such attachments can also be made to more distant individuals such as journalists (Thomson, 2006). Through network effects they become conforming associations within the relevant social system (Clement & Albers, 2008). The more frequently a person comes into contact with the brand, the better these ties can be learned.

According to Keller (1993, 2003) brand power is then a latent multi-dimensional construct that arises from the subjective appreciation of the brand. It can be described as a specific consumer reaction to the brand based on brand knowledge acquired over time (Stigler

& Becker, 1977). The brand knowledge is stored in the form of semantic networks or schemata and manifests itself in the two central components (1) brand awareness and (2) brand image (Keller, 1993).

Both variables create brand preferences and thus represent the necessary prerequisite for the economic success of the brand (Keller, 1993; Sattler, 2005). Accordingly, for a value-based brand management, it is important to design the knowledge structure of a journalist anchored in the minds of consumers with the aim of increasing brand value.

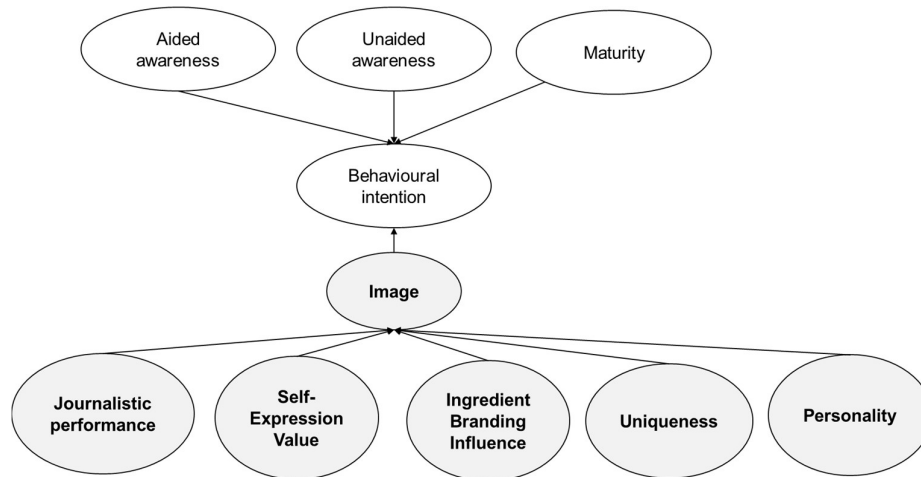


Figure 1. Conceptualization of Measurement Model

4.2 Image and Antecedents

The brand image includes the set of associations that a consumer can associate with a brand (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995). Accordingly, the journalist's brand image can be understood as a multitude of interconnected associations with the journalist's personality and a range of other assets. A distinction can be made between concrete and abstract features (Keller, 2003). Concrete characteristics are usually in direct relation to the journalist's qualities (e.g. "great writer", or "talented TV moderator"). They find their expression especially in the *journalistic performance*. By contrast, abstract features have a comparatively small direct relation to the journalistic output. They find their expression especially in the *brand personality associations*. We follow Mäder (2005) and Clement et al. (2008) and describe the brand personality as a construct, which is influenced by the dimensions "professionalism", "attractiveness", "competence" and "creativity" and complete it by adding "performance" and "style".

Due to the abstract associations, (journalist) brands are also suitable for fulfilling symbolic needs, in particular they can be used to support the self-portrayal of the consumer

(e.g. Holbrook & Hirshman, 1982, Mäder, 2005). Hedonic goods, such as journalistic output, are often consumed symbolically and partly serve to staging in a social environment (Fournier, 2001). On the basis of the congruence hypothesis, it is assumed that a correspondence of personality traits of the consumer with corresponding expressions of the brand personality leads to appreciation of the journalist (Sirgy, 1986). The *self-expression value* of a journalist based on the symbolically usable brand properties is a fundamental dimension of the journalist's image.

The *uniqueness* captures the extent to which associations are shared with competing journalists. Strong journalist brands should have as many unique associations as possible. The uniqueness of the journalist's image enables differentiation from other journalists and makes it easier for consumers to differentiate themselves from other social groups (Miller, McIntyre & Mantrala, 1993).

With journalists, often working for strong media brands, *ingredient branding* plays an important role when forming an image (Samu et al., 1999).

The preliminary study used an explorative factor analysis to check whether the assumed structure was reflected in the data. Corresponding changes have been made to the model for the main study. Thus, according to Fig. 1, the journalist's image is shaped by five constructs: (1) journalistic performance, (2) personality, (3) self-expression value (4) uniqueness of associations, and (5) ingredient branding influence. We follow the methodological plea by Albers & Hildebrandt (2006), which calls for a formative measurement of constructs, if concrete recommendations for action are to be made for management (see also Rossiter, 2002).

4.3 Aided & Unaided Awareness and Maturity

The awareness of a journalist brand indicates the ability of a consumer to remember (unaided) or recognize (aided) the journalist. It is thus a necessary condition allowing consumers to form a clear image of a journalist. Through a corresponding awareness, a journalist gets into the relevant set of a consumer (Aaker, 1991).

In our study, each respondent assesses one journalist, so that a total of five questionnaire versions are used. When assigning the journalists to the respondents, it has to be taken into account that the questionnaire can only be meaningfully filled out, if the respondent knows the respective journalist at least by name or picture and actively marks him as known. Further, to get an even distribution of the number of samples for each journalist, we randomly assign a known journalist to a respondent.

The measurement of the *unaided awareness* takes place via an open query of five journalists. If the journalist considered in the questionnaire is mentioned, he or she accounts for the rank of the entry in reverse coded form. The value 5 thus represents the highest unsupported awareness, the value 4 the second highest, etc. The case of non-nomination is coded with 0. The ranking variable thus represents an approximation for the respective active recognition level of the assigned journalist.

Maturity measures how long the journalist is already known to the consumer.

4.4 Behavioural Intention

The described dimensions are the trigger of a *behavioural effect or intention* on the consumer. They manifests itself in behavioural response metrics, quasi-economic metrics such as “buying intent” or “recommendation”. These behaviour-oriented indicators provide the link between the psychic processes taking place in the mind of the consumer and the economic success factors.

5. Further Steps

We intent to empirically test the model with primary questionnaire survey data and structural equation modelling. With the help of an online access panel we are be able to include 1.500 cases. The model is ideally calculated with PLS or SPSS.

We base the generation of the items for the empirical evaluation of the model presented in Fig. 1 on a comprehensive search of the communication, journalism, brand, and media literature. The literature search led to the establishment of an item list, which we then discussed with various experts from the media industry as well as in a consumer focus group. The primary goal of the discussions was to keep the item list complete and suitable, to discuss the model dimensions, and thus to check the face validity of the measurement model.

In order to check the plausibility of the questionnaire structure and to ensure the comprehensibility of the individual questions and statements of the online questionnaire, a pre-test with 100 students from the University of Cologne was conducted in June 2018.

In order to ensure a sufficient variance of the journalist brand power or the individual dimensions of the construct, the assessments of a total of five journalists were queried. The selection was made through a randomized survey of different consumers with the aim of covering the widest possible range of journalists. Journalists of established media brands as well as freelance journalists from various multimedia genres (e.g., TV, newspapers, and social media) were considered. In addition, long-standing but also relatively young journalists are

represented in order to record the influence of the duration of the journalist's activity on the brand power. Finally, both male and female journalists were included in the consideration.

We selected five representative German journalists: *Anne Will, Dunja Hayali, Peter Klöppel, Jakob Augstein* and *Sascha Lobo*. We focus on Germany, since journalism is very national, thus international journalists have been renounced. These journalists are all relatively well known in Germany to ensure that all facets of the measurement model can be captured. This follows the procedure known from empirical brand transfer research, in which typically only well-known brands are used. Otherwise no brand effect can be measured (Völckner, 2003).

The data collection will take place in December 2018 and will be representative of Germany. We explicitly point out that it is not the goal of the article to determine the journalist brand power for numerous journalists, but the development of a measurement model of journalists brand power.

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