

The role of sustainable brands in brand portfolios: how “lighthouse brands” contribute to the sustainability transformation

Florian Platzek

WHU - Otto Beisheim School of Management

Anna-Karina Schmitz

WHU - Otto Beisheim School of Management

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Abstract

Many companies face the challenge of transforming their brand portfolios towards more sustainability by introducing new sustainable brands. Extant brand portfolio research views brands predominantly from a financial perspective while disregarding other roles and functions sustainable brands may have. Drawing on an embedded case study with 31 semi-structured interviews with managers from three sustainable consumer brands, this research frames sustainable brands as “lighthouse brands” that act as sensemakers and sensegivers for their companies and other stakeholders. While not necessarily contributing from a financial perspective, lighthouse brands fulfill several essential roles, such as driving innovation, providing sustainable knowledge and giving orientation. In drawing a holistic picture of the role and function of lighthouse brands, this research integrates the interrelated concepts of sensemaking and sensegiving to brand portfolio literature, thus opening new research directions.

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