

Conceptualizing brand values in the charity sector: the relationship between sector, cause and organization

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Charity brands have been found to assist income generation by enhancing donor understanding of an organization and what it stands for. Despite an increasing interest in this topic few studies have addressed the dimensions of such brands and sought to explore the link (if any) with donor behaviour. In this paper, we focus on the personality traits of non-profit brands and begin by exploring how these may be structured. Reporting the findings of a series of nine focus groups, we conclude that dimensions of personality apply at the sector, causal and organizational levels and that the perception of specific categories of trait may be linked to individual giving behaviour.

Keywords: charity; branding; fundraising; giving behaviour

Introduction

Non-profit branding appears to have come of age. The Habitat for Humanity brand, for example, was recently valued at \$1.8 billion (Quelch, Austin, & Laidler-Kylander, 2004) reinforcing the significance of the practice of branding to non-profit organizations. As Sargeant and Jay (2004) specify, this is well overdue. Non-profits have been relatively slow to adopt branding practices because of difficulties in committing internal stakeholders to the process (Grounds & Harkness, 1998) and a perception on the part of some non-profit managers that branding is too 'commercial' or even immoral (Ritchie, Swami, & Weinberg, 1998).

Despite the reticence to use 'commercial' terminology, Tapp (1996, p. 335) reminds us that non-profit organizations have long been concerned with 'maintaining a consistent style and tone of voice and conducting periodic reviews of both policies and actions to ensure that a consistent personality is projected'. As Tapp rightly notes, such practices are the very essence of brand management, irrespective of whether an organization's management choose to call them such.

There is now ample evidence to suggest that an explicit consideration of non-profit branding by charity managers is warranted, not least because it appears that it can impact on income generation (Denney, 1998; Dixon, 1996; Kennedy, 1998; Grounds & Harkness, 1998). Extant work demonstrates that branding can convey the values and beliefs of a non-profit to potential donors and suggest very potent reasons why it might be worthy of support (Dixon, 1996; Harvey, 1990).

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However, despite the relevance of branding to fundraising there has been little empirical work conducted into the nature of charity brand personalities and the role that advertising can play in their communication.

As Plummer (1985, p. 29) notes the 'characterizational aspects of the brand or it's personality are (often) purely the result of communications because there is rarely anything intrinsic to a brand that makes it lively, or exotic, or sophisticated'. Yet although charitable organizations are widely seen as 'value expressive organizations' and therefore highly reliant on these dimensions (Supphellen, Kvitastein, & Nelson, 1997), there has been only limited academic interest in this facet of charity advertising to date (Brunel & Nelson, 2000).

Of particular interest in the UK where charities have a distinct legal status (akin to 501[C]3 in the USA) is how brand personalities might be structured. Are there, for example, brand personality traits (e.g. 'trustworthy' or 'caring') that are ostensibly 'charitable' in nature and when communicated effectively, generate higher levels of support? No empirical studies have to date identified the extent to which non-profit brand personalities are unique or shared with others in the sector or same category of cause. This point is of particular significance, because if certain traits accrue to an organization's brand by virtue of that organization being a charity, the need to focus on that trait in individual marketing practice is greatly reduced. Equally, if some traits apply at the level of the cause (e.g. animal welfare) the need to promote or manage that trait becomes one for the sub-sector as a whole to address, rather than a single organization *per se*.

In this article, it is our intention to delineate a set of personality traits associated with non-profit brands and to explore qualitatively how these might be structured. We will also identify possible links between perceived traits and facets of individual donor behaviour. We begin, however, by positioning our study within the wider advertising, gift giving and brand personality literature.

Brand personality

As long ago as 1919, Gilmore recognized that brands could be imbued with human characteristics. Since then the anthropomorphization of brands has become commonplace and brands are routinely employed as vehicles to convey a variety of symbolic and human values (McEnally & de Chernatony, 1999). Authors such as Laurent and Kapferer (1985) have argued that this personification of brands is of critical importance, because if the brand is viewed in human terms, not only can it be imbued with desirable human characteristics, it becomes possible for individuals to develop pseudo-human relationships with it (Aperia, 2001; Blackston, 1993; Fournier, 1994; Palmer, 1996).

Aaker (1997, p. 347) in her ground-breaking study of consumer brands defines brand personality as 'the set of human characteristics associated with a brand'. In common with other authors (e.g. Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993), she conceptualizes personality as a series of traits or values (i.e. the stable tendencies of individuals). The author stresses the significance of this conceptualization because while 'product-related attributes' serve a predominantly utilitarian function for consumers, brand personality serves a predominantly symbolic or self-expressive function (Keller, 1993). It therefore allows consumers to reflect their own individuality in their consumption choices.

This latter point is highly significant as Levy noted in 1959, people buy things not only for what they do, but also for what they mean. In electing to purchase brands with particular

personalities consumers can seek to convey a representation of themselves (Fournier, 1991; Ligas, 2000) and/or to reinforce their self-image. As Wee and Ming (2003, p. 216) note, 'symbolic values and meanings are desirable and useful to consumers for the construction of their self, whether that is self-enhancement or self-reinforcement'. This may be an equally important factor in the non-profit context, as extant research has shown that the act of offering a donation can confer an identity on the donor (Schwartz, 1967).

Goldberg (1990) in a comprehensive review of the literature, demonstrated how studies of human personality employing trait theory could typically be reduced to the extraction of the so-called 'big five' factors of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness. Drawing on this earlier work, Aaker (1997) attempted to clarify the underlying structure of brand personalities and identified five similar dimensions, namely sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness (certainly, the first three of these are congruent with earlier work in human psychology). However, the extent to which Aaker's framework could legitimately be generalized to all commercial brand contexts (Austin, Siguaw, & Mattila, 2003) and in particular to the non-profit sector remains unclear and doubts have been expressed over her original methodology (Davies, Chun, & da Silva, 2001; Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

These latter concerns make it necessary for Aaker's work to be revisited in the non-profit context, but more fundamentally, her original focus lay in identifying those traits that would be likely to distinguish between brands. Our interest in brand personality lies in determining not only those traits that are capable of differentiating between charities but also in determining whether any of them might typically be shared between causes or across the sector as a whole. The managerial implications of such a determination are profound since such a model would effectively delineate the span of control of individual charity brand managers.

Gift giving behaviour

Extant research in the field of charity advertising has tended to focus on advertising risk (Downer, 2002; Gray, 2002; West & Sargeant, 2004), the design of advertising to service users (Bennett & Barkensjo, 2005; Bennett & Kottasz, 2001) or the design of advertising to raise funds (Aldrich, 2004; Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2005). In the case of the latter, work has examined the effectiveness of framing strategies and in particular behavioural responses to appeals for helping oneself and helping others (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994). As Brunel and Nelson (2000, p. 17) note, because 'these motives are often in opposition . . . it is the identification of the primary reason – altruism (i.e. I want to help others) versus egoism (i.e. will the donation help me?) – that is most important for persuasion purposes'. Charity advertisers therefore need to match their appeal to the needs of the target audience. Martin (1994) and Brunel and Nelson (2000) argue that altruistic appeals may be distinguished by offering value expressive opportunities for helping others, a stance critical to the present study as the matching hypothesis of attitude functional theory tells us that advertising messages will be most persuasive when content is congruent with the functional bases of the target attitudes (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Shavitt, 1990). As we know from the work of Yavas, Riecken, and Parameswaran (1980) that donors have a stronger need than non-donors to be viewed as being sympathetic, caring, generous and helpful, charities whose brand personalities embody these dimensions might tend to be those favored in donation decisions.

Agency theory yields further insight into the possible relationship between giving behaviour and non-profit brands. Stark (1989) notes that in making donations donors are in effect requiring charities to act as their agents in disbursing funds. As donors cannot directly monitor the impact of their donation (Supphellen et al., 1997), the 'product' is almost entirely intangible and the exchange therefore is highly reliant on the development of trust (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003). If they are to give, donors must trust that their donations will be applied in accordance with their wishes (Sargeant & Jay, 2004). Sargeant and Lee (2004) identify that factors such as the perceived ethics of the organization, the extent to which its purpose is viewed as benevolent and the degree to which the non-profit organization is perceived as having the necessary skills, abilities and knowledge for effective task performance have all been shown to develop trust (Kennedy, Ferrell, & LeClair, 2001; McFall, 1987). The authors argue that the successful communication of these dimensions would be likely to build trust and thereby stimulate higher levels of giving; a view supported by social exchange theory (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Smith & Barclay, 1997). The brand personality of a non-profit organization can provide numerous clues as to how well a particular non-profit organization will perform in each of the latter respects. This is particularly the case in less personal forms of fundraising, such as direct mail and all forms of advertising where the donor may be entirely reliant on their perception of the organization in deciding whether to offer a donation.

Charity advertising

Aldrich (2004) draws a helpful distinction between advertising whose primary purpose is to build awareness of a brand proposition and advertising whose primary goal is to generate an immediate and measurable response. Both forms of advertising have the capacity to achieve either goal, the distinction lies in the primary focus of the campaign. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the former; a brand building advertisement from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). The NSPCC, in its internal brand planning documentation, regards itself as courageous, protecting, respectful and trustworthy (NSPCC, 2003). The charity is therefore careful to avoid overtly shocking depictions of abuse that may distress some audiences and instead uses powerful imagery that leads the reader inexorably to the conclusion that abuse is about to take place. The green full-stop logo is now one of the most widely recognized brand symbols in the UK (Saxton, 2005), as donors, potential donors and members of the wider UK public are encouraged to play a part in putting an end to child cruelty – 'full stop'.

In contrast, the advertisements depicted in Figures 2 and 3 are both direct response fundraising advertisements, from two animal welfare charities. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) is the oldest established animal welfare charity in the UK and the figure depicts a still from the Direct Response Television (DRTV) advertisement looking to recruit individuals into a low value regular monthly gift of UK £3. The advertisement focuses on the distinctive nature of the organization's services namely the provision of animal welfare inspectors who have powers similar to the UK police to investigate and prosecute instances of animal cruelty or neglect. The current advertisement shows a kitten being rescued from the bin in which it has been abandoned and left to die by its former owner. The advertisement was designed both to raise funds and communicate the organization's brand personality, namely being authoritative, compassionate, effective and responsible. This compares

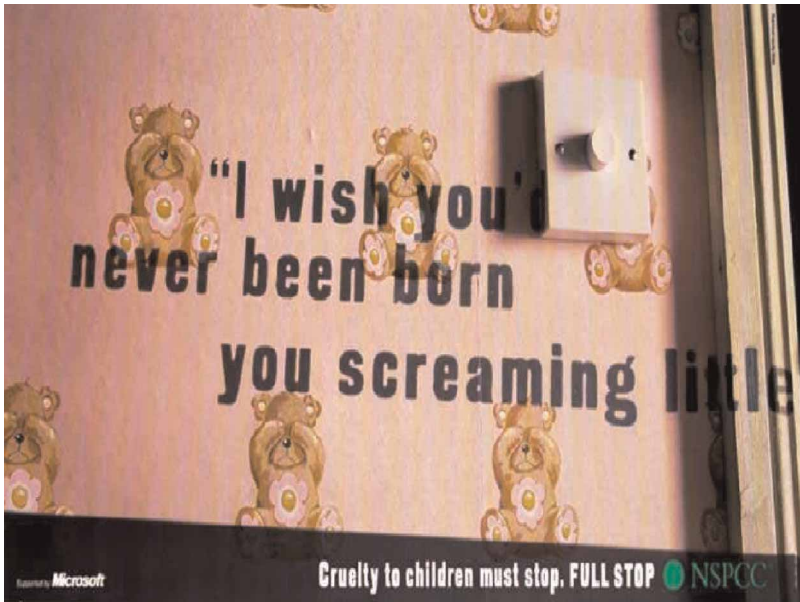


Figure 1. NSPCC poster advertisement.

starkly with the Direct Response Press Advertisement run by the Dogs Trust. Again, the advertisement is designed to recruit regular monthly supporters, but in this case it seeks to do so by conveying rather different personality characteristics; namely that it is fun, friendly and caring. Future communications will be addressed to the donor from the 'dog' they have chosen to



Figure 2. RSPCA television advertisement.

SMALL DOG SEEKS BIG LOVE



Looking for love? For just £1 a week, you can sponsor an abandoned dog like me at a Dogs Trust Rehoming Centre. Although some may never find another home, Dogs Trust will keep them happy – they never destroy a healthy dog. You can give one of my needy friends all the love they need for just £1 a week. In return, you'll get a sponsor's certificate, updates on your dog – and unconditional love.

Yes, I'd love to sponsor a dog

Call **08457 400 600** to set up your sponsorship now!
Or visit **www.sponsoradog.org.uk**, or complete this coupon:

Please send me my FREE Sponsor a Dog pack today so I can choose a dog to sponsor.

Name

Address

Postcode

Id. no. Date of Birth

Home and business 042 547

Sponsor a Dog Dogs Trust, FREEPOST NA111464, Northampton NN4 6HR

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Figure 3. Dogs Trust press advertisement.

sponsor, written in the same style and 'chatty' format as the introductory advertisement itself. The DRTV charity advertisements are similarly styled.

On the face of it, the three personalities depicted in the figures appear genuinely distinctive and the extant work alluded to the above by Aaker (1997) and Venable, Rose, Bush, and Gilbert (2005) makes it clear that donors do regard facets of brand personality differently between organizations, yet as the latter authors propose, 'individuals perceive non-profit organizations at an abstract level because of the organizations' intangibility and social ideals' (p. 295) are there facets of all three personalities who are in fact shared because of their charitable status, or, in the case of the latter examples, because of their involvement in animal welfare? In this

article, it is our intention to address these issues. The structure of the traits we identify will be appraised and links between any categories we identify and giving behaviour explored.

Methodology

To achieve these objectives, a series of nine focus groups were organized to work in partnership with nine large national UK charities. Three charity partners were selected from three distinct categories of cause, visual impairment (hereinafter VI), children and animal welfare. These causes were deliberately selected from the typology developed by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF, 2002) in an attempt to optimize diversity in the perceived traits. Focus group participation was solicited from donors of all nine organizations living in the geographical area in which the groups were to take place. Participants were offered a fee of UK £30 for attendance at each meeting, which was scheduled to last for 90 min. A total of 90 individuals participated in the groups, which were all organized by the authors in the central London area.

When the goal of research is to understand the meaning that individuals give to their actions rather than to predict their behaviour, qualitative methods are often the most appropriate methodology (Braybrooke, 1965). Field-based approaches, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups are particularly useful when the research objective is to understand tacit perceptions and beliefs, especially when the researcher cannot be sure of what interpretation or code is guiding the actors (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; McCracken, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss, 1990). Cost and time were the factors in the selection of focus groups for data collection, but as Basch (1987, p. 434) notes, focus groups 'are well suited to collecting in-depth qualitative data about individuals, definitions of problems, opinions, feelings and meaning associated with various phenomena'. Indeed, the theoretical advantages of focus groups have been felt to include synergism, snowballing, security, spontaneity and scrutiny (Stewart & Shandasani, 1990).

Writers such as Bryman and Burgess (1994) suggest that it is particularly appropriate for qualitative researchers to be explicit about their beliefs and purposes. To that end, the perspective adopted throughout this research is essentially post-positivist with objectivity remaining a regulatory ideal (Guba & Lincoln, 1992). The research process and data analysis were based on grounded theory, data were examined using the 'constant comparative method' in order to identify themes and patterns; concepts and codes were developed to summarize the data and were used to build propositions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was thought to be the most appropriate given the applied nature of the research.

The group discussion was kept semi-structured. Following an initial discussion of the organizations' participants elected to support, each group was asked to consider the factors that had driven that choice and what, if anything, was distinctive about each focal organization. They were then asked to specifically consider the personality of the brand of their supported organization, the moderators initiating discussion with the prompt 'suppose the brand were a person, what kind of person would he/she be – with what personality?' As Azoulay and Kapferer (2003) note, 'consumers have no difficulty answering metaphorical questions of this nature' (p. 145) and find it easier in this way to articulate the dimensions of the brand. A similar exercise was undertaken for the other two charities in the supported category of cause to identify potential differences in perception. This was followed by a more general discussion of other charities in other categories of cause.

Although the nine participating charities are all large national UK charities (all listed within the Top 300 by voluntary income), work by Saxton (2005) has identified that comparatively few charities have high levels of brand awareness among the general public. In seeking to facilitate a discussion of brand personality, it would therefore not have been practical to identify individuals who were able to discuss all nine participating organizations. Instead, we focussed on donors to each partner who would not only be able to discuss the personality of their supported organization but who, due to their familiarity with the cause, would be significantly more likely to have knowledge of the other partner organizations in the same category, whether they gave to them or not. This was confirmed as participation was solicited. The selection of donors may also be justified on the basis of their enhanced familiarity with the organizations in question and exposure to a wider range of communication materials (i.e. both donor recruitment and donor development). Copies of sample materials were available to each group (for all three organizations in each cause) to facilitate discussion.

The focus groups were audio-taped and then transcribed. Data were systematically and intensively analyzed through standard procedures for qualitative analysis (Spiggle, 1994). Data analysis involved several steps. First, the transcripts were reviewed individually and summarized. Secondly, in a phase that Strauss called 'open coding', the interview transcripts were scrutinized line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph to suggest initial categories or themes. Thirdly, which Strauss called 'axial' coding, the transcripts were scrutinized again and again to consider each of the themes across the interviews and to assess the fit of each theme to the data. In a next stage, which Strauss called 'selective' coding; the data were examined once again to refine the themes and findings for each. As a final step, the data were subjected to the Boolean algorithm contained in the software package AQUAD. This enabled the researchers to explore possible clustering of articulated traits.

The limitations of this research method are well documented, but considerable effort was expended to minimize their impact. Inevitably, a high degree of judgment is required by the researcher in interpreting the data, giving rise to concerns of subjectivity in analysis (Dexter, 1970). As a precaution and to ensure reliability, the initial analysis was undertaken by two researchers working independently. Findings were later discussed and agreed upon. We have also attempted to minimize the charge of subjectivity by opening our dataset to scrutiny. The quotations we supply are representative of the views of several participants unless otherwise stated. We also granted participants anonymity in an attempt to mitigate bias and in particular social desirability bias. Finally, the participants may not be representative of the total population, but they did vary on many dimensions, including age, gender and overall patterns of giving (Table 1).

Results

Charity personality

As participants were asked to consider characterizing the organization they had supported and in particular to consider the personalities or traits embodied by these organizations, it became clear that many participants were employing the notion of 'charity' to imbue the organization with a distinctive set of characteristics. Comments such as 'well it's a charity so it must be caring mustn't it?' and 'compassionate – goes without saying' were typical views expressed.

Table 1. Profile of participants.

Characteristic	Number
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	45
Female	45
<i>Age category</i>	
21–40	27
41–60	27
61+	36
<i>Cause supported</i>	
Visual impairment	27
Children's charities	36
Animal welfare	27
<i>Number of charities supported</i>	
1–5	26
6–10	36
11+	28

Our data also suggested that the charities under investigation appeared not to have to earn or develop these generic charity traits. A large number of 'charitable' characteristics were inferred from the communication of charitable status, rather than from exposure to the specific advertising messages of the organization (which many could not recall). It also appeared that once these characteristics had been imbued, individuals were willing to give the organization the 'benefit of the doubt', making assumptions about the way it would behave until offered 'evidence' to the contrary.

No – I don't think I formed my impressions from reading the detail of what they sent me and I don't even remember their (press) ads. I just saw it was a charity and thought – well, they must be doing good work
(Animal Charity Donor)

I think if it's a charity you make certain assumptions. I don't question whether they are sympathetic, caring, compassionate etc. Not unless I see something in the news'
(Children's Charity Donor)

All participants placed great importance on what they regarded as appropriate 'charity' traits and further analysis of the data suggested that two categories of trait were considered as being charitable in nature, namely 'benevolence' and 'progressive'.

Writers such as Werther and Berman (2001) have claimed that what distinguishes charitable organizations from those in the public or private sector is the benevolent value-based way in which these organizations manage and organize themselves. This is a view echoed by Anheier (2005) and Korten (1995) as the distinctive identity of the voluntary sector and is important for the wider health of society. For these authors, the coming together of individuals on a voluntary basis to aid others is what defines the sector and for Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen (2003) what subsequently builds wider levels of trust in a society. It was apparent that the benevolent characteristics of being caring, compassionate, supportive, fair, ethical, honest, trustworthy and helpful were all traits that were associated with the notion of charity. As one respondent noted:

'I think we've all got a pretty good idea of what a charity is, they are a certain kind of organization aren't they?. It's about getting together to care for others in an honest and ethical way.'

(VI Donor)

It's a charity so everybody does have a gut feeling that they are honest well meaning and you can trust them.

(Children's Charity Donor)

There was no indication in the groups that the presence of these traits would drive the absolute amounts that they would be willing to give, but it was clear that the presence of these values would be a prerequisite to giving, or including an organization in their consideration set. These characteristics were regarded as a necessary base. This is a finding in-line with attitude theory referred to earlier, but it is nevertheless interesting to note that congruence appears related only to consideration, rather than the absolute amounts donated *per se*.

The second category concerns the issue of change. Charitable purposes in the UK are defined as the relief of financial hardship, the advancement of education/religion and other purposes for the benefit of the community (Charity Commission, 2005). As a consequence, charities are under a legal duty to effect societal change. Participants did feel that charities played a common role in this regard and were consequently imbued with traits that reflected the 'progressive' nature of this engagement in society. Characteristics such as transforming, pioneering, responsive and engaging were typically mentioned by participants as being charitable traits and shared across the nine focal organizations. Participants felt that 'charities' were successful in effecting societal change, or as one respondent put it 'trying hard to do the best that they possibly can'. Ability to effect a change has been identified in the psychology literature as an issue in the decision of whether or not to offer help (Latané & Darley, 1970; Miller, 1977; Shelton & Rogers, 1981) and these findings have resonance with the present study as our analysis suggested 'progressive' change was a further prerequisite to inclusion in a consideration set. Again, it appeared unrelated to the actual amounts donated.

Causal personality

Many practitioners have argued that distinct brand values evolve by virtue of participation in specific avenues of voluntary activity, such as animal welfare, the prevention of child abuse, cancer research, etc. (Elischer, 2001; Growman, 2000; Pidgeon, 2002). We find some evidence in support of this proposition. Three categories of causal trait emerged from our dataset and as with sector traits, these dimensions appeared unrelated to the amounts individuals might be willing to give. We label them service, class and faith.

The strongest differences between causes were perceived between what might be termed 'human-service' organizations and the balance of the sector. Participants applied a range of traits to describe human-service organizations that appeared linked to the nature of the social intervention these charities were able to make. Human-service charities were imbued with additional characteristics that defined how participants felt a charity *should* deal with or communicate with a human beneficiary group. The emphasis here is deliberate since again, it was expected that a certain style or tone would be adopted, unless evidence had been uncovered to the contrary.

'I guess I would view them as open and approachable. They have to be really to do what they do. I mean I've no experience, but you just have that feeling'

(Animal Welfare Donor)

'I think (helpful) would be true of most charities, but not like Cancer Research, for instance, because it isn't their job to be helpful. Caring charities have to deal with people and I think they would all be helpful, one would hope.'

(VI Donor)

Traits such as approachable, compassionate, helpful, welcoming and understanding were typically applied to human-service organizations, irrespective of whether the individual participant had any direct experience on which to draw.

In respect of the second dimension, although we focussed on three distinct categories of cause, it was apparent from our wider discussion that a small number of other categories of cause were perceived as being 'upper class', 'intellectual' or 'sophisticated'. Education and arts charities were frequently referred to in these terms and regarded as 'elite'. For some these traits were terms of derision, while for others they were viewed as desirable characteristics that would actively foster engagement with the organization. There are parallels here with Aaker (1997) and Venable et al. (2005) who develop a similar dimension of brands, but who conclude that these may be the basis for differentiation. Our work suggests that this dimension may only be helpful in distinguishing between causes rather than organizations although further work focussed specifically on these sectors would be necessary to confirm this.

Faith-based organizations were also identified by participants as having a personality distinctive from the balance of the sector. Traits such as spiritual, devout, holy and religious were applied to church and parachurch organizations. Catholic, Methodist, Jewish and Muslim charities were all viewed as having distinctive identities that reflected the nature of each faith and the emphasis on various behaviours expressed in that faith. The extent to which these traits were seen as desirable appeared to be a function of the congruity of an individual's own religious beliefs and again would aid inclusion in a consideration set. There are clear parallels here with the concept of 'identification', drawn from social identity theory (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995; Dutton & Harquail, 1994).

Organisational personality

Two categories of trait appeared to offer scope for distinguishing between charitable organizations, namely emotional stimulation and performance. In respect of the former, the level of excitement generated or perceptions of heroism were felt to be distinctive about organizations such as the air ambulance or the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. Emotional stimulation can also be generated using humor (e.g. Dogs Trust) or the use of a strong media voice in their advertising (e.g. NSPCC). Traits such as strong, bold, exciting, fun, heroic and inspiring commonly linked to the level of arousal brands were able to generate and there are clear parallels here with the work of Aaker (1997) for whom 'excitement' was one of the five factors capable of distinguishing between commercial brands.

With respect to performance, a cluster of values seemed capable of distinguishing between a number of the focal charity brands. Traits such as prudent, efficient, effective, wasteful and bureaucratic appeared to drive both the inclusion of an organization in an individual's consideration set (or not) and the subsequent amounts that would be donated. The following quote was typical of the views expressed.

'I definitely give more to (X). They spend nearly all of the money donated on the cause, not on salaries and management. I know when I give to them they're not wasting my money'
(Children's Charity Donor)

Indeed, authors such as Sargeant et al. (2001), Harvey and McCrohan (1988) and Bennett and Savani (2003) have highlighted the significance of the notion of perceived efficiency to giving behaviour. In general, charities perceived as more efficient tend to generate higher levels of compliance and higher levels of giving.

Discussion

In summary, our analysis suggests that the personality of non-profit brands may be structured as depicted in Figure 1. We concur with Venable, Rose, and Gilbert (2003) that individuals can differentiate between non-profit organizations on the basis of personality traits, but conclude that the opportunities for differentiation in this context are rather limited. We find that the majority of personality traits are actually shared with others addressing the same cause or with organizations in the wider charity sector. Indeed, donors appear to have a clear conception of what it means to be a charity and how they would expect such organizations to behave. They also have a clear understanding of the traits associated with specific causes. It was interesting to note that donors seem to begin their appraisal of a charity brand from the starting point that such values apply, until they are given a specific reason to believe otherwise. This has profound implications for non-profit brand management because unlike commercial brands there would appear to be relatively few traits that are built through an organization's own fundraising or marketing communications. If the acquisition of such generic personality traits is felt to be desirable, our results suggest that an organization need only ensure that it is *recognized* as a charity and/or *recognized* to be working with a particular cause. If, on the other hand, these personality traits are felt to be inappropriate it may be necessary to work either with other organizations in the same sub-sector, or in the charity sector as a whole to manage these perceptions.

To highlight the significance of this issue, Table 2 presents the personality traits currently listed in the internal brand management documentation of our participant organizations and therefore regarded as defining the distinctive nature of the organization's brand. The traits listed are required by each of the participating organizations to be reflected in the nature of all organizational communications, including advertising, in a bid to create a unique identity.

Inspection of the table reveals a high degree of similarity between the managed traits of many of the nine organizations, despite being drawn from three disparate categories of cause. It is also worth noting the number of managed traits that pertain to our categories of either 'benevolence' or 'progressive'. While our charities regard these traits as distinctive, our analysis suggests that in fact these traits are imbued by virtue of their charitable status and therefore shared with the balance of the sector.

Our study suggests that organizations seeking to develop a genuinely distinctive persona should focus on the 'emotional stimulation' engendered by their brand. Here, we concur with Aaker (1997) who regards 'excitement' as a key route to differentiation. While other aspects of their brand personality appear to be shared, it is clear that the NSPCC (Figure 1) and Dogs Trust (Figure 3) can successfully differentiate on the basis of the tone of voice adopted in the media and the creative use of humor, respectively.

Table 2. Managed brand personality traits.

Animal charity A	Animal charity B	Animal charity C	Children's charity A	Children's charity B	Children's charity C	VI Charity A	VI Charity B	VI Charity C
Authoritative	Courteous	Ambitious	Courageous	Ambitious	Caring	Established	Enabling	Pioneering
Compassionate	Ethical	Caring	Protecting	Christian	Practical	Practical	Equality	Practical
Effective	Fair	Dedicated	Respectful	Collaborative	Supportive	Empowering	Inspiring	Professional
Responsible	Honest	Dynamic	Trustworthy	Effective		Trustworthy	Opportunity	Responsive
	Prudent	Fun		Helping			Positive	
	Sympathetic	Friendly		Pioneering			Transforming	
		Positive		Helping				
		Practical		Positive				
		Responsible		Responsive				
		Trustworthy		Supportive				

Equally there appear to be opportunities to differentiate charity brands on the basis of the pattern of performance achieved by the organization in delivering its outcomes. There are parallels here with the approach of the RSPCA (Figure 2). Again, other aspects of the organization's brand such as 'compassionate' appear not to be regarded as genuinely distinctive. It may be possible to conserve resources promoting those dimensions that are 'automatically' imbued by virtue of the organization being a charity, instead using them to promote what is (or could be) genuinely distinctive.

This latter aspect of our results is important. We find no evidence that shared personality traits are linked to the amounts that individuals would be willing to donate. Perceptions of performance and the level of emotional arousal a brand is able to generate seem, not only to differentiate, but also to drive the nature of the contribution that will be made. This emphasizes the need for organizations to pay particular attention in their advertising to facets of their brand that are genuinely distinctive. A review of Table 2 makes it clear that this is presently not the case. Many charities continue to focus their attention on the 'benevolence' component of their brands. This is an approach consistent with the extant trust literature, where for example, Sargeant and Lee (2004) conclude that perceived ethics and benevolence foster trust and hence giving, and also attitude functional theory, which when read in conjunction with the findings of Yavas et al. (1980) suggested that donors might align themselves with organizations deemed to be sympathetic, caring, generous and helpful. This appears to be the case, but rather than learning these characteristics from advertising, donors appear to imbue organizations with these characteristics once their charitable status becomes clear. It is therefore unsurprising that while these dimensions may prompt engagement with a charity brand, they appear unrelated to the level of that subsequent engagement.

This aspect of our results should also be of wider policy interest as the charity component of the persona does appear to drive whether or not an individual will consider support. While the perception of this persona remains favorable, charities are viewed as being worthy of support and donors give, but should this change, the sector as a whole may suffer a decline in income. At a point where many governments are actively considering revisiting the legal definition of charity (or equivalent) and thus altering the character of the sector, this is a point of great significance. In the UK, for example, the inclusion of a generic 'public benefit' test presently being considered by the government may allow campaigning organizations to register as charities for the first time, greatly changing the nature of the sector.

Conclusions

Our results suggest that charity brand managers should emphasize their charitable status in their advertising. It is interesting to note that in our three examples, the charitable status of the organization appears underplayed. The charity registration number in the case of the Dogs Trust, for example, appears only in very small print at the bottom of the advertisement. Emphasizing this dimension would imbue the brand with many presently desirable characteristics that stress the benevolent nature of the organization's work and its desire to effect a change in society.

Our results also suggest that in seeking to foster higher levels of support brand managers must focus on what is distinctive about their brand personalities. The traits presently managed by the organizations participating in this study exhibit a high degree of similarity,

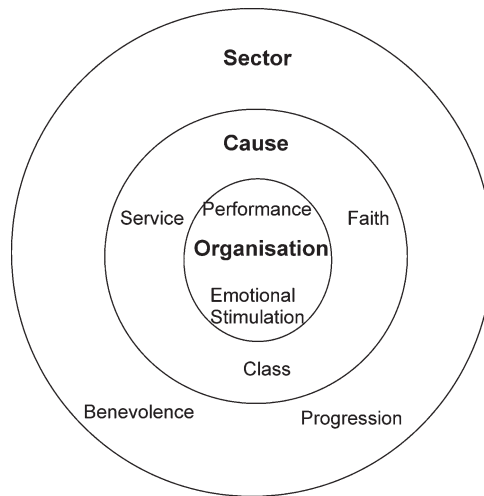


Figure 4. Hypothesized structure of charity brand personality.

and as our primary research indicates they are perceived in a similar way by their supporters. Such effort might focus on the dimensions of emotional stimulation, or performance, but it may also be concentrated on other fruitful avenues for differentiation. It is important to recognize that there may be other opportunities to differentiate, not highlighted by the nine organizations that formed the focus of our work.

Indeed, it is necessary to end by expressing a number of other caveats. Our work is exploratory and we must therefore emphasize that while our results are persuasive they may not generalize to the sector as a whole. Further and in particular, quantitative research would be necessary to confirm the conclusions we draw above. We also recognize that this may not be an easy task, as a number of traits delineated in this study could be interpreted rather differently in different contexts (Austin et al., 2003 or Morgeson & Hofman, 1999). It may therefore be the case that while two or more organizations share the same trait, the meaning donors ascribed to it will vary. Should this be the case, it is possible that a seemingly identical trait could be used very effectively as the basis for differentiation. Although we take steps to minimize the impact of this in reporting our present results, this may be an issue in the design of subsequent research.

Overall, however, we believe that our results offer new insight into the structure of charity brand personalities (Figure 4). They suggest that a hierarchy of traits may apply, making the application of branding practice to the context of non-profit organizations quite unique. While certain industries and product categories in the commercial sector may have brands imbued with similar personality traits, it would be facile to suggest that all commercial brands share components of a common identity. It seems, therefore, that the manner in which non-profit branding must be managed is genuinely distinctive, even if the sector's brands are presently not.

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