

4 The application of marketing and branding within the context of volunteering: views from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands

plaatsbepaling

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Met interesse heb ik het artikel over 'marketing and branding within the context of volunteering' gelezen. Hierbij een paar opmerkingen mijnerzijds.

In de eerste plaats gaat 'branding' over het maken van verschil. Door onderscheid tussen 'brands' van vrijwilligersorganisaties ontstaat voor potentiële vrijwilligers, maar ook voor de medewerkers, de mogelijkheid om zich te identificeren en te verbinden met één van de organisaties. Tussen vrijwilligersorganisaties bestaat namelijk verschil. Elke organisatie heeft een unieke set van kernwaarden en daaraan gekoppelde diensten en producten.

In de tweede plaats vormt merkidentiteit de basis van de 'brand' en gaat marketing over het vermarkten daarvan. De identiteit geeft weer wie de organisatie is en wil zijn in relatie tot de diensten die zij levert. In het artikel wordt het onderscheid tussen merkidentiteit en marketing niet scherp geformuleerd. De suggestie kan ontstaan dat het inzetten van marketing volstaat. Dat is niet zo. De basis van het vinden van nieuwe vrijwilligers is een merkidentiteit die wezenlijk en onderscheidend is, zodat potentiële vrijwilligers zich kunnen verbinden met organisaties. Hoe beter de 'brand', des te groter is de zelfsturende werking. In plaats van de doelgroep te werven, komt de doelgroep naar jouw organisatie toe.

In de derde plaats is het onderscheid tussen reputatie en identiteit belangrijk. Reputatie is wat anderen van jouw organisatie vinden, identiteit is wie en wat de organisatie zelf is. De reputatie van het vrijwilligerswerk is volgens het artikel blijkbaar stoffig, traditioneel en niet effectief. Het veranderen van negatieve reputaties kan alleen door te laten zien wie en wat het vrijwilligerswerk zelf is en niet, zoals in het artikel terecht wordt gesteld, door een taal (het begrip 'cool') te gebruiken die niet authentiek en wezenlijk is. Mensen hebben haarscherp door wat echt en onecht is.

In de vierde plaats wordt er terecht op gewezen dat bij het inzetten van branding en marketing betrokkenheid van de hele organisatie noodzakelijk is. Het gaat niet over het inzetten van technieken door een aantal professionals, maar over het zijn en handelen van de totale organisatie. Intern brandmanagement is een must.

The application of marketing and branding within the context of volunteering: views from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands

4

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Introduction

Opinions are divided about current trends in volunteering; they depend largely upon what is being counted and how. Figures from the 2003 Home Office Citizenship Survey in the United Kingdom show a healthy increase, while 2004 figures from the UK Office for National Statistics indicate a troubling decline. Long-term predictions in the Netherlands are similarly ambiguous. According to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP), longitudinal data from the Periodic Survey of Living Situation (POLS) conducted by Statistics Netherlands suggest a relatively stable rate of volunteering since 2000, with the current rate around forty percent. Data from the time-use surveys of the SCP, however, indicate an overall decline over the same period, with the current level around thirty percent (SCP, 2007).

Even the most optimistic figures provide evidence that volunteers continue to be drawn from narrow and shrinking segments of society – a ‘crisis of supply’ that was identified by Hedley and Davis Smith in 1992. As a remedy for this situation, many non-profit and volunteer-involving organisations (and the agencies that

support them) have recently been adopting marketing techniques that have been developed and tested within the commercial world. The UK charity sector has been particularly successful in demonstrating the practical benefits of branding by shifting their focus from marketing the problem to marketing the solution (Lindsay & Murphy, 1996).

One of the strongest arguments to be advanced for the use of marketing techniques in the volunteering sector is that volunteering currently suffers from an ‘image problem’ (see e.g. Hankinson & Rochester, 2005; Heinsius et al., 2001). Long-standing impressions and the demographics of traditional volunteers have spawned a popular perception that volunteering is ‘boring’, ‘stuffy’ and increasingly irrelevant to contemporary times (e.g. Ferrier et al., 2003; Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004). In particular, considerable evidence suggests that the concept of volunteering is particularly unattractive to young people (see e.g. Gaskin, 1999). Other authors have argued that some efforts intended to increase the supply of volunteers may also increase the risk of a ‘tragedy of the commons’ in the volunteering world (see the supplement to Volume 4 of this

journal). By focusing solely on reaching new target groups and “selling” volunteering to more and more people, the volunteering sector may be ensuring a continuing trend of high turnover and limited commitment. According to this argument, the responsible management and cultivation of the supply of volunteers is as important as (if not more important than) the identification of new sources of volunteers.

This article considers the relevance and implications of applying principles of brand management and marketing to the context of volunteering. It is based on exploratory research conducted in the UK (Hankinson & Rochester, 2005) and empirical observations from practical experiences during a Dutch project to stimulate volunteering among young people (www.movisie.nl/jongerenactief). We argue that, while marketing can offer effective tools (in particular, brand management) that can help organisations that involve volunteers and those that promote volunteering, no single technique or initiative should be considered ‘the answer’, due to the complexity of the problems and issues that are involved. We stress that any over-arching campaign must be accompanied by efforts to help individual organisations and sectors develop a better understanding of what they have to offer to the target groups that they wish to reach. We thus elaborate on the importance of focusing on both the internal and external faces of volunteering.

The article is organised as follows. We begin with a summary discussion of the ‘image problem’, which underlies many applications of marketing concepts to the context of volunteering. We then present overviews of exploratory research conducted in the UK and insights gained through the development of a Dutch youth-volunteering initiative. The subsequent analysis focuses on the application of brand management as a means of increasing volunteer participation. We close by considering the extent to which branding and other elements of marketing are applicable to the volunteering context and the adaptations that may be necessary for marketing interventions to be effective. Because of the exploratory nature of the research and experiences from which they are derived, all of our conclusions are tentative and should be tested through further empirical study.

The image problem

One of the most common themes in research on volunteering is that it suffers from an ‘image problem’ among certain groups. Much of this image problem can be attributed to characteristics that are associated with ‘traditional’ forms of volunteering and the demographics of those who have traditionally participated in them. In short, some people tend to view volunteering as boring, old-fashioned, or irrelevant to contemporary life, while ethnic minorities may see it as the domain of population groups in which they are not welcome.

One common response to the image problem is to search for new terminology that is better capable of communicating the aspects of volunteering that speak to the needs and interests of a wider segment of contemporary society. The transition from the term ‘volunteer work’ to ‘volunteering’ in the English-speaking world and from ‘*vrijwilligerswerk*’ [volunteer work] to ‘*vrijwillige inzet*’ [voluntary effort] in the Netherlands (and Flanders) provides a clear illustration of this struggle. Other sources suggest that efforts to create novel terms are unlikely to make much of a difference (Klein Hegeman & Kuperus, 2003), and that organisations would do better to focus their attention on the activities they offer and how they communicate about them.

In many cases, the image problem appears to be less the result of general impressions than of negative experiences that people have actually had with volunteering. In addition to general descriptions of volunteering (e.g. boring, irrelevant, time-consuming, old-fashioned), many studies regarding this image problem allude to feelings of being unwelcome and unappreciated, to activities that are poorly organised, to organisations that are poorly managed or to situations in which volunteers feel that their time has been wasted (e.g. Institute for Volunteering Research, 2005; Hankinson & Rochester, 2005). Results that reflect such first-hand experiences suggest that this type of negative perception is less likely to be remedied by a general overhaul of the image of volunteering than by conscious efforts to improve the volunteering experience within organisations.

Although it is clear that many people do have negative perceptions regarding volunteering in general, it is far from an uncontested fact that specific contexts of vol-

unteering – or individual volunteers – suffer from the same image problem. Research by Koppen and Riekwel (2006) shows that high school students in the Netherlands may evaluate their peers who volunteer slightly more highly than they do their peers who do not volunteer. Moreover, even though few of the 382 respondents considered volunteering 'cool', even fewer described it as 'boring', and nearly half considered it a worthwhile activity. In a review of literature concerning volunteering and the media, Machin (2005) reports considerable ambiguity concerning public perceptions of volunteering. According to this review, perceptions of volunteering are heavily influenced by personal experience, social environment, demographic characteristics and specific details of particular volunteer activities and organisations. Koppen and Riekwel argue that improving the availability of information about the possibilities and benefits of volunteering would have more effect on the rate of volunteering than would attempts to improve the image of volunteering by labelling it as "cool" (or some other generic positive adjective).

Branding as a means of increasing volunteer participation

Despite the ambiguities in the literature, the concept of volunteering is indisputably vulnerable to a number of negative associations. One obvious solution for this problem would be to turn to the world of marketing in a search for ways to structure and manage the impressions that exist within various segments of society. This section discusses two investigations of this issue. The first regards an exploratory research project that was conducted in the UK. The second investigation involves a project carried out to stimulate volunteering among young people in the Netherlands.

Exploratory research in the UK

Hankinson and Rochester (2005) conducted interviews with senior managers from national and local volunteer-promoting organisations and focus groups with current volunteers in order to explore "the need to reshape perceptions of volunteering and the extent to which this may be achieved through branding" (Hankinson & Rochester, 2005). The organisations and volunteers were chosen to reflect the "enormous diversity" of sectors and activities covered by the concept of volunteering. The managers represented volunteering-infrastructure organisations, both general and speciali-

sed, including six national organisations and four local organisations, three of which were volunteer centres. Following the typology developed by Davis Smith (2000), the selection of volunteers included those who were engaged in *service to others, self-help (or mutual aid), campaigning and participation and governance*.

Perceptions of volunteering

One of the most prominent results to emerge from the research was the consistent perception that volunteering suffers from a three-dimensional image problem. First, neither volunteers nor the government appears to recognise the full range and scope of the activities covered in the category of volunteering. Second, responses from the interviews suggested that traditional "vertical" volunteering was associated with a number of negative images (e.g. "the blue rinse brigade", "dogooders"). A third component of the image problem to emerge in the research involved the low status of volunteering and the general lack of respect that volunteers' experience. Interestingly, terminology played a prominent role in many of the interviews.

Not all of the images that emerged during the interviews were negative. Most of the managers shared similar views regarding the most important positive images or messages about volunteering. These perceptions can be categorised according to four types of value: intrinsic, instrumental, civic and leisure. The interviews perceived that volunteers were engaged in intrinsically worthwhile activity by choosing freely to help others who were at some disadvantage, by seeking to change lives and by "bringing about social change". In addition, volunteering was perceived as an instrumental means of acquiring career-enhancing skills or of coping with personal difficulties. The perceived civic value of volunteering was expressed in terms of contributions to the community. In this, the interviewees stressed that "the big issue for volunteering is that it doesn't happen nationally but it happens locally". Finally, the senior managers considered volunteering as a rewarding way to spend leisure time. These values could provide a foundation for developing a generic brand that would deliberately communicate desired messages about volunteering.

In contrast to the senior managers who were interviewed, volunteers participating in the focus groups tended to use their own areas of activity as a point of refe-

rence, rather than speaking of volunteering in general. In fact, some participants did not even identify themselves as volunteers, but simply as people who were active in their own communities.

Many of the positive associations that the volunteers reported were consistent with those mentioned by the managers. These associations included contributing time to help others, personal growth and contributing to shaping the community. They also referred to a sense of social belonging and a "good feeling" about their activities. Although their comments about the positive aspects of volunteering were clearly based on their own experiences, many of the volunteers said that the specific causes or activities with which they worked were not their sole reason for volunteering. They referred to a general impulse to volunteer, which would have led them to contribute their efforts to other causes under different circumstances.

One key finding from the interviews and the focus groups involves the strong link between perceptions of volunteering as a general phenomenon and each of the four distinctive areas of activity. The senior managers who were interviewed and the volunteers who participated in the focus groups all attributed distinct associations (both positive and negative) to each of the four areas of volunteering¹. A second important finding is that there were few linkages between the four areas. A generic concept could shift the focus towards what they have in common, rather than what distinguishes them from one another.

Promoting volunteering and managing the brand

While acknowledging the diversity entailed in the concept of volunteering, the senior managers that were interviewed saw considerable consistency in the reasons people have for volunteering. The most prominent of these reasons involve helping others and improving the community, in addition to gaining new skills and having flexibility in carrying out activities. According to the interviewees, these reasons reflected a contemporary rationale for volunteering, representing a shift away from the traditional religious and moral bases of philanthropy. They believed that volunteering could best be promoted through an inclusive approach that

would combine the principles of altruism and self-interest to benefit communities as well as individuals.

The opinions of the managers revealed considerable consensus regarding the application of branding to the promotion of volunteering at the local and national level. They reported a belief that a branded approach could be used to develop a consistent, overarching message concerning volunteering that would be able to unify the diverse strands of volunteering. According to the managers, the branding approach should be developed in terms of a common message and a common visual identity (e.g. logo), thereby providing a consistent "face and voice" for volunteering.

In the focus groups, the volunteers tended to have a more limited view of promotion, referring primarily to local activities (e.g. "fun days", promotional flyers, local media coverage). Although the concept of branding was unfamiliar to most of the volunteers, they did acknowledge the importance of sending consistent messages about volunteering in order to facilitate generic promotional activities. The volunteers also thought that national promotional campaigns could help volunteer recruitment at the local level.

Empirical insights from the Netherlands

In June 2004, a project was initiated to stimulate volunteering among young people in the Netherlands². This project, entitled &Joy, comprised a number of sub-projects, including an initiative focused on the application of marketing within the non-profit sector.

In the commercial sector, most organisations (particularly those that focus on young people) develop marketing strategies for reaching specific target groups. These strategies often involve market segmentation. According to the initial documentation of &Joy (www.movisie.nl/jongerenactief), the generic term "young people", as commonly used within the volunteer sector, fails to reflect the mosaic of youth participation that civil society deserves. Project documentation argued that volunteer organisations should be more aware of the diversity of young people and their needs, and that their activities and market combinations should be more specific when seeking to reach young volunteers.

¹ For a detailed discussion of this point, see Hankinson & Rochester (2005).

² The project was initiated within CIVIQ, the Dutch national volunteer centre, which has now merged into MOVISIE, the Netherlands Centre for Social Development.

Another issue that &Joy sought to address was the image problem discussed earlier in this article. In addition to researching the motivations of young volunteers (Karr, 2005), the project included a variety of activities involving youth participation and image building. To broaden its perspective on the image problem, members of the project team investigated a number of practices in the fields of branding and marketing in general.

Marketing resources

Together with a number of marketing agencies, the project team focused on communicating about youth volunteering and how MOVISIE could encourage organisations to utilise marketing principles. For example, portfolios about youth participation at the national level were developed and distributed on the Internet and in the field. In developing ways of transferring knowledge about marketing to volunteer organisations, it became clear that creating a new image was not enough.

Earlier research (Klein Hegeman & Kuperus, 2003) had shown that, instead of trying to find another term for volunteering, organisations should approach it differently. Against this backdrop, the project team collaborated with a marketing agency to develop a marketing clinic. The goal of the clinic was to help organisations realise that principles of marketing and branding could provide a new perspective on youth participation within their organisations.

In 2005, two test-runs of the clinic were held for representatives of local and national organisations that are active with young volunteers (e.g. Red Cross, Youth for Christ, volunteer centres and several commercial partners). It became clear that volunteer-involving organisations were in need of a new marketing-based way of thinking. Feedback from the clinics suggested that, the participants preferred to receive information about the experiences that young people have within their own worlds and the images that they have of volunteering, as well as concrete marketing tools that would be of practical use within their own organisations.

After attempting to translate commercial marketing to the context of volunteer organisations, the participants expressed a need for a handbook containing facts, figures and examples. In response, the project team published a handbook entitled *Cornering the Youth Market* (CIVIQ, 2006) to support the clinic. The handbook pro-

vides concrete steps with which organisations can develop their own marketing plans.

Combining the world of commercial marketing and the field of volunteering to develop a high-quality product proved complex and difficult. Collaboration with the marketing bureau allowed the team to gain a new perspective on their day-to-day practice. The focus on the image-formation processes and mindsets of young people was particularly helpful. On the other hand, the experience underscored the importance of maintaining control over the development of such initiatives, ensuring that they remain the result of collaboration.

Dissemination of the resources

The clinic that the project team ultimately launched in the field consisted of a theoretical component and an interactive practical component. The theoretical component was intended to provide a dynamic and illustrative introduction to the contemporary world of young people. In addition, it covered the basic principles of marketing by introducing such practical methods as recognising the difference between identity and image, the definition of Unique Selling Points and the 5 P's (i.e. Product, Price, Place, People and Promotion). The clinic ended with an assignment in which participants prepared their own activity schedules, which they could take back to their organisations in the form of concrete action steps.

The project team felt strongly that the participants should be able to leave the clinic with concrete actions that they could undertake in their own organisations. More importantly, the clinic aimed to effect a change of mindset. Preliminary evaluations indicated that participants had indeed gained a new perspective on young people within their organisations.

In addition to offering the clinic to groups of participants from volunteer-involving organisations, the project team wished to use the concept to promote the use of marketing as a way of reaching young people. To this end, they worked with the marketing bureau to create a train-the-trainer module, whereby representatives from organisations could receive the tools necessary to offer the clinic within their own organisations and communities. To date, the module has been offered four times. Although the module contained no mechanism for systematically tracking the subsequent use of the clinic, internal communications have confir-

med that the clinic has since been offered 45 times to approximately 675 participants.

The materials from the clinic were published in the handbook and on the Internet. During its first year of publication, more than one thousand copies of the handbook were sold. The handbook has been used in an initiative that involves matching young people with organisations in order to develop marketing plans. Although this initiative has produced a number of apparently excellent marketing plans, it has not succeeded in effecting the necessary changes in the mindsets of the organisations that they involve. In essence, the plans have remained the "property" of the young people who helped design them; the organisations have failed to "buy into" them.

The final report from the initial project period for &Joy (December 2006) states that awareness concerning the use of marketing and branding had been disseminated throughout the local level of the volunteering sector in the Netherlands³. The clinics clearly provided food for thought to many of the participants, and many of the forty trainers have been quite active. In December 2006, the project team attempted to contact individuals and organisations who had participated in the clinics and train-the-trainer programmes in order to gather further insight into their results. Information received during this telephone inventory suggests that the initiative has stimulated interest in the use of marketing, but that this interest has yet to be firmly rooted in the participants' organisations and translated into concrete application.

Analysis

Hankinson and Rochester (2005) observe that perceptions of volunteering are largely images (which are received) rather than identities (which are transmitted). They argue that the development and promotion of a volunteer brand would allow organisations and agencies that are involved in supporting volunteering to exercise more control over public perceptions of volunteering. Summarising various studies from both commercial and non-profit contexts, they conclude that "the brand is an active agent in the communication process, one that deliberately promotes desired messages which describe what the product, service or

organisation does and the values for which it stands" (pp. 94-95).

Practical experience with marketing within the &Joy project appears consistent with the findings of the UK research that volunteering would benefit from adopting brand-management principles. There is a recognised need for a 'make-over' to promote a more up-beat, helpful and modern representation of volunteering (Gaskin 1998). This would involve transforming the received image of volunteering into a more managed presentation of volunteering through branding. As presented in this article, the perceptions that managers in volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers themselves view volunteering could form the basis for developing a brand. As observed in the Netherlands, however, the process of brand development (and other marketing applications) should be integrated throughout the various layers of practice in the volunteering sector. As Hankinson (2004) argues, the effectiveness of any brand depends on a smooth interface between a brand's key messages and visual identity (its external face) and the extent to which infrastructure and organisational support personnel understand the function and objectives of the brand (its internal face).

The brand-development process should also consider the heterogeneity of volunteering. The specific areas of voluntary action identified in this study had their own distinctive sets of images, which should be developed as "sub-brands", thereby expressing their distinctive "flavour" and emphasising their relationship to the generic volunteering brand.

As with any trend, the effects of the introducing brand management (and other marketing techniques) into the world of volunteering are not immediately obvious, and systematic research is slow to develop. Nonetheless, literature is accumulating concerning marketing within the non-profit sector⁴ (as well as in the cultural, healthcare, and other "social" sectors), and some of these studies specifically examine the relationship between marketing and volunteering. Although no clear consensus exists concerning the utility of applying marketing concepts to non-profit and volunteer contexts, most authors agree that any such application requires at least some level of adaptation before they can be applied in non-commercial settings.

³ The 2006 Annual Report for the &Joy project is available upon request from the fourth author (I.vanSteekeleburg@movisie.nl)

⁴ See the literature review by Hankinson (2001).

According to the definition advanced by the American Marketing Association (www.marketingpower.com/mg-dictionary/view1862.php), marketing (of which branding is a component) is "... an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders". A key component of this definition is the coordination between the interests of customers (or potential customers) and those of the organization. As reflected in the UK interviews, the interests of customers (in this case, volunteers) are closely related to the motives that they have for engaging in particular behaviours (in this case, contributing effort on behalf of an organisation). The interests of organisations in the volunteer sector (which are often ideological or otherwise intangible) are likely to be more difficult to identify than are those of commercial organisations (which can usually be reduced to monetary or other quantitative terms).

An additional issue that recurs in the literature concerning the applicability of marketing to non-profit and volunteer contexts concerns the relative benefits of adopting a broad market orientation (e.g. Lauer, 1995; Shoham et al., 2006). This question highlights the difference between the use of marketing techniques (e.g. the use of brand management to promote volunteering) and the integration of marketing activities throughout the organisation. While many non-profit and volunteer-involving organisations (if they use marketing ideas at all) choose the former strategy, the prevailing marketing literature tends to argue that the latter is necessary to the long-term success of any specific marketing activities (e.g. Bussell & Forbes, 2002; Armstrong & Kotler, 2005).

One limitation of the literature on marketing in non-profit contexts is that investigations of the marketing concepts tend to pay little attention to differences between donors and volunteers as customers. Liao and colleagues (2001) even argue for the elaboration of a new term for the non-profit context. Their argument, however, highlights the importance of the element of exchange to the notion of market orientation. While such reciprocity is not always easily transferable to the non-profit context as a whole (e.g. recipients of services), it is applicable to the volunteer context, through the mechanism of motivation and reward. This relates to our previous observation concerning communicati-

on about altruism and self-interest, given that marketing essentially involves appealing to the motivations that people have for behaving (or consuming) in certain ways.

Although considerable knowledge has accumulated in recent decades concerning the motivation to volunteer (see e.g. Clary & colleagues, 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 2002), and although much of this literature is oriented towards identifying ways in which organisations can use motivation to recruit and retain volunteers more effectively, there are few links between the two bodies of literature. Marketing literature tends to draw upon overly simplified or less-developed models of motivation, preferring to focus on more readily available demographic and consumer behaviours for the purposes of market segmentation studies (see e.g. Armstrong & Armstrong & Kotler, 2005). Likewise, the volunteer motivation literature tends to focus more on broad management philosophies and systems than it does on the practical techniques that abound in the marketing literature.

Attending to the faces of volunteering

Any attempt to develop and manage a volunteer brand should consider the motivating factors that are most likely to be important to an organisation's target audience. The materials developed in connection with the youth marketing clinics in the Netherlands provide an example of how this can be done. While the growing body of literature on volunteer motivation (see e.g. the functional approach as developed by Clary and colleagues, 1998) could be helpful in this regard, it would be necessary to translate the complex, abstract relationships in this literature into practical, useful and attractive models that could be easily disseminated to organisations (the external face).

Organisations must also be cultivated to ensure the appropriate level of support for the brand and its management (the internal face). The steps involved in developing a market orientation (as outlined by Akchin, 2001) could serve as a helpful guideline. These steps can be summarised as follows:

- Researching the demands of the market and the prevailing images of the organisation (and the competition)
- Designing the product (or service) to correspond to the identified market demands

- Promoting the product by highlighting benefits that were identified as particularly important to the market (i.e. branding)
- Evaluating the promotion and the market's response to the product

The second and third steps are likely to receive the most attention in practice (as shown by the experiences of Branding & Joy). The first step is also likely to be emphasised to some extent, albeit in general and abstract terms (e.g. by disseminating practical guidelines to help organisations understand the specific audiences they wish to reach). The demands of practice, however, may cause the fourth step – continual evaluation – to be overlooked entirely. Given the preponderance of literature that warns non-profit, volunteer and cultural organisations of the risks involved in superficial applications of marketing activities, it may be advisable to consider ways to help organisations integrate market research and evaluation activities throughout their operations. In addition to these steps, our research and observations suggest that internal structure of the organisation should be appropriately designed in order to retain individuals who are attracted through branding and marketing initiatives.

Discussion and conclusion

The exploratory research in the UK identified three dimensions to the positive perception of volunteering in general: social purpose, benefits to individual volunteers and the nature of the activity. It also revealed diversity in the perceptions of various areas of volunteering, suggesting that any generic concept must allow for the distinctive characteristics of particular forms. The study also highlighted the value of a generic concept for highlighting commonalities among the four areas of volunteering, which otherwise have very few linkages. Finally, the study revealed considerable support for the idea of developing and managing a volunteering "brand", although the concept remained vague to individual volunteers.

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Practical experience with the youth marketing clinics in the Netherlands shows that volunteer-involving organisations are indeed receptive to adapting the principles of marketing to their current practice, particularly with regard to reaching and involving young people. Openness to and acknowledgement of the importance of these techniques, however, do not guarantee their successful implementation. Although a number of the organisations that participated were already familiar with the concepts that were presented (a few even had active marketing departments), follow-up indicates that many of the smaller, local organisations have been unable to bring the principles into concrete practice, although they do appear to have begun the process of mindset change. This stresses the importance of allowing room for sub-branding and local-level support for the implementation of a generic volunteering brand.

As stated in the introduction to this article, the research and experiences upon which our observations and arguments are based are much too limited to allow any generalisation or concrete conclusions. Further research – both academic and applied – is necessary to advance our ability to draw upon the resources available in commercial marketing in order to overcome the negative and misleading images that underlie the crisis of supply (as identified by Hedley and Davis Smith, 1992), as well as the counterproductive practices that could contribute to a tragedy of the volunteer commons (as described by Kuperus et al., 2007; Brudney & Meijs, 2007).

Despite these limitations, we are confident in stating that branding and other elements of marketing are powerful tools that organisations should use in order to expand and cultivate their existing and potential sources of volunteers. In doing so, however, they should take an integral approach to marketing for both internal and external audiences.

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