

## Chapter Five: Analysis Component

More than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations operate in the United States today. They promote ideals, raise awareness and funds, and provide important services. Many nonprofits, however, struggle to keep their services running. Decreased government funding, declines in giving and increased numbers of nonprofits account for this problem and result in greater competition for funds among nonprofits (Griffiths, 2005).

In a competitive charitable market, nonprofits must pay increased attention to their brand identities (Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005). Brands differentiate organizations, and they are particularly important for service organizations because of “the inherent difficulty in differentiating products that lack physical differences” (Berry, 2000, p. 128-29). Though research has shown the competitive advantage strong nonprofit brands provide, little research is available about the actual brand-building efforts nonprofits make (Venable et al.). This study’s purpose is to reveal more about ways in which nonprofits are working to develop strong and consistent brand identities.

This study both draws from and builds on current communication research. Current research has addressed the brand identities and personalities of nonprofits, the influence of brands on donor support, the way organizations’ communication with the public builds trust and the branding of service organizations (Berry, 2000; Bryce, 2007; Faircloth, 2005; O’Neil, 2008; Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Venable et al., 2005). There is a gap in the research regarding how nonprofits are actively working to build their brand identities.

This study addresses this gap, providing more data about real brand-building efforts of nonprofits, by focusing on the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do nonprofit organizations work—through actions, standards or language—to develop their brand identities?
- RQ2: How do nonprofit organization employees (paid or non-paid) articulate their brand identities, brand positions, brand images and brand value propositions?
- RQ3A: How do nonprofit organizations—through their employees, values and customs—support and emphasize the development of those organizations’ brand identities?
- RQ3B: How do nonprofit organizations—through their employees, values and customs—oppose and hinder the development of those organizations’ brand identities?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study relies on Aaker’s (1996) Brand Identity Planning Model as its theoretical framework and starting point. This model was originally designed for brand strategists, but it has also been useful to researchers who study branding because it identifies several elements of brand identity and differentiates among them. This study focuses on the concept of brand identity, which Aaker defines as “a unique set of brand associations that ... represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers,” as well as related concepts including brand image, brand awareness and brand position (p. 68).

Aaker’s Brand Identity Planning Model was first presented in his book *Building Strong Brands*. The model was chosen as a starting point for the research at hand because of its use in brand development and because it breaks the concept of brand

identity into many elements organized around four perspectives: brand-as-product, brand-as-organization, brand-as-person and brand-as-symbol.

The brand-as-product perspective is built on the idea that a brand's products are central to its identity. According to Aaker's model, the scope, attributes, quality and value, uses, users and country of origin of a product can all affect the brand identity. Many nonprofits provide services rather than products (and some provide neither), but the model is still applicable considering Aaker's acknowledgment that not all perspectives fit all brands.

The brand-as-organization perspective posits that basing brand identity in part on the organization itself can help a brand differentiate itself from competitors. This perspective focuses primarily on organization attributes and associations. These include an organization's community orientation, level of innovation and global or local orientation. These associations benefit a brand by adding credibility, clarifying its culture and values and influencing its value proposition.

The brand-as-person perspective focuses on brand personality, the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 141). This perspective suggests people perceive brands as having both human-like characteristics such as age and socioeconomic class and personality traits such as competence and trustworthiness. Strong, positive brand personalities can act as the basis of supporters' relationships with a brand. They can also add to a brand's self-expressive benefits, "by providing a way for a person to communicate his ... self-image" through support of the brand (p. 84, 99).

The brand-as-symbol perspective focuses on three types of symbols: visual imagery, metaphors and brand heritage, all of which can add cohesion and structure to a

brand identity. Such symbols can represent brand benefits, act as cornerstone for brand strategy and represent the essence of a brand.

These four perspectives are not the only components of the Brand Identity Planning Model, which also includes secondary components related to value proposition, credibility and brand-customer relationship as well as initial brand analysis and eventual brand identity implementation. The four perspectives do, however, serve as the core of the model and provide guidance for developing and evaluating brand identities.

The Brand Identity Planning Model was used in Hill and Vincent's (2006) study on the branding of English football club Manchester United. Hill and Vincent used the model to "delineate the distinctive features of the Manchester United Brand" (p. 218). Like this study does, they focused on the portion of the model composed of the four perspectives of brand identity. Though Manchester United is a for-profit organization, it is similar to many nonprofit organizations in that it does not offer a traditional product. Nevertheless, the researchers managed to study the brand from the brand-as-product perspective. They considered its product scope to be the game of soccer; its product attributes to be its fan base, team-orientation and strategies; and its quality to be the excellence of the players. Though the topic of their study is largely unrelated to the research at hand, their study exemplifies how Aaker's model can be applied to a brand that does not offer traditional products.

Wallström, Karlsson and Salehi-sangari (2008) also drew on the Brand Identity Planning Model in their study of the internal brand-building process in Swedish service firms. These researchers focused on the brand-building efforts of a financial services supplier, a commercial bank and a chain of real estate agents. All three firms were

chosen because they had recently undertaken internal brand-building processes, which included brand audits, brand identity planning and brand position statement development. Their study, like this one, focused on brand building from the organization's perspective rather than customers', and the researchers relied on Aaker's brand component definitions and four-perspective approach in their analysis.

Mohan and Sequeira (2009) evaluated Aaker's model by using case studies to analyze whether brand-building initiatives undertaken by Fevicol, Nokia, Kingfisher and Airtel could be classified under Aaker's four brand perspectives. The researchers found these cases to be in line with Aaker's model. Fevicol's brand image had been built primarily around the quality of its product; Nokia's, around the organization's attributes; Kingfisher's, around a personality; and Airtel's, around a symbol.

Moorthi (2002), too, drew from Aaker's brand identity framework in a study proposing a comprehensive approach for branding services. Moorthi integrated Aaker's model with Booms and Bitner's Extended Marketing Mix, categorizing the aspects of marketing under Aaker's four brand perspectives and then relating this modified Aaker model to the three-fold economic classification of goods as search goods, experience goods and credence goods. In addition to using Aaker's model, Moorthi relied on Aaker's brand component definitions throughout his study.

As exemplified by the studies mentioned, Aaker's model has a history of use within communication and marketing research in addition to its use as a tool for brand strategists. The four-perspective approach Aaker proposes and the brand concept

definitions his model provides, in particular, have aided researchers to analyze brand identities and brand-building efforts. The model also served as a strong starting point from which to research the brand-building efforts of nonprofit organizations.

### **Literature Review**

In looking at the research questions at hand, it is important to review what current research reveals about nonprofit brands. Though the majority of studies about brand building have focused on for-profit organizations and companies, a number of studies have shown the importance of brand identities for nonprofit organizations as well (Venable et al., 2005; Faircloth, 2005). In a broader but closely related vein, studies have also shown the importance of nonprofits' promotional and communication efforts as a whole, which contribute to what Aaker (1996) calls "brand image," or the public's perceptions of a brand (Berry, 2000).

In her study on the relationship between nonprofits' communications and donor trust, O'Neil (2008) states that "communicating the mission and work in promotional efforts is one way nonprofit organizations can foster a strong relationship with donors" (p. 266). This relates to Aaker's (1996) brand-as-product and brand-as-organization perspectives of brand identity. Through surveys sent to nonprofit donors, O'Neil found that the types of communications that most influence donors' trust, commitment and satisfaction are those that show how donations are used. This type of information sheds light on a nonprofit's organizational attributes, e.g., community orientation, which according to Aaker's model, leads to increased credibility.

Bennett and Barkensjo (2005) consider donors' perception that an organization is credible to be evidence of trust, which Berry (1995) calls perhaps the single most

powerful marketing tool available to an organization. Bryce (2007) also emphasizes the importance of trust, defining it as the expectation that the other will act in accordance with a shared interest, and stating that nonprofits need public trust for legitimacy, effectiveness and financial support. In their study on public trust in the nonprofit sector, Sargeant and Lee (2002) used focus groups to determine the factors that affect donor trust, which they define more narrowly as the “the belief that an organisation/sector ... will never take advantage of stakeholder vulnerabilities, by being fair, reliable, competent and ethical in all dealings” (p. 70).

The concept of trust is particularly relevant to a study of brand-building efforts because, according to Bryce (2007), “the public’s trust in an organization reflects the organization’s projection of itself,” (p. 114) or what Aaker (1996) calls brand position. Bryce also notes that public perceptions of an organization’s goodwill play an important role in restoring and maintaining trust. Goodwill arises from the organization’s identification with the public, the history of the organization, the social significance of past performance, the reputation of the organization’s leadership and the degree to which the public participates in the organization’s decision-making process.

Building on research about brand identity in for-profits, Venable et al. (2005) used a six-study multi-method design to address whether nonprofits have personalities, what the dimensions of these personalities are and whether these brand personalities can affect the intent to donate. Their focus relates clearly to Aaker’s brand-as-person perspective. Through focus groups and depth interviews, Venable et al. found that participants not only easily ascribed personality traits to nonprofit organizations but also differentiated among organizations on the basis of personality and showed particular

concern for organizations' efficiency and effectiveness. The researchers found the overarching dimensions of nonprofit brand personality to be integrity, sophistication, ruggedness and nurturance and that these did correlate to participants' likelihood to contribute to an organization.

In her study on the values dimensions of branding charities, Stride (2006) explains that some practitioners and researchers have expressed concern that using branding techniques associated with for-profit organizations to develop the brands of charities can lead to their over-commercialization. Grounds (2005) also addresses this concern, stating that "there are those in the not-for-profit sector who believe that the world of branding and corporate identity is something for the 'dirty' world of business and consumer products to worry about" (p. 65). He points out, however, that charities—and this could be said of other nonprofits as well—have long sought to communicate clearly about what they do and why they need support and that this is the basis of brand strategy.

Faircloth (2005), also recognizing nonprofits' need for support, conducted a study focused on how the factors antecedent to brand equity influence donors' support of nonprofit organizations. Faircloth draws from Aaker's (1991) earlier work on "brand equity," which Aaker defines as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers" (p. 15). The antecedent factors that Faircloth addresses are brand personality, brand image and brand awareness, or the consumer's knowledge, recall and recognition of a brand. Like Venable et al. (2005), Faircloth used focus groups and depth interviews. He found that respondents were more interested in

providing resources to those nonprofits they respected and saw as different from other nonprofits. He did not, however, find level of brand awareness to influence responders' interest in donating to specific nonprofits.

In his study Faircloth (2005) pointed out that clear brand identities are particularly critical for nonprofit organizations because consumers are more likely to contribute and support nonprofits whose goals and values they identify with. Venable et al. (2005) also emphasize the unique importance of brands for nonprofits, stating that “because the characteristics and benefits of becoming involved with a nonprofit organization are largely intangible, branding can facilitate a donor’s understanding and support of a charity” (p. 298). Similarly, Berry (2000) notes that because service organizations lack tangible products, the company itself is the brand. Service companies with the strongest brands, he posits, are those that consciously differentiate themselves from competitors.

One problem posed by current research on brands is the lack of consistency in the use of related terms. Venable et al. (2005) used the terms “corporate identity” and “corporate image” (p. 298) when describing brand identity and brand image. The terms “brand personality” (Faircloth, 2005, p. 2) and “brand meaning” (Berry, 2000, p. 129) have also been used in lieu of “brand image.” The branding definitions included in this proposal thus far—for brand identity, brand personality, brand awareness, brand image, brand position and brand equity—have all been provided by Aaker or are congruent with

his definitions. These definitions have been chosen for this study because Aaker's model will be used as the starting point for the research.<sup>1</sup>

This study builds on the research mentioned by providing more data about the real brand-building efforts of functioning nonprofit organizations. As detailed, current research has addressed branding in service organizations, the importance of brand identities and personalities of nonprofits, the influence of brands on donor support and the ways in which organizations build trust through their communication with the public (Berry, 2000; Bryce, 2007; Faircloth, 2005; O'Neil, 2008; Sargeant & Lee, 2002; Venable et al., 2005). There is little information available about the actual steps and actions nonprofit organizations take as they work to build their brands, and that gap is what this research addresses.

Additionally, the information gathered through this research provides insights to practitioners or other researchers about ways in which other nonprofits can build and evaluate their brands. Nonprofits often face unique challenges as a result of limited budgets and work forces. They could benefit from strong brand identities and the resulting increase in credibility, contributions, public trust and differentiation. By including insights from those who work to develop a number of nonprofit brands, this research provides information about ways in which many types of nonprofits can develop their brands as well. Overall, this study sheds light on what makes a brand strong and successful and how organizations can work most effectively to build their own brands.

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<sup>1</sup> The only definitions included thus far that were not derived from Aaker's writings were the definitions for "trust," which were provided by Bryce and Sargeant and Lee. 10

## Method

To answer the research questions I posed for this study, I conducted nine semi-structured phone interviews with nonprofit organization employees, and I used the grounded theory method to analyze the data. I used a set of pre-established questions but also improvised as the interview progressed, adding new questions based on interviewees' responses.

The pre-established questions were written specifically to answer the primary three research questions at hand, and many of them were adapted from Aaker's *Building Strong Brands* so they specifically related to the Brand Identity Planning Model. A few sample questions include:

- Related to RQ1: How does your organization show that it is different from other nonprofit organizations? How are those who work in your organization made aware of the organizations' values and vision?
- Related to RQ2: What is the desired image of your organization? What do supporters of your organization say about themselves through their support?
- Related to RQ3: What internal organizational pressures work against brand building? What internal organizational pressures work toward brand building?

Additionally, because this study relies on Aaker's (1996) model and writing on brands, his definitions for brand terms informed the interview questions and are used throughout the results and discussion. These include:

- Brand identity: “a unique set of brand associations that ... represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers” (p. 68).
- Brand image: “how the brand is now perceived” (p. 71).
- Brand position: “the part of the brand identity and value proposition to be actively communicated to a target audience” (p. 71).
- Brand value proposition: “a statement of the functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits delivered by the brand that provide value to the customer” (p. 95).

I recorded interviews with a digital audio recorder and transcribed them.<sup>2</sup> I used the grounded theory method to analyze interviewees’ responses and the information they provided. Though Aaker’s model served as a starting point for the research, using the grounded theory method once data had been gathered helped me avoid forcing the gathered data back into a specific model.

I coded the interview content into categories of analysis, such as mission, reason for support, brand development and public misunderstanding. While coding, I constantly compared new incidents with others in existing categories and wrote memos of theoretical notions and category properties and relationships throughout the process. As a result of constant comparison, the resultant theory corresponds closely to data gathered in the interviews.

### **Sample**

This study relied on purposive sampling. I used my existing knowledge of nonprofits and the Internet to develop a list of organizations that corresponded loosely

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<sup>2</sup> Full transcripts will be made available upon request.

with the eight types of nonprofit organizations recognized by the IRS: charitable, religious, educational, scientific, literary, testing for public safety, fostering amateur sports competition and preventing cruelty to children or animals.<sup>3</sup> I sought nine nonprofits, however, because I wanted to include both types of cruelty prevention organizations.

I then contacted these organizations to secure interviews with nonprofit employees who were familiar with the organizations' brands. In total, I contacted 26 organizations to secure nine interviews. The nine interviews, which lasted between 40 and 60 minutes each, were conducted over the phone between February 7 and March 29, 2013. Once transcribed in their entirety, the transcripts ranged from 11 to 21 pages.

Those interviewed include:

**Miriam Hansen: Brand, Advertising & Design Director, American Heart Association, February 11, 2013.**

The American Heart Association works in a variety of ways to fight heart disease and stroke. It funds research, advocates for public health policies and provides information and education related to healthcare and healthy living (e.g. CPR training). This organization was founded in 1924 and has nearly 2,700 employees and more than 22.5 million volunteers.

**Kelly Morton: Senior Manager of Marketing, Best Friends Animal Society, March 29, 2013.**

Best Friends is an animal welfare organization that operates a no-kill animal sanctuary in Utah and partners with local governments and other organizations across

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for more information on the IRS's categorization of organizations. 13

the country to end the killing of homeless pets in shelters. Best Friends, which was founded in 1984 and has roughly 450 employees on staff, started the No More Homeless Pets Network, which includes 1,000 animal organizations.

**Jeff Cronin: Director of Communications, Center for Science in the Public Interest, March 14, 2013.**

CSPI is a health advocacy organization focused on food safety and nutrition. This organization is known for publishing studies on nutritional quality in its Nutrition Action Healthletter and for advocating for government policies that promote food safety. This organization was founded in 1971 and has around 60 employees on staff.

**Daniel Li: Director of Interactive & Creative Services, International Justice Mission, February 20, 2013.**

IJM is a human rights organization that works to rescue and restore victims of slavery, trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of oppression around the world. It does this through victim relief, aftercare, prosecuting perpetrators and transforming justice systems. IJM was founded in 1997 and has more than 500 employees on staff worldwide, roughly 100 of whom work at the U.S. headquarters and roughly 90% of whom are nationals of the countries in which they work.

**Emily Martin: Director of Communication, iGo Global, February 7, 2013.**

iGo Global is a Christian missions organization that trains and sends high school and college students on mission trips to areas with unreached people groups. This organization was founded in 2011 and has a staff of 12.

**John Ellis: Vice President for Communications, The Pittsburgh Foundation,  
February 22, 2013.**

The Pittsburgh Foundation is a community foundation that enables individuals or organizations to set up funds that, in turn, finance grants for nonprofits that work in the Pittsburgh community. This organization was founded in 1945, has over 1,700 individual funds and total assets of \$900 million.

**Jay Brown: Director of Integrated Marketing, Reading is Fundamental,  
February 15, 2013.**

Reading is Fundamental is a children's literacy organization that gives books and literacy resources to underserved children. This organization was founded in 1966 and has 26 employees and more than 400,000 volunteers.

**Liz Mester: Director of Development, WINGS for Kids, March 25, 2013.**

WINGS provides social and emotional education in an after-school program for elementary school kids in Title I schools. This organization operates these programs at four schools in North Charleston, South Carolina, and two schools in Atlanta. It was founded in 1996 and has 18 full-time employees.

**Jan Walther: Senior Director of Brand Development & Marketing, YMCA  
of the USA, March 15, 2013.**

YUSA is the national resource office of the 2,700 YMCAs in the United States. These local Y's provide programs related to youth development, healthy living and social responsibility for more than 10,000 communities across the country.

## **Results**

RQ1 asked how nonprofit organizations work to develop their brand identities through actions, standards or language. All of the organizations represented in this study had undertaken specific brand development efforts within the last several years. Though the scale of these efforts differed, their prevalence demonstrated a sample-wide recognition of the importance of strong brands.

### **Actions**

The most basic brand development undertakings were efforts to streamline an organization's look and language. Emily Martin of iGo Global stated, "We have worked really hard over the last four years or so to try to unify the things we put out." Their efforts included using the color green in their promotional materials, setting a standard font and size and emphasizing that they do not just send students on mission trips but "mobilize and train" them.

Efforts to streamline a brand's look and language suggest that organizations recognized that inconsistencies could cause confusion, send the wrong messages or damage their brand equity. A number of organizations had worked or were currently working with outside design, branding and advertising agencies to streamline the looks of their brands. Jeff Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest said that the organization hired a graphic design agency in 2006 for a logo redesign, and Jon Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation said the organization was currently working with an advertising agency to choose a new typeface, put a brand standards guide into place and develop a new tagline. Ellis stated:

What we want is this brand to tie everything together because it's very disparate right now, so I mean right down to letterhead and business cards and the way the look is maintained throughout the organization.

Ellis's notion that the brand should tie everything together is in line with Aaker's (1996) broader statement that "a brand identity ... provides direction, purpose, and meaning for a brand" (p. 69).

WINGS for Kids worked with an outside graphic design agency when it was founded in 1996, but brand development work has been ongoing. Liz Mester said:

The founder of WINGS came from a design firm ... and she worked with that firm to create the visual identity of Wings ... picking fonts, picking the blue colors that we wanted for the Pantones ... also having a slew of words that we use when we talk about Wings, so innovative, fresh, fun, effective.... The logo was created with them as well.... I've been here for 5 years, and we've had three websites, so we're constantly updating our look. It wasn't until maybe three to four years ago that we incorporated new colors.... We've incorporated a new font, and that's been shared with the whole staff.

Though WINGS staff members had been intentional with the brand's look from the organization's founding, they have continued updating it over time. This suggests that they saw the potential for their brand look to grow stagnant if it did not adapt and evolve.

## Language

Whereas these organizations focused largely on the visual side of their brand identities, others partnered with advertising, design and branding agencies for broader brand development that placed additional emphasis on language. Daniel Li of International Justice Mission stated:

We're actually going through a brand refresh.... A lot of changes to some visual elements, from the logo to maybe our font choices, color palette. Some of the language we're going to try to make more accessible, try to wipe out the ... very verbose or very academic sounding mission statement to something that's a little more digestible. We don't want people going, 'Oh, this is a completely new organization,' but to address the accessibility to a global audience.

Like the WINGS brand, the IJM brand has had to adapt over time. For IJM, the adaptation was the result of changing needs and audiences. Li stated:

Fifteen years ago when Gary Haugen first started the organization.... the brand itself, the feel and our original logo, the way in which we talk[ed] about ourselves, the way in which we told stories ... it was all being geared toward us being able to successfully conduct our casework, so it intentionally looked professional. It intentionally looked like a law firm.... That worked for the beginning of the organization back in the day. But you can imagine that time has evolved, and .... For students or say ... a stay-at-home mom.... You can see how that brand didn't necessarily translate, so for us it's been an evolution of keeping

the things that we feel like are non-negotiable [and] rediscovering how we can make our brand work for this entirely new side that ... the original brand wasn't created on the backend of napkins to try to actually address.

Jay Brown of Reading is Fundamental, which recently partnered with an advertising agency to develop a new font, new logo, illustrations for collateral material and a style guide, explained how RIF's messages also had to be adapted to better suit the organization's audiences. He stated:

We've just gone through this whole brand refresh.... In the last few years or so [we] have been more academic than I think is necessary. I think it speaks to the practitioners and our allies in the nonprofit field, but it doesn't speak to the parents, so we're working to align a lot of our messaging ... with that.

### **Organization and Brand Architecture**

Best Friends Animal Society, which readdressed its brand strategy in 2009 in preparation for the organization's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, focused its brand development efforts less on the visuals or language and more on the organization itself. In this regard, Best Friends' approach lined up with Aaker's brand-as-organization perspective, which focuses on attributes of the organization itself. Kelly Morton stated:

We did go through a formal brand strategy process.... We really just did a lot of discovery work, looking [at] the current communications of the organization, the current philosophy of the organization, really solidified "No More Homeless Pets" as the mission of the organization, and then identified kind of the three basic brand strategy categories—which are business description ... personality traits [and] our positioning and how we wanted to differentiate from our competition.

The brand development efforts of the American Heart Association and the YMCA were the most comprehensive of all the organizations studied, spanning years and involving more preliminary research and greater changes to the overall architecture of the brands. Jan Walther of YUSA stated:

[We] did what we called a “brand revitalization” that was launched in July of 2010.... We worked with an agency called Siegel and Gale out of New York City, and they helped us go through all the things that would happen in a Y, so we made lists of programs, services, everything we could think of, and kind of threw those all on the table and then kind of organized that in our brand architecture....

[We] wanted to position ourselves as the Y for youth development, the Y for healthy living and the Y for social responsibility. And then under each of those, there are four subcategories that grouped our programs and services.

After addressing the brand architecture, the brand revitalization team from the YMCA determined the values behind the brand, defined their organization’s voice, chose a new logo and developed standards for elements such as photographs, headlines and color schemes. The initial categorization of offerings under youth development, healthy living or social responsibility not only guided the rest of the brand revitalization but also enabled YMCA employees to articulate what the organization does more clearly. This will be further addressed in the results section devoted to RQ3A.

The American Heart Association launched what Miriam Hansen called its “rebranding” in 2010. The rebranding included an updated logo and new guidelines, but, like the YMCA’s efforts, started with the brand architecture. Hansen said of their efforts:

We did a three-year branding study to look at the trends of our brands in the marketplace.... We came to realize that we had created a lot of small brands—sub-brands outside of our brand.... It was actually causing consumers confusion.... We cleaned up our brand architecture, and we started to align all of our cause marketing efforts and sub-brands and realign it back to the major brand, and we have a lot stricter guidelines now about just going off and creating a brand new logo or a program name just because it's a new initiative.

Aaker (1996), too, has noted the confusion that can be caused by secondary brands. “In many organizations today there is a proliferation of brands and brand extensions and a bewildering set of overlapping and often inconsistent brand roles” (p. 266). He stated that organizations must have a clear brand system or architecture, like the one the American Heart Association created, to avoid “creating confusion or using an inconsistent identity” (p. 266).

### **Standards**

The prevalence of brand development efforts—and the interviewees’ own comments—suggest that these organizations’ portrayals of their brands have not always have been as consistent and intentional as possible. Many of their brand development efforts involved the creation of style guides or brand standards to ensure consistent portrayal in the future.

The American Heart Association’s rebranding involved launching a website complete with branding guidelines, logo files, images and templates for marketing purposes and a document that details the association’s brand promise, story, voice, message and personality.

Best Friends Animal Society, WINGS for Kids—and, as mentioned earlier, Reading is Fundamental and The Pittsburgh Foundation—also had style guides in place or were in the process of developing them. International Justice Mission and Best Friends both had photography standards in place that not only designated the types of images that could be used but also exemplified the overall brand position and values. Li said:

You never see IJM use photography where there's the proverbial child with a fly on the face. We're very intentional about using images that preserve the dignity of the person because, at the end of the day, that's what we're trying to do.

Morton of Best Friends said:

We're not an organization that's going to show tragic pictures of dying animals or injured animals. We definitely focus on the happy ending—certainly talking about the hard struggles that the animal has but focusing really on the happy ending and showing the true personality of the animal in our photography and other promotions.

The YMCA's brand revitalization—because it extended to 2,700 YMCAs nationwide—involved not only a brand standards guide but also the creation of a brand resource center and the formation of a brand compliance team. This team coaches local Y's through the transition process to see that all will be fully compliant with the new standards by the end of 2015. The existence of such a team suggests that those within the YMCA understood both the difficulty and the importance of maintaining consistency in brand portrayal.

Another way that organizations worked to standardize their brand portrayal was through frequent internal communication about the brand and periodic evaluations of

whether employees exemplified the brand values. This will be further discussed in the section devoted to RQ3A.

RQ2 asked how nonprofit organization employees articulate their brand identities, brand positions, brand images and brand value propositions.

### **Brand identities**

Aaker (1996) defines brand identity as “a unique set of brand associations that ... represent what the brand stands for and imply a promise to customers,” (p. 68).

Interviewees tended to articulate their brand identities in terms of their organizations’ missions. Though Aaker does not include mission as part of his Brand Identity Planning Model, mission has been discussed in other literature, which often addresses it as part of an organization’s mission statement. Falsey (as cited in Williams, 2008), speaking of for-profit organizations, said that an organization’s mission statement, “tells two things about a company: who it is and what it does” (p. 3)

Williams (2008) pointed out that “In addition to conveying a corporation’s nature and reason for being, this statement may also outline where a firm is headed; how it plans to get there; what its priorities, values, and beliefs are; and how it is distinctive” (p. 3).

Along with what the organization does, these were the types of details interviewees were likely to articulate when explaining their brand identities.

Martin defined iGo’s brand identity in terms of what the organization does:

We’re a mission organization, and we focus primarily on training and mobilizing high school and college students to go overseas and to work with missionaries

who are on the field.... Mobilizing and training have become a greater focus rather than just sending.... so that has obviously played a huge role in our brand identity.

Brown of Reading is Fundamental, too, defined the brand identity in terms of both what the organization does and its reason for being:

We have three components. We're electric, empowering and innovative. And when you talk about an organization, what we do is we give books to kids in need in underserved communities.

When explaining IJM's brand identity, Li even used the word "mission," explaining what IJM does, its reason for being and its goals. His explanation also shed light on the organization's priorities, values and beliefs:

With us at IJM the brand itself starts from the work that we do. So if you want to boil it down to like a mission statement, it would be: the mission of IJM is being a leading global human rights organization dedicated to rescuing and restoring victims of slavery, trafficking, sexual exploitation and other forms of violent oppression around the world and energizing a global movement to resolve these issues.

Hansen of the American Heart Association also articulated the brand identity in terms of goals, which related both to the organization's reason for being and to where it is headed:

We have a 2020 goal to reach by the year 2020, and I think that puts into perspective where we are today with our brand. It's to reduce risk and death from both cardiovascular disease and stroke by 20% of all Americans by 2020.

## **Brand images**

When asked about their organizations' brand images, which Aaker (2006) defines as the public's perceptions of a brand, many interviewees explained that members of the public, despite being aware of their organizations, do not understand what their organizations do.

This suggests that people may grasp some portion of these organizations' missions but not the whole of them.

Hansen of the American Heart Association revealed that members of the public know what the organization is but not what it does or its reason for being:

We have really high awareness for our brand by the name, so the name's what carries our weight; it's the American Heart Association. People know our name, and our awareness is between 94 and 96 percent, which is extremely high. The problem is they know our name, but they don't know what we do. They can't really articulate what we do, and there's a lot of confusion like "American Heart Association are the ones we give blood to." No, that's the wrong nonprofit.

Brown of Reading is Fundamental articulated the similar problem:

A lot of what I hear from people when I work with them through RIF is that, you know, "I remember RIF from my childhood. Wow, you guys are still around." So it's sort of this memory of old PSAs.... People remember those and remember that we are involved in reading, obviously because of our name, but not necessarily clear on what it is we are doing, that we actually get books to underserved children, and they're not as clear on the real issues that RIF is fighting for.

Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation stated that members of the public tend to know only part of what his organization does. Speaking of the organization's brand image, he said:

It's an interesting thing because it depends on the audience you're talking to.... I did some rough calculation, and I numbered 18 different components that feed into who we are. So someone out in the public could pick one of 18 things, and in their mind, that's what The Pittsburgh Foundation is.

Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest, too, revealed that some people do not know what CSPI does or its reason for being:

Some people see CSPI and think "Oh, that's the Consumer Product Safety Commission." It's this big jumble of words, right? And every once in a while, as communications director, I will get a call from someone saying, "What do you guys think about the new Mars rover vehicle?" or "What do you think of this particle accelerator in Switzerland?" So I think our name misleads people into thinking that we're concerned with basic science, and our name doesn't really communicate our more narrow focus on nutrition and food safety and food.

Walther of the YCMA also stated that members of the public know what the Y is but do not know all of what it does or its reason for being:

One of the things that most people recognize the Y for is either as a place to work out, place to swim—we call that "gym and swim"—a place for kids, for camp and childcare and swimming lessons and so forth. But the majority of the other things that we do, very few people recognize that, and so we know that people are very familiar with the Y, but they have a very narrow setting.

Mester of WINGS for Kids also articulated that brand image problems arise when member of the public misunderstand what the organization does:

What's hard is that people think they know what we do when really they don't.

They hear WINGS for Kids, teaching social and emotional learning after school.

They think that we're teaching self-esteem to kids.... It's difficult because sometimes you have to tell them, tell the general public, you don't know what you think you know, and let me tell you what we really do.

Misunderstanding can be detrimental to brands because it hinders people from seeing effectiveness and differentiating among organizations, which have been found to increase donations. The public's misunderstanding of what organizations do will be addressed further in the discussion section, where it is considered in light of the concept of mission, and ways to communicate mission and work are provided.

### **Brand positions and brand value propositions**

Whereas brand image is the public's perception of a brand, brand position, according to Aaker (1996), is "the part of the brand identity and value proposition to be actively communicated to the target audience" (p. 71). Most interviewees stated that relevance and impact—or the difference made—were the aspects of the brand that they were most concerned with projecting to the public. Some articulated their brand positions in terms of what they wanted the public to know or feel about them.

Explaining what the American Heart Association strove to project to the public, Hansen stated:

Through many years of research, we do know—and I think this is probably for most industries—you want to be relevant. Consumers aren't going to pay

attention unless they understand how you're relevant, so the part for us is that we help you and your loved ones live longer.... One of the things research told us that is truly relevant is ... that we can help you live longer so that you can spend more time with those you love....

One of our differentiators and one thing that we are able to say is that we do save lives, and that's, you know, not all nonprofits are able to say that, so saving lives and impact [on] the lives of your loved ones is really key.

This relates to the idea of mission because it touches on what the organization does, its reason for being and its distinctiveness. Brown of Reading of Fundamental also addressed mission when articulating what the organization projects and how it aims to be perceived:

We want to be the organization that people think of when they're thinking of an organization that really delivers on its mission in a very compelling, energetic way, [that] we're going to do a lot with whatever support you give us.

Li, too, stated that International Justice Mission focuses on both impact and what differentiates IJM from other organizations concerned with similar issues:

Overall what IJM wants to be known for doing is, with the high degree of excellence and integrity, we want to show that this change is possible.... There are a lot of really great organizations that bring a lot of resources and tools to bring awareness and to educate the global audience on the issues.... What sets IJM apart is the fact that we are doing something to end it, end modern day slavery as the crucial source, and it is not just building awareness ... but to say we have a very unique model in that we're saying we're addressing rule of law.

He was explaining that, unlike organizations that work only to bring awareness to human trafficking and other injustices, IJM combats the problems by addressing rule of law—identifying brokenness and corruption within justice systems, working to correct them and having perpetrators prosecuted through them. In discussing IJM’s brand position, Li was also describing aspects of the mission: what the organization does, its reason for being and its distinctiveness.

Interviewees also noted impact—or the difference made—as a way in which organizations demonstrated value to supporters and a reason why people chose to support their organizations. Martin of iGo stated:

Our financial supporters ... obviously to want to back what we’re doing, so they see themselves as making a difference and part of a team that’s doing this work, and I think they see themselves as helpful, contributing to the ministry.

Hansen of the American Heart Association said:

So some of the drivers [for supporters] in some of the research we’ve done ... it’s usually the impact. What’s the impact that I have by giving to this organization? And some of the messages that really have resonated with our target audience have been around childhood obesity or children’s health in general. There is a desire to make a difference in the lives of children.

It is logical that these organizations articulate the value they provide supporters in terms of their impact and what they do because most do not have products with which to provide value. Center for Science in the Public Interest was the exception to this, exemplifying Aaker’s brand-as-product perspective as a result, because it did sell a product. Cronin said of CSPI’s supporters:

Unlike a group like the Sierra Club [which] is asking people to join an organization, an advocacy organization, for advocacy's sake, and maybe ... get a newsletter or a magazine in return, for us it's different.... A higher percentage of our subscribers probably see themselves as customers paying for a publication [Nutrition Action Healthletter] from a nonprofit, well-respected publisher. I think it might be more transactional than what happens at a lot of organizations.

Hansen also mentioned products, but exemplified the brand-as-symbol perspective, when she noted the value provided to consumers through the American Heart Association's nutritional checkmark. She said:

We have the heart with the check in it, and that's our nutritional certification mark, so you'll see it on products, consumer goods, foods that meet certain nutrition criteria.... It's kind of a recognition mark that we want consumers to see and know that it's a good product for them to choose from.

Though interviewees' descriptions of their brands shed light on their current states, a look at the effect of the organizations on brand development reveals more about how they got there. RQ3A asked how nonprofit organizations support and emphasize the development of their brand identities through their employees, values and customs. The organizations in this study supported their brand development by communicating internally about their brands, fostering organizational cultures based on the brand's values and treating staff members and volunteers or supporters as brand representatives.

### **Employees and customs**

Internal communication about the brand was a primary way by which organizations supported and emphasized their brand development. This

communication tended to take place in meetings, retreats and orientation activities, and it served as a way to keep the brand at the forefront of employees' and volunteers' minds.

Martin of iGo Global stated:

Within the staff, we are reminded of it in staff meetings, and we have monthly off-site meetings that our staff go to and our staff retreat every year.... All of our events we talk about what our vision is, of mobilizing and training students.

Morton of Best Friends Animal Society said:

When we first documented the brand strategy, I did educational sessions without the organization with the different division and departmental meetings, and we also talk about it in new employee orientation ... but I think there's still lots of opportunity to keep it in the forefront. We do have a regular internal newsletter that goes out, so there's opportunities to put stories and reminders in that.... We have an all-staff meeting, so [the CEO] is really good about weaving the core messages into the speech he gives at the all-staff meeting.

Many interviewees also stated that internal communication about the brand took place during the brand development efforts detailed in the section on RQ1.

Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation, speaking of their brand development work:

We've engaged staff right from the out, and after the ad agency came up with proposals, we showed those proposals to staff and they were very forthright about stuff they liked and the stuff they didn't.

Brown of Reading is Fundamental:

When we did the new brand ... we did a lot of work with the staff to make sure they understand it and that they kind of got a sense, as things were changing, of why and how they were changing.

For the YMCA, in particular, the brand revitalization efforts—and the internal communication that took place as a result—were what finally enabled staff members to articulate the brand publically in ways in which they previously had been unable to.

Walther said:

The Y has so much going on. We had [one] CEO who came to our CEO meetings [during the brand revitalization process], and ... when we presented the areas of focus—youth development, healthy living and social responsibility—to this group of about 20 CEOs ... he stands up, and he goes, "I can't believe it.... For the first time in my 40 years with the Y, I can actually describe what we do." ... And he was like, "You know, everybody asks me what the Y is, and ... I never had a short, succinct way to say, and now I can: The Y for youth development, healthy living and social responsibility."

This demonstrates that internal communication about the brand facilitates external communication about the brand. By keeping employees informed about the brand, the YMCA enabled these employees to be more prepared brand representatives. This example also supports Aaker's statement (as cited in Berry, 2000) that "When a brand identity and position are clear, they help all employees gauge their actions in terms of a central strategy" (p. 135). Further analysis of the application of Aaker's model to the organizations studied will be provided in the discussion section.

## **Employees and values**

Another way in which these nonprofits supported brand development was by promoting the brand values within the organizational culture. This relates to Aaker's brand-as-organization perspective, which focuses on organizational attributes. Multiple interviewees said that employees were evaluated on how well they represented brand values.

When articulating International Justice Mission's brand identity, Li discussed IJM's core internal values, "being Christian, being professional, and being bridge-building," and these values served as a basis of evaluation for employees. He stated:

We're very intentional about [communicating within the organization about the brand values]. It starts from day one as an employee. When you first start at IJM, you actually go through what we call training week, literally five days of education and understanding of IJM culture, our history.... Then [we] have the periodic reinforcement that we do throughout the year reminding ourselves of these core values....

We actually do evaluate annual performance on those values, and one of the things we do is rate whether or not this individual, this employee, has exhibited or embodied the core values.

Mester described WINGS' internal communication and evaluations similarly:

We do a lot of professional development and bonding as a staff.... What we have to work hard on, through these trainings and through these Soar Sessions and professional development opportunities, [is] really teaching everybody what the culture is.... It's what we teach, especially to new staff when they join

WINGS.... Our CEO absolutely 100% lives WINGS, and it trickles down all the way into volunteers, so it's very top to bottom, everybody lives this brand....

We have evaluations—a six-month evaluation, a year-end evaluation. A lot of what each employee is evaluated on is if they're living the culture of WINGS, so whether they are able to be flexible... if they're able to work well as a team, if they are able to persevere and not give up. Things like that, that we're teaching to kids, we are also learning and being—quote, unquote—tested ourselves as a corporate staff.

These evaluations demonstrated that staff members were seen as stewards or representatives of the brand. This reflects Berry's (2000) statement that those who work for service organizations “are a powerful medium for building brand meaning and equity” and that they “make or break a brand” (p. 135). For some organizations, this idea of brand stewardship also extended to volunteers or financial supporters.

Hansen of the American Heart Association:

We have about 3,000 staff, but we have about 22,000 [or] 23,000 volunteers, and we treat those volunteers as staff, and they are as involved, and they are very passionate ... so I think those that work for the organization are very passionate and care about what we do and the mission.

Morton of Best Friends said of supporters:

The people that we do have are super loyal and completely satisfied with their experience with Best Friends, so I think once we get them into the organization, their work from a brand advocacy perspective is amazing.

Mester, speaking of the college students who lead the after-school WINGS programs, said, “The part-time staff, our college students, they do know the brand. They are the brand. They are literally the brand on the ground every day.”

Organizational cultures and attributes do not always positively affect brand development, however. RQ3B asked how nonprofit organizations oppose and hinder the development of their brand identities through their employees, values and customs.

### **Employees and customs**

Just as internal communication about the brand was one way in which organizations supported brand development, failure to communicate internally about the brand hindered brand development by leaving staff members unprepared and unable to articulate their brands publically. Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest gave this example:

A few months ago I was doing a mock radio interview with one of our nutritionists who was preparing to do some media around one of the studies we were putting out.... My last question was something like—with me being the radio interviewer—“Okay, so finally, we have about 90 seconds left. Can you tell us a little about CSPI and who you are and what you do?” And she blanked out, meaning she didn't have that at the tip of her tongue....

We have people here who work in very highly specialized roles. An epidemiologist in our food safety department is probably not going to know what's going on in the pages of Nutrition Action Healthletter. A dietician on that staff is probably not going to know a heck of a lot of what we're doing in Congress advocating on soda taxes.... It's a challenge because most people are

pretty focused on their highly specialized role and aren't in the position of having to articulate our brand. Certainly anyone here who is in the position of speaking to the media could do it, but we could probably do a better job with a good chunk of our staff.

As discussed under RQ3A, many organizations view their employees as representatives or stewards of the brand. When these brand stewards are unable to communicate clearly about what the organization does, they can misrepresent the brand and lose opportunities to increase awareness and understanding.

Another aspect of some organizations that seemed to hinder brand development was the lack of communication among separate departments. Multiple interviewees referred to their departments as being like “silos.” Hansen of the American Heart Association stated:

The one thing from the operational standpoint that has a negative impact is we are structured very silo, so our communication are one arm, but we have another department that oversees the development of programs, and so they're separate from us, and there isn't a traditional marketing department, so marketing efforts and campaign efforts are all kind of mixed in there, attached to individual programs, and the reason we're structured that way is because of our funding model.... A sponsor is funding one program, so staff are delegated based on that one program with that one set of funding, and they have to work to independently, so it creates silos.

Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation explained a similar problem, which his organization has moved away from in recent years:

The leadership here changed five years ago, and thank goodness it did because in those five years we've really made some giant leaps in terms of progress, but the reason I float back to this is ... it was certainly an obstacle to development, to overall progress: every department here operated as its own silo. You had development: "We're all about donors; we don't need to know about grant making." And then you had the program department, which is grant making: "Oh, we're grant making. We don't need to know about donors. We just make sure we know where the money's going to go." And finance: "Well, you're both wrong because the most important thing is finance and investment, so what we do is the most important." ... And it was like this tension, this tension within the organization.

In addition to failing to communicate internally, organizations hindered brand development through inconsistencies. As Aaker (1996) stated, "Being consistent over time with respect to a brand's identity, position, visual imagery, and theme or slogan is clearly a key to strong brands" (p. 224).

The inconsistencies that had arisen in organizations were much of what was combated by the brand development efforts detailed in the section on RQ1. Walther of the YMCA stated, "You're not supposed to have any other logos now but the Y. We had hundreds and hundreds [before the brand revitalization]. YUSA itself had 182 different logos, and if you take that times 2,700 Y's, tons of logos."

As earlier mentioned, the rebranding efforts by the American Heart Association and Center for Science in the Public Interest, too, addressed confusion and inconsistencies caused through the use of multiple logos and too many sub-brands.

Cronin of Center for Science in the Public Interest stated:

In 2006 we did our logo redesign. [There had been] an uneven hodgepodge of the logos that were in use here around 2005.... One version on the web, another version on the letterhead.... We had no one really policing its usage across the organization in our materials.

Working toward consistency, on the other hand, can help organizations build stronger brands and facilitate public understanding of mission. The importance of mission and public understanding is discussed in more detail in the next section.

### **Discussion**

The interviews revealed that the nonprofit brands studied fit some of Aaker's four brand perspectives better than others. The perspective that fit best was that of brand-as-organization, which, according to Aaker, focuses on the organizational attributes created by people, culture, values and programs. International Justice Mission and WINGS for Kids serve as clear examples of nonprofits whose brand identities reflect the cultures of the organizations and vice versa.

Mester of WINGS stated:

We tout that we are innovative and we're fresh and we're fun. That is something that we carry over into our organization, and so just as we try and succeed at

offering kids a really fun, energized program, we also try to maintain that in our corporate environment as well—being fresh, being innovative, being fun—really trying hard to stand out against other youth-serving organizations.

Li of International Justice Mission articulated a similar relationship between brand and organization.

Here's a little bit of our brand culture. We're a business-formal environment. We wear suits and ties to work like every day. We have no casual Fridays, and the people in the field practice the same dress code as well, especially when they're going to court or meeting government officials. And for us we believe that, if we believe these clients [are] worthy of the best services that we can provide, [then] we want to be able to communicate that through everything that we do, even if that means looking like lawyers, having a business card that makes us look professional and [being] dressed professionally, and that works.

The brand-as-product perspective, which focuses on product scope, attributes, quality or value, uses and users, was the least applicable to these nonprofit organizations. It did, however, apply in the case of Center for Science in the Public Interest, which is known largely for the Nutrition Action Healthletter that it sells to subscribers. Ellis of The Pittsburgh Foundation even noted that his brand cannot be built around a product because the organization does not offer one. When describing the brand identity, he said, “It’s not [as if] we make nuts and bolts, where we can say, ‘We make the best nuts and bolts in the world.’”

The brand-as-person and brand-as-symbol perspectives also fit some organizations better than others. The brand-as-symbol perspective, which focuses on

visual imagery and metaphors, was clearly seen in the example of the American Heart Association, whose recognizable food certification checkmark reminds consumers of the organization and what it stands for. Hansen stated:

We have the heart with the check in it, and that's our nutritional certification mark, so you'll see it on products, consumer goods, foods that meet certain nutrition criteria.... It's kind of a recognition mark that we want consumers to see and know that it's a good product for them to choose from.... We are—this is verbatim what consumers tell us—we are, kind of, a sacred trust with the content that consumers get from us.

Best Friends Animal Society, the YMCA, WINGS for Kids and Reading is Fundamental all exemplified the brand-as-person perspective, which focuses on brand personality and brand-customer relationships. Morton stated that Best Friends' "personality traits are positive, dedicated and empowering." Other interviewees hinted at their brand personalities when they spoke of their brands' voices. Walther of the YMCA stated:

How do we want to represent ourselves as an organization by our voice? We determined the characteristics of [that], which was determined, welcoming, genuine, hopeful.

Mester of WINGS for Kids also made the connection between voice and personality. She said, "We have a really fun voice.... It's not stiff and stuffy because we're not stiff and stuffy."

Though Aaker's four perspectives can and do help explain the brands of these organizations, there are aspects of each brand that do not fit clearly into any of the four

categories. The theory developed through this research helps to cover the brand aspects insufficiently covered by Aaker's model.

## **Theory**

Coding and analysis of the interview transcripts revealed a number of telling concepts, the most significant of which is the concept of brand-as-mission. When describing their brand identities—as well as their brand images, positions and value propositions—interviewees tended to articulate them, as detailed under RQ2, in terms of their organizations' missions.

This suggests an addition to Aaker's brand perspectives as they apply to nonprofit organizations. It leads to the theory that, when applied to nonprofit organizations, the Brand Identity Planning Model should include the perspective of brand-as-mission. This perspective, informed by the definitions of mission provided by Falsey and Williams (2008), would encompass what the nonprofit organization does, its reason for existence, its direction or goals; its priorities, values and beliefs; and its distinctiveness.

The usefulness of a brand-as-mission perspective is supported by the fact that the missions of the organizations studied have played a fundamental role in their brand development efforts. For instance, the YMCA's brand revitalization involved first categorizing the organization's services and programs by the Y's three focus areas: youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. This categorization shed light on what the organization does, its reason for existence and its priorities and values, all of which are aspects of mission.

Similarly, Morton stated that those at Best Friends “solidified ‘No More Homeless Pets’ as the mission of the organization,” as part of their brand strategy work before they identified their business descriptions, personality traits and positioning.

Li, too, stressed the centrality of mission to his organization’s brand. He called the mission the “core” of IJM’s brand identity:

The mission of IJM is being a leading global human rights organization dedicated to rescuing and restoring victims ... of violent oppression around the world and energizing a global movement to resolve these issues. Just, kind of, at its core, that's our brand identity, what we want to be known for.

The unique importance of mission for nonprofits is supported by previous research on nonprofits’ mission statements. Kirk and Nolan (2010) said, “Mission statements often are viewed as more important to nonprofit organizations than to for-profit entities.... This view derives from the belief that, lacking a profit motive, nonprofit organizations rely on a mission statement to articulate their *raison d’être*” (p. 474).

Two others concepts that emerged during the coding and relate to the idea of brand-as-mission include (1) the public’s misunderstanding of what organizations do and (2) the need to demonstrate impact as a reason for support.

The first concept, the public’s misunderstanding of what organizations do, was exemplified in the discussion of brand image under RQ2. Many organizations have found that, despite the public’s high awareness of their brands, members of the public simply do not know or cannot articulate what their organizations do. For example, as in the case of Reading is Fundamental, the public may know what the organization stands for but fail to realize what it does. As Brown stated:

People remember ... that we are involved in reading ... but [are] not necessarily clear on what it is we are doing, that we actually get books to underserved children, and they're not as clear on the real issues that RIF is fighting for.

For others, as in the case of WINGS for Kids, which provides social and emotional education for children, members of the public may misunderstand what they do. Mester stated:

What's hard is that people think they know what we do when really they don't. They hear WINGS for Kids, teaching social and emotional learning after school. They think that we're teaching self-esteem to kids.... Sometimes you have to tell them... you don't know what you think you know, and let me tell you what we really do.

For others still, as in the case of Center for Science in the Public Interest, members of the public may be completely off-base in their assumptions about what an organization does. All of these brand image issues stem not from a lack of awareness but from a misunderstanding or an unclear picture of the mission of the organization.

This is a problem because, according to past research by Faircloth (2005), respect and differentiation, not brand awareness, positively influenced people's interest in donating to specific nonprofits. If awareness alone does not generate financial support, organizations need to communicate their missions, specifically their distinctiveness, work and reason for being, to gain the respect that will result in financial support. Similarly, O'Neil (2008) found in her study on the relationship between nonprofits' communication and donor trust that "communicating the mission and work in promotional efforts is one way nonprofit organizations can foster a strong relationship with donors" (p. 266).

Communicating an organization's work and mission also relates to the second concept, the need to demonstrate impact as a reason for support. As detailed under RQ2, one of the messages organizations are most concerned with communicating is that they are making an impact. They want to be known for delivering on their missions, making a difference, using support effectively and helping people. This goes hand in hand with previous research that suggests that, when differentiating among organizations, people show particular concern for organizations' efficiency and effectiveness. Communicating the work that an organization has done is a primary way both to demonstrate impact and to explain the mission to the public.

Organizations can communicate their missions, particularly what they do and their reason for being, in a number of ways. They can teach staff members and other supporters how to talk about their brands and missions, thereby making sure brand representatives are ready to share organizations' work with the public. As in the cases of the YMCA CEO and the CSPI nutritionist who experienced difficulty articulating the brand to others, organizations lose opportunities to communicate their missions when their own employees have not been taught how to do so. Like the YMCA and the American Heart Association, organizations also can straighten out their brand architecture, which should be built on the mission itself, so that work can be both seen and articulated more clearly in terms of the big picture.

Additionally, nonprofits can tell the stories of their supporters and those whom they have helped. Storytelling was a way in which many of the organizations represented,

including iGo Global, Reading is Fundamental, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Best Friends and WINGS strove both to demonstrate their impact and articulate their missions.

Finally, communication about what an organization does must itself be consistent with the overall brand and mission. Just as International Justice Mission and Best Friends Animal Society set photography guidelines that stayed true to their overall goals, values and distinctiveness, other organizations should make sure that their materials and messages represent the mission itself.

By evaluating and developing their brands in light of the brand-as-mission perspective, nonprofit organizations can ensure that their messages and efforts line up with their work, reasons for existence, goals and distinctiveness. Additionally, they can facilitate the consistency that is so important for nonprofits as they strive to differentiate themselves, explain their missions and communicate their effectiveness.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

Due to the non-probability sampling and the small number of organizations studied, these findings are limited and not generalizable. Studies of the 17 organizations that were contacted but not included—as well as studies of the countless other nonprofit organizations that were not contacted—would undoubtedly reveal more information and insights about the brand-building efforts of nonprofits and about the applicability of the perspective of brand-as-mission. More research would reveal which insights gathered in this study are the most universal and which are unique to the sample studied.

### **Future Research**

This study contributes to the field by adapting Aaker's Brand Identity Planning Model to make it more applicable and useful to nonprofit organizations, thereby

providing a new perspective through which researchers and strategists can evaluate and build their brands. Additionally, it provides more information about ways in which nonprofit organizations are working to build their brands and sheds light on ways in which organizations either support or hinder their own brand development efforts. It reveals the actions organizations have taken to strengthen their brands or rebrand entirely and also identifies some of the problems that led organizations to undertake these brand development efforts.

More research could expand upon these findings even further. Future research could address rebranding efforts—for example, the problems or stagnation that lead brands to rebranding or the effects of rebranding efforts on brand image. Research could also address the effects of different types of brand messages on public understanding of organizations' missions. In addition, research could address the ability of organizations' employees to articulate their missions to those outside the organizations. More research about the applicability of the brand-as-mission perspective would also be beneficial and reveal the extent to which it would be useful to other nonprofit brands.

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