

# Identifying the components of the consumer-based brand equity of media outlets

Thematic field: Media industry and society

## Abstract

*Facing technological, social, and economic change, competition in the various media markets is increasing and quality standards are generally high. Thus, a strong brand is of particular relevance for differentiation. To assess the strength of a brand from a consumer's perspective, economic literature refers to the concept of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE). Research on media brands mainly draws on conceptualizations by Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), assessing CBBE quantitatively via the dimensions brand awareness, quality, loyalty, and associations. Due to the specific characteristics of media goods, however, the transfer of these concepts stemming from general brand research should be scrutinized: First, the existing dimensions need to be modified in the context of media brands and potential other dimensions that are constitutive for CBBE of media need to be identified. Secondly, not only the valence of the associations, but what exactly they comprise needs to be determined. Thirdly, research has so far focused mainly on the CBBE of television channels and news media, while other media have rarely been considered. We thus pursued the research question of how CBBE can be conceptualized for media brands, i.e. what dimensions it includes based on associations. Furthermore, we examined how CBBE composition differs between different media outlets. We conducted interviews with n=34 recipients, using free association techniques as recommended for the initial assessment of CBBE, to ask them about their perceptions of brands in the areas of TV shows, podcasts, news programs, and feature films. The transcripts were examined using qualitative content analysis. Results show that brand awareness as a dimension is necessary but not sufficient for the emergence of media CBBE. Depending on the medium, recipients assign different objects of reference (e.g., the competence of the speaker, technical characteristics) to the construct of quality. Habitual behaviour can easily be mistaken for loyalty, which points to the necessity of a distinction between spurious and genuine loyalty. Dimensions that have not been considered so far are the social benefit of prestige and follow-up communication as well as the personal benefit in terms of identification and distinction. In addition, personalization in the sense of ingredient branding plays a decisive role for the CBBE of all brands examined. The results allow an extension of the CBBE conceptualization for media brands and add to its content-validity: The concept should consider different dimensions specific to the media outlet as well as different reference points for quality. In addition, social and person-related dimensions of CBBE should be added. To build strong brands, it is essential for brand managers to gain knowledge about the associations with the brand and the factors that make it distinctive from the consumer's perspective. The results provide detailed information about functional and symbolic brand associations, the emphasis on social benefits and how they contribute to achieving CBBE and genuine loyalty. The adaptation of the CBBE concept from marketing studies proved to be a suitable approach for media brands, which can be further refined considering the specifics of media goods.*

**Keywords:** Customer-based brand equity, media brands, conceptualization, social brand benefits, qualitative research