Ask the Audience: Determining the Organizational Identity of a State Extension Agency

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Abstract

This study explored organizational identity of one state extension agency to determine strategies for building future messaging in external branding materials. Thirty-nine focus groups were conducted to assess how internal audiences (employees and board members) perceive, feel, and think about the organization. Two of the 15 major themes found were 1) Extension is a link between the university and the people and 2) Extension provides research-based, credible information. Participants identified strongly with the vision statement and official slogan communicated by leaders prior to the study. The organization should build upon this identity when solidifying a brand image. Previous research indicates Extension should also proceed with caution regarding the themes of providing valuable services and information for low or no cost and not selling anything.

Key Words

Extension, organizational identity, branding, values, and culture

Introduction

Land-grant institutions celebrate a rich history of improving lives by sharing knowledge, while continually striving "to do more, and to do it better" (Kellogg Commission, 1999, p. 9). Professionals within Extension help individuals and communities make decisions to best serve their needs and improve future conditions (Mitchell & Gillis, 2006). The constant need to demonstrate fiscal responsibility while communicating the value of a public program (Settle at al., 2015) and the limited marketing budgets available to Extension communicators make it critical to use cost-effective strategies and tactics (Baker, Abrams, Irani, & Meyers, 2011).

Extension must market itself to ensure its resources are available and understood by stakeholders and are not merely known by few as the "best kept secret" (DeBord, 2007, para. 1). This can be achieved through developing a strong corporate brand, which can be useful to service-based organizations (Brady, Bourdeau, & Heskel, 2005; Krishnan & Hartline, 2001). Corporate branding is an opportunity for organizations to use vision, culture, and image as a means of promoting services (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Organizational culture is reflected in organizational identity, how members "perceive, feel, and think about their organizations" (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 357). Beyond developing the brand name and graphic elements, corporate branding requires assessment of organizational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Extension communicators must ensure brand strategy is informed by both external and internal perspectives. The purpose of this study is to assess the organizational identity of one state Extension agency to inform strategy for maintaining and strengthening the brand.

Organizational Identity

Organizational identity is "a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organization's distinctive values and characteristics" and "refers broadly to what members perceive, feel, and think about their organizations" (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p 357). Understanding the relationship between organizational, identity, culture, and image allows leaders to "encourage a balanced [organizational] identity able to develop and grow along with changing conditions" (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 1014). Organizational identity is fluid and unstable, not a core, enduring organizational quality. This characteristic means organizational identity can be adaptive in accomplishing desired change if well managed (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000).

Previous research indicates Extension employees at some state agencies have internalized the organization's mission and identify strongly with its values (Scott, 1997; Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998). Torppa and Smith (2009) compared scores of Extension personnel's organizational identity gathered during a period of relative stability and during a time of organizational restructuring. Although the scores were slightly lower in times of restructuring, they were still relatively high, indicating Extension employees have a strong and robust identification with Extension values. The authors agree reductions in organizational identity can be minimized through communicating continuity in values, even in times of change (Bartels et al., 2006; van Dick, Ullrich, & Tissington, 2006; Torppa & Smith, 2009). Continual measurement of organizational identity is needed to determine the success of leaders' efforts to create stability or to shift values to better serve organizational needs.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture involves all members at all levels, is rooted in organizational history, and includes material aspects of the organization, such as names, logos, buildings, leaders, and symbols. The culture develops within the organization and helps to explain the development and maintenance of organizational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Organizational culture is open and available to scrutiny from outside audiences (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Quinn Patton (1987) argued Extension needed to change its cultural norms and shared beliefs to embrace the Information Age to remain relevant and effective in its mission. Extension is held together by strong commitment and tradition (Berrio, 2003), which may make it challenging to create changes in Extension cultural norms.

Organizational Values

Organizational values are one aspect of organizational culture, reflected in organizational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2002). Safrit, Conklin, and Jones (2003) examined how Extension employee values changed between 1991 and 2001. After a baseline assessment in 1991, administrators invested resources to emphasize three concepts not valued by employees: racial/ethical diversity among employees, racial/ethnic diversity among clientele, and Extension as a leader in overall outreach and engagement at the university. The value of racial/ethnic diversity among clientele increased by 41% during the 10-year period and the other two values remained the same. In the overall assessment, 10 of the original 12 values still existed, along with one new value. This study demonstrates organizational values may be slow to change (Safrit et al.). Employees perceived the organizational values most evident in the organization as working with groups of clients, unbiased delivery of information, credibility with clientele, helping people help themselves, and research-based programs (Crossgrove et al., 2005).

Organizational values may have unforeseen negative implications. Hansen (1993) argued "grassroots" and "research-based" values may come into conflict and said priority should be placed

"research-based" in such situations. Additionally, the value of low-cost resources and programs may be an area of concern. While Extension agents may believe providing free or low cost programs is an important component of the mission, external audiences may not value this attribute. External audiences of Extension in Kansas perceived services offered for "free" as lacking quality (Swendson & Baker, 2014). Assessment of internal and external perceptions of the brand is needed to identify areas for improved communication.

Changes and Challenges for Extension Identity

Changes in organizational structure may impact culture, identity, and image (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, 2003). Changes to Extension structure may include increased use of Extension technology (Mitchell & Gillis, 2006), new program areas (Klemme, Hausafus, & Shirer, 2005), and increased integration of family and youth programs into other Extension programs (Braverman, Franz, & Rennekamp, 2012). Iowa State University Extension conducted focus groups to identify employee perceptions related to a newer program area for at-risk audiences (Klemme et al.). The study identified challenges to new program areas, including perceptions the primary mission of the organization is agriculture and at-risk programming is not viewed as part of regular Extension work (Klemme et al.). With Extension's long history, it is necessary to monitor how current internal audiences perceive the organization and how they may impress those perceptions on external stakeholders.

Corporate Branding

Service-based organizations, such as Extension, may benefit from corporate branding (Brady et al., 2005; Krishnan & Hartline, 2001). Employees express organizational identity to outside audiences, leaving impressions that impact the organization's image (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). "Successful companies build their visions from redefinitions and reinventions of core values, rather than revolutionary shifts from one value to the next" (Hatch & Schultz, 2003, p. 1048).

The vision statement leaders at K-State Research and Extension communicated to internal audiences prior to this study was:

> "K-State Research and Extension goal is to create and reinforce the impression that we are: science-based, inclusive, unbiased, practical, and community-focused." (K-State Research and Extension Branding Guidelines, 2014, p. 1)

The vision statement is meant to guide employees in understanding brand values and communicating the values to external audiences. Additionally, employees are made aware of the organization's official slogan, "Knowledge for Life," which is also used in external communication.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to assess perceptions, feelings, and thoughts internal Extension audiences (employees and board members) have toward one state extension agency to understand the organization's current organizational identity. Prior to this study, the organization had not examined how the vision and slogan aligned with internal perceptions of the brand. As this was the organization's first assessment of organizational identity, a qualitative approach was used to gather the participants' unique responses. With this knowledge, organization leaders can determine how to adjust messages to internal audiences, while striving to maintain and strengthen a corporate brand.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How would internal audiences describe Extension to an external stakeholder?
2. How do internal audiences perceive the organization's mission?
3. What do internal audiences perceive to be unique about the services and resources Extension provides?
4. What do internal audiences perceive to be the most important service Extension provides?
5. How does organizational identity align with the organization's vision statement and slogan, communicated to internal audiences prior to this study?

Methodology

This qualitative study used focus groups to gather information on how internal audiences feel and think about K-State Research and Extension to gauge organizational identity. Focus groups are used in marketing research to determine emotional or unconscious factors, which can be difficult to study in survey research (Morgan, 1998). This study assessed notes from 39 focus groups, composed of county Extension agents and board members gathered at four partnership meetings in January and February 2014. Participants represented county and district offices from across Kansas in all discipline areas with diverse years of experience working for the organization or serving on a local board. This convenience sampling method was used to gather information from a large number of internal audiences already gathered.

One researcher, a communication administrator within the organization recruited participants, note-takers, and facilitators for each group. Note-takers were critical, as the setting did not allow for audio recording of the simultaneously conducted focus groups at each location. The researchers designed one moderator's guide and one questioning route, both provided to each group moderator. The communication administrator researcher trained the note-takers and moderators on how to ask questions and take accurate notes. The role of the communication administrator researcher aided in credibility of the note-taker training. Note-takers were members of the population of interest, which offered a level of intuitiveness and in-depth response. Note-takers kept an audit trail, conducted member checks, and debriefed participants. The moderators did not prompt participants by reminding them or providing them with examples of organization values, slogans, or other branding elements. The questioning route consisted of five questions related to describing the organization to others, the mission, what makes it unique, what it stands for, and what service is most important. A panel of experts — Extension administrators — reviewed the questioning route, and changes were made accordingly. The note-takers each used a unique style of recording discussion, leading to potential subjectivities in the responses and a potential loss of data.

The communication administrator researcher created a participant list for each focus group to represent diverse counties and discipline areas. Focus groups ranged in size from four to eight participants, which is within the target range recommended for a homogeneous focus group (Brown, 1999). There were 43 focus groups conducted among the four meeting locations. Each group had one note-taker and one moderator. More than 320 internal audience members participated. Focus group discussions ranged from one hour to one-and-a-half hours in length. Institutional Review Board consent was obtained prior to the start of the study, and all participants signed a consent form and were debriefed by the communication administrator researcher.

Notetakers submitted their group's notes to the lead researcher via email. Forty-three focus groups were conducted, but only 39 sets of notes were submitted in time to be analyzed. Therefore,

39 focus groups are included in this study. The primary researcher analyzed the 39 focus group notes according to Glaser's Constant Comparative Method (Glaser, 1965). This method involved the researcher reviewing data for emergent themes, while constantly comparing to previous themes. The lead researcher used WeftQDA software to facilitate the identification and development of themes.

The lead researcher is an agricultural communication master's student at Kansas State University, which is associated with K-State Research and Extension, who has previous experience interning for another state Extension agency. These experiences may have influenced viewpoints in analyzing focus group notes. Researcher subjectivity is a common concern in qualitative research (Flick, 2009).

Results

Although no emergent themes appeared in all 39 focus groups, 15 themes appeared in more than half of the groups (more than 20 groups). These are recorded here as major themes.

RQ1: How would internal audiences describe Extension to an external stakeholder?

Major Theme: Extension is a link between the university and the people of the state.
This theme appeared in 35 of the focus groups. One participant said, "Extension is the outreach arm of Kansas State University and part of a national organization, as well, where experts collaborate to bring credible, research-based information to the public ..." Another said, "We're the link of the knowledge and resources from Kansas State Uiversity to the residents of the county." Additional keywords and phrases are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension is a link between the university and the people of the state

arm	disseminating
extending	brings the university to the people
linking	Kansas State University in the community
connecting	bringing the university to you
bringing	local source of information supported by KSU
outreach	a way to continue the university experience

Major Theme: Extension is a place to find answers.
This theme appeared in 28 of the groups. One participant described the theme as "if you have questions, go ask the Extension office." Additional phrases are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Phrases describing major theme, Extension is a place to find answers

local library	try to help you find the answer
one-step source	the right answers
can find anything out	the answer people

Another aspect of this theme is the expectation of agents "to work with and answer the question, no matter what." One participant described it as "I know about a lot of things and if I don't, I have

the whole university of specialists to help me find the answer." Another said, "If we don't know, we will find it for you."

RQ 2: How do internal audiences perceive the organization's mission?

Major Theme: Extension provides research-based, credible information.
This theme appeared in 38 of the focus groups. One participant indicated, "All information is research based, not just what you would find on Google." Words such as unbiased, objective, research based, and credible demonstrated this theme. One participant mentioned the mission of Extension is "to provide unbiased information to individuals and local communities." This theme was also demonstrated by mentioning Extension is not affiliated with corporations. "One thing I've enjoyed with KSU Extension is the unbiased opinions, recommendations, and research. They are not bought by big corporations. From the state level to the local level, they maintain integrity."

Major Theme: Extension provides a wide variety of education experiences and opportunities.
This theme appeared in 32 of the focus groups. One participant explained that Extension is "diverse in [the] educational opportunities and experiences" it provides.

Table 3

Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension provides a wide variety of education experiences and opportunities

hands-on	educational programming
co-learning	variety of modes of information
lifelong learning	our purpose is education, not regulation
educating for life	educational source for youth and adults
community classroom	education ranging from rural to urban
teaching and outreach	continuing education for all in the community
local informal educators	many unique ways of disseminating information and knowledge

One participant questioned the way to describe the education Extension provides by asking, "Informal education. Do you use that term?" Another participant mentioned, "Participants are lifelong learners that transgress from participant/user to supporter/promoter over time."

Major Theme: Extension provides valuable resources for low or no cost.
This theme appeared in 31 of the focus groups (see Table 4).
One participant explained, "We don't have a dog in the fight; we're just presenting the facts; people tend to trust more; minimal fees charged as we're not trying to make a living off of others." Internal audiences indicated this was a key aspect of the Extension mission. Extension is "not in it for the money" and must distinguish itself from "scams out there." Extension provides "service without monetary compensation."

Table 4

Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension provides valuable resources for low or no cost

free	low cost or no cost
cheap	you've paid for it already
no charge	it does not cost you a thing
affordable	not commercial/not for sale
mostly free	partially funded through taxes
not for profit	economical because programs are typically free or low cost
no personal cost	

Major Theme: Extension provides knowledge for life.

This theme appeared in 25 of the focus groups. The phrase "knowledge for life" appeared, along with phrases such as "knowledge transfer," "knowledge out to the people," "knowledge for life for all Kansans," "knowledge to practice," and "to empower people through knowledge and skills." One notetaker recorded, "They all agreed. The real buzzword is the 'knowledge for life.'" Another recorded, "The phrase, 'knowledge for life' touches all aspects [of Extension.]" Another said, "Knowledge [is the most important aspect of Extension] because it helps to better our communities."

Major Theme: Extension provides people with information and skills to make decisions and take action in real-life situations.

This theme appeared in 24 of the focus groups. The theme was described in three groups as "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime."

Table 5

Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension provides people with information and skills to make decisions and take action in real-life situations

life skills	solving problems for life
applicable	the client makes the decision
how to live	resource for practical and achievable goals
learn by doing	practical information for everyday life issues
decision making skills	provide information to make better decisions
real-world application	educating people to make informed decisions

This often overlapped with the "knowledge for life" theme, in that Extension provides these skills that can be used throughout life such as the "ability to assess information." In this way, Extension works to "enhance people's ability to live a successful life," by providing skills and "information to apply lifelong." This also relates to the theme of empowerment (mentioned later) in that Extension aims to "give adults confidence to act." One participant described a reason why communities need this aspect of Extension. "As lifestyles change, [there is a] real need for practical knowledge and education. Home [economic] classes, used to teach these skills, but [now the classes are] no longer offered."

Major Theme: Extension improves the quality of life for people.

This theme appeared in 21 of the focus groups. This theme appeared in claims that a critical or the

most important component of Extension is to "improve," "better," or "maintain and improve" the quality of life for people. Another phrase that appeared was "Extension makes a difference in people's lives." Another variation was that Extension helps people to improve their life for themselves or "enhance people's ability to live a successful life."

RQ3: What do internal audiences perceive to be unique about the services and resources Extension provides?

Major Theme: Extension has a presence in every county.
This theme appeared in 30 of the focus groups. Participants stated the local availability of Extension resources and staff was unique and important.

Table 6
Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension has a presence in every county

local	presence in every county
localized	relevant at the local level
local connection	located in every part of the state
we are everywhere	reach all parts of the population
may be accessed locally	boots on the ground in every county

There was also a strong emphasis Extension is a part of the community, evident in the phrases "live in community," "most people know the county agent," "the agent is a member of the community," "local presence felt," "every county has a direct feed to the university," and "agents are real people; we live there and know the community."

Major Theme: Extension addresses community needs on a local level.
This theme appeared in 28 of the focus groups.

Table 7
Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension addresses community needs on a local level

personalized	considerate of local needs
locally driven	reactive to community needs
filter information	counties have different goals
community driven	community run with our boards
fit to the community	helps people solve their own problems
needs of communities	localizing programs to make them more effective

One participant said Extension "helps communities find solutions for issues affecting them, and is driven by local community; [Extension] can bring resources to them at the local level, where they live, grow, and learn."

Major Theme: Extension is trusted and has a solid reputation.
This theme appeared in 27 of the focus groups. One participant said, "We are the best source to get at

the research-based information. [Extension] agent is also viewed as being knowledgeable." Another said, "If it comes from [Extension], it is true."

Table 8
Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension is trusted and has a solid reputation

trusted	a role model
honesty	can't break trust
respect	trusting environment
integrity	truthful and dependable
expertise	feel comfortable going to
helpful trust	trustworthiness of the organization

Note-takers recorded that the "agent/consumer relationship is important," and "high quality." One participant shared an anecdote demonstrating this theme, saying, "I worked in the private business sector eight years, then in watershed. I realized how people perceive K-State Extension; I was shut off, but the K-State Extension name opened the door."

Major Theme: Extension provides a wide range of programs and expertise.
This theme appeared in 23 of the groups.

Table 9
Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension provides a wide range of programs and expertise

one-stop shop	all-encompassing
many subjects	large body of information
the whole gamut	vast availability of expertise
wealth of knowledge	wide variety of program areas
broad-based, very diverse	specialists in many areas of life
extensive knowledge base	information available is unlimited

Sometimes a list of programs was mentioned to demonstrate Extension covers a wide range of topics, such as "program areas of agriculture, family and consumer science, 4-H, and community development." One participant said Extension includes "food systems, not just agriculture."

Major Theme: Extension is for all Kansans.
This theme appeared in 23 of the focus groups. The idea is Extension is "for all Kansas residents" and "for people of diverse backgrounds-socioeconomic, age, and other types of diversity." One of the most common ways this was reflected in the notes was "all ages." This aspect was described as "from birth to death" or "womb to tomb" in three separate groups.

Participants noted there is "something for absolutely everyone in [Extension]" and the organization should "reach all age groups, all backgrounds, [with] no boundaries." It was noted this aspect should to be better promoted as part of the Extension brand. "A misconception of the public is that we're just about youth," said one participant.

Table 10

Keywords and phrases describing major theme, Extension is for all Kansans

everyone	all ages, all-inclusive
to all people	for all the Kansas people
rural to urban	all communities and ages
all Kansans	not limiting to certain income bracket
all walks of life	should reach out to more than just the poor and underprivileged

Major Theme: Extension is not selling anything.

This theme appeared in 21 of the focus groups. This theme appeared through the exact phrase "not selling something" and other very similar phrases. One participant said, "We do not have anything to sell but education." The concept was used to support Extension is an unbiased source of information and to explain the Extension mission is to serve the people of the state, not to make a profit from them. Another participant made a note to say Extension is not selling something, but the organization does want its "brand to be recognized."

RQ4:   What do internal audiences perceive to be the most important service Extension provides?

Major Theme: 4-H Youth Development is a critical part of Extension, if not the most important.

This theme appeared in 35 of the focus groups. Many groups mentioned 4-H fits in with the overall mission of Extension. One participant described it as "leadership education, starting at an early age (4-H) in basic family life, home, personal business, and community business." Others mentioned a technique of "using youth to reach the entire family." A similar idea was to "Train young children … Develop them for life and they will use other Extension programs." This idea is also reflected in the statement "4-H is the first place kids encounter community service, a springboard." One participant described the overall Extension mission as "Two-fold: disseminate information from the university and develop future leaders through the 4-H program." Another described it as "a process — growing tomorrow's leaders that will feed the 9 billion (grand challenge)."

Another aspect of this theme is 4-H affects all people. 4-H is "not just for rural and farmers. 4-H includes technology, lots of topics pertinent to cities." Adults were mentioned in reference to "developing volunteers and making leaders out of people with no 4-H experience." One participant mentioned 4-H has an important role in the history of Extension, as "Originally, 4-H was the link to reach farm families." Many participants indicated 4-H is or may be the most important aspect of Extension. "4-H is coming back. In our community, it is the last thing that should be sacrificed," one participant said.

RQ5: How does organizational identity align with the organization's vision statement and slogan, communicated to internal audiences prior to this study?

All five values present in the organization's strategic vision statement were reflected in the participants' responses, demonstrated in the results from the first four research questions. The official slogan, knowledge for life, was also a major theme. The strategic vision statement organizational leaders communicated to internal audiences prior to this study was "K-State Research and Extension's goal is to create and reinforce the impression that we are: science-based, inclusive, unbiased, practical, and

community-focused" (K-State Research and Extension Branding Guidelines, 2014, p. 1).

The *science-based* and *unbiased* values were reflected in the themes of providing research-based information and Extension being a trusted organization. The *inclusive* value was reflected in themes of Extension being for all people, being affordable, being present in all counties, linking people to the university, and providing a variety of resources, programs, and opportunities for people. The themes of providing answers, providing knowledge for life, and providing information to make real-life choices were reflective of the *practical* value in the vision statement. The *community-focused* value was apparent in themes of improving the quality of lives, addressing needs at a local level, and providing youth development.

Conclusions & Discussion

Results indicate K-State Research and Extension employees believe in the Extension brand, and feel they are meeting community needs through quality information and programming. In terms of Extension's brand, these results are positive. Employees lead to the ultimate success in delivering brand promise (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2010). Their perceptions of the organization need to match the image the organization is seeking to represent, creating a shared identity within the organization. This shared organizational identity helps the organization be successful (de Chernatony, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). The match between what the organization seeks to represent and what its employees believe of the organization is also important because it adds to the credibility of the organization in the views of the public (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The affirmation from employees, that they know and understand the current Extension brand, may indicate Extension communicators and administrators have done a good job of communicating the brand to employees.

While this research indicates the brand is strong with employees and internal organizational identity is intact, there is concern this does not extend to external audiences. This research continues to reinforce the concept Extension is still known as the "best kept secret" (DeBord, 2007, para. 1). Without prompting, employees mentioned a few concerns related to branding, such as the idea the organization wants its brand to be recognized and it needs to better communicate the "Extension is for all state residents" theme. Minor themes (found in 11 to 19 focus groups) also revealed challenges in communicating the brand, such as the need for an elevator speech to easily convey all aspects of the mission. Employees mentioned Extension communication professionals should work with Extension employees to make sure they communicate the entire brand to external audiences, including all information and programming provided. There is no value in being the "best kept secret," as this puts Extension in danger of continued funding cuts and lack of recognition at the state and national levels.

This study offers some interesting comparisons to previous research. The findings are consistent with Crossgrove et al. (2005)'s assessment of most-evident values held by Extension employees at The Ohio State University: working with groups of clients, unbiased delivery, credibility, helping people help themselves, and research-based programming. Unlike Klemme et al. (2005)'s study of employee perceptions throughout Iowa, the idea agriculture is the primary mission of Extension was not a major theme in this study. Perhaps if the focus groups in this study were designed with single-discipline groups, rather than a mix employees working across disciplines, a difference in opinion may have surfaced. Nonetheless, this study revealed internal audiences at K-State Research and Extension believe 4-H is a more important component of the mission. This may suggest a shift in thinking throughout the past decade. Additionally, the idea Extension promotes "grass-roots" efforts

was only a minor theme in this study, which is in line with Hansen (1993)'s notion that "research-based" should take priority. Finally, it has been argued Extension needs to change to stay relevant (Quinn Patton, 1987), while it has been shown Extension values may be slow to change (Safrit et al., 2003) and employees have a strong commitment to tradition (Berrio, 2003). In this study, the idea Extension is "current, proactive, timely, and relevant" only surfaced as a minor theme (in 11 to 19 of the 39 groups), suggesting internal audiences have not fully embraced the idea continual change is needed in achieving the Extension mission.

Recommendations for Practitioners

While this research was qualitative and focused on one state Extension program, it offers insight for other state Extension programs. Moving forward, Extension communicators at K-State Research and Extension should build messaging in external branding materials that reflect the values in its vision statement, which were supported by the participants in this study. As the organization develops its external branding materials, it should engage in the best practices that have been indicated in past literature, such as Walvis's laws for branding (2008), which were to remain relevant and distinct from competing brands, repeat a specific message, and use messages that garner active participation from your target audience. Being able to repeat a specific message will be important for Extension's brand success (Walvis, 2003), but it will also be difficult, given that the organization has five values it wants to represent. Multiple values and purposes, which are typical of public organizations, can be difficult to represent in external communications (Hoggett, 2006; Wæraas, 2008, 2010). Extension communicators should test any developed materials before implementation to ensure the materials meet the needs of the intended audience (Goodwin, Settle, & Irani, 2012).

Extension communicators should proceed with caution regarding the themes of providing valuable services and information for low or no cost and that Extension is not selling anything. Previous research indicates external stakeholders may not perceive this positively (Swendson & Baker, 2013) and will value programming and information less if it is seen as "cheap" or "free." As Extension continues to find its fit in the marketplace, it is important for external stakeholders to see value in what Extension provides. If people associate Extension with "cheap" or "free," they may not be willing to support the programming or speak of its importance to legislators. The perceived value of services can be examined in the testing stage of new marketing material implementation (Goodwin, Settle, & Irani, 2012).

Recommendations for Research

After implementation of new external branding materials, follow-up research should be conducted to determine the success of the materials as well as the public's response to the core values it is seeking to represent. As illustrated by the results of this study and Swendson and Baker's (2013) work, there is the potential for disparity in what internal and external audiences value. Future research looking at both groups will be necessary to ensure the brand is successfully interacting with its internal and external audiences. Additionally, researchers should continue to explore external audiences' views on paying for Extension materials and programming and the relation between paying and the perceived value of Extension. Finally, as Extension values have been slow to change in the past (Safrit et al., 2003), researchers should continually measure organizational identity to determine if, how, and why an organization's internal perceptions are changing over time. As organizational identity plays a critical role in building a successful corporate brand, it should be considered in shaping successful communication strategies.

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