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*Adapting to audiences, mere marketing or a strategy for legitimation?
The role of web-shops for second-hand stores*

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Abstract

This research has investigated how storytelling on the web-shop of a sustainable second-hand store functions as a legitimization strategy. It has done so by interviewing six high-positioned actors of second-hand stores that have sustainable value creation at their core and have a webshop. This research has added to the body of literature on legitimacy and more specifically cultural entrepreneurship, which holds that entrepreneurs can actively gain and maintain legitimacy. One way to do so is through storytelling. It was found that the webshop is not used as a site for storytelling the mission of the store but is rather a stage for specific products that tell a story of trendy, adventurous shopping. This attracts a customer segment to the store that conventionally does not shop there. Thus, this research concludes that to a certain extent second-hand stores engage in storytelling through their web-shop to legitimize themselves to a particular audience.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time characterized by social and ecological issues. Conventional production and consumption in our “throwaway society” characterize an unsustainable way of living that leads to environmental degradation (Cooper, 2010). These issues demand a shift to a more sustainable society that cannot seem to be delivered adequately by conventional business models that are solely oriented on creating economic profit (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

The need to move towards a more sustainable society has sparked renewed interest in hybrid organizations in the last couple of years (Alexius & Furusten, 2019). Hybrid organizations respond to social and environmental issues by combining a business identity with a social identity (Haigh, Walker, Bacq & Kickul, 2015). The most well-known hybrid organizations are social enterprises. (Battilana & Lee, 2014). In the Netherlands social enterprises became more important after the crisis of 2007, yet it has a history of a specific social enterprise, namely the second-hand store (European Commission, 2019). Many second-hand stores in the Netherlands are social enterprises concerned with generating value within the social bottom line of sustainability by offering inclusion and meaning through the employment of people with a distance to the labour market (Accenture, 2014). Moreover, as their essence concerns reusing goods, many promote and further the move towards a circular economy. These second-hand stores add mainly to the social and the environmental side of the triple bottom line and not necessarily to the economic side, since many of them are non-profits. Such second-hand stores that actively aim to create sustainable value (denoting both social and environmental value) are dubbed sustainable second-hand stores (SSHS's) in this research.

Traditionally viewed as the “poor man’s shop”, second-hand stores now attract a broad range of customers. In 2017, the second-hand store market grew by 30% in the Netherlands (Export Enterprises SA, 2020). It thus seems that shopping second-hand products becomes more and more legitimized as a normal thing to do in society. This might be due to various reasons, such as a rise in environmental awareness pushing people to buy second-hand products. It might also signal a bigger appreciation for the social function a sustainable second-hand store plays, or an expression of the vintage shopping trend (Hobbs, 2016).

A venture has legitimacy if it is seen as desirable or appropriate within a certain system of beliefs (Suchman, 1995; Fisher, 2016). Legitimacy is a necessary resource to get other resources that ventures need (Suchman, 1995). As such most research on legitimacy has been concerned with how new ventures achieve legitimacy, focussing on conventional profit-oriented businesses (Fisher & Lahiri, 2016). Moreover, most research on the legitimacy of

hybrid organizations concerns its acquisition due to their relatively new organizational form (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Research on how legitimacy is maintained is therefore scarce and if it is researched, it focusses on how conventional firms maintain their legitimacy when it is threatened (Debenedettia et al., 2020). Recent literature has especially focussed on how the rising concern for environmental issues poses a threat to the legitimacy of mature ventures (Scherer, Palazzo & Seidl, 2013; Debenedettia et al, 2020). Yet, as mentioned earlier, second-hand stores seem to be gaining legitimacy and thus might enjoy what I call “legitimizing opportunities” due to rising concern by consumers for the creation of sustainable value by ventures (Sheth, Sethia & Srinivas, 2011; Borusiak et al., 2020). Especially since legitimacy maintenance requires ventures to constantly adapt to its changing environment and demands of its audiences (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Fisher & Lahiri, 2016). SSHS’s thus might have opportunities to maintain and perhaps even achieve legitimacy in new customer segments by responding to the rising demand for sustainable value creation by consumers by emphasizing the sustainable value creation of their venture.

A sustainable second-hand store that has consciously chosen to actively target sustainable shoppers is the Estafette Recycleboulevard in Leeuwarden, thus being the direct reason for theorization about “legitimizing opportunities” in this research. One way that SSHS’s can reach out to customers is by storytelling their values (Moore, 2012). Moreover, storytelling is an important tool to gain and maintain legitimacy, especially within the cultural entrepreneurship view of legitimacy. Within this view, the entrepreneur is seen as actively undertaking actions to gain and maintain legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Überbacher, 2014). It must be noted that the line between storytelling for marketing purposes and legitimacy-seeking purposes is mostly a theoretical one, therefore entrepreneurial marketing literature has been included in this research to complement the (lacking) literature on legitimation strategies of social enterprises and to account for possible overlap.

This research will focus on a particular site of storytelling, namely the web-shop. The shift of sustainable second hand stores towards offering their products online has been a recent one and demonstrates an interest to connect with a broader audience, as it takes away barriers of access and visibility that might have kept potential consumers from second hand shopping (Bostanshirin, 2014). Moreover, it indicates a willingness and active attitude to satisfy the evolving expectations of customers, of which having the opportunity to shop online may be one, hence showing an interest in gaining and maintaining legitimacy that fits the cultural entrepreneurship view on legitimacy. This research will therefore investigate if and how SSHS tell stories on their web-shop to maintain and/or gain legitimacy for their venture by answering

the following research question: *how does storytelling on the web-shop of a sustainable second-hand store function as a legitimization strategy?*

Since the establishment of web-shops is a recent phenomenon for SSHS's in the Netherlands, this research is not only novel in researching storytelling on this particular front for the literature on legitimacy, but also makes an important practical contribution for SSHS's aiming to launch their own web-shop. It gives insight on how storytelling might attract specific customer segments through the web-shop so SSHS can develop better strategies to attract these segments and perhaps broaden their consumer base. Hence, this research might aid the normalization of hybrid organizations in society, an essential step in the transformation of our society to a more sustainable future (Alexius & Furusten, 2019).

This research will in sum add to the recent development in legitimacy studies to recognize the importance of firstly hybrid organizations, secondly maintaining legitimacy and thirdly viewing a venture's audience as diverse rather than homogenous. Moreover, this research explores new avenues for the legitimacy-building literature to view sustainable value creation not solely as a threat to legitimacy building, but as an opportunity. It does so through the lens of storytelling, thus adding to the body of literature on storytelling as legitimacy-building and advancing the practical understanding of storytelling as a legitimization strategy.

In the upcoming theory section, I will elaborate on the theory on legitimacy and especially storytelling. Next, I will lay down the research design before moving on to an exposition of the findings and consequent discussion of these results. The paper concludes with the implications of the findings for theory and practice and discusses some interesting topics left for future research that are related to the limitations of this study.

THEORY

This research concerns sustainable second-hand stores, which are hybrid organizations. Hybrid organizations have been defined in research as combining multiple (1) organizational identities, (2) organizational forms or (3) institutional logics (Battilana & Lee, 2014). An institutional logic is a certain “taken-for-granted” belief or practice that guides behaviour in the field in question (Thornton, 2012; Battilana & Lee, 2014). It results in a set of standards and norms that exists in a certain field or industry, which shapes the expectations a venture must fulfil. If a venture conforms to these expectations, it gains legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Hybrid organizations such as social enterprises are therefore interesting to research since they combine different institutional logics and hence have to conform to different (perhaps even opposing) expectations to gain legitimacy. Social enterprises after all combine a charity and business identity, two logics that seem incompatible. Yet, the amount of social enterprises has been rising over the last years in the Netherlands (European Commission, 2019). Many social enterprises seem successful in the juggle and struggle with multiple identities to gain and maintain legitimacy. How do they do this? This theory section will demonstrate the importance of storytelling as a strategy to gain legitimacy in different institutional logics that are comprised of different audiences. To this end, this chapter will first elaborate on the definition of legitimacy. Next, it will dive deeper into a particular way to acquire legitimacy, namely cultural entrepreneurship. Lastly, the chapter will demonstrate the importance of not only gaining but also maintaining legitimacy and how this takes place through a specific tool of cultural entrepreneurship, namely storytelling.

The multi-dimensional nature of legitimacy has led to many different definitions and typologies aiming to provide a clearer understanding of this essential concept for the study of organizations. In this thesis I build on the definition(s) of legitimacy as laid down by Greg Fisher, who has based his understanding on the seminal works of writers such as Aldrich & Fiol and Suchman and has made the most recent contributions to the literature on legitimacy for ventures. Following the typology laid down by Fisher et al. (2017) entrepreneurs can gain legitimacy through three mechanisms, which are the associative, identity and organizational mechanisms.

The associative and organizational mechanism fit within the traditional view of legitimacy as laid down in institutional theory, which holds that a venture is deemed legitimate if it engages in the “standard” or “normal” behaviour of its field (Fisher et al., 2017). If a venture engages in “rituals of conformity” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and lives up to expectations of

the environment it finds itself in, it gains legitimacy. This view overlaps with the notion of cognitive legitimacy, which is achieved when an organization fits in the “taken for granted” beliefs that audiences have about “normal” behaviour (Suchman, 1995; Überbacher, 2014).

This traditional view of legitimacy is expressed in Fisher’s typology mainly as the organizational mechanism, meaning that a venture adopts the expected organizational structures, has a certain level of professionalization or demonstrates a certain performance to acquire legitimacy. More specifically, a venture can acquire legitimacy by adopting certain standards, for example in the form of certifications (Fisher et al., 2016).

The associative mechanism fits best with the other side of institutional legitimacy that has been characterized by Überbacher (2014) as evaluative legitimacy. This type of legitimacy is gained by being positively related to or evaluated by other authorities. It concerns the relations an entrepreneur makes to establish and manage their legitimacy, for example by connecting to powerful actors in a field (Fisher et al., 2017). Here it already becomes clear that, although artificially differentiated, associative and organizational mechanisms often overlap. Adopting a certain standard only grants legitimacy because the standard (indirectly) came from an authoritative actor.

It can be said that the institutional perspective perceives the entrepreneur as reactive to the demands of the audience and views the entrepreneur as taking actions to fit in with already existing expectations (Überbacher, 2014). However, more recent strands in legitimacy studies acknowledge the capacity of actors of a venture to influence and even create legitimacy for their venture. This is the cultural entrepreneurship view of legitimacy, where the entrepreneur is viewed as actively using cultural tools to gain and maintain legitimacy (Überbacher, 2014). This view finds its expression in the identity mechanisms as described by Fisher et al. (2017), which holds that an entrepreneur can use identity claims and cultural tools, such as symbols, images or a certain discourse to gain legitimacy. One such important cultural tool are stories (Überbacher, 2014; Fisher et al., 2017). Through story telling ventures can appeal to certain audiences and gain legitimacy. Storytelling is especially important for social enterprises, as they usually work with “antagonistic assets”, meaning human resources conventionally deemed a misfit for the work at hand. Because of the story that these assets hold of being ‘antagonistic’ they actually turn into complementarities that generate profit (Hockerts, 2015). The story behind the antagonism of these assets grants a unique value and can give the venture a competitive advantage. The strength of many social enterprises therefore lies in their story telling capacity.

Storytelling is not only an important legitimacy strategy; it is also a marketing tool. Marketing here is defined as entrepreneurial marketing, that best encompasses the aim to communicate not only economic value, but also sustainable and social value. Entrepreneurial marketing can be defined as being “a combination of innovative, proactive, and risk-taking activities that create, communicate, and deliver value to and by customers, entrepreneurs, marketers, their partners, and society at large” (Whalen et al., 2016, in Ghods, 2019. p.5). Logically, one would expect that social enterprises are quite engaged in marketing, specifically so-called content or brand marketing, as that is the act of telling your story as a venture (Pulizzi, 2012). Yet, social enterprises are not very engaged with marketing, because it is associated with profit seeking efforts and it is therefore viewed as undermining the social values of the organization (McKinsey & Company, 2016; Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2019). The negative association of marketing and social enterprise might explain why marketing strategies are not well-researched in social enterprises either, like legitimacy seeking efforts of social enterprises (Ghods, 2019). Due to the overlap in practice between entrepreneurial marketing and storytelling for legitimacy it is important to include marketing theory in this research to be able to evaluate to what extent these activities can be distinguished and might influence each other.

Cultural entrepreneurs “continually make and remake stories to maintain their identity and status” (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001: 560, quoted in Gehman & Soublière, 2017). They do so because legitimacy always depends on how you are perceived by your audience (Fisher et al., 2017). For years, the audience of a venture was seen as a homogenous environment that the venture finds itself in. Only in recent research the audience has been redefined as a diverse group of distinct audiences that all want and expect different things from the venture (Überbacher, 2014). This insight has sparked new research to investigate what gives a firm legitimacy to a particular audience (Fisher et al. 2017). This is especially relevant for hybrid organizations, as they combine different institutional logics and therefore have more chance of facing institutional pluralism, where it must fit into multiple institutional logics. These different institutional logics come with different audiences whose expectations must be fulfilled (Thornton 2012; Fisher 2016). To fit multiple institutional logics, a venture may have to develop multiple identities to appeal to its different audiences, running the risk that one identity might invalidate the other (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Fisher & Lahiri, 2016). The inability to integrate their business and social identity might lead to “mission drift”, where the social enterprise moves more towards the already established business form, sacrificing some of its social goals in the process (Battilana & Lee, 2014). However, if social enterprises manage to harmonize these different identities their organizational form does not only gain more

legitimacy, but they might even have the advantage of being able to draw on multiple identities to connect to their different audiences, for example through storytelling their identity and/or mission (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Hybridity can thus open up new avenues of success if a venture is capable of successfully formulating and communicating its brand identity.

This making of identities and stories to fit all the aspects and audiences of a social enterprise is not just the occupation of a new venture, it is an ongoing affair. The strive for legitimacy does not end when ventures have passed their “liability of newness” (Zimmerman, 2002), which is often seen as the main legitimacy threshold that needs to be surpassed (Fisher & Lahiri, 2016). In order to stay relevant, and hence legitimate in the eyes of the public, ventures have to satisfy the changing tastes of their consumer base and keep living up to the expectations of their consumers (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Fisher & Lahiri, 2016). Existing ventures often maintain their legitimacy by conforming to the norms surrounding “hot topics” like climate change and sustainability (Debenedettia et al. 2020). This shows how legitimacy is a process where legitimacy comes from the various ways in which meaning is constructed (Tracey et al. 2018, in Fisher, 2020).

In sum, a venture does not simply comply to *one* set of norms and is then rewarded with everlasting legitimacy. The process of legitimization is characterized by the formulation of different identities and discourses to appeal to differing audiences (Debenedettia et al. 2020). Rephrasing, remaking and maybe even juggling identities might simply be part of the daily routine of some ventures, especially hybrid organizations. (O'Neil & Ucbasaran, 2016). The legitimization process, and thus the success of a social enterprise, is an ongoing endeavour that depends on its ability to engage with topics that its audiences find important.

Lastly, as this chapter has shown, legitimacy is multi-dimensional concept that can only artificially be divided into a typology, as the mechanisms in practice might overlap. Therefore, the multifaceted nature of legitimacy should be approached in a holistic manner. (Überbacher, 2014). Previous studies of legitimacy have focussed on researching a particular definition of legitimacy. It is therefore important to research if and how different forms of legitimacy attainment interact (Überbacher, 2014). To this end this research, although departing from the cultural entrepreneurship perspective on legitimacy, will also consider the organizational and associative mechanisms. Such an open approach is only fitting for an explorative research, as will be elaborated upon in the next section.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As cultural entrepreneurship is an actor-centred theory of legitimacy, data has been gathered by interviewing six actors in high functions of sustainable second-hand stores (SSHS's) that have a web-shop, since they are deemed to be in the position to coordinate and influence the storytelling strategies of their venture. The actual functions of the interviewees will not be named to assure their anonymity.

The shops are the following:

Organization	Assigned Name	Date	Duration
Vindingrijk Breda	Vindingrijk	14-05-2020	41:18
Kringloopwinkel Steenwijk	Steenwijk	15-05-2020	50:46
Noppes Kringloopwinkel (chain of sixteen stores)	Noppes	15-05-2020	44:04
Administrative merger of: Noggus & Noggus (chain of five stores) and Kringloop Zwolle (two stores)	Zwolle	18-05-2020	43:47
Kringloop Kampen	Kampen	15-05-2020	36:36
MamaMini (chain of four stores)	MamaMini	22-05-2020	55:24

By focusing on second-hand stores that explicitly aim to add sustainable value the study assures that these ventures are indeed hybrid organizations, and not conventional businesses. Secondly, it assures that the stories of all the subjects are essentially the same, namely the promotion of a social and environmental mission and identity. This allows for a better comparison of the storytelling means the stores use to tell their story and especially the role of the web-shop.

Of these ventures five are BKN certified, which means that they have gotten the '100% kringloop' (100% second-hand store) certificate from the Dutch branch association of second-hand stores (BKN). To get this certificate the stores must codify and follow their social and sustainable goals. The certificate is based on the ISO 9001 standards and is tested every 1,5 years, thus assuring that the interviewed SSHS's are following their mission and create

sustainable value. The sixth venture is MamaMini, a non-profit second-hand store with a unique business model. For 31 years they have been giving all profit they make away to local charities. Moreover, they are registered as a public benefit organization (ANBI), thus assuring they are also a sustainable second-hand store.

To answer the research question *how does storytelling on the web-shop of a sustainable second-hand store function as a legitimization strategy?* I have conducted interviews that were semi-structured with open-ended questions, allowing for flexibility in the answers of the interviewees. This also enables the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and adapt to issues the interviewee finds important (Kallio et al., 2016). The interviews took between 30-50 minutes and due to the COVID-19 situation the interviews were conducted electronically. Before every interview a consent form was signed by the interviewee to ensure they understand the research in which they are partaking and their rights as interviewee. The consent form can be found in appendix A.

The interview was firstly concerned with mapping the story that is told by the SSHS's and the sources they draw on for their storytelling. Secondly, it was concerned with *how* this story was told, in other words through which media, and thirdly the role of the web-shop specifically in this storytelling process. Lastly, to map the degree of storytelling as a legitimization strategy, there were interview questions aimed at understanding to what extent a particular consumer segment was actively targeted and why. A complete overview of the interview questions with more extensive explanations of the goal of the questions can be found in appendix B. The interview questions were based on previous literature (Kallio et al., 2016):

The mission of a social enterprise is the main source of their story, as they reflect the identity of the venture (Moore, 2012). Other 'story materials' for specifically hybrid organizations can be the sustainable impact they make (Gomez-Barris, 2017), of which (sustainable) certificates are proof, and the relations they have with other (sustainable) organizations (Sarpong & Davies, 2014). The main media for the SSHS's are the website, social media, conventional media like the television or the newspaper, the web-shop and the store itself. These themes were thus used to map the story that was told and how. To this extent the existing literature was used to develop themes, however the interview data was mostly coded inductively. I have worked according to the classic grounded theory, which allows the researcher to stay open to ideas emerging from the data one analyses to generate a theory (Lehane, 2019). This theory is therefore fitting for a research concerning a phenomenon of which little is yet known (Tie, Burks & Francis, 2019), or in other words an exploratory research

(Davies, 2011). In line with this theory one codes the emerging themes. In the initial phase of coding the data I organized both the answers and conversation topics within the interviews according to my interview questions. This allowed me to gain better oversight on which themes emerged from the answers in the interviews, and how they overlapped with answers from other interviews (Tie, Burks & Francis, 2019). I ordered the data according to themes that recurred in various interviews. Since this research fills a gap in the literature, it is counterintuitive to focus on ordering data according to pre-set themes, as there is not much existing literature to base the themes on.

For the coding process I have used the software Atlas.ti, which allows you to order codes according to code groups, thus smoothly allowing progress to the intermediate coding stage (Tie, Burks & Francis, 2019). Furthermore, the program allows you to see connections between codes and overarching themes by visualizing the network of codes and code groups, enabling the researcher to engage in advanced coding to see how the categories all ‘come together’ (Chametzky, 2016). In the results section I demonstrate the themes that became apparent and the relationships between them in a storyline manner (Tie, Burks & Francis, 2019). In the discussion section I relate the findings to the previous literature, thus grounding the data into theory.

RESULTS

As expected by interviewing solely second-hand stores that actively pursue the creation of sustainable value (SSHS's) the story of all the interviewees concentrated itself on two goals. Firstly, to help people with a distance to the labour market get a job and be included into society again. Secondly, to be a sustainable business by reusing products and giving them a second chance, thus promoting a circular economy. Aside from these 'mens & milieu' goals (human and environment), MamaMini also has adding to society as its mission, by giving money to local charities. It became clear from the interviews that historically the focus has been on helping people with a distance to the labour market, so the social side of the triple bottom line, and the environmental-friendly aspect of second-stores was a side effect of its business model of reusing products. However, in recent years for various SSHS's the focus has switched more to the environmental side, mostly out of political developments that push for more integration of second-hand stores with waste management to generate more circularity in line with the sustainability goals (Vindingrijk, Kampen). These regulations also oblige SSHS's to measure the amount of waste, recycled and reused products, which is thus a readily available source to draw on for storytelling. However, this does not really happen, as some stores feel that customers are more interested in the social value they create (Steenwijk, Vindingrijk). Social value added generally does not get measured, since it is hard to do, but some SSHS's are concerned with social impact measurement as it might be an opportunity for storytelling (Steenwijk, Noppes). Another option would be to tell personalized stories rather than communicate numbers, yet this is also hardly done, for various reasons. Firstly, out of privacy reasons it is hard to storytell people's lives (Steenwijk), although when it took place via television SSHS's experienced positive feedback from their audience and rising sales (Steenwijk). The environmental story is also experienced to be more appreciated thanks to the the storytelling ability of the TV (Vindingrijk). Still, most SSHS's are sceptical about the value that the story behinds the product really adds:

"I don't think that the customer is very conscious of the value they add by buying it.

But once they bought it, it is maybe nice to have, to tell." – Zwolle

It can be said that many SSHS's communicate their story mainly out of concern to gain awareness for their mission, rather than that they believe it will generate extra profits. However,

SSHS's do mention that part of the reason why they communicate their story is to get more donations of products from people to keep their business model running.

“[...] if you want to give away a couch, then you bring it to MamaMini because you know that the profit of your couch goes to a good cause.” – MamaMini

In general, SSHS's communicate their story through their website and social media. Many SSHS's are engaged in storytelling through 'new social media' by partnering up with 'micro-influencers' that have many followers on Youtube or Instagram or want to do so, to attract a younger consumer (Zwolle, Kampen, MamaMini). The store itself also functions as a platform to share their story, but not in an explicit way. SSHS generally have many partnerships with local initiatives, linking their social mission to other organizations with the same mission to help each other. An example is the Repair Café, a nation-wide initiative to repair products, to which many SSHS's give a stage inside their store. The SSHS thus acts as a platform for organizations that create sustainable value. This fits with the widely shared opinion that “doing what you say” is better than “saying what you do”. Most SSHS's believe that the people employed in their store and the products themselves demonstrate the sustainable value they create better than stories about impact or certificates (Noppes, Kampen, Vindingrijk). Although involved in many partnerships, the SSHS's do not collaborate much among each other, especially regarding knowledge and experience concerning the (making of a) web-shop. But when they do, they are in contact with each other through the BKN, the Dutch second-hand store branch organization, which is also the main important source of authority to show you are a professional and sustainable second-hand store. Through the BKN you can namely gain the 100% kringloop certificate, for most second-hand stores the only certificate they are concerned in getting.

Interestingly, the web-shop is not a site for storytelling for most SSHS's:

“The story of the product has nothing to do with our story.” – Vindingrijk
“If you go to the web-shop you'll see a little story of who we are and what we do, but you won't see it in the products.” – Kampen

However, aside from Noppes, all SSHS's do selectively choose the products they put on the web-shop. This happens out of various reasons. First and foremost, the web-shop is seen as a;

“signboard” (Kampen), “shop window” (Noppes & Kampen) and way to “profile yourself” (MamaMini). Although most SSHS’s started with a web-shop to reach a broader audience from beyond their locality and create more profit, SSHS’s with longer running web-shops feel that a web-shop is more a “medium of promotion” (Vindingrijk) to generate “visibility” (Vindingrijk & Noppes) and brand awareness (Vindingrijk) than that it generates profit.

To this end most only put ‘treasures’ online, which are usually vintage products (Vindingrijk & Zwolle). According to the SSHS with the longest running web-shop most people that visit the web-shop are consumers between 30-40 with an interest in vintage. It is therefore sensible that many SSHS’s select vintage products for their web-shops because they simply sell better. Thus, it can be said that although the web-shop is not a site for storytelling the mission of the SSHS, the products are the story in the sense that they attract customers:

“The way to sell your product is through vintage” - Vindingrijk

Another reason is that these treasures do not get sold for the price they are worth in the store. Many SSHS’s mention they if try to sell these special products in the store they often get bought by traders that sell them again for a higher price (Steenwijk & Zwolle). The SSHS is unable to ask the price that the product is actually worth in the store, because this generates negative backlash from the low-budget customer as it does not fit in their perception of the identity of the second-hand store (Kampen). Although the second-hand store is not a “malle pietje” (Steenwijk & Noppes) store anymore, meaning only for the low-income consumers, this customer segment is still an important one and delivering goods to the ‘minima’ is for many SSHS’s part of their mission (MamaMini). To this extent the image of the second-hand store as a place for low-income consumers seems to constrain the profitmaking ability of SSHS’s. One way to manage this problem is by putting the special products on a web-shop so they can be bought by consumers with a higher budget.

The function of the web-shop as promotion mechanism touches upon the SSHS’s aim to attract more customers to the store by having a web-shop, and this seems to work:

“You can see where the products are, and people just go straight to the store.

They don’t order.” - Noppes

Yet, this view seems contradictory with the function of the web-shop as a place where more high-end products can be linked to a more high-income customer segment. If you can find your ‘treasure’ on a web-shop, why bother to go to the actual store? SSHS’s do not experience that the web-shop reduces visits to the store, mainly because the store is seen as an experience where you can shop adventurously and can go ‘treasure hunting’ (Steenwijk & MamaMini). The average customer wants to go there as a daytime activity, rather than because they need to. Departing from this knowledge, some SSHS’s believe that the web-shop attracts a more high-income customer segment that did not yet shop at the second hand store and who is not into the ‘treasure hunting’ activity that attracts the main customer to the SSHS (the so called “snuffelaar”; Accenture, 2014).

“It’s not the normal second-hand shop goer, it is really a different segment you touch upon. It is an addition to the second-hand store. Maybe it is the lazy second-hand shopper who does not want to go treasure hunting but still wants to buy these products.” – Zwolle

This ‘clash’ of different consumer segments is also mirrored in the dilemma that SSHS’s face with conforming or differentiating from the standard image of the second-hand store.

Most SSHS’s describe that the second-hand store faces an image of being dirty (MamaMini), filled with ‘weird people’ (Kampen) and meant for poor customers (Noppes). For this reason, many actively try to differentiate themselves from it through looking professional by keeping the store clean and orderly (Noppes, Mamamini). Yet at the same time some SSHS’s do not view the image as necessarily problematic. Firstly, because it is true to a certain extent (MamaMini) and secondly because it is only problematic in the perception of a specific customer segment:

“You touch upon another audience. But to do so you do have to put it [the web-shop with lifestyle store] into the market as a different brand. So not as a second-hand store brand.”

– Zwolle

“I think that our customers like to go treasure hunting and at the moment you make everything really orderly and clean, you miss a part of these people that come to you store for the experience. But you do reach another audience when you are really clean.” – MamaMini

SSHS's are thus not yet really clear on whether they actively want to pursue a more high-income customer. This is also demonstrated in how besides 'treasures', that inherently attract a more high-income customer, some SSHS's also put products on the web-shop for practical reasons, namely that they are easy to send and have less chance of being send back (Kampen) or might break in the store (MamaMini). However, SSHS's do generally aim to attract a younger consumer (Noppes, Kampen & MamaMini). This goal is also a consideration in the decision to selectively put vintage products on the web-shop, as it is experienced that both younger and older customers are interested in these products (Vindingrijk). Yet, SSHS's do not have a common perception of the young consumer segment, as some SSHS's equate young consumers with being the 'lazy second-hand shoppers' (Zwolle), others say especially young consumers do *not* go on the web-shop, because the products are too expensive (Steenwijk), and yet others actively aim to attract young customers to the store through the web-shop (Noppes). These differing opinions signal a lack of information on firstly how what kind of consumer the web-shop attracts and secondly on the young consumer segment.

The following chapter will demonstrate how these results fit with the literature on legitimacy as laid down in the theory chapter. Secondly, it will answer the research question before moving on to the practical and theoretical implications of this research. Lastly, the chapter discusses the limitations of this research and some interesting topics left for future research.

DISCUSSION

Being a hybrid organization, sustainable second-hand stores must unite two different institutional logics, namely that of charity and business (Battilana & Lee, 2014). Such differing institutional logics generate different expectations from different types of consumers that must be satisfied to attain and maintain legitimacy (Fisher et al., 2016; Thornton, 2012). This research has shown that these institutional logics of charity and business create two identities for SSHS's that at times conflict each other, reinforcing existing literature (Gehman & Soublière, 2017; Fisher & Lahiri, 2016). On the one hand the SSHS are viewed from the standard image of the second-hand store. They are thus expected to be a place for low-income consumers, offering cheap products. This view of the SSHS corresponds with the identity of charity and is complemented and conflicted by their rise as store for a broader audience. The special 'treasures' that can be found and the (renewed) interest in vintage products drive average to high-income customers to also shop at the SSHS. This development comes with expectations of the SSHS behaving more like a business by keeping a clean and orderly store with a professional service. SSHS's are struggling to harmonize these identities.

The "treasures" attract a more high-income consumer, however often the products cannot be sold for their value because increasing prices will antagonize the low-budget consumer who expects prices to be low as part of the identity of a SSHS as a 'poor people store' (Haigh & Hoffman, 2015). One way to solve this problem is by creating a separate space for these treasures, namely the web-shop. This way, more profit can be made by connecting the products to a higher consumer segment. Moreover, it is a great way to promote the second-hand store, which this research has shown to be the most important function of the web-shop for most SSHS's. Interestingly, the web-shop is not a site for storytelling the mission of the SSHS's but is a place where the products act as stories to attract customers to the store. The web-shop therefore seems to fit more into the business identity of the SSHS. The web-shop can thus be regarded an identity mechanism, communicating the business identity of the SHS to consumers through their product selection of trendy treasures.

Regarding the mission of SSHS's, which is more an expression of the charity identity of the second-hand store, most storytelling happens through the website and social media. Social media is used by many SHS's to attract a younger consumer. SSHS use youtubers (new social media) to get their endorsement to legitimize themselves to a younger audience in line with earlier research (Sarpong & Davies, 2014), thus engaging in associative legitimacy mechanism. Moreover, they connect to these actors to actively tell the story of their mission.

Active storytelling, a trait of cultural entrepreneurship in legitimacy studies, therefore seems to be more related to the associative mechanism for SSHS, which challenges the idea that the associative mechanism is mostly a reactive legitimacy-seeking effort. Although social media and the website is a site for active storytelling, most SSHS's believe that "doing what you say" is still better than "saying what you do". This is in line with marketing literature that notes that many social enterprises see marketing as unfitting their identity (Bandyopadhyay & Ray, 2019). Although most SSHS's regard storytelling their mission mostly as a 'must' that comes with having a charity identity, it has become clear that SSHS's also use storytelling in line with their business identity. Storytelling the mission is for various SSHS's a way to get more donations, which fits into the traditional view of legitimacy studies that attaining legitimacy is necessary to get resources (Suchman, 1995; Roundy, 2014).

Lastly, the main certificate that SSHS's have is the 100% kringloop, which demonstrates that they make sustainable impact. This certificate can be seen as an organizational mechanism, as it demonstrates that SSHS's live up to standards of being a sustainable second-hand store. Simultaneously, as mentioned before in the theory section, it is also an example of the associative mechanism as it is awarded by the BKN, the most important authority for second-hand stores that can assure the sincerity of SSHS's in their sustainable mission. Such overlap of mechanisms and their characteristic uses strengthen the call to research how different forms of legitimacy attainment interact (Überbacher, 2014).

This research has endeavoured to answer the question; *how does storytelling on the web-shop of a sustainable second-hand store function as a legitimization strategy?*

It has shown that the web-shop is a curious medium for storytelling. The main story of the SSHS's, the mission, is generally not told through the web-shop, but another story takes the stage, namely that of the 'treasures'. Most SSHS's selectively put products on the web-shop that attract a more high-income customer. This can be viewed as a legitimization strategy in two ways. Firstly, it aims to attract a consumer segment that is new or still small for second-hand stores. Secondly, it demonstrates a conformation to what SSHS's think the average consumer wants and expects to find at a second-hand store, namely that what is 'trendy'.

Although many SSHS's purposely aim to touch upon a customer segment that is unconventional to the standard second-hand store, it must be noted that there exist various other reasons to selectively put 'treasures' on the web-shop. These reasons are intertwined and mutually influence each other. For example, various SSHS's put special products online to get a better value for it, thus unconsciously targeting a more high-income customer.

Although the high-income customer is not always actively targeted as consumer, the young consumer segment is for most SSHS's a target they are increasingly focussed on.

Theoretical implications

Active attempts by entrepreneurs to gain and maintain legitimacy, or in other words cultural entrepreneurship, have for years been largely neglected in legitimacy building literature (Sarpong & Davies, 2014; Fisher et al., 2016). Moreover, research about legitimacy building in hybrid organizations is still sorely lacking, while they are a perfect site to research how legitimacy-building is undertaken in the face of multiple institutional logics that thus entice multiple audiences. Departing from the knowledge that storytelling is especially important for hybrid organizations it is imperative to fill these gaps and research how storytelling functions as a legitimation strategy (Wankel & Pate, 2013; Gomez-Barris, 2017; Powell & Osborne, 2015). This research has shown that storytelling is used to legitimate SSHS's to particular consumer segments, thus adding to all the gaps in literature mentioned above. Furthermore, the legitimacy-building function of storytelling was researched in respect to a relevant site, namely the web-shop. Only very recently SSHS's have decided to engage in online marketing. This research thus sets a precedent for research on legitimacy-building through the web-shops of SSHS's and therefore not only advances legitimacy-building literature but also has practical applicability for second-hand stores situated at the eve of storytelling in an online world.

Lastly, this research, although departing from a cultural entrepreneurship view on legitimacy-building, has shown that legitimacy-building mechanisms in practice overlap. This answers the call for researching legitimacy building in a more holistic manner (Überbacher, 2014). The decision to study particular dimensions of legitimacy is understandable, since practice suggests that the different legitimacy mechanisms are related to the opposing pressures a venture has to comply with. A venture needs to fit in with existing ventures by taking over the industry standards (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), using an organizational or associative mechanism. This isomorphic process is opposed to the need of the venture to posit itself as different to assure a competitive advantage over other firms (Fisher 2020), which could be deemed an expression of the identity mechanism. Yet, although the organizational, associative and identity mechanism are distinct from each other, they are all legitimacy strategies and thus might be used in a complementary manner, as was shown in this in this research where storytelling was more part of an associative mechanism than an identity mechanism. Thus, in the story that an organization tells, contradictory demands can be bridged, and multiple legitimacy strategies can be harmonized.

Practical implications

By successfully combining your identities you generate legitimacy (Battilana & Lee, 2014). This research has shown that SSHS's have a hard time harmonizing their charity and business identity. Storytelling can be a way to harmonize these identities better and thus ease the process of gaining and maintaining legitimacy (Ferreira, 2014). Sadly, storytelling the sustainable side of the SSHS is generally viewed as an activity belonging to the realm of the charity identity. Hence the web-shop, deemed a part of the business identity, is not viewed as a site for storytelling sustainability. Such an attitude that emphasizes the divide rather than the way the charity and business identity of SSHS's come together stands in the way of successfully creating and communicating a brand. Storytelling the mission of the SSHS's is therefore a "legitimizing opportunity" that can still be engaged in more, especially because consumers are increasingly concerned about the sustainable value creation of ventures (Sheth, Sethia & Srinivas, 2011; Borusiak et al., 2020).

Most SSHS's experienced that a more high-budget customer is hard to reach due to the image they have of the second-hand store as being dirty and cheap, in line with previous research (Hobbs, 2016; Wodon et al., 2013; Cozer, 2018; Alam, 2014). SSHS's can improve their public image if they get better at storytelling (Tilahun & Cozonac, 2015). Research has found that ventures that use green marketing strategies can enhance consumer perceived quality of their products and use this 'greenness' as a competitive advantage (Chen & Chang, 2013). Moreover, firms with an environmentally friendly image are better at retaining their existing customer base and acquiring new customers, in other words gain legitimacy (Bhattacharya, 2016; Ketprapakorn & Kantabutra 2019).

Storytelling the social value you add also has a positive effect on legitimacy building, especially personalized impact-stories (Gomez-Barris, 2017). This research found that SSHS's would rather like to tell compassionate enterprise narratives (Sarpong & Davies, 2014) than "bore people with numbers". However, in line with previous literature, SSHS's barely make use of these stories (Sarpong & Davies, 2014). Nonetheless, when space is created for storytelling, for example on the television, SSHS's experience a positive effect on their audience attitude and sales. Another valuable source for storytelling might be the local partnerships SSHS's engage in and the social impact they create with this community engagement (Sarpong & Davies, 2014). Lastly, storytelling is great for targeting young audiences, as they are more into stories than traditional advertisement (Wankel & Pate, 2013)

In sum, telling a sustainable story generates more sales, which then again adds to your mission thus generating sustainable value again (McKinsey and company, 2016). A greater

focus on storytelling therefore seems a strategy worth considering and some SSHS's recognize this. To tell the right stories, you must first consolidate who you are, what message you want to convey and to whom. It is important for SSHS's to think about these questions and see how the answers coincide with what consumers want, so they can find the right story to tell. In general, about 60% of the consumers would like to see or reserve a product on a webshop before going to the store (Accenture, 2014). Using the web-shop therefore with as main goal to generate more visibility might be more profitable in the long run rather than aiming to generate direct sales through the webshop. Such an understanding of the web-shop as a marketing tool is consequently promising for storytelling sustainability as well.

Limitations and future research

Most SSHS's are still starting up their web-shop or have not had it for long, thus they are still in the process of clarifying the role of the web-shop for their store. It is therefore important to undertake further research, especially because the SSHS's differ in their opinion on how to market their stores, thus providing an interesting base for comparison. Some SSHS's have consciously decided to establish a different marketing channel to reach a more high-budget consumer, stepping away from their second-hand image for this customer segment, while others try to improve the second-hand store image. Such decisions will also have an influence on the role the web-shop plays, especially for storytelling. Currently the web-shop is seen as a place for selling products, not for marketing the sustainable story of the store, but this view might change in the coming years when the web-shop becomes better incorporated into the business model of the SSHS's.

Lastly, it would be interesting to better understand to what institutional logic and consumer segment the web-shop adds legitimacy. The findings of this research seem to suggest that the web-shop is regarded as a medium that fits more into the business identity of the SSHS than in the charity identity, thus it is not really used for storytelling the sustainable story of the SSHS. It would be interesting to further research in what way the web-shop is legitimacy-building within this business identity. This research has concerned itself with investigating how the web-shop functions as an identity mechanism, specifically focussing on its storytelling capabilities. However, the web-shop might also function as an organizational mechanism, being a "ritual of conformity" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) that fulfils the expectations of the institutional logic of the business identity of the SSHS's. In a world where online-marketing is becoming increasingly normalized and even expected, having a web-shop might be a

prerequisite for any business to simply live up to the expectations consumers have when shopping, namely to be able to shop anytime, anywhere, online.

“Soon every self-respecting second-hand store will have a webshop” - Vindingrijk

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Toestemmingsformulier (informed consent)

Betreft: Masteronderzoek Duurzaam Ondernemerschap aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.
 Het doel van dit onderzoek is het beter begrijpen wat voor waarde webshops, naast een hogere omzet, toevoegen aan kringlopen met een sociale en/of duurzame doelstelling. U wordt geïnterviewd vanwege uw positie binnen de kringlopen branche en de kennis die u heeft van de branche. Dit interview duurt minder dan een uur en bestaat uit semigestructureerde en open vragen.

Ik verklaar hierbij op voor mij duidelijke wijze te zijn ingelicht over de aard, methode en doel van het onderzoek.

Ik begrijp dat:

- ik vragen niet hoeft te beantwoorden en kan overslaan.
- ik mijn medewerking aan dit onderzoek kan stoppen op ieder moment en zonder opgave van reden.
- gegevens anoniem worden verwerkt, zonder herleidbaar te zijn tot de persoon
- dit interview opgenomen wordt voor transcriptie doeleinden.**
- de opname vernietigd wordt na uitwerking van het interview.
- ik de uitkomsten van het onderzoek kan opvragen.

Ik verklaar dat ik:

- geheel vrijwillig bereid ben aan dit onderzoek mee te doen.
- de uitkomsten van dit interview verwerkt mogen worden in een verslag of wetenschappelijke publicatie.
- toestemming geef om het interview op te laten nemen door middel van een voice-recorder.

Handtekening:

Naam:

Datum:

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions were leading for the interviews, however as the interviews were semi-structured it must be noted that sometimes the questions were asked in a different formulation, asked in a different part of the interview or left out in its totality when it became clear it was not relevant. At times follow up questions were asked to gain better insight in a particular topic that were not part of the standard set of questions and thus not mentioned in this guide. The questions are organized according to topics that structured the coding of the findings.

The Story

As introduction to better understand the position of the interviewee in the firm and to understand the (brand) identity and story of the venture the following questions were asked:

Wat is het verhaal van jullie bedrijf?

Waarom vertellen jullie dit verhaal?

Wat doen jullie?

Wie zijn jullie?

The Storytelling

To gain insight in the media used for storytelling the following question was asked:

Hoe vertellen jullie jullie verhaal?

To better understand the reasons for starting a web-shop the following question was asked:

Waarom besloten jullie een webshop te maken?

To understand how storytelling took place on the web-shop the following questions were asked:

Vertellen jullie jullie verhaal via de webshop?

Zo ja, hoe en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom?

Targeting a Specific Consumer

The following questions aim to charter to what extent the SSHS's target a particular customer segment, how they do so and why. These questions were used to gain an understanding of whether SSHS's try to legitimize themselves to particular customer segments.

To verify the accuracy of typologies of second-hand store consumer segments the following question was asked:

Hoe zou u uw klanten typeren/omschrijven?

The following question tries to shed some light on whether the web-shop attracts a certain customer segment, which might point to the web-shop being part of a certain institutional logic.

Heeft u inzicht in wat voor soort publiek er in de webshop winkelt?

Zo ja, wat voor publiek trekt uw webshop aan?

Waarom denk u dat dit het geval is?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

The following question inquires whether the SSHS's consciously and actively target a particular consumer and how and why they do so.

Richt u zich op een bepaald soort consument?

Zo ja, op wat voor soort consument richt u zich en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

The following questions are follow-up questions from the previous question in case the interviewee answered positively. The questions add to the research on entrepreneurial marketing and storytelling as an active strategy to reach a particular consumer.

The next question is aimed at understanding the means cultural entrepreneurs employ to target a consumer segment, to see whether storytelling is part of this toolbox.

Zijn er bepaalde manieren waarop jullie proberen die type consument aan te spreken?

Zo ja, wat voor manieren en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

This is a follow up question to specify the role of the web-shop:

Zijn er bepaalde manieren waarop jullie proberen die type consument aan te spreken door de webshop?

Zo ja, wat voor manieren en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

This is a follow up question to see whether the targeting strategies are successful:

Komt uw publiek overeen met het soort consument waar u zich op richt?

Zo ja, waarom denkt u?

Zo nee, waarom niet denkt u?

The Second-Hand Store Image

The following questions are concerned with understanding how SSHS's themselves view the image that second-hand stores have, to verify the literature describing the image of second-hand stores as a barrier to successfully attracting a broader range of consumers. It also relates to previous questions asked about storytelling the story of the SSHS's and thus functions to connect storytelling with the targeting of consumers for the purpose of legitimation.

Heeft u het idee dat jullie bedrijf een bepaald imago heeft in de ogen van het publiek?

Zo ja, wat en waarom denkt u?

Hoe voelt u zich hierover?

Is er een manier waarop u probeert dit imago te beïnvloeden?

Zo ja, hoe en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

The following question is a follow up question if the previous question was answered in the affirmative. It is aimed at understanding whether the web-shop is seen as influencing the image of the second-hand store. The association of the web-shop with a particular image also helps to position the web-shop in a particular institutional logic.

Heeft u het idee dat sinds het hebben van een webshop dit imago veranderd is?

Zo ja, hoe en waarom denkt u?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

Collaborations

To gain a better understanding of the dynamic in the field of SSHS's the following questions were asked:

Kennen jullie andere tweedehands winkels met een webshop?

Zo ja, hebben jullie daar ook contact mee gehad om ervaringen uit te wisselen e.d.?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

Other Story Sources and Legitimacy Mechanisms

The following questions were asked to gain a better understanding of the storytelling activities of SSHS's and to assure that no type of story or storytelling was left out of consideration. The first set of questions relates to collaboration and thus also gives insight on how association is potentially used as a legitimacy mechanism which gives context to how other legitimacy-building strategies such as the identity mechanism is used.

Tot welke hoogte bent u betrokken bij andere sociale bedrijven zoals andere duurzame tweedehands winkels?

Zo ja, op wat voor manier bent u betrokken en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

Bent u betrokken bij het platform Social Enterprise NL of een ander platform specifiek voor sociale ondernemingen?

Zo ja, op wat voor manier bent u betrokken en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

Bent u partner van derde partijen die sociale/duurzame doelen hebben?

Zo ja, welke en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

The following questions are aimed at better understanding how the SSHS's might use the organizational mechanism.

Heeft u bepaalde duurzame certificatie of voldoet aan anderzijds aantoonbare duurzame standaarden?

Zo ja, welke en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

Meet u op een bepaalde manier jullie duurzame of sociale impact?

Zo ja, hoe en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom niet?

The last question aims to integrate the associative and organizational mechanism with the identity mechanism and shows to what extent storytelling can harmonize these different legitimacy mechanisms. The question was adapted to fit the previous answers.

Communiceren jullie deze certificaten/standaarden waar jullie aan voldoen, duurzame platforms en/of partijen waar jullie een partnerschap mee hebben, kwaliteitswaarborging proces of impact meting ook met jullie publiek?

Zo ja, hoe en waarom?

Zo nee, waarom?