A BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH TO UNIVERSITY BRANDING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Mathias Akotia

Abstract

Branding of universities is attracting increasing attention, as educational organisations strive to succeed in a more competitive environment. Though many universities are now adopting branding, which is operationalised as conscious development and management of the university's identity, there is little literature and research on university brands, and how they can be created and managed. This contribution explores the subject of university branding as a means of generating sustainable competitive advantage. This article concludes that success in a competitive environment will depend on effective brand differentiation based on the identification, internalisation, delivery and communication of unique brand identity that appeals to both internal and external stakeholders. Based on in-depth interviews conducted among industry experts and university administrators in Ghana, a conceptual framework is proposed for university branding, through behavioural management.

INTRODUCTION

The perceived dynamism of a country is judged not by its history, its monuments or its cuisine, but by its brands, in particular, brands that evoke attraction, modernity and intellectual power (Kapferer, 2007). The reputation of any country in recent times is associated with the image of its centres of intellectual excellence: its universities, its research centres, and its entrepreneurial and innovative organisations.

The university is no longer just an institution of higher learning but also a business (Bunzel, 2007). As a business, the university must be driven by a competitive identity, an identity that will enable it design, create, deliver and communicate superior value. Today, greater competition exists among universities, in

attracting the best and brightest students and faculty members, the most rewarding consulting businesses, executive programmes and funds from donors and financiers who are either inundated with requests and or need funds injection themselves. Branding in universities has become an increasingly significant issue with several universities committing substantial financial resources to branding activity (Chapleo, 2010).

Some believe that if you announce the start of a branding programme and do a few ads, growth and improvement will come. However, competing to win for universities is about powerful and imaginative strategy, more a product of intellectual than financial capital. Competing to win is also about strategy focus and consistent investment in university growth drivers. Competing to win must be about a particular mind-set and set of behaviours that are appealing to internal and external stakeholders (Burmann, Zeplin & Riley, 2009). It is only when a university's members have a shared mental model of their brand (common vision and shared values) that is consistent brand supporting behaviour is possible. Because culture is unique and difficult to imitate, culture must also become the enduring essence of the university brand.

Brands are about choice and education service providers now have to compete in a fast becoming overcrowded market-space. Many universities therefore have had to continually search for what makes them special to many people and how they can continue to innovate and meet these consumer needs and wants better than competition. They know that education service customers have choices, and that if the benefits of university service offers are not readily apparent and consis-

tently delivered, the consumer will choose something else (Brymer, 2003).

Although university branding is now receiving increasing academic attention, this has largely been limited (Chapleo, 2010). The intangible nature, diversity and complexity of university products, services and faculties present several challenges for branding. It is therefore imperative that research and discourses are provoked to help address the university branding challenges.

This study aims at unearthing the key factors, people and processes involved in university brand creation through in-depth interview of brand and industry experts as well as university administrators. This contribution seeks to address the following questions:

1. How does the university brand create value for the consumer?
2. How does a university brand create value for the institution?
3. What are the success factors for university brand creation?
4. What behavioural processes are involved in university brand creation?

This contribution explores the subject of university branding as a means of generating sustainable competitive advantage. The paper continues with literature review on brands, the research method, presentation and discussion of findings and suggestion of a conceptual framework for university branding.

Brand: A name with the power to influence buyers

Through burning, early man stamped ownership on livestock, and with the development

of trade, buyers would use brands as a means of differentiating between the cattle of one farmer and another (Blackett, 2009). Medieval guilds required that crafts-people put trademarks on their products to protect themselves and their customers against counterfeits. Thus, the utility of brands as a tool for identification and a guide to consumer choice decisions was established, roles that have remained unchanged till today. The widespread use of brands however, is essentially a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, enabled by the industrial revolution with its improvement in manufacturing and communications (Blackett, 2009).

From this perspective of the brand as an identity, the brand came to be defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, a design or combination of them intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (AMA, 1960: In Kotler & Keller, 2009). The brand is thus a product or service whose dimensions distinguish it in some way from other products or services designed to satisfy the same needs and preferences.

These differences may be functional, rational, or tangible all related to the performance of the brand (Kotler & Keller, 2009). These differences may also be related to more symbolic, emotional or intangible dimensions, and these may relate to what the brand represents in the life of consumers. From this perspective of the brand being an identity flows the legal definition for the brand as a trade mark, that is, a sign or set of signs certifying the origin of a product or services and differentiating it from competition (Kapferer, 2007). Trademarks have birthdays, the day on which they were launched and from that day they need to be defended against infringements and counterfeiting.

The brand is also conceptualised as a set of mental associations, held by the consumer which adds to the perceived value of a product or service (Keller, 2005). Kapferer (2007) built on Keller's definition of the brand by adding that strong brands have intense emotional components as well. Beyond mental associations, the power of brand name is due to the specific nature of emotional relationships it develops. Therefore, a brand, according to Kapferer (2007), is a name with power to influence stakeholders and that what really makes a name become a brand are the saliency, differentiability, intensity and trust attached to these associations. Kapferer (2007) adds that brand power to influence depends on representations and relationships. A representation is a system of mental associations, also described as brand image. Kapferer (2007) sums up on brands by emphasising that a brand exists when it has acquired power to influence the market. To gain market share the brand must be able to conjure a big idea and be attractive. It must also be experienced by people in the organisation, customers and other stakeholders at contact points and activated by people's deeds and behaviours.

Modern brand management begins with the product and service as the prime vector of value (Kapferer, 2007). The brand therefore needs to be communicated clearly and consistently, to structure and orientate tangible perceptions and to add intangible ones. Finally, the brand must be distributed as successful value creation requires successful value delivery (Kapferer, 2007).

The major challenge to branding is co-

ordinating all the value adding activities to deliver a holistic brand experience. Brand management, observed Tosti & Stotz (2001), has moved on from solely focusing on customers to having a more balanced approach on satisfying stakeholders. Therefore, brand management has become a team-based activity, managed at more senior levels by people who adopt a more strategic and broad perspectives.

Services Branding

Because of the *intangibility* of services, branding is more critical for services than for tangible products. Branding aids the marketing of services by differentiating the service beyond commodity level and from competition (Berry, 2000). Classical product branding assumes an internal quality controlled value delivery system invisible to consumers. However for services, and especially education services, the value delivery process is not only visible to the consumers, they participate in the delivery process themselves and thus influence the quality of delivery. Therefore, employees of universities as well as consumers are critical to brand value co-creation and are ultimately responsible for delivering its promise.

Berry (2000) has suggested, based on an in-depth study of a number of firms providing excellent service that four strategic viewpoints should be taken into account in order for the firm to cultivate brand equity and to create brand relationships that pay off. Firstly, services firms must be different. They innovate rather than imitate. Their service is presented differently (brand relationships different from those of competitors are created). Hence, the brand is distinct in the minds of the customers. Secondly, services

firms must determine their own fame. To Berry (2000) differentiating the service from that of the competitors is not enough, a service firm must perform services better than competitors.

Thirdly, a service firm must make emotional connection. They must create feelings of trust, affection and closeness. Brands should reflect customer's core values which often go beyond the logical. Finally, service firms internalize the brand through service mindedness and supporting behaviour. The brand relationship is to a large degree created in the service encounter, where customer contact employees often have a central role.

Akotia's (2007) study of Barclays Bank Ghana, the leading bank brand in Ghana during the early 2000s, concluded that the brand's strong consumer equity derived from its holistic approach to branding, and its excellent customer service supported by brand-centred behaviours. Akotia (2007) found that beyond a redefinition of Barclays' mission, vision and values, Barclays also has espoused a set of behaviours, the Barclays' Behaviours. These behaviours (the 6Bs) provide the framework for Barclays' excellent functional performance. The Barclays' brand behaviors are to "delight customers, drive performance, execute plans at speed, grow talent and capability, project and enhance reputation, build pride and passion" (Akotia, 2007). These Barclays' behaviours (6Bs) and the Barclays performance indicators (5Cs), expressed in terms of Company, Customers, Colleagues, Controls and Community, form the bases for employee development and socialisation as well as performance evaluation.

Branding process and outcomes

Several branding models exist but for simplicity of the process Wood's (2000) identity based branding model will be used to explain what the process entails and what outcomes are measurable and at what stage of the process.

Wood defined a brand as a "mechanism for achieving competitive advantage for the firm through differentiation" (Wood, 2000: p.669). This definition adopts a holistic perspective and assumes a relationship. Brands are created and managed synergistically using the marketing-mix as depicted in Figure 1. Brands are strategically positioned in the market by offering distinctive benefits (tangible and intangible) desired by consumers to achieve competitive advantage. Simply put, brand description or identity (sources of brand influence such as: brand value, awareness, associations, personality, reputation, patents) is adapted to the needs and wants of a chosen market segment using the marketing-mix.

Figure 1:   The Management of Brand

| Marketing-mix → Brand |
|---|
| → Competitive advantage |
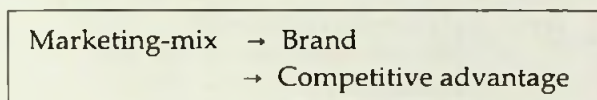
Source: Wood (2000)

Branding or the management of brands involves the creation of brand description (identity) and therefore the degree of brand strength (market share, leadership, penetration, loyalty rate, price premium) achieved. It is assumed that the higher the degree of brand strength the greater the competitive advantage. This relationship is captured in Figure 2. Figure 2 suggests that brand value is a function of brand strength which is also a function of brand description. Brand value, according to Wood, is distinct as

it refers to an actual or notional business transaction, while the other two focus on the consumer. It was noted by Wood that the outcome of brand strength is not specified as brand value, but implies market share and profit.

Figure 2: The Brand Equity Chain

Brand description→ Brand strength→ Brand value
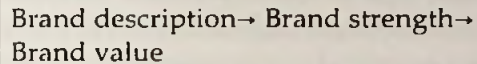
Source: Wood (2000)

Literature on branding suggests that strong brands usually provide several advantages such as enhanced line and brand extension possibilities, trade channel access, insulation from competitive attacks and increased entry barriers to competition, higher margins and profit (Kapferer, 2007; Aaker, 1996). Thus, there can be more than one outcome determined by brand strength apart from brand value. Wood noted that brand value measurements could be used as an indicator of market power of a brand. This relationship is summed up in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The Relationship between Branding and Competitive Advantage

Marketing-mix→ Brand description→ Brand strength→Competitive advantage
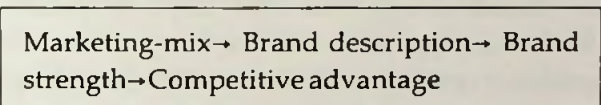
Source: Wood (2000

According to Wood (2000), competitive advantage, or brand equity, which is the outcome of branding activity, can be measured in terms of revenue, profit, added value or market share. Quantification of measurements provides hard data that can be compared year on year as well as providing

references for planning and controlling across the organization.

Research Method

The purpose of this research was exploratory, to enable the researcher gain insights into, and deepen understanding of how branding could be advanced in the complex university environment and to identify future research areas. The discovery-oriented nature of this study, particularly its concern with generating meanings and gaining insights into brand creation process called for a phenomenological approach (King & Grace, 2008; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007).

The research questions demanded answers that emphasised full contextual analysis of organisational processes and relationships. In this study, gaining insights and deepening understanding in branding and organisational processes was derived directly from qualitative information generated from exploring brand experts and brand implementers in universities.

The population and sample

Participants were purposively drawn to reflect multiple experiences and backgrounds in brand *development* and implementation. Since the main aim was to explore and deepen understanding of university branding, purposive sampling, on the basis of who was knowledgeable and available to articulate opinions clearly about brand strategy and implementation, was employed. The sample was made up of 7 brand consultants, 6 brand managers of best practice corporate brands, 6 university marketing lecturers and 5 university administrators who are involved in brand implementation in Ghana.

Data Collection

It was important that an interview-guide was used to ensure consistency in interviewing and also to ensure that the research questions were fully addressed through the interview process. The interview guide elicited responses on corporate brand identity, brand management, the roles of leadership, internal communication and organisational structures, policies and human resource policies and practices in brand creation. The interview also elicited information on the strategic imperatives and key success factors for successful brand creation in higher education environment and how brand strategy is clarified and internally implemented and, how brand strategy and performance management are integrated through human resource (HR) policies and practices.

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Umbrella Questions:

RQ1: *How does the university brand create value for the consumer?*
1. *What are brand benefits and roles to stakeholders?*
2. *On what consumer attributes can successful university brands be discriminated?*

RQ2: *How does a brand create value for the Institution?*
1. *What are brand benefits to the university?*
2. *What do university brands stand for?*
   How do they create relevance and value?
3. *How does the university imprint the brand identity on university processes?*

For an emerging area of study, the qualitative data design provided a more holistic and richer insight into the experiences of respondents with the brand, beyond the understanding that would be generated through a quantitative study (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). In-depth interviewing which involves a certain style of social and interpersonal interaction was chosen among the range of qualitative research techniques because it allowed for one on one interviewing of executives and officers whose schedules are hectic and cannot afford time to gather with other executives in a group setting. According to Malhotra and Birks (2007), in-depth interview also allows for more interviewing in a live context and interviewer reflection. In-depth interviewing choice is also in keeping with recent research in branding and organisational studies (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2008; Burmann, Zeplin &Riley, 2009).

Data Analyses and Presentation

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data. Common themes that cut across the respondents' views were identified. The codes were not pre-specified, but resulted from the data analysis. The results have been presented in a factual narrative format that attempts to represent the respondents' relationships and experiences consistent with other similar studies on services branding (de Chernatony& Cottam, 2008), with discussions.

Findings and Discussion

How does a brand create value in the eyes of the university consumer?

Many universities seek to attract students, faculty, and industry seeking staff or consulting business. University brands "identify the source of the service and allow consumers to assign responsibility for its performance to a particular education supplier", noted several respondents. The university brand also functions as a "recognized symbol" in order to facilitate choice and to gain time. Consumers learn about brands through past experiences with the service and its marketing programme (Wood, 2000), finding out which brands satisfy university needs and which do not. They also learn about the brand through alumni, publications authored by university professors and extension activities.

Public speeches and media interviews were particularly highlighted by majority as sources of awareness and association for

particular universities. "This awareness help prospects to simplify the decisions on particular universities they wish to do business with," observed one university administrator who emphasised that his Institution's relatively strong image has been helped by his former Rector's relevant outspokenness on national issues. This is in keeping with Kapferer (2007) who observed that as consumers' lives become more complicated, rushed, and time starved, the ability of a brand to simplify decision making rigour and reduce risk is invaluable.

How does the brand create value for the university service provider?

If the brand is strong, it benefits from a high degree of loyalty and thus from "stability of future admissions, attraction of desirable faculty, consulting services and reputation in general". The reputation of the university brand is a source of demand and lasting attractiveness, the image of superior quality and added value which may justify a premium price. A dominant university brand was said to be "an entry barrier to competitors because it acts as a reference in its category," noted several respondents. If the brand is prestigious, it can generate substantial royalties by granting accreditation to other Institutions.

Brand loyalty also provides "predictability and security of demand for the university and can translate into customer willingness to pay a higher price, often 20 to 25% more than competing brands" as is the case of some business schools in Ghana. Although competitors may duplicate services delivery processes and product designs, they cannot easily match lasting impressions left in the minds of individuals and organizations by

years of service experience and marketing activity (Gronroos, 2000). For the university, branding can be a powerful means to secure a competitive advantage (Kapferer, 2007).

The strategic imperatives for university branding

What really makes a name become a brand are the benefits of saliency, exclusivity, and trust that name evokes (Kapferer, 2007), but how are these benefits achieved for university brands?

The university brand is "created through its products, not advertising," emphasised a brand consultant who added that the "advertising route to branding was wasteful of resources". For the university, its ambassadors are the quality and success of its students and faculty members, hence the criticality of selection of its students, and faculty members and the publication of professors in the leading journals as a means to impact learning. Respondents emphasised the need therefore for universities to purposefully recruit and admit best quality students as well as support faculty members to research and publish. Respondents noted that some universities achieved fame because of the publication contributions of notable faculty members. Kotler to North-Western and Porter to Harvard's image and competitiveness were mentioned by some respondents. In Ghana, Professor Stephen Adei, former Rector of GIMPA, was mentioned as one professor whose commentaries on national issues helped boost the image of GIMPA, ahead of much older institutions.

Respondents suggested three elements as key to successful service branding: the brand

identity (true essence and character), the brand *environment* (employee mental assets, behaviours and attitudes) and the *basics* (the organisation structures-resources, systems and processes).

The brand identity must be inspirational
Every corporate entity "must have a dream, a vision" (university administrator) to inspire it to great achievements. This vision must spell out "what the institution wants to achieve, and consists of an immensely inspirational and motivating goal which reaches beyond money or students enrolment numbers or pass grades" (several respondents). A vision of where it wants to be, "a clear, simple and stimulating statement must connect the entire institution passionately towards brand goal achievement" (university administrator).

Values must drive behaviour: The institution must clearly spell out its core values to drive appropriate behaviour and provide the principles for the brand's healthy growth. These values must be deeply embedded within the organisation. When these values are enacted with passion by faculty members and university employees in general they are more likely to result in true staff conviction, and thus engender brand supportive behaviour. According to de Chernatony and Segal-Horn (2001), values act as a point of difference, stimulating a unique style of behaviour from employees, and secondly, values are a source of motivation for employees.

Mission must differentiate: The Institute must feel it truly exists and that it is a coherent and unique being, with a history and a place of its own, different from others. "Many schools (for example: Yale, Harvard, Birmingham)

have mission statements which articulate university *raison d'être* and which differentiates them from other institutions and gives them real meaning and uniqueness to their existence" (University administrator). Here respondents said though most universities in Ghana have mission and vision statements these are largely meaningless as the universities do not make efforts to "internalise what they purport to believe". "It is not enough to have these statements, you must bring them alive, through the behaviours of leadership and members," emphasised a brand consultant.

An educational brand has to express its brand vision through the definition of its positioning, which is the externalisation of the brand proposition with a view to occupy a distinctive place in the minds of the desired prospects (Ries & Trout, 2001). The brand identity, mission and values are employed as levers to guide management decision-making. They become central organising principles for the entire education service organisation.

Robust business plan: When it comes to *how* an education brand will achieve its vision, respondents said it needs thorough understanding of the market place. Allied to the mission statement the university must clearly define brand's *know-how*, attributes that will bring the brand values alive and generate bases for customer relevance and distinctiveness. Insead became Europe's most famous Master of Business Administration (MBA) provider through its understanding of, and delivering the European market's value for a rigorous immersion in a truly international ten-month long programme in which students learn to work with multi-nationalities (Kapferer, 2007).

Several respondents stressed that an educational brand needs a challenging and detailed business plan, and this plan must show clearly what and how each part of the organization is expected to contribute to the overall achievement of the goals. The business plan must begin with the vision and must be exciting and motivating to organization members. But the focus of this plan must be to deliver the brand promise or propositions consistently and to achieve brand business objectives. The plan must be based on a "clear focus on stakeholders". Thus, "continuous stakeholder dialogue systems with faculty and managers on one hand and, on the other with prospective clients, the community and government are imperative to inform the university's strategic plan" (corporate marketer). The plan must be "clearly owned by faculty and managers to stand a chance of successful implementation", stressed several respondents.

The environment must be both tough and enabling

This involves internal branding which must aim at provoking appropriate brand behaviour among staff leading to brand supporting organisational culture.

Internal branding: The University must aim to enable and empower its employees to perform at high levels. "Workshops, sharing research findings and implications, collaboration in research, cross functional project teams, brand leadership interaction with staff, multi-level contacts with clients, brand rites, storytelling and the development and use of corporate brand lingo", were mentioned as some tools for internal branding. According to Vallaster and de

Chernatony (2003), only when employees have a shared mental model of the corporate brand is consistent brand supporting behaviour possible.

Transformational leader imperative: The leadership perspective must be transformational with an enormous focus on cultural sense making through strong values management. Leadership's role in the university is to "create the values and systems to realise from staff brand-asset mindedness and behaviour that will construct for the institution a culture which is congruent with brand values" (marketing practitioner). Leadership in universities that adopt branding are not passive, they constitute the face of the brand, setting the tone for all brand supportive behaviours. They must be "managers of meaning, articulating the vision, broadening and promoting the interest of followers, generating awareness and acceptance of the purpose and mission of the brand, and motivating the entire followers to go beyond their self-interest for the good of the brand," said one corporate manager. However, the regret for several of the respondents is that "leadership for most universities in Ghana are not role models at all... not setting the leadership tone with university brand behaviours for others to follow."

Brand centred HR: For effective university branding, faculty, managers and supporting colleagues are critical to brand promise delivery. Because of services' unique characteristic of intangibility, *variability* in service delivery is likely to occur. So staff must be carefully recruited, trained, inducted, empowered and motivated to support the brand. A successful service brand, according

to Free (1999), attracts, develops and retains employees who can transform the brand's values into actions and behaviours perceived by customers as appropriate and unique. Such universities must also exhibit high passion and commitment to the institution's core values. Given the importance of expectations in the establishment of high quality standards, internal climate study should be conducted to ensure that management and faculty expectations of the service are aligned to students and other clients (Leblanc & Nguyen, 1997).

Continuous service process improvements: Respondents noted that the process by which students and other customers acquire university services should be improved continually. Respondents placed emphasis on students' recruitment and admission, teaching, and examination and reporting processes. What discriminates successful brands from also-rans is the ability to adapt or reorient themselves continuously while remaining true to core values (Collins & Porras, 1998). Fostering dialogue with the business community and offering co-operative business programmes that emphasise on the job experience are prerequisites to improving the institution's reputation and service delivery (Leblanc & Nguyen, 1997).

Respondents noted that successful service brands are characterized by employees that reinforce the values of the brand. Therefore, internal marketing programmes to communicate with staff about the brand, to motivate them and help them appreciate their roles as university brand ambassadors are carefully made part of the organisation. Mitchell (2002) has advocated applying the principles of consumer marketing to internal communication so leadership can guide employees to a

better understanding of, even a passion for, the brand. Keller (1999) on the other hand advocated the concept of brand "mantra" to improve internal brand building. Brand mantra, according to Vallaster and de Chernatony (2003), refers to the internal translation of a brand's external position to enable staff understand the values and the behaviours needed to reinforce these.

Team approach: Organisations that have effective internal branding have people working in "teams, supporting one another and collaborating". There are minimum controls and procedures. People have the "sense of belonging and pride in being members of the elite organisation.... work is fun, team spirit is strong, and success is greatly celebrated" (sampled views from practitioners. But "compromises to core values are eschewed and there is little room for those who will not and can not conform to brand supportive behaviours." These views are consistent with Collins and Porras (1998).

The basics required for high performance
For successful internal branding, respondents noted that human resource (HR) management must have elevated position within the brand leadership team, "using the HR policies and practices to orchestrate brand supportive behaviours and culture" (sampled views). For service branding success, the brand must become the religion, and brand behaviours the credo channelling staff energies to brand promise delivery, rewarding those who enact the brand behaviours and ejecting those who can not or are unwilling to live out university roles (Collins & Porras, 1998).

HR must aim at positive attitudes: HR must ensure, as part of internal branding process,

that all those involved in the educational brand value delivery are committed, prepared, informed and motivated. Another domain of HR is to ensure employees possess the appropriate knowledge, skills and organizational support (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2003) to become effectual brand ambassadors.

Corporate structures must be supporting: Respondents called for clear corporate structure which must direct employee behaviour along the defined brand promise. Vallaster and de Chernatony (2003) conclude that the continuous blending of corporate structure with related brand symbols and rites can improve employee commitment. The university corporate structures specify how an individual should behave and how decisions are to be made in a brand-consistent way. Corporate structures are defined as rules and tangible or intangible resources which members of an organisation can draw upon to act in brand supporting manner (Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2003). To harmonise internal communication therefore, several corporate managers recommended that institutions create identity charters, to ensure consistency in brand communication and recognition.

With increasing diversity of university staff comes country, regional, sub-cultural influences on individual's interpretation of structural conditions. The structures must not only be consistent with the brand's deepest values, they must emanate from the brand identity. For example, "the brand must not be promising *excellence in management education* when basic resources are lacking to make this promise feasible ... when on-line admission/registration processes and basic presentation equipment that nowadays are

taken for granted even in *ordinary* institutions are lacking in a particular institution,... when curriculum updates lag,.... library facilities are dismal and employers are not experiencing excellence in the products from the institution and,... when faculty is in constant shortage, morale abysmal and turnover high, ...a brand promise of world class management education is simply unrealistic and will not evoke trust and certitude", were some sampled views from respondents.

University Brand Equity: Brands do generate differential competitive advantages, normally referred to as brand equity. What is to be measured and at what level can measurement be done? Respondents suggested that measurement of the brand performance can be done at several levels. The recommendation of respondents was to separate consumer brand equity (brand assets/descriptors and brand strength) from brand financial valuation.

Starting with consumer brand equity, respondents suggested that at the brand description level, brand awareness, brand association, perceived brand personality, quality and values can be measured as they reflect with specific stakeholders. At the brand strength level however, market share, leadership, loyalty rate could be employed consistent with Wood (2000). Multi-item measures were strongly recommended with brand awareness, perceived quality, brand loyalty and brand association being the most common among respondents. Many respondents also pointed to several university rankings schemes but noted that these may use factors that may not load the drivers for university brand choices.

Brand financial value was said to be brand competitive advantage which is the outcome of branding activity, consistent with Wood (2000). A brand's competitive advantage in financial terms can then be measured in several ways: revenue, profits and market share. A few respondents suggested that one other form of the university brand equity could be through brand valuation. Brand valuation in this context is derived from net discounted cash-flow attributable to the brand after paying the cost of capital to produce and run the business and the cost of marketing (Kapferer, 2007).

The Conceptual Framework

What processes and success factors are involved in university branding? Based on the study, a conceptual framework is suggested.

Strong brands are built through identity based brand management (Kapferer, 2007; Burmann, Zeplin & Riley, 2009). This involves the organisation purposefully directing the behaviour of members to behave in ways that support and promote the brand values.

Just like a person, for a brand to be strong, it must have an identity, which is its true self, a field of unique competence, driven by a vision, values and personality that are different from others and resistant to change (Kapferer, 2007). The main dimensions of brand identity are brand vision, values (culture), personality, capabilities, behaviour and other recognisable brand externalisations (Burmann, Zeplin & Riley, 2009). Corporations combine and coordinate several brand identity driven policies, activities and measures that are combined in three levers: brand-centred leadership, brand communications and brand supporting structures, policies and HR practices (Burmann & Associates, 2009).
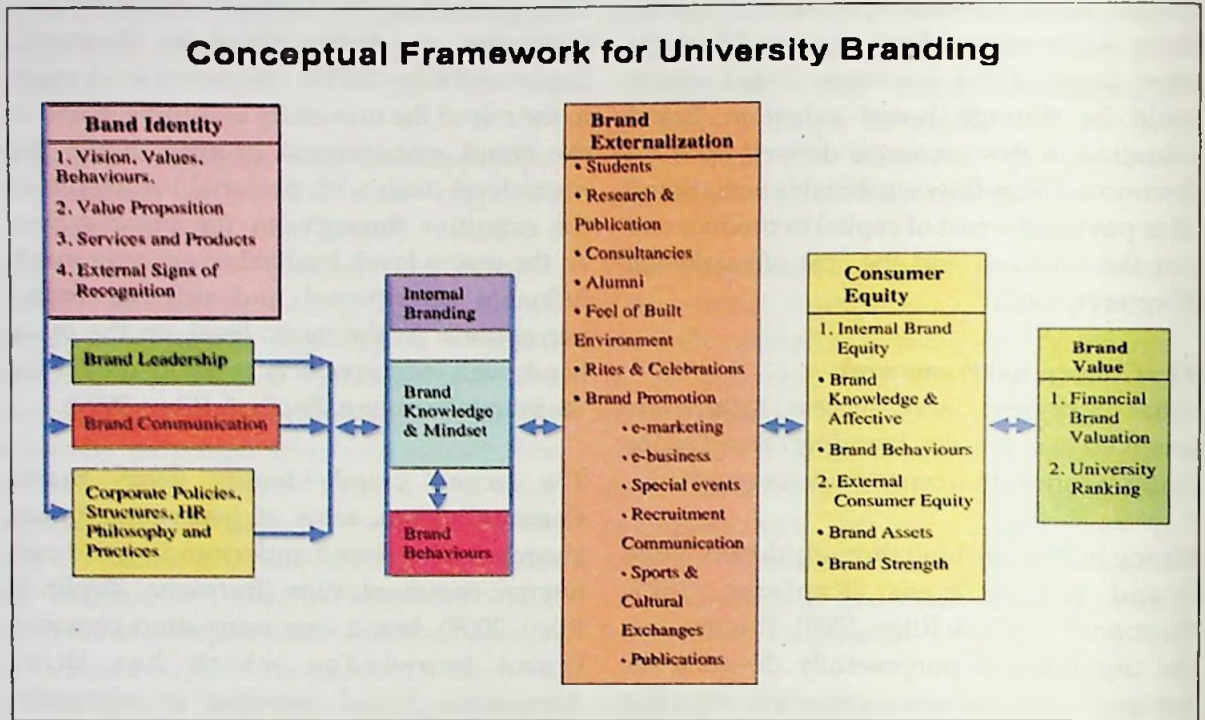
The first brand lever, **Brand Leadership**, aims at encouraging brand leadership at all levels in the organisation. Two brand-relevant levels of leadership are distinguished by Burmann, Zeplin and Riley (2009). The macro level refers to the role of the university executive board in the brand management process, while the micro level deals with personal leadership of the executive through-out the organisation. At the macro level, leadership exercise much influence on internal and external brand perceptions. At the micro level, on the other hand, each executive acts as a role model for the brand (Burmann, Zeplin & Riley, 2009).

The second brand identity lever, **Brand Communication**, aims at generating brand awareness and shared understanding through internal communication (Burmann, Zeplin & Riley, 2009). Brand communication provides brand knowledge which has three dimensions: brand meaning or relevance, knowledge of customer needs and expectations, and employee understanding of university responsibility to deliver the brand promise. Internal communication aims to influence employee brand knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and the outcome of internal communication include employee commitment, shared vision, a service minded approach, loyalty and satisfaction.

The final brand identity lever, **Brand-centred Human Resources**, aims at ensuring person-brand identity fit through brand directed HR activities, supporting structures and policies. Brand centred HR ensures that applicants with personal identity fit are recruited and selected, are trained and developed,

motivated, promoted and "internalised" through a series of planned brand socialisation/orientation programmes. Brand-centred HR also ensures employees are adequately remunerated and that the organisational structures are designed to support the brand identity.

Conceptual Framework for University Branding

Band Identity
1. Vision, Values, Behaviours.
2. Value Proposition
3. Services and Products
4. External Signs of Recognition

Brand Leadership

Brand Communication

Corporate Policies, Structures, HR Philosophy and Practices

Internal Branding

Brand Knowledge & Mindset

Brand Behaviours

Brand Externalization
• Students
• Research & Publication
• Consultancies
• Alumni
• Feel of Built Environment
• Rites & Celebrations
• Brand Promotion
  • e-marketing
  • e-business
  • Special events
  • Recruitment Communication
  • Sports & Cultural Exchanges
  • Publications

Consumer Equity
1. Internal Brand Equity
• Brand Knowledge & Affective
• Brand Behaviours
2. External Consumer Equity
• Brand Assets
• Brand Strength

Brand Value
1. Financial Brand Valuation
2. University Ranking

Akotia (2010)

This coordinated brand directed measures interact with organisation culture to produce performance culture that is supportive of the brand identity. This comes in the form of University brand knowledge and behaviours which are projected externally to students, alumni and the community. Consumer equity becomes generated in the form of human-based competences and attitudes as well as external consumer equity. Finally the brand value is generated in the form of notional financial valuation as well as university ranking which may be based on critical drivers of value added activities.

Conclusion

The educational brand experience is driven by what happens at points of contact, where the customer interacts with the faculty members, supporting staff and other customers in brand value co-creation. However, education services are deeds, performances and for these reasons may run the risks of being perceived as commodities. Thus, university branding involves two-way recognition. Internally, the university's people must adopt the brand and be aligned to brand identity through brand supportive mindedness and supporting behaviours. At another level, the

brand promise must be delivered to the chosen market. Success in what has now become a competitive and cluttered university market will depend on effective brand differentiation, based on the identification, internalisation, delivery and communication of unique brand values relevant to and desired by consumers. Further empirical work is required to validate this conceptual framework.

REFERENCE

Aaker, D. (1996). *Building Strong Brands.* New York: The Free Press.

Akotia, M. (2007). Strategic Services Branding: An imperative for services financial performance. GIMPA Journal of Leadership, Management & Administration, 5/1

Blackett, T. (2009). What is a brand? In R. Clifton (Ed): *Brands and Branding.* London: The Economist with Profile Books

Berry, L. (2000). Cultivating services brand equity. *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science, 28(I),* 128 – 137.

Brymer, C. (2009).The Future of Brands: In R. Clifton (Ed): *Brands and Branding.* London: The Economist with Profile Books.

Bunzel, D. (2007). Universities sell their brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management,* 16/2

Burmann, C., Zeplin S. & Riley, N. (2009). Key determinants of internal brand management success: An exploratory empirical analysis. *Journal of Brand Management,* 26 (4), 264-284.

Chapleo, C. (2010). What defines successful university brands? *International Journal of Public Sector Management,* 23/2

Collins, J.C. & Porras, J. (1998). *Built to Last.* London: Random House Business.

de Chernatony L. & Cottam S. (2008). Interactions between organisational cultures and corporate brands. *Journal of Product and Brand Management,* 17(1), 13-24.

de Chernatony, L. (2001). *From Brand Vision to Brand Evaluation-Strategically Building and Sustaining Brands.* Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

de Chernatony, L. & Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (1996). Did Brand Managers Ever Jump on the
same Brand Wagon as Brand Consultants? *ESOMAR Publication Series, 203,* 34-50.

de Chernatony, L. & Dall'Olmo Riley, F. (1998). Defining A "Brand": Beyond The Literature
with Experts' Interpretations. *Journal of Marketing Management 14,* 417 - 443.

de Chernatony, L. & McDonald, M. (1998). *Creating Powerful Brands in Consumer, Service and*
Industrial Markets, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
Free, C. (1999). The Internal Brand. *The Journal of Brand Management, 6,* 231 - 236.

Gronroos, C. (2000). *Service Management and Marketing.* New York: New York

Kapferer, J. (2007). *The New Strategic Brand Management ,* London: Kogan Page.

Kotler, P. & Keller, K. (2009). *Marketing Management.* New Jersey: Pearson.

Keller, L. (2005). *Strategic Brand Management.* New Delhi: Prentice-Hall

Keller, K. (1999). Brand Mantras: Rationale, Criteria and Examples. *Journal*

of Marketing Management, 15(1-3), 43-51.

Leblanc, G & Nguyen, N. (1997). Searching for excellence in business education: an exploratory study of customer impressions of service quality. *International Journal of Educational Management.*11/2, 72-79.

Malhotra, N. & Birks, D. (2007). *Marketing Research.* Harlow: Pearson Education
Mitchell, C. (2002). Selling the brand Inside. *Harvard Business Review, 1,* 99-105.

Ries A., & Trout, J. (2001). *Positioning: The Battle for your mind,* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Tosti, D. & Stotz, R. (2001). "Building Your Brand From the Inside Out", *Marketing Management.* July/August, 181-191.

Vallaster, C. & de Chernatony L., (2003). Service branding: The role of leadership during
the internal brand building process (*working paper*), Birmingham.

Wood, l. (2000). Brands and brand equity: Definitions and management. *Management Decision, 38(9),* 662 – 669.

Zeithaml, V. & Bitner, M. (2009). *Services Marketing.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr Mathias Akotia, Chief Executive Officer of Brand Ghana Office since September 2009, brings to this role his vast experience working on commercial and corporate brands and demonstrated achievements at the highest levels of international brand management. He has also presented at several prestigious forums on brands and branding in Europe, Asia and Africa and has several publications on brands and branding in peer reviewed journals.

Mr Akotia's management career began with Unilever in 1987. He later joined British American Tobacco (BAT), rising to become Brand Marketing Director, BAT Central-West Africa. While with BAT, Mr Akotia worked for BAT-Kenya, BAT-West Africa and, was at one time Managing Director of Pioneer Aluminium Factory, Tema.

A member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Mr Akotia has won several "excellence" citations, culminating in the award of BAT's prestigious Sir Albert Levy Award for Marketing Excellence.

Mr Akotia holds BSc (Management), MPhil in Marketing and is completing PhD at the University of Ghana in Internal Branding and Performance Culture. He can be reached on: mathias4042@hotmail.com & 233 (24) 4423318