

Branding Public Universities through Advertising: A Study of Two Public Universities in Ghana

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Abstract

Higher education marketing has become a major avenue for institutions to deliver marketing communication activities. Consequently, research that provides insights into branding has been of importance to academic and management practitioners. The objective of this study was to appraise how UEW and UCC utilise branding and advertising to enhance their brand identities and images. The study adopted a qualitative approach to gather data from respondents at UEW and UCC. Primary data (interviews) and secondary data (letters, reports, newspapers, among others) were relied upon in testing the propositions developed through literature review. The outcome of the study provides support for a service brand identity comprising six facets: physique, personality, relationship, reflection, culture and self-image. The discussion outlines how the findings lend credence to these elements to create a brand identity implied by existing brand identity framework. The data points to positive results for higher institutions which desire to invest and maintain strong brand identity and image given that these facets influence competition. For branding and advertising to effectively promote the image of institutions, a strategically planned branding programme is recommended to attract more constituents.

Keywords: branding, advertising, brand, corporate identity systems, Kapferer's identity prism model

1. Introduction

Marketisation in higher education implies liberalising institutions from the previously high degree of control in the sector (Jongbloed, 2003). Higher education institutions use marketing campaign as critical step in achieving their targets to increase the numbers of students attending their universities (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). According to Young (2002) marketisation is a "compromise between privatisation, academic autonomy and state control" (p. 79). Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) emphasise the need for higher education institutions especially public universities to respond to changes by making use of potential and effective benefits of marketing theories and concepts in the business world to gain competitive edge over others. Marketing communications are crucial component by which higher education institutions reach success in marketing. This assertion is supported by Fill (2003) in his discussion of marketing communication as a management process through which an organisation enters into dialogue with its various audiences. According to Fill (2003) the objective of marketing communication process is to reposition an organisation by influencing the perception and understanding of its services or products with the view of generating attitudinal and behavioural responses. Its primary goal is to reach a defined audience or target to affect behaviour by strategically informing, persuading and reminding (Dolphin, 2000).

Universities worldwide are searching for unique definition of what they are in order to differentiate themselves and attract students and academic staff due to increased competition (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2009). Davies (2002) shares a similar opinion stressing that branding messages set institutions apart and indicate a promise to their constituents. Branding messages involves defining the essence of what a university is, what it stands for and what it wants to be known for. All these require precision and consistency in the formulations and internal commitment to the brand (Harsha & Shah, 2011)

According to Etzel, Walker and Stanton (2006) a brand is a name and/or mark intended to identify one product or service from another and to differentiate the product or service from other competing products or services. Istileulova (2010) describes brand as a mental expression or sign of quality. It could be an identity in the market place. It may also be defined as image or identity of a corporate entity (De Chernatony, 2001; Ellwood, 2000). Branding in most situations is augmented by advertising to achieve maximum results. The ultimate way of marketing a service is to promote it by advertising (Beavers-Moss, 2001). According to Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (2003) advertising is a non personal communication of information usually paid for to persuade or influence audience regarding products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through mass media. Organisations use advertising to enhance image of the general brand to influence social values or establish a connection between the brand and an already established positive value which emphasises importance of the brand and corporate identities (Richards, MacRury & Botterill, 2000).

2. Marketing in Higher Education

Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) indicate that the higher education market is well established as a global phenomenon especially in nations such as the USA, UK, Australia and Canada. There is evidence of marketisation and deregulation of universities in the USA (Dill, 2003) in Canada (Kwong, 2000; Young, 2002) in the UK (Gibbs,

2001; Taylor, 2003) in Australia (Baldwin & James, 2000) and in Africa (Maringe & Fosket, 2002). According to Rosenthal (2003) discussions of literature of marketing in higher education institutions commenced since the early 1980s in respect of branding and change process in the settings of educational institutions. Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (2004) emphasise that literature on education marketing which emerged from the United States of America and United Kingdom in the 1980s were more theoretical-normative in nature based on models utilised by the business sector. Such literatures include books by Gibbs and Knapp (2001) on how institutions can apply advertising (above-the-line) and public relations (below-the-line) practices in the business sector to higher education. According to Binsardi *et al* (2003) various writers including Kotler and Armstrong (2003) and Kotler (2003) have developed marketing theories and related definitions in the business sector that continue to be used to underpin research in education marketing. According to Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) universities worldwide are suffering something of identity crisis under pressures of rapid increases in students' numbers, governmental control and rising public disenchantment. These have prompted universities to adopt fundamental principles of integrated marketing and branding (Klassen, 2002). Being market-oriented is very important in the present higher education marketplace. The infusion of marketing into higher education has been supported by many scholars. For example, Gibbs (2002) indicates the need for academic institutions to market themselves within the global competition in which they operate, resulting in the development and transfer of concepts and practices of marketing from different sectors into higher education. Young (2002) sees marketisation in higher education as compromise between privatisation, academic autonomy and state control. This opinion is emphasised by Dill (2003) with the view that world leaders continue to advocate for higher education to be free from government regulation.

According to Hemsley-Brown *et al* (2006) higher education marketing draws its conceptualisations and empirical frameworks from services marketing despite the differences in context between institutions and other service organisations. However, the integration of marketing models used by businesses into higher education has been criticised by much debate, especially about who the customers of academic institutions are (Gibbs *et al*, 2001). Taylor (2003) explains that the opposing views to higher education marketing serve to point out concerns about marketisation of higher education by the introduction of business terminology which sought to indicate that higher education institutions were increasingly being regarded as profit-oriented business entities. According to scholars such as Dill (2003) the introduction of market forces and business orientation in higher education institutions contradicts values of education. Dill (2003) and Lewis (2003) therefore argue that educationists should oppose any form of marketing in their institutions of higher learning. Lewis (2003) also points out that branding in particular is anathema to higher education requiring central control and consistency whereas universities are generally about freedom and action.

This study however, supports the assertions that encourage higher education institutions to make use of marketing as tool for branding themselves locally and internationally via advertising. This study is of the opinion that brand's emotional values are communicated by advertising and through interactions of organisational members with different stakeholders. A key issue of empirical research identified for this study into higher education marketing is related to marketing communications and dissemination of branding and advertising information. According to Balmer and Greyser (2006) marketing communications is an aspect of the marketing landscape which involves concepts that address issues at corporate level. Among others, marketing communications include branding and advertising.

2.1. Branding

According to Coleman (2010) the American Marketing Association (AMA) first produced a brand definition in the 1960s that described brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of all these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. Etzel *et al* (2006) stress on the definition of brand as a name, design, symbol and/or mark used to identify the service or product of one seller or entity and to differentiate the service or product from competing services or products. Brodie, Glynn and Little (2006b) rather conceptualise "service brand" in terms of "making", "enabling" and "keeping" promises. The current definition of brand by the American Marketing Association draws heavily on previous definitions which describe a brand as a name, term, design, symbol or any feature that identifies one seller's good or service as different from those of other sellers (AMA, 2009). According to AMA (2009) a brand may identify one item, a family of items or all items of a seller. If the brand is used for the organisation or firm as a whole, the preferred term is trade name (AMA, 2009). In legal terms brand is referred to as trademark (AMA, 2009).

The definitions above and others similar to them have been criticised for being goods-centric (Jevons & Gabbott, 2009). This claim is however contestable, given that they consider both goods and services, whilst other elements of the definitions such as name, design, symbol or trademark have equal applicability to service brands. But it is the view of this study that AMA's (2009) definition over emphasises visible manifestations of brand at the expense of customers or stakeholders. Keller and Lehmann (2006) argue that AMA's definition fails to account for the powerful role emotion plays in brand development. De Chernatony (2006) also disagrees that brand is just

a logo, name or package that differentiates products or services. According to De Chernatony (2006) brand is not just a name because the name is created to identify the product or service as brand is also developed to add value to the product or service and give it a personality. Brand could be a psychological and implicit covenant between the brand owner and consumer or audience through which shared expectations are set and met (Kapferer, 2004). Brand may be a perception that exists in the mindsets of consumers or audience.

From the above definitions of brand, this study can suggest that the role of brand has moved from just designating the ownership of services or product into a valuable source of information and a tool which deliver promises to enhance relationships. It (brand) could be something unique that distinguishes one service, product or organisation from the other. This is highlighted by Keller's (2008) description of brand as the essence of an organisation and a powerful differentiator and decision-making tool on the part of consumers.

2.2. Corporate Branding

Corporate branding dominates service brands (Coleman, 2010). Higher education institutions which are examples of service brands are now corporatising in an effort to ensure efficiency in operations and management of their institutions (Jarvis, 2011). According to Hajiba-Osman (2008) there is the emergence of corporatisation because from being the centre of academia, universities are now like business organisations. Public universities are coming to terms with trends of the new corporate culture by their establishment of corporate communications departments in institutions to handle corporate issues (Treadwell & Treadwell, 2000).

Einwiller and Will (2002) propose an illustrative definition of corporate branding based upon consideration of opinions by different scholars. They describe corporate branding as "a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining favourable images and consequently favourable reputation of the organisation as a whole by sending signals to all stakeholders by managing behaviour, communication and symbolism" (p.101). Coleman (2010) emphasises that corporate branding involves placing an organisation's brand name in the minds of audience or consumers, and therefore concerned with creating image and reputation. This study envisages corporate branding as a strategy for higher education institutions to market their core values, vision, mission and programmes, which is consistent with the assertion of Muzellec (2006) who describes corporate branding as the means for an organisation to project or promote its inner identity or defining values to all stakeholders. Einwiller *et al* (2002) also highlight the important role symbolism plays in corporate branding which could be in the form of brand logo, typeface or even premises of an organisation.

Following from the above discussions, this study considers that incorporating strong brand equity and awareness are vital in communicating what institutions offer in ways that persuade individuals to desire to attend and be a part of their institutions. Brand equity is built through effective management of the brand over time (Kim, Lee & Ku, 2004). This study asserts that symbols of institutions have to be projected through communications with the continuous support of employees to reflect and create very strong values.

2.3. Brand Image

Higher education institutions are investing so much to enhance their brand image in the competitive higher education market (Chapleo, 2005). According to Chapleo (2005) there is the need for higher education institutions to develop and/or maintain distinct images to create advantage in the competitive global market. Image could be seen as emotional elements and values associated with an organisation (Ellwood, 2000). A brand's image could be the perception of the public as a whole. De Pelsmacker, Geuens and Van den Bergh (2007) define brand image as the perception and interpretation held by consumers in respect of a brand's identity. For organisations to achieve effective differentiation they are required to project an image of perceived added value in the competitive market (Czarniawska & Genell, 2002). According to Keller (2008) brand image consists of user profiles, purchase and usage situations, personality and values including history, heritage and experiences. The brand image of service brands is usually referred to as corporate image.

Corporate image emphasises the outside world's overall impression of the organisation including the views of customers, shareholders, media and the public (Hatch *et al*, 2003). Corporate image explores the thoughts of others about the organisation. There are different understandings of corporate image. For example, Davies (2002) describe corporate image as an organisation's views about the perceptions of its external stakeholders. Brown, Dacin, Pratt and Whetton (2006) define corporate image as the mental associations that organisation members think others outside the organisation hold about their organisation. Brown *et al* (2006) refer to corporate brand as the construed image. According to Brown *et al* (2006) construed images include all associations that members within the organisation have about the perceptions of the organisation by external stakeholders. The associations held by leaders of organisations that are to be projected to stakeholders are also referred to as intended image (Brown *et al*, 2006). Hatch *et al* (2003) share Brown *et al*'s (2006) opinion of corporate image describing it as the view of an organisation developed by its stakeholders, namely the outside world's overall impression of the organisation.

This study shares the opinion that the distinct images of institutions influence consumers' choice, and

therefore in this particular case, students' willingness to apply to certain institutions of their choice. This is because they (students) establish positive images in the mindsets of stakeholders. This view by the study is supported by Ivy (2001) who points out that a distinct image influences the willingness of students to choose particular institutions. This study envisages that brand identity and image should have close connection. The reason is that a brand that is in synchrony or aligned with its target audiences performs better than one which is not (Burmah & Riley, 2008).

2.4. Brand Reputation and Attitude

Price, Matzdorf, Smith and Agahi (2003) recommend "reputational pull" as a means of differentiating brands or organisations. Brand reputation is a collective representation of a brand's past actions and results which indicate its ability to build and deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders (Fombrun, Gardberg & Sever, 2000). Price *et al* (2003) emphasise that successful management of branding activities should result in a favourable brand reputation. Unlike a brand's image which reflects current changing perceptions, a brand's reputation is more stable and represents the distillation of multiple images over time (Fombrun *et al*, 2000). By encompassing the evaluations of all stakeholders, reputation provides a much more representative indication of brand performance. De Chernatony's (2001) model of brand reputation management conceptualises brand building process as revolving around the identification and narrowing of gaps between a brand's identity and its reputation. De Chernatony (2001) therefore, suggests the need for managers to work with other employees to reduce gaps and eliminate sources of incongruity. De Chernatony (2001) emphasises that there should be regular fine-tuning of diverse strategies to achieve a better match between identity and reputation by including both internal and external components in the branding process to have a balanced approach to brand building and development.

Wells *et al* (2003) indicate the central role attitude plays in brand reputation and choice especially portraying the dislikes and likes of consumers. Wells *et al* (2003) describe brand attitude as "a learned predisposition, a feeling that an individual holds towards an object, a person or an idea that leads to a particular decision" (p.112). Attitudes are the overall evaluations of the brand from the consumer's perspective. Attitude represents the image of a certain brand in consumers' minds which reflects what they feel and think about that particular brand (Wells *et al*, 2003). This study recognises attitudes as either positive or negative that reflects the likes, dislikes and neutrality of the brand. Brand reputation and identity have been recognised as very critical elements by this study in branding and advertising because they link the thoughts and feelings of consumers or audiences about a service, product or institution to choice and patronage. Advertisers are also much concerned about consumers' attitude and likeability of their advertisement because emotions and feelings evoked by an advertisement have carry over effects to brands (Bruner & Kumar, 2000).

3. Branding in Higher Education Institutions

Harsha *et al* (2011) describe branding in higher education institutions as the latest focus in education marketing to attract students. According to Alessandri (2001) and Waeraas *et al* (2009) there have been numerous studies published on branding in the context of higher education marketing. For example, the work of Gray, Fam and Llanes (2003) focuses on branding to identify key factors when marketing or promoting universities and positioning higher education institutions in the competitive global environment. Branding of higher education institutions emanates from the transfer of good practices from the private business sector into academia (Wæraas *et al*, 2009).

The shrinking global boundaries and technological changes have intensified the significance of branding higher education (Harsha *et al*, 2011). Harsha *et al* (2011) postulates that the strength of a higher education brand is represented by the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images and experiences linked to the brand in the mindsets of constituents or audiences, and what consumers (audiences) have learned, felt, seen and heard about the institution over time. Some of the benefits of branding to higher education institutions include attracting students from high income families, providing information, projecting image, improving institutional cooperation, instigating internal change and re-discovering their (institutions) basic purposes (Stensaker, 2005). Higher academic institutions have branded their identities by the use of trademarks such as, any word, name, symbol or device, or combination of all these to identify and distinguish their source of service from others (United States Patent and Trademark Office, 2001).

This study views higher education branding as projecting the physical and behavioural features of an institution. The study lends credence to the proposition of Bulotaite (2003) that the purpose of developing a brand in higher education is to communicate "corporate identity" in order to promote attraction and loyalty. In higher education circles brand name reflects the identity of the university (Davies, 2002). Creating a very distinct identity enables students to solidify and choose their preferred institutions without any reservation (Lambo, 2011). According to Wæraas *et al* (2009) branding efforts in academia are easily observable through the use of vision statements, visual designs and core values. In addition to the use of identity features, most institutions also brand themselves by promoting the quality of functional attributes such as strong faculty, prestigious alumni, broad

range of programmes, campus and housing infrastructure and amenities, among others (Harsha *et al*, 2011). This study asserts that branding adds value to higher education institutions and provides maximum satisfaction for their consumers and constituents.

Considering the various opinions that have been expressed in the study so far, it attempts to define higher education brand as the peculiar qualities that differentiate that brand from other institutions. Oplatka *et al* (2004) buttress this view by envisaging higher education brand as an indication of how institutions meet students' requirements through the provision of high quality education, unique identity in the market and employability of its graduates. Branding institutions in higher education enables potential students of an institution and larger community to identify and distinguish a particular or preferred institution from other institutions (Lambooy, 2011).

3.1. Higher Education Brand Architecture

Brand architecture has been studied on various contexts of line extensions, vertical extensions, multiple brand extensions, sub-brands and brand portfolios (Aaker 2004). According to Hemsley-Brown *et al* (2007) brand architecture is the framework that enables a university to manage and market its programmes and services. Hemsley-Brown *et al* (2007) suggest that brand architectures of higher education institutions have to align with their support structures, mission and strategies, although different strategies in some circumstances may require different architectures. Petromilli, Morrison and Million (2002) propose two types of brand architecture systems which are cited for the purpose of this study. The first brand architecture system identified by Petromilli *et al* (2002) is the "monolithic" or "corporate" architecture where the corporate name of the university is used on programmes and services offered by the institution. In this case, all sub-brands of the institution such as departments, faculties, schools, among others are linked to the corporate brand of the higher education institution through verbal and visual endorsement (Petromilli *et al*, 2002). The second architecture system of Petromilli *et al* (2002) is the "freestanding" or "house-of-brands" where the corporate brand, namely the university brand operates largely as a holding organisation, and each product or service such as schools, faculties and departments are branded individually for their target markets. In this case each of the subsidiary institutions remains autonomous in respect of verbal and visual identity. Petromilli *et al* (2002) explain that with regards to the "house-of-brands" approach, each department, faculty or school of the university identifies target markets separately based on academic discipline and programmes that are offered.

From the discussion of the two brand architectures, this study realises that the former, monolithic or corporate system detests individuality of the various outfits of higher education institutions, while the latter, house of brands or freestanding system promotes independence and individuality of the different outfits in higher education institutions. According to Hemsley-Brown *et al* (2007) the decisions of management of institutions have huge impact on their brand architecture and the competitive effects on the higher education market. Hemsley-Brown *et al* (2007) indicate therefore that higher education institutions need to enhance their architecture by harmonising their brands' visual identity, values, vision and mission of their institutions. Brand harmonisation is the process of ensuring that services and products in a brand range acquire consistent name, visual identity and positioning across internal and external market environments (Hemsley-Brown *et al*, 2007). This study envisages communication and brand harmonisation as key processes for managements of higher education institutions to achieve well structured architectures and corporatisation. Strong brand values from the top hierarchy of higher education institutions promote positive sentiment through all avenues of the institutions to secure a sense of synergy (Hemsley-Brown *et al*, 2007).

3.2. Advertising

Till and Baack (2005) describe advertisements as essential mechanisms for transferring images from organisations into the minds of consumers and audience. Advertising is a communication whose purpose is to inform potential customers and audience about services and products and how to obtain and use them (Kocabiyikoglu, 2004). According to Wells *et al* (2003) various media such as television, radio, movies, magazines, newspapers, video games, internet and bill boards are used to deliver advertising messages. Advertising plays a crucial role in the effective functioning of an organisation (Till *et al*, 2005). For an advertisement to be effective it should be able to differentiate one service or product from others to produce a desired persuasive effect (Jeong, 2004). According to Jeong (2004) the inability of an advertisement to generate the required impact means it is ineffective, however if it produces a positive or favourable impact it multiplies the effectiveness of advertising expenditures.

Jeong (2004) enumerates two mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of advertisements. These are the psychological and behavioural aspects of advertising effects, and the sales and market response effects (Jeong, 2004). According to Jeong (2004) the market response method of advertising effectiveness assesses the impact of advertising in terms of the relationship between advertising expenditures and sales in respect of an advertising brand for a period. Jeong (2004) for example stresses on how time series and simultaneous equation models are used to determine the relationship between advertising and sales. The market response method of assessing advertising effectiveness uses other marketing variables such as economic conditions and level of competition in

the market to influence advertising – sales relationship (Kocabiyikoglu, 2004). Neslin (2002) emphasises that other variables including economic factors, market factors, sales promotion, among others influence advertising and sales relationship and the effectiveness of advertisement. Till *et al* (2005) elaborate that the psychological and behavioural impact of advertising focus on psychological factors such as recall and attitude to the advertisement or brand and purchase interest for the advertised brand. Recall is the critical measure of a particular interest or attention which an advertisement has to command before it can persuade (Till *et al*, 2005). According to Till *et al* (2005) attitude which is closely related to consumers’ or audiences’ evaluation of advertised products and services is another key measure of advertising effectiveness. Wells *et al* (2003) indicate that a positive attitude towards a product or service shows that consumers may buy or use the brand in future. Jeong (2004) stresses that the behavioural perspective of advertising effectiveness is concerned with how people perceive, process, respond to and use advertising information to make decisions about particular products or services. Due to the complex nature of human psychology, various mechanisms such as association among recall, recognition and attractiveness of advertisement (Wells *et al*, 2003), effects of attention on memory (Rajaram, Srinivast & Travers, 2001), likeability and attitude toward the brand and advertisement (Ang & Low, 2000) are also used to evaluate advertising effectiveness.

From the discussions above, this study identifies persuasion as a major factor in the definitions and functions of advertising. The study proposes that the content of advertising should be understandable and interesting with persuasive features that can easily stick into the memory of audiences. Therefore, for higher education institutions to achieve the ultimate goals or objectives of their advertising campaigns, they (institutions) need to package the contents especially language, messages and symbols, among others of such campaigns in ways that can easily attract attention, be understood and remembered by audiences and constituents in order to persuade them. This is supported by Ang *et al* (2006) who postulate the need for an advertisement to build positive and meaningful connection with audience. Advertisements that are meaningful can quickly influence and enhance the promotional values of institutions. These opinions are also concretised by Jeong (2004) who emphasises that recall of advertising information on the part of listeners or viewers indicates that the advertisement has captured a place in consumers’ or audiences’ mind which increases the possibility of choosing the advertised brand.

3.3. Kapferer’s Hexagonal Identity Prism

Kapferer’s (2004) Hexagonal Identity Prism model of the brand identity theory puts brand identity into six concepts. These concepts include physique, personality, relationships, culture, reflection and self-image (Kapferer, 2004).

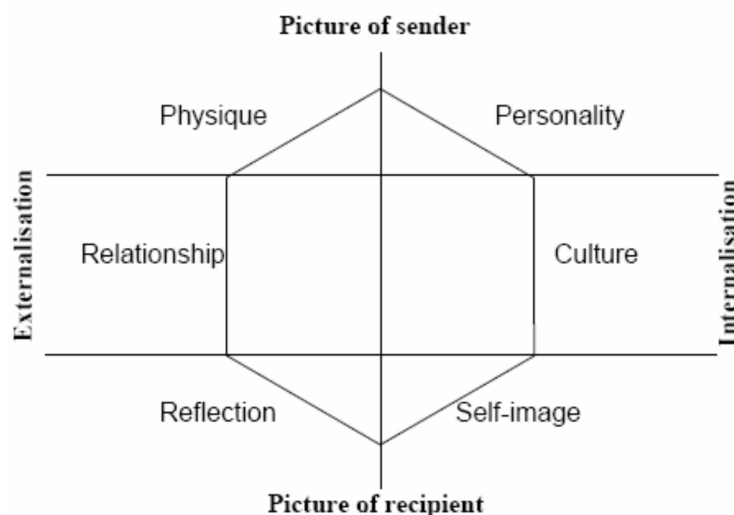


Figure 1 Hexagonal Identity Prism Model (Kapferer, 2004)

According to Kapferer (2004) physique relates to the concrete, tangible or objective features of the brand which encompasses product or service features, symbols and attributes. These are considered as the basic purpose of the brand in terms of what the brand is, what it does and how it looks. Whilst not explicit in Kapferer’s (2004) work, it is reasonable to interpret physique as having service branding applicability. For example, the minimal offices, furniture and computers, among other equipment used in producing services contribute to the creative and artistic brand identity that advertisers want to build (Kapferer, 2004). This assertion gives credence to that of Coleman (2010) who regards physical cues such as premises, architecture, location and interior decoration, among others as contributing to an organisation’s visual identity.

According to Kapferer (2004) personality considers how brands can be “humanised” through “traits” which portray the character and attitude of the brand in a highly emotional manner. Kapferer (2004) stresses that

developing brand personality involves addressing questions of how the brand would be if it were a person. Culture relates to the fundamental values a brand and / or organisation exhibits in addition to norms that guide the behaviour of employees to enhance brand identity building (Kapferer, 2004). According to Coleman (2010) looking at identity in terms of relationship moves a brand beyond a purely functional domain in the sense that emotions remain intricate part of relationships. Kapferer (2004) emphasises that relationship could be characterised as caring, loving, loyal or as providing status.

Kapferer (2004) explains that reflection relates to the brand as an instrument for individuals to make statements about their (individuals) actual or desired self. For example, marketing communications that reflect the brand being used by certain types of individuals in certain ways play important role to encourage potential users (Coleman, 2010). The reason is that such communications allow consumers or audiences to imagine themselves using the good or service in a particular way or at a particular time as reflected and projected by the brand user or advertiser (Kapferer, 2004). Self-image as Kapferer (2004) points out also relates to how the brand is viewed introspectively by consumers or audience in terms of a personal brand evaluation.

As highlighted by Figure 1, Kapferer's (2004) model considers the six facets of brand identity from these key sets of perspectives. Kapferer (2004) names the first perspective as the sender and receiver of brand identity. The sender in respect of Kapferer's (2004) model is the source or organisation from where the brand's messages emanate. The receiver on the hand is the target or perhaps the final consumers, customers or constituents of the branding messages. Kapferer (2004) describes the second as the internal and external perspective. According to Kapferer (2004) physical appearance and personality are controlled by the sender whilst consumer reflection and self-image are concerned with the receiver. Kapferer (2004) indicates that culture and relationships connect the sender and recipient and so act as a common denominator between the brand (the sender) and the consumer (the receiver). In respect of internalisation and externalisation, elements to the left of the model such as physical appearance, relationship and reflection are social which provide the brand with a form of visible external expressions (Kapferer, 2004). According to Kapferer (2004) the facets to the right of the model which include personality, culture and self-image are connected with the inside or "soul" of a brand. This study attempts to examine how public universities portray these features and are affected by the perspectives of the hexagonal identity, and whether or not the concepts exist in the institutions under study.

3.4. Corporate Visual Identity Systems

Berry (2000) notes that service brands try to make their offerings tangible and concrete through symbolism. According to Chandler (2007) symbolism entails a variety of related disciplines and topics including semiology. Due to the extensive nature of corporate visual identity systems, they are based on semiology to theorise and concretise elements associated with developing service brand identity (Melewar & Akel, 2006). Balmer (2008) supports this assertion of Melewar *et al* (2006) by regarding corporate visual identity as synonymous with the tenets of symbolism in respect of corporate identity mix. According to Melewar and Saunders (2000) corporate visual identity encompasses name, symbol and / or logo, typography, colour and slogan that are transmitted through marketing collateral, vehicles, clothing and buildings, among others. These visual cues provide the medium through which organisations project consistent visual identity to their publics (Simoes, Dibb & Fisk, 2005). Balmer (2008) also emphasises how visual cues help communicate the quintessence of an organisation such as values, standards and distinctiveness.

Van den Bosch, De Jong and Elving (2004) indicate that corporate visual identity operates at three levels: strategic level, operational level and design level. According to Balmer (2008) the strategic level focuses on corporate choices in respect of brand structure which could be monolithic, endorsed or branded approach. Balmer(2008) stresses that the operational level deals with processes and systems of corporate visual identity while the design level dwells on logos, names, slogans and typography. However, this study focuses on the design level of corporate visual identity due to the importance and pervasiveness of physical cues in service branding. Van den Bosch, Elving & De Jong(2006b) describe a logo as an important part of corporate visual identity. The terms "logo" and "symbol" or "symbolism" are used interchangeably by authorities in brand identity literature. For example, Aaker *et al* (2000) emphasise how unique or strong symbols provide structure and cohesion to identity and reminds of a brand for easy recognition and recall. Aaker (2004) also gives credence to the strategic value of symbolism and highlights how brands that harness metaphorical power through symbols particularly logos are effective in conveying the benefits and attributes of their brand identity to target audiences or consumers. The importance of the objective and tangible elements of brands is also mentioned in the "physique" facet of Kapferer's (2004) Hexagonal Identity Prism. Coleman (2010) postulates the appropriateness of the physique logic to service brands. He argues that organisational name, vehicles, nomenclature, clothing and equipment, among others all contribute to the visual identity of a brand.

Considering symbolism in the context of corporate identity, Van Riel and Van den Ban (2001) lay much emphasis on how logos serve as efficient management tool to express the desired features of a brand or an organisation. But relating personality to symbolism, Fill (2002) describes symbolism as the element of the

corporate identity mix which helps organisations to communicate their personality to various stakeholders. This opinion is in line with that of Van Riel *et al* (2001) in their analysis of how organisational symbolisms such as logos enable organisations to express their unique characteristics, and facilitate brand recognition.

From the views espoused above, this study envisages symbolism particularly logos as enabling instruments for organisations to express their qualities. These identity cues such as symbols and logos are apparatus for conveying or expressing the brand to the outside world. Visual identity plays enormous role with respect to brand differentiation. For example, Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006a) outline how logos reflect corporate characteristics of brands as well as facilitate the connection between brand and stakeholders due to the receptive nature of humans to images and symbols than other forms like text. This is because visual stimuli such as logos are very effective in terms of brand recall because they are learned very fast and remembered easily for a longtime (Henderson, Cote, Leong & Schmitt, 2003). Coleman (2010) refers to such phenomena as “picture superiority effect.” This study asserts that strong visual cues can positively influence a brand’s image and reputation. This is consistent with Walley, Custance, Taylor, Lindgreen and Hingley (2007) who stress on the significant impact corporate visual identity has on brand choice. Kotler & Keller (2006) emphasise that corporate visual identity ensures differentiation and promotes brand awareness. Bendixen, Bukasa and Abratt (2004) also highlight how visual identity develops equity as an asset in service brands’ markets.

4. Conclusion

In as much as branding and advertising create value, they also differentiate institutions from their competitors (Kapferer, 2004). Hence this calls for effective management and delivery of branding and advertising initiatives to consistently provide the opportunity of communicating the unique qualities and features of higher education institutions in order to gain competitive advantage. The activities of branding and advertising appeared to be complicated, and posed some challenges to higher education institutions. This study attempted to assess how public universities in Ghana handled their branding programmes. The information elicited from respondents were compared with earlier brand identity studies by Kapferer (2004, 2005). The findings were grouped under Kapferer’s (2004) Hexagonal Identity Prism. Generally, it appeared UEW and UCC were aware of the need for a strategic execution of branding activities, which conformed to the earlier study by Kapferer (2004).

This study therefore concludes that UEW and UCC appreciate the benefits of carrying out branding and advertising initiatives in a systematic, practical and professional manner, although mere recognition of the potential benefits is not a guarantee for success in creating a positive brand image and reputation. The relevance and roles of marketing communications, branding and advertising in higher education institutions especially public universities have to be understood from a more dynamic and strategic level. That is, branding has to be extended across all avenues, levels and employees of institutions, create identity, add value, differentiate the universities from competitors and promise constituents of quality. Clearly outlined and planned branding and advertising programmes were critical factors in the process of brand management.

Finally, from the research and findings from respondents, it is evident that public universities have vivid descriptions of how their brands (institutions) and images are projected and perceived in the Ghanaian higher education sector. The public universities identified various branding strategies for promoting their identities and images in the competitive environment. It is also clear that advertising remains a major instrument which the public universities employ to market their institutions, and bring their activities and programmes to public knowledge or notice.

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