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# Corporate Visual Identity Systems and Brand Performance Of Kenyan Universities

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**There is a heightened interest towards corporate identity with organisations realising that it is indispensable if they wish to create a competitive advantage in the global environment in which they are operating in. Globalization of the higher education sector implies that Kenyan universities need to market themselves in a climate of competition that is not only local but global. They have to attract high quality students and academic staff at an international level hence competition is no longer limited within national borders.Faced with competition, universities are developing strategies for competitiveness and survival such as management of corporate visual identity systems in order to positively impact on their corporate image and performance.This study investigated the relationship between corporate visual identity systems (CVIS) and brand performance of Kenyan Universities. Data were collected from the universities' corporate affairs or public relations managers or their equivalent as the key informants using a semi structured questionnaire. The results of the study revealed direct effect of corporate visual identity systems on brand performance to be statistically significant. The beta coefficient was 0.447 and this was highly statistically significant (p-value=.000).This variable explained 41.1% of the variation in brand performance. The empirical finding supports the notion that corporate visual identity systems drive brand performance. Consequently, by investing in brand marketing activities that span all the corporate visual identity facets, universities should experience enhanced brand performance..The study has made contribution to theory, policy and practice in corporate visual identity systems specifically in the higher education sector. The study was limited to Kenyan universities. Replication of the study with all universities being included could serve as a useful reference for future research. Future studies could also focus on other sectors other than the higher education sector.**

**Key Words:** *Corporate Visual Identity Systems , Organizations, Brand Performance*

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**Introduction**

The market place is increasingly becoming complex with increased competition, globalization and changing customer needs and wants hence the need for organizations to develop strategies for competitiveness and survival. The globalization of business has been embraced by the higher education sector in which education is seen as a service that could be marketed worldwide. Institutions of higher education have to attract high quality students and academic staff at an international level. Competition is therefore no longer limited within national borders. As education and training become a global business sector, education marketing is developing standards similar to consumer goods marketing presenting challenges for universities to develop strategies to influence students' and faculty choice as a way of enhancing competitiveness.Foskett and Hemsley-Brown ( 2001) observe that research into higher education choice, or consumer behaviour in higher education sector has been stimulated by the need to anticipate the implications of choice and to understand the key factors involved in student and faculty choice of a university.

The attempt by the government to enhance the quality of higher education through the encouragement of market forces is based on an assumption that students are informed consumers making rational choices of higher education courses and institutions. However, despite the substantial literature on the marketisation of higher education and consumer behaviour, scholarship to provide evidence of the marketing strategies that have been implemented by higher education institutions on the supply-side remains limited.In the context of increasing competition, universities are finding it necessary to equip themselves with marketing intelligence and information that would enable them to face the challenge of an international market for higher education (Binsardi & Ekwulugo,2003).

Faced with competition, univeristies are turning to Corporate Identity Visual Systemsas a source of competitive advantage which may impact positively on brand performance.Boyle (1996) observes that brand's visual identity helps overcome intangibility by enabling consumers to differentiate betweenavailable brands.Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) similarly points out that distinctive trademarks and logos used by organizations facilitate brand recognition all over the world. Van den Bosch et al. (2005) concur and assert that a brand's name and logo as visual cues are important drivers of brand awareness and building competitive advantage.The emphasis on competitive advantage could be further appreciated by looking at the amount of money spent by companies on re-branding and updating their image in search of distinctiveness. For instance British Airways changed its designs from a distinctive and well-known logo to a diverse set of designs trying to appeal to the global market (Schmidt,1995).Similarly, BP is also another organization that is understood to have invested over $US7m on the promotion of its corporate identity in the year 2000(Melewar and Wooldridge, 2001). In another corporate identity management exercise BT (British Telecom) committed over £5m on its corporate visuals and appearance in an effort to mark its entry into new businesses and to signify the internationalization of its personality

(Melewar, 2008). Across the Atlantic, Lucent Technologies, an American firm, was reported to have spent as much as $US50m on the advertisement of corporate identity (Barboza, 1996). In less developed countries of Africa for instance Nigeria, the twenty-five financial institutions that emerged from Central Bank of Nigeria's forced consolidation exercise in 2005, have committed a fortune to the redevelopment of their corporate identities. Although there are no credible figures it is estimated that millions of US$ was spent by some key operators to reposition their corporate identities(Knox and Maklan's ,2005).

The role of Corporate identity in service industries poses a greater challenge than in a manufacturing company primarily because of the four unique service characteristics, i.e. intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity and perishability that distinguish services from goods (Gronroos (1990), Zeithaml et al. (1996) and Clemes et al. (2000). In a manufacturing company, the stakeholders can directly perceive the identity of the organisation through the products offered but in service organizations,a lack of objective and measurable attributes in evaluating the identity of the firm lead to such firms selecting some tangible extrinsic cues and attributes to form their judgements (Zeithaml et al, 1996).Effective management of corporate visual identity systems in the service organizations like the higher education sector is therefore essential since it addresses the needs of the firm's important stakeholders and enhance organizations image and competitiveness.

The higher education sector has been identified as a key sub-pillar in the Economic Pillar of Vision 2030 in terms of providing globally competitive quality education, training and research for development. Reed (2004) observes that the fundamental task of universities are teaching, engaging in basic and applied research, assisting the professional development of their faculty members and the character development of their students. The higher education sector in Kenya is one of the fastest growing sectors in the economy with 31 public and 22 private local universities and university colleges totaling 53 universities (CUE, 2014).The high number of universities has heightened competition for quality students and academic staff. The competition is not only regional but also global as the demand for university education increases. The globalization of university education has made it necessary for universities to rethink strategies for survival such as management of corporate visual identitysystems. While the concept of corporate visual identity systemsand performance has received considerable attention, studies seem to be focused more on western contexts and on other sectors other than the higher education sector.

## Literature Review

Corporate visual identity Systems (CVIS) is a tangible asset which can be used to represent the organization. Melewar and Saunders (1998) state that corporate visual identity consists of the corporate name, logotype and/or symbol, typography, and color. Key elements of corporate visual identity systems are the corporate name, logo, corporate slogan,colour, stationery, printed materials such as brochures and leaflets, advertisements, websites, vehicles, buildings, interiors, and corporate clothing as well as architectural buildings.In general terms, a CVIS expresses the values and ambitions of an organization, its business, and its characteristics.

The extant literature point to the influence of CVIS on an organization's performance. Boyle (1996) points out that the brand's visual identity helps overcome intangibility in terms of consumers being able to differentiate between brands. This view is supported by Balmer and Gray (2000) who observes thesignificant role playedby corporate visual identity in enabling organizations to effectively present themselves to both internal and external stakeholders.Schultz,Hatch and Larsen (2000) concur noting that it provides an organization with visibility and makes it easy to be recognized. It also symbolizes an organization for external stakeholders and hence contributes to its image and reputation .This view is supported by Van den Bosch,De Jong and Elving (2005) who conducted a study exploring the possible relationship between corporate visual identity and reputation and concluded that visual identity plays a supportive role in corpoate reputations.Corporate visual identity enables employees to identity with the organization they work for(Bromley,2001).Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) adds that a number of distinctive trademarks, logos and visual elements like Nike, the swan of KLM, the logo of Akzo Nobel and the Shell emblem are used by organizations and are recognized all over the world. Van den Bosch et al. (2005) concur noting that a brand's name and logo as visual cues are important drivers of brand awareness. Similarly, deChernatony (2006) observes that for service brands, physical cues such as the logo, clothes employees wear and premises help to distinguish organizations.

Melewar and Saunders (1998) assert that with rapid technological changes consumers are increasingly relying upon the reputation communicated by the firm's corporate visual identity to guide their purchase decisions. This view is further augmented by Melewar and Saunders (2000) study on which CVI applications were effective in projecting the identity of British multinationals with subsidiaries in Malaysia. The study concluded that apart from clothing, all other CVI items like interior/exteriors, stationery, publications, vehicles, signs, forms, advertising, packaging, promotional gifts, and products were of importance in expressing the identity of the organization. The study on logo designs has been replicated and extended in China and Singapore (Henderson, Cote, Meng Leong, and Schmitt, 2010) with the conclusion that logo design may accomplish the visibility goals of an organization across international borders. Henderson and Cote limited their study to the design of the logo butWarlop, Ratneshwar and Osselaer (2005) increased the complexity of their research by measuring its recognizability, comparing easy and difficult learning conditions, based on different brand names, packaging and price. The study found out that attributes such as a distinctive brand name and packaging helped consumers to recall intrinsic product quality. This view is supported by Souiden et al. (2006) empirical study on corporate branding dimensions on consumers' product evaluation that was based on a sample of 218 Japanese and American consumers. The corporate name was found to have a direct, positive and significant effect ($p < 0.001$) on consumers' product evaluations hence impacting on performance.

To compete in today's competitive and complex environment, organizations need regular and reliable feedback on their performance. Brand performance refers to how successful a brand is in the market and provides an evaluation of its strategic success. Research interest in Brand Performance (BP) is indicative of corporate brands role as a powerful tool for investors, employees and consumers (Coleman, 2004; Bridson and Mavondo, 2011).Literature notes that brand performance is influenced by corporate visual identify systems (Fombrun and Van Riel, 2004;Van den Bosch et al. ,2005;Souiden et al., 2006).It is acknowledged that no single metric can perfectly measure brand performance and that a universal measure does not exist (de Chernatony et al., 2004; Lehmann et al., 2008 and Farris et al., 2008). The study adopted both financial and subjective measure of brand performance. Previous theoretical and empirical studies have led support to the positive relationship between corporate identity and performance in the developed world. However, the contextual differences between developed and developing make generalization of findings difficult.

**Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

The relationships between the independent variable corporate visual identity systems comprising corporate name, logo, symbol, typography and color and the dependent variable consisting of various brand performance measures are depicted in Figure 1.

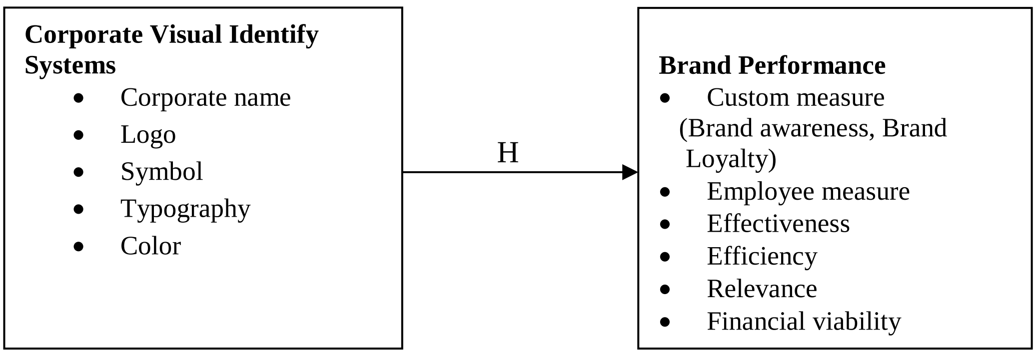


**Figure 1: Conceptual Model**

From the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1, brand performance is directly influenced by corporate identity visual systems. The hypotheses are derived from the literature and can be stated as follows:

***H: There is a statistically significant relationship between corporate identity visual systems and brand performance of Kenyan universities.***

**Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. This type of design is considered to be robust for studies that aim to analyze a phenomenon, situation, behavioral relationships problem attitude or issue by considering a cross-section of the population at one point in time (O'Sullivan, et al., 2009). The target population comprised all the 53 Kenyan public and private universities together with their constituents' university colleges (CUE, 2014). Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire. The corporate affairs managers or their equivalent were the key informants in each university. Secondary data were also collected from publicly available sources. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and regression analysis. Descriptive analyses were conducted to arrive at the profiles of the respondent firms. Thereafter regression analyses were carried out in order to assess the relationship between corporate identity visual systems and brand performance.

**Reliability and Validity**

The reliability of the study variables was checked using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient α (Cronbach, 1951). Literature notes lack of consensus as to the lower limit of the coefficient. Some authors cite a lower limit of 0.70 while others cite 0.60 to be the lower limit (Gliem&Gliem, 2003; Hair et al., 1998). For the purpose of the current study an alpha of 0.7 was taken as the lower limit.

**Descriptive Statistics**

To measure CVIS, questions were anchored on a 5 point likert-type scale ranging from 1=Not at all to 5= To a very large extent were used. Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics of CVIS

**Table 1: Summary of Corporate Visual Identity Systems**

| **Corporate Visual Identity Systems** | N | Mean Score | Standard Deviation | CV Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| University standardizes visual identity to positively impact on sales consumer goodwill and awareness | 39 | 3.74 | .715 | 19.1 |
| The university's name and logo is a driver of brand awareness and choice | 39 | 3.74 | .715 | 19.1. |
| University promotes visual identity as a way of engineering a sense of company pride | 39 | 3.72 | .647 | 17.4 |
| Logos favorably influence brand selection and institutional evaluation | 39 | 3.67 | .621 | 16.9 |
| University ensures design,decor, architectural buildings and employee presentation favorably enhances its image and performance | 39 | 3.67 | .621 | 16.9 |
| Grand Mean Score | | 3.708 | 0.664 | 17.9 |

Source: Primary Data

As shown in Table 1, the results reveal a grand mean score of 3.7 and coefficient of variation (CV) =17.9 % indicating that the answers given by the respondents were generally in agreement. Universities being keen to manage their corporate visual identity in terms of CVI standardization, name, logo design and décor. University standardization of corporate visual identity systems as well as name and logobeing driver of brand awareness and choice were rated highest with a mean score of 3.74 respectively. This could be attributed to their distinguishing role and power of enabling universities to accomplish visibility goals across international borders. Van den Bosch et al. (2005) points out that a brand's name and logo as visual cues are important drivers of brand awareness.University logos favorably influencing brand selection had a means score rating of 3.67 and CV =16.9

% indicating agreement by the respondents. This can be attributed to the distinguishing power and awareness creation of logos where in the absence of the organizations' name being attached it is still recognized all over the world.Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) assert thatthe Shell emblem has been in use since the 1980s and the company does not need to attach its name to it yet isrecognized all over the world denoting visibility and recognizability power of logos. Similarly, University ensuring design, decor, architectural buildings and employee presentation favorably enhances its image and performancehad a means score rating of 3.67 and CV (16.9%).This illustrate CVIS is a lot more than just a logo additional visual elements such as design, decor, architectural buildings and employee presentation also help to build up university's image among stakeholders influencing the faculty and students choice of a university.

Brand performance was measured using both subjective and financial measures. Customer centric measures that included brand awareness and brand loyalty were included to reflect the central role of customers (Aaker,1996;Guenzi and Pelloni,2004).Employee measures were included given theessential role that employees play in the provision of services (Balmer and Greyser, 2006;Berry and Seltman, 2007; de Chernatony and Cottam, 2008).Organization effectiveness was used to reflect degree to which universities moved toward attainment of mission and goal realization, efficiency to ensure provision of services to customers within an appropriate cost structure, relevance as a measure of how well universities mission continued to serve the purpose it was intended for and research and publications and CSR activities as an indication of universities research output and engagement in CSR activities.

The respondents were asked to state the extent of agreement with the subjective brand performance measures adopted by the university. A five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=not at all to 5=to a very large extent was used. The relevant responses were analyzed using mean scores and standard errors.

**Summary of subjective Brand Performance measures**

The summary of subjective brand Performance measures which include, employee measure, customer measure, effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of organization as well as research and publications and CSR activities is Table 2

**Table 2: Summary of Subjective Brand Performance Measures**

| Subjective Brand Performance Indicators | N | Mean score | Standard Deviation | CV (%) Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand loyalty | 39 | 3.73 | .635 | 17.0 |
| Brand awareness | 39 | 3.68 | .657 | 17.9 |
| Employee satisfaction | 39 | 3.495 | .564 | 16.2 |
| Effectiveness of the organization | 39 | 3.452 | .645 | 18.9 |
| Efficiency of the organization | 39 | 3.754 | .552 | 14.2 |
| Relevance of the organization | 39 | 3.679 | .557 | 15.2 |
| Research and publications and CSR activities | 39 | 3.355 | .706 | 21.1 |
| **Average of Grand Mean Scores** | | **3.59** | **.617** | **17.2** |

Source: Primary Data

The summary results in Table 2 show an average of grand mean scores of the selected subjective brand performance measures of 3.59. Efficiency of the organization had the highest mean score of 3.75 followed by brand loyalty 3.73 and relevance of the university with mean score rating of 3.68.Research and publications and CSR activities had relatively low mean score rating of 3.36 and also had the highest average variability in responses (CV =21.1%). This suggests a moderate engagement in research and CSR activities by the universities. Efficiency of the organization had the lowest average response variations (CV= 14.2%).

Financial measures of brand performance were also incorporated. To survive in a highly competitive environment, universities need to constantly monitor their revenues and expenses as well as sources of funding as a way of ensuring a healthy financial status. Ambler (2003) and Oktemgil (2003) point out the need to incorporate financial measures owing to the growing role they play in justifying marketing expenditures and for analyzing previous activities of an organization. The respondents had therefore been asked to indicate extent to which they agreed with a number of statements regarding university's financial viability. The relevant responses are summarized on Table 3.

**Table 3: Financial Viability of the university**

| **Financial Viability of the university** | **N** | **Mean Score** | **Standard Deviation** | **CV (%) Percentage** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monitors finances on a regular basis | 39 | 3.54 | .555 | 15.7 |
| Does not depend on single source of funding | 39 | 3.44 | .680 | 19.8 |
| Consistently obtains new funding sources | 38 | 3.42 | .758 | 22.2 |
| Has improved liquidity position | 39 | 3.36 | .668 | 19.9 |
| Keeps a reasonable surplus of money to use during difficult times | 38 | 3.32 | .775 | 23.3 |
| Existing sources of fund offer sustainable support | 39 | 3.28 | .825 | 25.2 |
| Consistently has more revenues than expenses | 39 | 3.00 | ..889 | 29.6 |
| **Grand Mean Score** | | **3.337** | **.736** | **22.2** |

Source: Primary Data

The results presented on Table 3 reveal a moderate agreement regarding university's financial viability with an average mean score of 3.34. Monitoring of finances on a regular basis was the most highly rated with a mean score of 3.54. New funding sources existing for the universities obtained a mean score rating of 3.42.The overall result indicates that universities closely monitor their finances. This can be attributed to the financial constraints that many universities and especially the public ones experience. The highest variability in responses was on university consistently having more revenues than expenses (CV=29.6%).University monitoring finances on a regular basis had the lowest variability in responses (CV=15.7).

The financial position of the university was also studied to reflect cash flow and the extent to which the university is able to finance recurrent expenditures. It also reflects extent of debts, liabilities and the asset that the university has. The respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed with a number of statements regarding university's financial position. The results are presented on Table 4

**Table 4: Financial position of the university**

| | Response (Yes/No) | Number of universities | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Debt is greater than equity | No<br>Yes<br>Total | 5<br>34<br>39 | 13<br>87<br>100 |
| Cash flow is enough to finance recurrent expenditure like paying part time lecturers | No<br>Yes<br>Total | 32<br>7<br>39 | 82<br>18<br>100 |
| Current assets are greater than current liabilities | No<br>Yes<br>Total | 14<br>25<br>39 | 36<br>64<br>100 |
| The university is able to meet its current obligations | No<br>Yes<br>Total | 27<br>12<br>39 | 69<br>31<br>100 |

Source: Primary Data

The results in Table 4 reveal that 87% of the universities had debt greater than equity while about 82 % of the universities revealed thatCash flow is not enough to finance recurrent expenditure. 36% indicated that current assets were greater than current liabilities while 69 % indicated that they were not able to meet their current obligation.

The overall summary of brand performance embraces both subjective and financial measures. The pertinent results are presented on Table 5.

**Table 5: Brand Performance**

| Overall Summary of Brand Performance | N | Mean score | Standard Deviation | CV (%) Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Subjective measure | 39 | 3.59 | .617 | 17.2 |
| Financial measure | 39 | 3.34 | .736 | 22.2 |
| **Average of Grand Mean Scores** | | **3.47** | **.677** | **19.7** |

Source: Primary Data

The results on overall summary of brand performance measures in Table 5 reveal a higher average mean score rating of 3.56 for subjective measures as compared to financial measure with an average mean score of 3.34.The average variability in responses was higher in financial measures of brand performance (CV=22.2%) as compared to the average variability in subjective measures (CV=17.2%).

**Regression Analysis and Hypotheses Testing**

This current study was based on the premise that there is a relationship between CVIS and Brand Performance of Kenyan Universities. The hypothesis of the study was to assess the relationship between

CVIS and Brand Performance of Kenyan universities. The relevant results in Table 6.

**Table 6: Regression Results of Corporate Visual Identity Systems and Brand Performance**

**(a) The Goodness of Fit**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .641[a] | .411 | .394 | .04738 |

**(b) The Overall Significance**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | .055 | 1 | .055 | 24.398 | .000[a] |
| | Residual | .079 | 35 | .002 | | |
| | Total | .133 | 36 | | | |

**(c) The Composite Score Test**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | .447 | .056 | | 8.038 | .000 |
| | corporate visual identity systems | .219 | .044 | .641 | 4.939 | .000 |

**a. Predictors: (Constant), Corporate Visual Identity Systems**

**b. Dependent Variable: Brand Performance**

Source: Primary Data

The results in Table 6 show that Corporate Visual Identity Systems had a statistically significant influence on Brand Performance. It explained 41.1 % of variation ($R^2$=.411). The standardized regression coefficient (β) value of the computed (composite index) scores of corporate visual identity system was .641 with a t-test of 4.939 and a significance level of p-value=.000.The results indicate a linear dependence of brand performance on CVIS. The standardized regression coefficient was used as it is free from original units of the predictor and outcome variables. The hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between corporate visual identity systems and brand performance of Kenyan universities was therefore supported.

**Discussion**

The study established a positive and significant relationship between CVIS and Brand Performance. The results are consistent with previous studies.Schultz,Hatch and Larsen (2000) observe that CVIS symbolizes an organization for external stakeholders and hence contributes to its image and reputation.Fombrun and Van Riel (2004) assert that organizations are recognized globally through their logos and points out that the Shell emblem has been in use since the 1980s enabling the company to be recognized worldwide even without the need to attach its name .This view is augumened by Van den Bosch et al.'s (2005) study that explored the possible relationship between corporate visual identity and reputation and concluded that visual identity plays a supportive role in corporate reputations.Similarly,Souiden et al. (2006) empirical study on corporate branding dimensions on consumers' product evaluation establishedthat corporate name had a direct, positive and significant effect ($p < 0.001$) on consumers' product evaluations hence impacting on performance.

**Conclusion**

The study investigated the relationship between CVIS and Brand performance of Kenyan universities andestablished that CVIS influences Brand Performance .Corporate visual identity systems plays a significant role in the way an organization presents itself to both internal and external stakeholders.It provides an organization with visibility and makes it easy to be recognized.It also symbolizes an organization for external stakeholders and hence contributes to its image and reputation which is essential in a competitive global environment. The results suggest the need to manage corporate visual identity systemsin order to positively impact on organizations corporate image and performance.

**Implications of the Research Findings**

From a theoretical perspective, the current study's overall results for the hypothesized relationships are positive and statistically significant. The study established that CVIS influences Brand Performance of Kenyan universities. The findings contribute to the general body of knowledge especially in the higher education sector**.** Kenyan universities are expected to play a vital role in the Country's attainment of Vision 2030. The higher education sector has been identified as one of the priority sectors under the economic pillar of Vision 2030 because of its expected contribution in providing globally competitive quality education, training and research for the development of the country. The results of the study are expected to inform policy formulation and implementation of CVIS given its role in enhancingperformance. The research therefore provides a strong indication that CVIS contributes to Brand Performance.

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