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**Title: Corporate brand identity in higher education: a relational
perspective**

Research Paper

Extended Abstract

Purpose

Identity is traditionally defined as an emission concept (Kapferer, 2008). Yet, some research points out that there are external factors that that can influence it (Kennedy, 1975; Markwick e Fill, 1997; Balmer e Gray, 2000). This subject is even more interesting if one considers corporate brands. According to Aaker (2004) the number, the power and the credibility of corporate associations are bigger in the case corporate brands.

Literature recognizes the influence of relationships between companies in identity management (Hakansson and Snehota, 1989, 1995; Hakansson and Ford, 2002). Yet, given the increasingly important role of corporate brands, it is surprising that to date no attempt to evaluate that influence has been made in corporate brand's identity management and reputation. Also Keller and Lehman (2006) highlight relationships and customer experience as two areas requiring more investigation. The authors argue that corporate brand's identity can be developed under a relational perspective using relationships with other recognised brands in order to generate positive reputations in stakeholders. Based in relationship and

corporate brand identity management, a framework is developed to identify how corporate brands select, develop and invest in relationships with other brands. The context of the proposed relationship concept is the services area (Dwyer et al, 1987; Moorman et al, 1992; Rauyruen et al, 2005 and Hennig-Thurau and Klee, 1997). An empirical qualitative research is designed using two reputational technological higher education institutions (two corporate brands) acting in Portuguese public higher education market.

Method

The investigation question is “how do relationships between brands influence the management of corporate brand identity and reputation?”. To answer this question the authors carried out in-depth-interviews to 13 lecturers/investigators, 4 students’ focus groups (2 in each institution) and 12 alumni employer companies. The data gathering occurred between June 2011 and February 2012. Data is analysed using qualitative analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984) with content analysis of in-depth-interviews, (Bardin, 1979) and supported by NVivo9 software.

Findings/conclusions

The results suggest that both technological schools (corporate brands) have relationships with other recognised brands: investigation units, other reputational higher education institutions (MIT, Carnegie Mellon University...) and companies. By influencing each corporate brand identity, these relationships also influence students and companies’ reputations about the two technological institutions (corporate brands). Yet, these relationships influence differently the corporate brand identity of each institution...

This investigation is very important to increase the knowledge in the area of educational corporate brands management in terms of the influence of relationships in brand identity and reputation. The proposed framework intends to help higher education institutions (corporate brands) to select, develop and invest in relationships with recognized brands in order to manage its corporate brand identity and reputation attracting the best students and employer companies.

Future investigation

Another study is being carried out to all the students of both corporate educational brands and to alumni employers (companies) to test the importance of these relationships when choosing the university/faculty to study and when choosing graduates to work in a company. Structural

equation modelling (Kline, 2011; Byrne, 2010) is being used to find influences of relationships in the corporate brands' identity and reputation. This way the authors have an internal and an external perspective about relationships' influence in corporate brand identity.

Keywords: *relationships, brand, identity, corporate brands*

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