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***Assessment of Corporate Branding and Communication
Strategies in Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions***

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Abstract

This study aimed at exploring problems of corporate branding and communication strategies in Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions. For this end, six public universities, four from first generation and two from second generation, were selected using purposive sampling method for this study. The participants were selected using random sampling method. A total of 300 hundred students and 12 communication office heads (50 prospect and 50 regular students and 2 officials at each site) were selected as participants. As the main purpose was to investigate the existing problems, a descriptive research method was used employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather and analyze data. Data have been gathered using questionnaire, interview, content analysis, and observation. As the study results show, universities have not implemented effective corporate brand communication strategies; both the prospect and regular students have not been provided with consolidated information. Hence, they relied on others' advice to choose their university. In addition, universities have gaps in branding their universities designing and using unique features.

Keywords: Communication strategies; Corporate brand; Higher education; Identity; Students

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Chapter One

1. Introduction

In globalization era, when people are regularly overloaded with abundant information, differentiation is considered as the main strategy to get seen by the target audience. No matter what an organization has to offer, it has been difficult to attract the target audiences and see. The case in point is the challenges of higher educations around the world which are struggling to persuade stakeholders win sustained collaborations. These universities are also facing tough competitions in attracting high caliber students and research funds.

The main purpose of this study is exploring the problem of HEs in planning corporate identities and communication strategies to attract competent students and reliable stakeholders. As it has been planned, the study has been conducted in six selected universities. This paper contains chapter one which includes: background of the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions and significance of the study; chapter two which deals with review of related literature; chapter three which discusses the research methodology section; chapter four which has contains the data analysis and interpretation and chapter five which deals with the summary and conclusion of the findings.

1.1. Background of the Study

Education has now become a service that can be marketed to customers not only locally, but also globally. HE institutions are under pressure to conform to a new global “common sense of quality” (Paradeise & Thoenig, **2013**). Global standards, rankings, performance audits and common approaches force HE to align in standardized and competitive manner. Environmental changes, such as privatization, diversification, decentralization, internationalization and increased competition force HE to be competitive. Universities have to develop their own peculiar identities which can help them attract their stakeholders and customers. The brand is defined by where the institution’s values and the constituents’ expectations intersect. Perhaps the most significant benefit of branding in higher education is the focus it brings to an institution. For example, a student-centered university will respond to changing student needs and expectations, but, in an attempt to be all things to all people, often it becomes vulnerable to mission drift or a gradual dilution of effectiveness as the institution becomes increasingly thin,

first on the margins and then in the core enterprise—teaching and learning. The values-centric approach inherent in branding provides an institution with an anchor to guide responses to constituent needs and expectations. In this paradigm, the brand becomes the filter through which everything is vetted (e.g., strategic directions, resource allocations, hiring decisions, and curriculum development). It serves as a lens to strategically focus the institution in the midst of fluid internal and external pressures as well as opportunities (Jim Black,2008:7).

In cognizant of this, universities in our country embarked on developing unique brands and emblems that differentiate them from other competitors. But at this time of globalization effective strategic planning and brand management require more than traditional advertising, marketing or identity development. Higher Education institutions that craft, present and manage a unified brand message, experience and environment achieve a competitive advantage in recruiting, retaining and building loyalty amongst their students, parents, staff, faculty, alumnae and donors. Communicating a brand successfully to students, both current and prospective, requires strategic planning and effective tools (Hanover Research, 2014:5). But sources indicate that universities are not using consistent strategies in promoting and maintaining their value laden brands. This initiated researchers to undertake this research.

1.2.Statement of the Problem

The HE sector in Ethiopia has grown rapidly in the last two decades. However, there are now concerns about quality education in these public higher education institutions. On the one hand, these institutions are not working in a competitive manner. As government universities, they do not plan to competitive strategies so as to win more funds and attract students. Their University Industry Linkage (UIL) practices are not as such strong as; stakeholders may not even know the universities around them and what they are doing. The participation of industries in funding the universities is very low. Besides, in Ethiopian case, students have been choosing universities just based on the word of mouth information from others as universities fail to provide prospective students with sufficient information about their unique features and future directions.

In principle, higher education institutions have to compete for qualified professionals and high caliber students. In order to attract their stakeholders, professionals and students, planning strong brands and communication strategies is mandatory. HEIs have to realize the value of distinctive

corporate identities and symbolize them in their unique educational brands, Furthermore, they need to communicate their unique features through well planned communication strategies. However, so far our universities have gaps in building their reputations in their brands and communicate them to their target publics.

1.3.Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To assess the practice of educational branding in Ethiopian Higher institutions.
- To investigate the experience of students, professionals and stakeholders in selecting their preferred university.
- To explore the contents of brands in the Ethiopian Public Higher Education institutions.
- To identify the strategies used to promote brands;
- To identify the gaps in promoting the corporate brands of universities;

1.4.Research Questions

Based on the objectives identified, the study aims to answer the following questions.

- How are educational brands practiced in Ethiopian universities?
- How do students select universities to study their preferred field of study?
- What contents are incorporated in building identities via branding in PHEI's of Ethiopia?
- How are these brands promoted/communicated so that they can build reputation and attract customers?
- What are the gaps in promoting/communicating brands in EPHEIs?

1.5.Significance of the study

The Study is expected to assess the educational branding practices in Ethiopian universities and come up with substantial findings; and these findings: can make university strategic planners be

aware of the relevance of educational branding; can support university communicators to identify their gaps in promoting/communicating image via brands', can help students to select their "BEST" universities based on the peculiarities conveyed in the brands and can serve as an initial for researchers and innovators to plan on attracting stakeholders and donors using well organized corporate branding strategies.

Chapter Two

2. Literature Review

2.1.What is a brand?

Different scholars define brand in various ways. The general notion relates a brand to a distinguishing name and/or symbol...intended to identify the goods or services of either one item or a producer/provider of the item, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors. A brand is something that exists more in the minds of consumers than in the product or organization itself” (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). A ‘brand’ is formally defined as a unique visual representation that captures the essence or character of a product or an organization. The brand of a university can be embodied in different artifacts of a university: building architecture, a university’s webpage, newspaper, advertisements, sports mascot, merchandise and formal dress etc...(Drori Delmestri and Oberg, 2013)

Branding means to make attributes of the organisation’s identity known in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition packages. In order to do so, the organization must first define for itself the essence of ‘*what*’ and ‘*who*’ it is, and what it ‘stands’ for’ in terms of values and characteristics. It is believed that this definition should be as precise and consistent as possible, and communicated very consistently (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Hence, brand identity embodies a fixed set of values constituted by contextual experiences. To illustrate, the mission statement of one university acts as one of the core of brand identity.

2.2.Higher Educational Branding

The concept of branding, as applied to higher education, is somewhat different from branding in the commercial sector (Black, 2008). Most notably, branding in higher education is about who we are, and is not limited to what a particular product offers the marketplace. An educational brand is often equated to an institution’s academic reputation. But, that explanation is far too limiting. Think of a college or university brand as being synonymous with the institution’s personality congruent with its mission, defined by its values.

Perhaps the most significant benefit of branding in higher education is the focus it brings to an institution. For example, a student-centered college or university will respond to changing student needs and expectations, but, in an attempt to be all things to all people, often it becomes

vulnerable to mission drift or a gradual dilution of effectiveness as the institution becomes increasingly thin, first on the margins and then in the core enterprise—teaching and learning. The values-centric approach inherent in branding provides an institution with an anchor to guide responses to constituent needs and expectations. The brand is defined by where the institution's values and the constituents' expectations intersect. In this paradigm, the brand becomes the filter through which everything is vetted (e.g., strategic directions, resource allocations, hiring decisions, and curriculum development). It serves as a lens to strategically focus the institution in the midst of fluid internal and external pressures as well as opportunities.

In this instance, education essentially serves as the product, which is being sold to a consumer base of students. Each college and university strives to differentiate themselves and their product within the educational marketplace. These efforts to achieve differentiation result in brands--identifying markers encompassing a symbolic understanding (Fahmy, 2013). This trend of expansion relates to the university's quest for constant innovation, responding to an impetus to stay ahead of the curve. In addition to meeting "standard" expectations, universities feel pressured to offer unique opportunities, strong academic programs, and specialized courses in order to lure students. "Columbia University offers courses in fifty-eight languages altogether, including Urdu, Korean, Iranian, Turkic, and many others not commonly available. The demand for them is genuine but fitful...The result is that this lavish offering, or a large part of it, is that familiar burden, a necessary luxury" (Barzun, 1968, p.30). This competitive focus structures the discursive self-presentation performed by higher educational institutions. Take, for example, the popular section of university websites that promote all the top reasons to enroll. Washington State University, for instance, advertises its "top academic programs" with "groundbreaking research" and "top rankings and recognition" as an answer to the question "Why WSU?," additionally citing its "renowned professors," "students who make a difference," "community that bridges cultures," and "great neighborhood" ("About WSU," 2012). This branded representation operates along the first level of Peirce's model, a mediated image framed by the modern market ideology--Peirce's third level.

University brands embody a multifaceted, multilayered representation that surpasses the simple, material product. The construction of this representation hinges on mediums of communication: social networking sites, television commercials, websites, media publications, posters, radio

broadcasts, and so on. Keane (1997) explains the significance of representational mediums: “A medium of representation is not only something that stands ‘between’ those things that it mediates, it is also a ‘thing’ in its own right...As a result, it works at the unstable boundary at which the ‘symbolic’ and the ‘material’ meet, reinforcing or undermining one another” (p. 8). As Keane points out, communicative mediums actually convey symbolic meaning. The coded meanings of representational mediums for higher education institutions will later be examined (Fahmy, 2013).

By utilizing these symbolic communication channels to link the brand with targeted associations, universities develop a branded representation. Through the repetition of certain linguistic identity markers, higher education institutions carefully construct and perform a brand identity based on the citation of dominant cultural discourses. In this way, universities sell an ideological identity, not just a product. Brands serve as a representational mediation of reality, garnering meaning from the different levels of Peirce’s model--the represent amen, object, and interpretant. The interaction of these three levels exhibits the dynamic and nuanced nature of representation and branding (Fahmy, 2013).

In the 1980s, the conceptual positioning of education shifted. Education became integrated into the market, and students became consumers. Previously viewed as a public good, education came to be understood as a private commodity, a personal investment made available for purchase (Smith & Bender, 2008). “Student consumers choose (frequently private) colleges and universities that they calculate are likely to bring a return on educational investment and increasingly choose majors linked to the new economy, such as business, communications, media arts” (Rhoades & Slaughter, 2004). This most recent shift sets the stage for the revolution of the higher education system, renegotiating the societal positioning of higher education.

‘During the last decade, technology, globalization, and competition have caused the ground to shift under higher education worldwide, defying national borders and calling into question honored traditions, sacred myths, and previously unquestioned assumptions...They interact with each other, so that technology intensifies competition as well as enables globalization; similarly, globalization fosters competition.’ (Kizilbash, 2012).

Branding an institution in accordance with its cultural values and norms can help a university differentiate itself in an already crowded and competitive marketplace, whether that competition is for students, donors or public support (Blanton 2007). But what do we mean by a brand in the first place. According to Aaker (1997), a brand is perceived as having a distinct personality which may lead customers to establish some sort of connection with the brand or they might use it to reflect their image in the society. A brand is something that is special and relevant. In fact, it is the brand that brings true distinction and differentiation (Roper and Fill, 2012).

Higher education around the world has experienced rapid growth and, under the pressure of obtaining sufficient funds, it has had to become a “big business enterprise” (Liu, 1998:19). In fact, differentiation is considered as one of the main concerns facing colleges in the field of marketing. Even though higher education provides an interesting and important context for research, since higher education institutions across the world have become increasingly “marketing oriented” and students increasingly become “consumers” (Chen, 2008; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2008), research in this field is considered limited. That is why this research sought to address the lack of context specific conceptual models for branding in higher education (Chapleo, 2011).

2.3. Higher Education Branding Models:

There are few studies that tried to evaluate students’ tendency to choose one institution over the other and presented some sort of explanation regarding the decision making process. For example, Ivy’s (2008) study built up 25 statements that assess student attitudes and their perceptions regarding the effect of diverse marketing tools they faced when they tried to select a business school. The most outstanding aspects in sequence were the program, prominence, price, prospectus, people, and premiums. Also, Price et al. (2003) carried out a similar study which tried to assess the impact of the eminence of facilities available on students’ selection of a university and discovered that quality of facilities had considerable influence on student’s choice. In another study by Warwick and Mansfield (2003), several authors found the quality of academic staff, quality of majors of interest, and overall academic reputation as being the most important factors when prospective students and their parents engage in the process of assessing functional risk. Out of these studies we can conclude that the quality of staff, quality of the program offered and the overall reputation highly influence how the student’s perceive the

worthiness of any institution and based on that they decide whether to apply there or not. In general, much of the branding effort in higher education appears to be focused on promotion and identity, including logos, mottos, promotional materials, and advertising (Marrs et al, 2011). Promotion is quite important but it is not the only ingredient for a successful HE brand. In a recent research, Chapleo (2010) deducted the characteristics of successful university brands and they are as follows; clear vision, strong internal support, support and commitment of leadership, sufficient press coverage and smart public relations, value of marketing communications, and unique brand experience. However, the dilemma is how to put these factors together into a branding system or structure that reflects the image the university aspires for.

To overcome this challenge, Pinar et al, (2011), in the following model, provides a theoretical portray of a university brand ecosystem. The focal point of this ecosystem is presented by the educational experience the institution intends to provide to its targeted students. This goes along with what Gray et al. (2003) concluded regarding building a university brand that universities need to carefully examine and understand the key educational needs of the students and the perceived value of the core and underlying elements of their program offerings. Accordingly, students are supposed to be under the microscope in articulating intended experiences as they are the sole reason for the existence of colleges and universities. But that does not mean that other parties cannot influence students' decisions such as parents, friends, potential employers, alumni, donors, and the local community.

2.4.Strategic communication of Higher Education

National and international competitions are catalysts for strategic communication and branding in the HE sector, and branding has become a strategic managerial issue in education (Stensaker, 2007). At the same time, HE institutions are under pressure to conform to a new global “common sense of quality” (Paradeise & Thoenig, 2013). Global standards, rankings, performance audits and common approaches to New Public Management reforms force local higher education institutions within the field of HE to align in a standardized manner. Rankings and global indexes are becoming important for measuring the performance of both institutions, cities, and nations (e.g., Anholt, 2006). For the HE sector, this global standardization is enforced by soft law indicators, rankings and international accreditation associations as well as international

organisations such as the OECD and the European Commission, “foster[ing] the vision that there is one good way, and only one, to produce and judge quality in higher education and research” (Paradeise & Thoenig, p. 191). This form of quality is excellence. The quest for excellence has become important in all parts of the HE sector, as evidenced by a study by Aula and Tienari (2011, p. 7) of a university merger in Finland where the need “to become an innovative ‘world class’ university act[ed] as an imaginary incentive.”

The proliferation of global quality standards implies strong conformity and legitimacy pressures, but it also—paradoxically—invites a quest for differentiation. Standing out is necessary in order to achieve competitive advantage (Deephouse, 1999; Porter, 1985) and a favourable reputation (Fombrun & van Riel, 2004). As a result, it is not surprising that differentiation is considered an important feature of strategic communication in the HE sector. Previous studies have noted increased attention given to strategic communication aimed at creating differentiation in the HE sector (Ivy, 2001; Kosmützky & Krücken, 2015), although some researchers (such as Chapleo, 2005, 2010) have shown that there is little ‘real’ differentiation in practice.

The challenge for individual HE institutions, then, is to respond successfully to similarity and differentiation pressures at the same time, taking into account that “the pressure to conform dampens the impulse to be different” (King & Whetten, 2008, p. 193) and that legitimacy pressures may conflict with reputation-building pressures. For the HE sector as a whole, the challenge is to differentiate successfully from other countries’ HE sectors in order to build reputation, while at the same time conforming to expectations of quality and excellence in order to satisfy legitimacy requirements.

Presentations of national HE sectors tend to rely on strategic communication of the nation’s history, nature, culture, and identity expressions (Sataøen, 2015). The purpose is to ‘stand out’ in the competition among nations for students, staff and resources, although at the same time, very different countries’ general branding campaigns tend to involve the communication of similar core values and characteristics, such as ‘friendly,’ ‘beautiful,’ ‘adventurous,’ ‘peaceful,’ and ‘caring’ (Mossberg & Kleppe, 2005). This paradox is the same as the one concerning individual HE institutions (Chapleo, 2005; 2010), underscoring how the desire to differentiate effectively from competitors sometimes leads to a “conformity trap” (Antorini & Schultz, 2005). Thus,

while the strategic communication of a brand, e.g., an organization, a specific sector, or a nation, is aimed at securing differentiation, the exact opposite may end up in practice.

2.5.Promotion of corporate Brand

According to Black (2008), before the brand can be effectively promoted, the desired brand identity (how you want others to perceive the institution) must be defined. A brand rationale, brand attributes, and brand benefits should be clearly articulated and consistently reflect the institution's values while aligning with constituent expectations. As previously suggested, the brand lives in the hearts and minds of those we serve. Consequently, the logical place to begin defining the brand identity is with an assessment of the existing brand image for various constituent groups valued by the institution. Though the assessment can take many forms, the desired outcome is to gain insight into the current reality.

The current reality is then compared against the institution's vision for its brand identity to determine where gaps between the two exist. Recognized gaps enable marketers to target a brand strategy—increasing the probability of achieving related institutional objectives. A targeted brand strategy fosters effective positioning of a school's brand among competitors along with the management of brand assets such as institutional image, brand equity, the brand message, and the promise inherent in the brand message. Too often, the brand strategy is devoid of any assessment data and thus, positioning and messaging are not grounded in the current reality or a gap analysis linked to institutional aspirations. The end result is typically a failed promotional campaign defined by empty or unfulfilled promises.

Brand tactics emanating from a sound brand strategy yield successful promotional campaigns infinitely more often than the fragmented “flavor of the month” or the panic-driven “let's try anything” approaches common at many colleges and universities. For example, market segmentation inspired by a brand strategy focuses efforts on target populations who, if compelled to enroll, persist, advocate for, or financially support the institution, will impact strategic goals of the college more so than other potential segments. Likewise, a brand message spawned from a brand strategy is likely to have a laser focus that reflects the essence of the institution rather than the whims of a marketer or preferences of current students or administrators. Assuming that brand tactics are aligned with the brand strategy and that brand strategy is aligned with the institution's mission and values, there are five universal tactics that should be employed.

Beyond the tactics themselves, practical matters of implementation must be addressed as well. What communication channels will be most effective in delivering the message? Who will have the most influence over the targeted population and hence, should deliver the message? When will the message most likely influence decision-making? What resources and infrastructure are needed to ensure successful implementation? How will the quality of execution be monitored? How will effectiveness of the brand promotional efforts be measured?

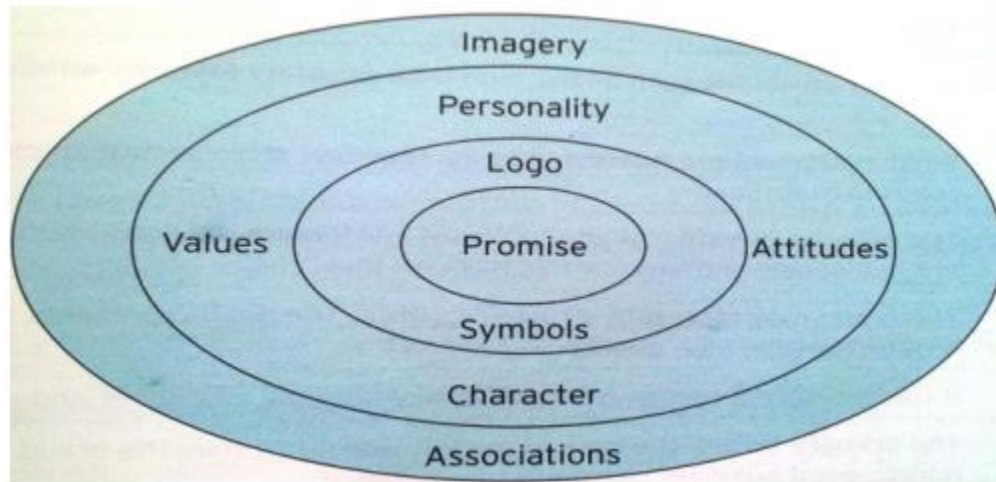


Figure 1: The intangible nature of a brand (Roper and Fill, 2012)

As elaborated in figure (2.1), these layers of intangible elements allow the customer to realize the differentiated value in the service offered and direct them towards easier decision making process topped by a sweet premium. The most interesting part about this definition is that the vocal point is the promise and this is what higher education all about. It is the promise of quality experience that leads to a better career. Promises might be given about the student's consequent social and educational experiences at the institution for example, career prospects on graduation or improved network of contacts. Perhaps, the intangible texture of educational services instigates promises to represent major and important components of a university brand due to the necessity to emphasize clear indicators associated with physical verification of the brand's values. This being clarified, the first step towards a stronger brand is to minimize the gap between what is promised and reality. But to do so we have to understand that a university brand is a special form of branding. Also, the concept by itself is quite newly introduced to the continuum of higher education marketing.

On the other hand, McNally and Speak (2002, p. 4) define a higher education brand as “perception or emotion maintained by a buyer or a prospective buyer describing the experience related to doing business with an academic institution with its product and service”. This is a reflection of what universities and colleges in all parts of the world are always hunting for an exceptional meaning of their existence in order to differentiate themselves and draw more students and higher quality academic staff. This definition puts the weight on the student’s experience on the decision making scale. But creating a positive enjoyable experience in higher education is a bit of a challenge. According to Doyle (2001) the creation of successful brands requires three things: an effective product, a distinctive identity and added values. The idea of differentiation being critical to a “successful” brand is backed by Aaker (2003). To be more specific, an initial definition of a successful university brand is seen as having a clear and consistent synthesis of positioning, purpose and perception that differentiates an organization and builds trust with stakeholders by communicating rational and emotional values congruent with their needs (Chapleo, 2011). However, differentiation without depending on a solid value that meets the needs and wants of the student, creating a positive experience becomes impossible. To support this argument, Temple (2006) points out that the brand of a university surfaces as a sign of how well a university performs in meeting customer needs, and is therefore the result of being effective as an institution, rather than a base.

According to Melewar and Akel (2006, p. 41), universities are supposed to develop a competitive advantage based on a set of unique characteristics. Furthermore, universities need to communicate these characteristics in an effective and consistent way to all of the relevant stakeholders. Based on this background, universities have finally realized the role of corporate identity (CI) as a powerful source of competitive advantage. This could be achieved through coherent effective brand management. According to Chapleo (2011), corporate branding in the higher education sector can be pursued through two lanes, it is suggested; firstly though the promotion of internal values, culture and vision, or alternatively externally focused on the marketing of the brand. But it is logical to comprehend that the two are definitely not reciprocally exclusive and a brand could and should include and depend on both of these approaches.

2.6. Corporate Brand Management

2.6.1. Aligning Core Values, Strategic Vision, Corporate Culture and Image

2.6.1.1. Corporate Branding

Corporate branding can be defined as a systematic process of creating and maintaining positive images and a positive reputation of the company as a whole by sending signals to all stakeholders, by managing behaviour and all internal and external communication (Einwiller & Will, 2002; Van Riel, 2001). Christensen and Askegaard (2001) describe corporate branding as the sum of organisational expressions, that are communicated to its various audiences, through core values (Ind, 1997), the behaviour of employees (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Tomczak & Bexendorf, 2003) and via all corporate communication to all internal and external stakeholders (Rode & Vallaster, 2005).

Corporate branding has received a lot attention recently (e.g. Balmer, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Ind, 1997; Schultz & de Chernatony, 2002; Schultz & Hatch, 2003). Academics increasingly acknowledge that corporate branding refers to creating an organisation's unique characteristic, (De Chernatony, 1999, 2001, Esch, Tomczak, Kernstock, Langer, 2004) and that managers must pay attention to corporate branding, as it is acknowledged as an important driver for added value for all stakeholders of a company (Hawabhy, Abratt, Peter, 2009). Empiric research shows that a strong corporate brand has positive effects on the positioning of new products and product extensions (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ind, 1997), customer attractiveness, investor confidence and employees motivation (Balmer, 2001a). The effects on a number of different key stakeholders (Balmer, 2001a, Brown & Dacin, 1997; Ind, 1997) underpin the importance of strong positioning for both, external and internal positioning (Harris & De Chernatony, 2001).

i. Vision, Culture and Image approach

The growing recognition of the importance of corporate branding and corporate brand positioning piqued Hatch and Schultz's interest. According to Hatch and Schultz (2001) successful corporate branding is typically based on the alignment between (1) the strategic goals of the top management level (strategic vision), (2) the knowledge and attitude of the employees (corporate culture) and (3) the perceptions of external stakeholders (image) (see figure 1). In

other words, Hatch and Schultz claim that the strategic goals need to be supported by and fit with the corporate culture and must fit with the perceptions of key stakeholders to build and maintain a strong corporate brand.

Hatch and Schultz's (2001) method depicts a process that is focused on the cohesion and consistency between the three elements: strategic vision, corporate culture and the image. They noticed during their work at LEGO and British Airways, that a strong cohesion between all three elements is vital for effective corporate branding (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Hatch and Schultz (2001) state that inadequate or faulty alignment of these three factors is in many cases an indicator for poor or faulty brand management and branding.

Hatch and Schultz (2001) call this corporate branding approach the VCI method. The key for a strong corporate brand are closed or small gaps between vision, culture and image. The relations between strategic vision, corporate culture and the image are key problem areas for corporate branding, e.g. relations must be monitored and maintained for effective corporate branding (Hatch and Schultz, 2001).

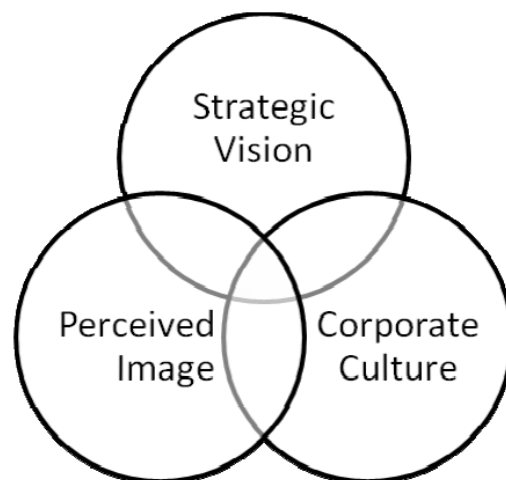


Figure 2: Hatch and Schultz's VCI method

ii. Core Value Approach

Another theory that approaches corporate branding is based on core values. Urde (2003) speaks about core value based corporate brand building. Urde (2003) describes that well established and

maintained core values influence all kinds of decisions varying from product related matters to internal or external communication within organisations. According Urde (2003) core values are guiding themes for brand personality, the positioning of brands, present in the strategy and the corporate culture. Urde (2003) suggests core values as the guide for internal and external brand building and as guiding factors in organisations.

According to Urde (2003), value based brand building and management consists of creating an integrated common approach, that is omnipresent in the entire organisation and persuaded by all sections and members in order to achieve the organisational goals (see figure 2). This would mean that successful corporate branding is related to a common approach all members share, which is based on core values. This common approach influences the entire organisation and the corporate brand. Therefore, core values need to be monitored and maintained (Urde, 2003).

iii. Combining vision, culture, image method and the core value approach

Hatch and Schultz's (2001) method and the core value approach (Urde, 2003) are conceptual frameworks that describe different types of corporate brand management. Hatch and Schultz's (2001) method focuses on important relations between the areas they identified as vital cross points for corporate branding: vision, culture and image. Their method could be used in empiric research, even if the VCI method has not been used in empiric research yet, as they describe three specific starting points to explore corporate brand alignment (e.g. potential gaps between (1) strategic vision and corporate culture, (2) corporate culture and image, (3) image and strategic vision). Urde's (2003) core value approach on the other hand is focused on the effects of core values on organisations and the corporate brands. This method is a managerial approach that involves the basis of corporate brands, but is less usable to design empirical research.

Chapter Three

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the existing gaps in the practices of educational branding in Ethiopian Higher institutions. Hence, an descriptive research design was used. Mixed approaches were employed to manage data: qualitative and quantitative. For the quantitative approach a survey method was utilized to gather data. Quantitative data were organized and analyzed in percentages/frequencies and mean scores; whereas, qualitative data were categorized, coded and analyzed thematically.

3.2. Target Areas, Population and Sampling Techniques

The targets areas of this study are public universities of Ethiopia. Six universities were selected using purposive sampling method: 4 from 1st generation, and 2 from second generation universities. For this end, Addis Ababa University, Adama Science and Technology University, Bahir Dar University, Gondar University, Mekelle University and Jimma University were selected. The target populations of this study were university Communication office directors, regular university students and grade 12 preparatory students. Fifty students were randomly selected from each university. In addition, fifty grade 12 preparatory students were randomly selected from each town the universities were found.

3.3. Data Gathering Tools

Data were gathered using multiple tools. For both regular university students and prospect grade 12 students, a questionnaire was distributed. The items were planned based on the literature review made about educational branding strategies. Students were asked mainly about the university choosing criteria. Moreover, the items included techniques of students to gather information about their preferred university.

A face to face interview was also made with the university communication directors. The interviews were recorded carefully, coded and analyzed thematically. Besides, five students at each study area (schools and universities) were selected randomly for focus group discussion. Furthermore, branded materials were gathered from each university for content analysis. Brochures, magazines, mugs pens and other gift materials were collected to analyze the gaps in branding.

3.4. Data Gathering and Analysis Procedures

As it has been pointed earlier, a mixed research approach has been selected for this study. Hence, data were gathered employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The main assumption to select the mixed approach is that both forms of data provide different types of information (open-ended data in the case of qualitative and closed-ended data in the case of quantitative). As Creswell (2014) “mixing” or blending of data can provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than by each separately. Data for this study have mainly been gathered from primary sources. As per the objective of the study, the main sources of data were key stakeholders (communication office heads, student and other stakeholders) involved educational branding and communication activities. However, data have also been collected from secondary sources. In order to get a general overview of the organization selected for the study, some sources, such as print outs (published articles, posters, brochures, flyers...) and web designs, logos and other related documents were assessed.

For this study, Creswell’s ‘Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design’ has been applied to analyze the data collected from both sources. In this approach, both qualitative and quantitative data collected were analyzed concurrently. Then, the findings were compared to find out whether the results are similar or different (Creswell, 2014). Applying qualitative approach, the researcher has used ‘in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, and content analysis to examine the practices of educational branding in Ethiopian public higher education. The reflections of personal experiences, perception of participants and results of rubric ratings of content analyses were the row data gathered. In order to codify and categorize the data gathered, codes were used in which data were organized into ‘chunks’ or segments of data that are alike (Curry, 2015). An integrative or pragmatic approach has been applied in order to code the data. Using an inductive approach, codes were derived continuously from the emerging data (de novo coding) comparing and contrasting ideas. The researcher has also applied the start list approach in which initial concepts derived from the theoretical frameworks and the research questions were used to code the data. Hence, merging the benefits of these approaches, an integrative or pragmatic method has been applied in the process (Curry, 2015).

Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods

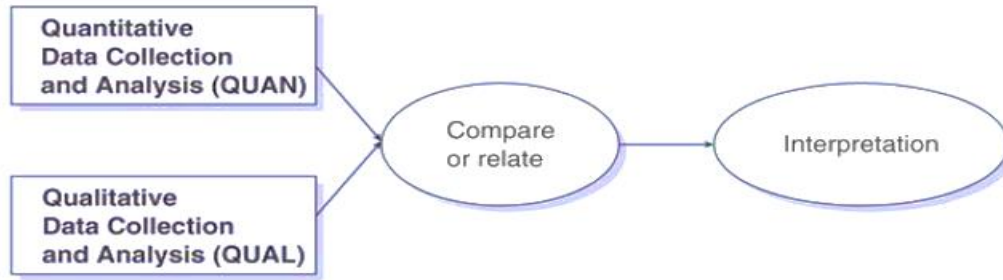


Figure 3: Data analysis procedure (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher has followed the following steps for qualitative data analysis. First, the transcriptions of the data were read thoroughly. Then, key sentences or sections of the transcription which contain actions, opinions or concepts were ‘labeled, ‘coded’ or ‘indexed’ with key words or phrases. The criteria to code are based on ‘recurrences of the concept’, ‘relation with the research questions or the theoretical framework selected (Lofgren, 2013). The codes were then categorized into themes using key concepts. In order to ensure reliability and validity, the researcher has used: rigorous analysis and interpretation and code negotiation in groups strategies.

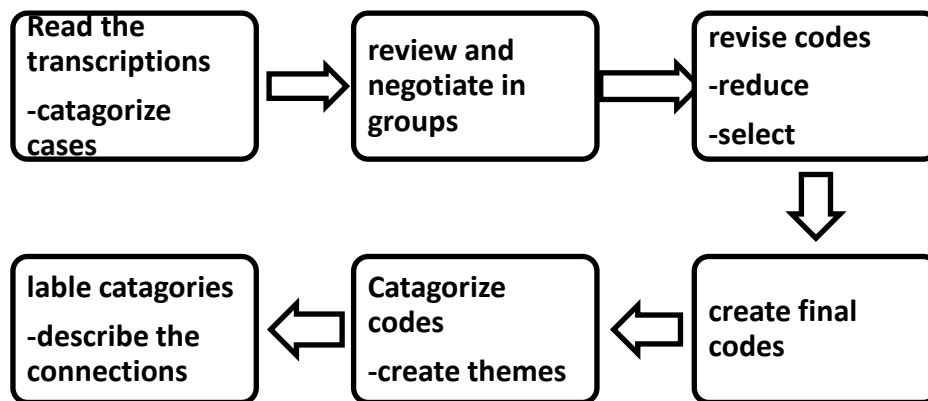


Figure 4: Steps of Data Analysis (Adapted from Curry, 2015; Lofgren, 2013)

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Both data from questionnaires and Semi-structured interview were analyzed using the SPSS applying ‘Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design’. Accordingly, the findings were analyzed together with qualitative data as per the themes identified.

Chapter Four

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter the data gathered through quantitative and qualitative data gathering tools have been presented in tables. The data have been analyzed using percentiles and mean values of ratings. Based on the numbers displayed and reflections made, results have been interpreted.

4.1. Data from Prospect Students

4.1.1. Personal Profiles

Sex		%
Male	194	64.7
Female	106	35.3
Total	300	100
Stream		
Natural Science	196	65.3
Social Science	104	34.7

Table-1: Respondents' Profile

The first groups of the participants were preparatory students. At each site (Mekele, Gondar, Bahir Dar, Jimma, Addis Ababa and Adama) questionnaires were distributed for 50 students. A total of 300 students participated. As we can see from the table, most of the respondents (64.7%) are males, and the rest (35.3%) are females. The samples were drawn from the two streams; natural and social sciences. As per the new educational policy of the country, the students are assigned in to the two groups based on 70/30 ratio. Accordingly, our samples were selected based on this frame of reference. As it has been depicted in the table, the majority (65.3%) is from Natural Science and the remaining 34.7% are from the Social Science stream.

4.1.2. Answer the Questions

The first item of the questionnaire enquired the students how they have decided to choose their future university. A list of nine options was given for the students to choose. Their responses have been organized in table below.

1. How have you decided to choose the universities?

Options	No.	%
1. My teachers recommended the university	86	28.7
2. My parents would be proud if I went here	74	24.7
3. Students in my school think highly of the university	56	18.7
4. My friends would be impressed if I went here	30	10.0
5. The university gets mainly positive coverage in the media	4	1.3
6. The university is a top university in its home country	4	1.3
7. The university achieves high positions in rankings	6	2.0
8. Employers like to recruit this university's graduates	36	2.0
9. The university's vision, mission, motto and core values have given me clear directions	4	1.3
Others		

Table-2: University Choosing Rationale

As it can be seen from the table, most of the students have decided to choose their future university based on others' advices; (28.7% from their teachers, 24.7% from their parents, 18.7% from classmates and 10% from their friends). On the other hand, some students have decided to choose their future university based on the information regarding the employability of graduates they have earlier.

This shows that students have not been provided with enough information by each university. The students mainly rely on rumors about universities from other people (family, teachers, friends...); they do not have access to each university to get information so as to decide by their own judgment.

The second item emphasized the students' personal experience in gathering information about their future university. A list of ten statements were provided for the students, and they were asked to rate their attitude for each statement.

2. How do you rate the following statements?

(5=s/agree;4=agree;3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=s. disagree)

	Statement	Strongly (5) agree	(4) agree	(3) neutral	(2) disagree	(1) Strongly disagree	Mean score of
1	I regularly read their brochures/magazines/newsletters	16 (5.3%)	10 (3.3%)	14 (4.7%)	106 (35.3%)	154 (51.3%)	2
2.	I often watch/listen news/promotion/notice about them on TV/radio	14 (4.6%)	16 (5.3)	12 (4%)	120 (40%)	138 (46%)	2
3.	I always visit their website/read about them on Facebook...	10 (3.3%)	14 (4.7%)	6 (2%)	154 (51%)	116 (38.7%)	2
4.	I have got enough information about my preferred university from its unique features on the brand-logo, mission, vision..	2 (0.7%)	6 (2%)	28 (9.3%)	140 (46.7%)	124 (41.3%)	2
5.	The university's vision, mission, motto and core values have given me clear directions of the university.	4 (1.3%)	10 (3.3%)	32 (10.7%)	136 (45.3%)	118 (39.3%)	2
6.	The brand of my preferred university is very unique and simple, so I can identify it easily.	4 (1.3%)	14 (4.7%)	144 (48%)	76 (25.3%)	62 (26.3)	2
7.	I have got enough information from its website	40 (1.3%)	64 (21.3%)	14 (4.7%)	92 (30.7%)	90 (30%)	3
8.	I am quite confident to choose it because of my role model-graduates	80 (26.7%)	76 (25.3%)	84 (28%)	40 (1.3%)	20 (6.7%)	3.5
9.	The university distributes newsletters/brochures to our school	4 (1.3%)	4 (1.3%)	42 (14%)	136 (45.6%)	114 (38%)	2
10.	My relatives/brothers/sisters/graduated from this university and advise me to choose it.	42 (14%)	66 (22%)	134 (44.7%)	34 (11.3%)	24 (8%)	3

Table-3: Students' Attitude towards information gathering techniques

The table shows that only few students (8.6%) read brochures/newsletters and magazines. Most of them (86.6%) do not read. The mean score of their rating for this option is 2, which means “disagree”. For the second option-attending electronic media (TV. radio), only few students (about 10%) of them agreed that they attend the media about the university they prefer. Majority of them (86%) disagreed and the mean score of their rating is 2, which means “disagree”. The majority of the students (89.7%) replied “disagree” for visiting university websites to get information. Few of them (8%) responded “agree” and the mean score is 2, which is “disagree”.

Regarding the information from unique university brand, most students (88%) disagreed; only few of them (2.7%) agreed they have got enough information. In addition, some students (9.3%) replied neutral. Almost none of the students (14/300) replied “agree” for knowing the direction of a university from its mission, vision and mottos. The majority (84.6%) rated “disagree” and the overall mean score is 2, which means “disagree”. On the other hand, some students (10.7%) replied “neutral”. For simplicity and uniqueness of a university’s brand to clearly identify it, many of the students (48%) replied “neutral”, whereas, half of them (51.3%) replied “disagree”. Only few of them (18/300) agreed. Some students (22.6%) agreed that they have got enough information from the website of their preferred university. However, over half of the respondents (60%) rated “disagree”. Just over half of the respondents (52%) agreed that they are confident to choose the university because of their role models, but over a quarter of them (28%) are not sure. Only some students (60/300) replied “disagree” and the mean score is 3.5 which mean “Agree”.

For option 9 (whether their preferred university distributes reading materials) most of them (83.6%) responded “disagree”. Very few of them (8/300) rated “agree”. The rest (14% students) remained “neutral” and the mean score is 2; that means “disagree”. For the last option of the 2nd item, (relatives graduated from the university, many of the respondents (44.7%) are not sure, whereas 36% of them replied “agree”. Some students (19.3%) replied “disagree” and the mean score is 3, which means “Neutral”.

The result shows that the students do not have consolidated information to decide and choose a university they would like to join in the future. As it has been displayed in the table, universities do not distribute print outs which can give overview of the university. In addition, students have replied that they do not get information from TV or radio about universities. Furthermore, most the students do not visit university websites to get information.

On the other hand, universities have not provided well organized information for the prospect students. The respondents have shown their dissatisfaction of getting clear directions from universities' brands (missions, visions and motto). This implies that the students rely on word of mouth advices to choose a university.

The purpose of the 3rd item was to identify students' best criterion to choose their future university. The respondents were provided with 6 possible criteria and asked to put them in order. Their ratings have been displayed in the table below.

3. *What is your best criterion to choose a university? Put the possible criteria in Order;*

Criterion	Rank	No. responses
1. employability of the university's graduates	1 st	178 (59.3%)
2. reputation of the university	2 nd	150(50%)
3. teaching quality	3 rd	114 (38%)
4. facilities, learning environment, easy of entry and safety and security	4 th	90 (30%)
5. course suitability	5 th	86 (28.7%)
6. location of the university	6 th	48 (16%)

Table-4: Criteria to choose a university

As it can be seen from the table above, the first criterion is “employability of the university's graduates” which many students (59.3%) put it 1st. The second best criterion is “reputation of the university” which received 50% rating. The 3rd best criterion as per their ratings is “teaching quality”. Their last criterion is “location of the university”.

It is possible to conclude from the students' responses that the priority the put first to choose a university is employability of graduates from that university. As we have seen from the previous tables, the students rely on others' advice to choose their best university. Hence, their information about that university is mainly “fan based”. In other words, those who have good image about a university promote it in discussions and influence others. The students do not have concrete evidences. Hence, they are easily influenced by rumors. Had they been informed formally from each university, they would have selected “teaching quality” and “course suitability” as their best criteria.

4. *How do you rank the following universities in terms of the image you have about them?*

University	Rank	No. responses
1. Addis Ababa University	1 st	98 (32.7%)
2. Jimma University	2 nd	60 (20%)
3. Gondar University	3 rd	44 (14.7%)
4. Adama Science and Technology University	4 th	42 (14%)
5. Bahir Dar University	5 th	32 (10.7%)
6. Mekele University	6 th	24 (8%)

Table-5: Preferred Universities in Rank

As it has been displayed in the table, AAU has been put first (32.7%) , Jimma University has been paced as the second choice (20%) and Gondar University third (14.7%).

The results have supported the above response. The three universities-Addis Ababa University, Jima University and Gondar University are first generation universities and have got good reputation, especially in Medicine. As it has been seen in the previous tables, preparatory students get information mainly from other people. These people have good image of these universities though the universities may not promote themselves. Hence, the popular image influences students to put them in order.

In order to check if the students' responses were consistent, students were asked which criterion they used to select their no.1 university.

5. *Which of the above criteria did you use to select your best university?*

Criteria	Response	
	no	%
A. reputation of the university	60	20
B. location of the university]	40	13
C. employability of the university's graduates	80	27
D. course suitability	40	13
E. teaching quality	51	17
F. facilities, learning environment, easy of entry and safety and security	29	10

Table-6: Criteria to select the best university

The students were also asked how they identify the above universities.

6. Which of the following do you use to identify the above universities?

Identifying method	Response	
	no	%
1. Logo	287	95.7
2. Motto	7	2.3
3. Vision	2	0.7
4. Mission	4	1.3

Table-7: University Identifying Signs

As we can see from the table the majority (95.7%) use just logo to identify each university.

Motto, vision and mission are rarely used to identify one university from the other.

4.2 Data from Regular Students

4.2.1 Personal Profiles

University	M	%	F	%	TT
Addis Ababa University	37	74	13	26	50
ASTU	44	88	6	12	50
Bahir Dar University	38	82.6	12	17.4	50
Gondar University	34	68	16	32	50
Jimma University	41	82	9	18	50
Mekele University	44	88	6	12	50
Total	116	79.40	30	20.6	300

Table-8: Regular students' profile

4.2.2 Answer the Questions

The first item of the regular students' questionnaire was intended to know how they had chosen the university. A list of nine options was given for them. Their responses have been displayed in the table below.

1. How did you choose this university?

Options	TT	%
1. My teachers recommended the university	66	22
2. My parents would be proud if I went here	46	15
3. Students in my school thought highly of the university	40	13
4. My friends would be impressed if I went here	32	11
5. The university gets mainly positive coverage in the media	12	4
6. I knew the university is a top university in the home country	12	4
7. The university achieved high positions in rankings	10	3
8. Employers liked to recruit this university's graduates	70	23
9. The university's vision, mission, motto and core values gave me clear directions	12	4
Total	300	100%

Table-9: Regular students' criteria of choosing the university

As it can be seen from the table, most the students chose their university based on the suggestions they have received from other; (22% from their teachers, 15% from their parents, 13% from classmates). But, a good number of the respondents (23%), decided to choose their university based on the information regarding the employability of graduates. Other options such as the university's coverage on media, its rankings and achievements, have received very low points.

It is obvious from the students' response that they did not get sufficient information about the universities before they decided. Hence, they decided based on the suggestions from others. The result matches with the responses of the prospect students. This shows that the situation is still similar.

The second item enquired students about the reasons that might have helped to choose their current university. Like the prospect students, the regular students were provided ten list of factors to be rated. Their responses for each option have been displayed as follows.

2. *How do you rate the following factors which might helped you to choose this university?*

(4.5-5=strongly agree; 3.5-4.4=agree; 2.5-3.4=neutral; 1.5-2.4=disagree ; < =1.4=strongly disagree)

N o.	Statement	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean rating
1	I read its brochures/magazines/newsletters	18	22	58	106	96	2.2
2.	I watched/listened news/promotion/notice about it on TV/radio	30	29	24	121	96	2.3
3.	I visited the website/read about it on Facebook...	11	10	45	114	120	1.9
4.	I got enough information about my preferred university from its unique features on the brand-logo, mission, vision..	15	24	30	123	108	2.1
5.	The university's vision, mission, motto and core values gave me clear directions of the university.	12	27	72	84	105	2.2
6.	The brand of my preferred university is very unique and simple, so I can identify it easily.	12	11	98	95	84	2.2
7.	I have got enough information from its website	30	20	50	101	99	2.3
8.	I was quite confident to choose it because of my role model-graduates.	45	51	33	81	90	2.6
9.	The university distributed newsletters/brochures to our school	18	21	32	133	96	2.1
10	My relatives/brothers/sisters/graduated from this university and advised me to choose it.	70	68	15	79	78	3.0

Table-10: Regular students' reaction towards influencing factors

The average rating for eight of the factors listed (I read its brochures/magazines/newsletters, I watched/listened news/promotion/notice about it on TV/radio; I visited the website/read about it on Facebook..., I got enough information about my preferred university from its unique features

on the brand-logo, mission, vision, The university's vision, mission, motto and core values gave me clear directions of the university, The brand of my preferred university is very unique and simple, so I can identify it easily, I have got enough information from its website and The university distributed newsletters/brochures to our school) is 2 which is "disagree". For the rest (I was quite confident to choose it because of my role model-graduates and my relatives/brothers/sisters/graduated from this university and advised me to choose it), they mean rating is 3, which means "Neutral".

From the responses it can be implied that the techniques that could have helped them to get consolidated information to choose a university were not accessible to them. For one thing the universities failed to provide students with sufficient information about their university with a unique brand. For example, for the option "*The University distributed newsletters/brochures to our school*" and "*I watched/listened news/promotion/notice about it on TV/radio*" the students' mean rating is 2.1 which means "disagree". On the other hand, the students themselves did not have a habit of searching for detailed information about universities before they decide. For instance, visiting websites has been rated 1.9, which means "disagree". This proves that their decision was mainly based on the information of peers, parents or teachers.

In order to explore the students' main criteria to choose their university, six lists of possible criteria were given to them in item 3. Their ratings have been depicted in the table below.

3. *Can you put the following factors which might helped you to choose this university in order; the most important to the least important (1= the most important)?*

Criterion for selecting a university	No. of responses	Rank
1.employability of the university's graduates	90(30%)	1st
2.course suitability	70 (23.3%)	2 nd
3.reputation of the university	60 (20%)	3 rd
4.teaching quality	40(13.3%)	4 th
5.location of the university	32(10.7%)	5 th
6.facilities, learning environment, easy of entry and safety and security	8(2.7%)	6 th

Table-11: Regular Students' Criteria ranking

The regular students ranked the criteria unlike the prospect students. Here, “employability of the university’s graduates” has been ranked 1st (30%), the second criterion is “course suitability” (23.3%), whereas “reputation of the university” has been ranked 3rd with 60/300 responses, the 4th criterion is “teaching quality” with 13.3% point, “location of the university” has been put 5th and the last is “facilities, learning environment, easy of entry and safety and security.”

The results show that the students have been affected by their perceived criteria to the best university. It seems that their current criterion is employability not teaching quality. That is why they placed employability at first and reputation 3rd. It might be because they feel they were not right when they decided. On the other hand, ‘course suitability’ has been placed at the second rank which is different from prospect students. This might be because students their current experiences influenced them to put it as important criterion. However, still their responses point out that their judgments were not based on personal knowledge; rather information from informal discussions.

4. How do you differentiate this university from others? What are the unique features/qualities?

Item 5 focused on the current experiences of students in the university. They were asked how much they know their university. A list of four statements was given and students were asked to statement rate their attitudes for each.

5. As the student of this university, how do you rate the following statements?

(4.5-5=strongly agree, 3.5-4.4=agree; 2.5-3.4=neutral; 1.5-2.4=disagree; <=1=strongly agree)

No .	Statements	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	Strongly agree	Mean Rating
1	Students are regularly informed about all plans and achievements	18	20	70	80	92	1.9
2	The university has its own code of conduct and we have been oriented from the very beginning	40	40	50	90	80	2.6
3	I can easily demonstrate/explain the university’s brand for a stranger; logo, color, motto, vision, mission, font types/sizes,	20	16	70	88	106	2.2
4	Students are proud to advise new students to choose it.	32	64	94	70	40	2.9

Table-12: Regular students' reaction towards their status about the university brand

For the options *“informing students about the university regularly”* the students’ which is *“disagree”* and *“I can easily demonstrate/explain the university’s brand for a stranger; logo, color, motto, vision, mission, font types/sizes”* the mean rating is 1.9 and 2.2 respectively. But the average rating for the options *“the university has its own code of conduct and we have been oriented from the very beginning”*, and *“Students are proud to advise new students to choose it”* is 2.6 and 2.9 respectively which means “neutral”.

The students’ responses show that the universities do not inform their respective students about its progress and directions on a regular basis. Besides, the universities do not explain their brands to their respective students. Hence, the students do not have much information to say to the new comers. For example, they replied “disagree” for the option “I can easily demonstrate/explain the university’s brand for a stranger; logo, color, motto, vision, mission, font types/sizes”. This shows that they do not know the meaning of the brand employed.

4.3 Summary of Interview Findings

In order to assess the educational branding and communication practices of universities, a face to face interview was held with each university communication office directors. The interview questions were all unstructured so that the researchers can gain in depth information about the phenomenon. The main points discussed in the interview include: university identity symbolizing practices, corporate identity demonstration, corporate communication strategies, intra-campus interactions...

The findings of the interview show that each university has been working to promote itself in almost a similar manner. All universities have their own logos, mottos, visions and missions. Each university has established separate communication office though nomenclature varies. Sometimes it is called “Corporate Communication Directorate”, and sometimes it is named as “International Affairs and Public Relation Directorate”. Still, in others, it is known as “Strategic Planning and Communication Office”. The directors explained their respective office hard work in trying to promote their university and publicize the progresses. According to their explanations, they all employ various communications to do so. TV., Radio, Newsletters, Magazines and Brochures are the most outlets utilized to disseminate information. Some universities have bought airtimes from broadcasting corporations to promote their university. As per their view their office has been playing key roles in all the activities of communications.

During the interview, we, the researchers have tried to learn the most prominent challenges in university branding and communication practices. The major gaps have been summarized as follows below.

The first problem is *Lack of strong intra-university relations*. The selected universities have 5 or more campuses under one president. Some of these campuses, especially engineering fields, have upgraded themselves into institutions. The institutes are managed by two directors; one scientific director and one managing director. There is a tendency of being independent campus among the officials of these institutes. Consequently, there are no strong interactions between the central communication office and the campuses. As the interviewees indicated, their office is unable to follow up all the university activities and publicize them to the public.

“Sometimes campuses prepare events and invite media without communicating to us. Thus, we are left behind the scene and feel embarrassed to explain what has been performed,” (Interviewee1).

In addition, the interviewees complained that they are unable to monitor the message released. Each campus tries to promote itself without planning on the corporate identities.

“There is a challenge of uniformity across the campuses. For example, there are times when a campus prepares brochures, newsletters or T-shirts and caps without the Universities Logo and Name. Furthermore, the messages released via various outlets are not edited carefully,” (interviewee2).

“One day, “Anti-Corruption” day was being celebrated in one of our university campuses. A big banner was posted containing a message read “Bricking Corruption” to “Breaking Corruption. When I saw the message I was embarrassed, you know. The meaning of the Bricking is building Corruption,” (interviewee 3).

On the other hand, the communication offices have a challenge to get latest information from each campus and update their university website. They do not know what has been changed or included in the campuses as the campuses fail to communicate with the central communication offices.

“There are times when people call and shout at us about the obsolete information. For example, one day a guy called and shouted at my secretary; ‘I missed the chance to enroll for PG class because of the old fields posted on the website.’ They do not let us know the new programs for each year or the new position holders,” (interviewee 4).

The second challenge the interviewees identified was lack of endorsed guiding editorial policy at the central level. As there is no approved editorial policy, they could not monitor and evaluate the contents publicized to the public. The typologies, size, color, domain names for internet and publicizing procedures are not managed well because of lack of the guiding regulation. So far the messages released do not have consistency to be used as the universities’ unique styles, they added.

The third bottleneck of the communication offices is the public purchasing process. As public universities, everything has to be purchased under the regulation of Public Purchase and Procurement Office. Hence, the performance is too slow.

“We are not able to promote our university and let our public know about the activities on time because of the slow purchasing process. The print process and Tv. and radio ads. have to pass through Purchasing and Prosperity Administration Directorate PPAD. Hence, we cannot do that on time. For instance, this year’s calendar has just arrived after six months passed,” (interviewee 5).

A director from one university complained that the university management does not care much about promoting the university.

“Our university managers believe that the university has already built a good image. Hence, they do not give much emphasis for planning the university brand and communication strategies. When our office proposes communication packages, they devalue it and become reluctant to allow the budget. Our university could not compete internationally because of our poor branding and communication strategies,” (interview 6).

The directors were also asked how much they have done in introducing the university for new students. As they all have admitted unequivocally, they do not go to schools to promote their university. In fact, this has been proved by the students themselves. Students’ responses pointed out that universities do not provide clear visions, missions, directions and unique features, which could have helped them to choose their preferred university based on consolidated information. For this reason, students have been choosing universities based on the suggestions from other people.

4.4 Summary of Findings from Content Analysis

4.4.1 Evaluation of Printouts

Rubrics (*adopted from Texas Education Agency, 2006*) had been prepared to analyze the design of university brand in brochures, newsletters, magazines and other gift materials.

Brochures/newsletters/ magazines Evaluation Rubrics

Criteria	Professional	Adequate	Needs Work	Unsatisfactory
Content	☐ Demonstrates the university in depth and create an excellent image ☐ Accurately utilizes researched information. ☐ The university has been displayed in a comprehensive and precise manner.	☐ Demonstrates the university well and can create good image ☐ The information provided is supported by an adequate research. ☐ The major parts of the university have been displayed.	☐ Demonstrates little understanding of the university. ☐ Employs research information with a fair degree of accuracy ☐ The university corporate identity has not been displayed well.	☐ Lacks enough contents of the university. ☐ Reports only the most basic parts of the information. ☐ It is not comprehensive; does not provide the university's corporate identity.
Written Presentation	☐ Well organized content ☐ Attractive and well-designed format ☐ Clear and easily understood message ☐ Prepared using latest software with strong visual appeals ☐ Accurate use of language; perfect grammar, consistent typeface, size, space...	☐ Content is organized ☐ Format is adequate ☐ Message is sufficiently understood ☐ Prepared using appropriate software with acceptable eye appeal ☐ Good use of language; correct grammar, consistent typeface, size, space	☐ Content lacks organization ☐ Format is difficult to follow and poorly organized. ☐ Message not clearly understood ☐ Software used but poorly designed ☐ Lack of consistency in language use; some errors in grammar and spelling.	☐ Unorganized content ☐ Hard to follow ☐ Message difficult to understand; tendency to wander or ramble ☐ Prepared without using software or with little organization or skill ☐ Poor use language; incorrect grammar, spelling, inconsistent typeface...

Table-13: Rubrics for evaluation of Print outs

Samples of print outs were taken from each university for general overview. The researchers then distributed the samples to selected professionals from comment. The experts have forwarded their own comments using the evaluating rubrics as frame of reference. As it can be seen from the table above, their average evaluation lies under the column “Needs Work”.

In the first place, the contents of these print outs need more upgrading. Three main contents-introducing the university, education and research contents and university corporate identity were expected to be incorporated in the print outs. As we can see from the evaluation result, these contents were not demonstrated well. The readers can get little understanding of the university, less consolidated and unclear information about education and research progresses and incomplete university corporate identity.

When we see the presentations of the information in the print outs evaluated, first of all, the contents lack organization. In other words, the contents included in the brochures, magazines and newsletters are not designed coherently and consistently. For example, the formats are difficult to follow as they are poorly organized. Some print outs are designed using software such as, adobe in design. However, the results observed are not to the standards of other international universities' designs. The color, typeface and font size used are not consistent and cannot represent the universities' identity. In addition, the message displayed in these print outs is not clear and cannot provide readers with precise information. Furthermore, lack of consistency in language the common problem observed in the print outs of these universities. There are even sill grammar and spelling errors which should have been proofread and edited painstakingly.

4.5 Summary of Findings from website evaluation

A check list was designed to review the website of the selected universities. The researchers then recruited two experts of ICT from Adama Science and Technology University for the website evaluation. The experts have checked each university's website using the checklist. Their comments have been summarized as follows.

4.5.1 Website Management Problem

All the universities selected do not have a clear regulation of website management communication office officials have complained about this during the interview. In five of these universities the website is under the management of ICT directorate except Bahir Dar University. The problem is uploading and monitoring the contents into the website. The communication office directors say they have to edit and approve any information to uploaded into the website. But, the schools, faculties and colleges do not like the bureaucracy. They say they do not have to go to the communication offices for approval. Temporarily, the ICT directorate has granted communication offices' directors gate pass passwords so that they can access the website for uploading and editing. BDU has already made ICT under Strategic Planning and Corporate Communication Vice President Office which also contains PR.

4.5.2 Graphics

The general comment of the experts shows that the universities lack consistency in applying designs, typefaces, and color in their website designs. There are no consistent graphics employed in the contents of the websites. A reader has to guess which university is coming out as soon as the first page appears just looking at the designs if the logo, colors, font types and sizes are demonstrated consistently.

4.5.3 Website Content Design

As the experts commented, some university websites are overloaded with too much information. A visitor has to scroll up and down to check all the contents in the websites. ‘This is a traditional way of designing a website. In modern styles, one simple page is enough,’ (expert 1). A visitor may not that much patient to scroll all the pages while checking a website. For one thing, it takes time. Most importantly, the internet connection will slow down to display all the contents at once. On the other hand, the contents included in the website pages are not simplified and consolidated. ‘A large amount photos and texts are uploaded and it is difficult to check the website in a short time,’ (expert 2).

4.5.4 Inactive Links

The other gap observed in the websites of these universities is ‘inactive links’. In some universities there are links found, but these links do not open or they are empty when they are clicked. ‘‘You see a heading academic calendar at the heading, but you can’t access it when you try to open it. In the other university, I found a heading ‘research and innovation progresses’, but it is empty when I opened it. If it has no content there is no need to show the heading,’’ (expert 2).

4.5.5 Lack of Updating the Website

Most universities do not update their website continuously and on time. The case in point is students’ challenge to get up to date information on university websites.

“One student told me that when he was in grade 12, he chose the university checking the ‘Software department’ on the website. But when he joined the university he learned that, the department had been closed two years ago. This is a mess for the student. They failed to update their website contents and affected the students’ life,” (expert 1).

Moreover, the campuses of each university do not have strong relationships with the central communication office. In fact, this was raised as one big challenge during the interview. The central communication office does not get up to date information continuously. As a result, obsolete information is displayed in the website. According to the experts’ comments, in some universities a person who is no more at the position has still been displayed in the website.

4.6 Summary of Visual Identity Evaluation

An attempt has been made to evaluate the visual identity planning of the selected universities which includes logo, color and typeface. A checklist has been employed to evaluate the identity planning and design of these universities. The findings have been summarized as follows.

Logo	Motif (picture items)	Possible Conceptual attributes	Colour	Image style
	• gear • science symbol • crop • book • texts in 2 languages	• industry • science • knowledge • development	• red • yellow • blue • white	• mixed-text and pictures
	• odda (tree) • gear • science symbol • book • globe • Nomenclature-in 3 languages	• culture • industry • science • knowledge • world	• red • green • white • blue	• mixed-texts and pictures • circle logo
	• torch • sun • book • river • plants • stones • nomenclature in 2 languages+ motto	• education • hope • knowledge • environment	• yellow • brown • white • green • blue	• mixed-text and picture • circle logo
	• mountains • plants • castle of Fasil • paper • gear • science symbol • sky • Nomenclature in 2 languages	• environment • civilization • knowledge • science • industry	• blue • green • yellow • white • black • blue	• mixed; text and pictures • circle logo

	• gear • sun rise • book • stool • coffee tree+ beans • nomenclature in 2 languages+ motto	• industry • hope • knowledge • culture • environment	• blue • yellow • white • black • green • red	• mixed-text and pictures • cup shaped logo with wave at the bottom
	• gear • obelisk of Axum • book • science symbol • crop • Nomenclature in 2 languages	• industry • civilization • science • knowledge • development	• blue • yellow • white • green	• mixed; text and pictures • circle logo

Table-14: Universities Logo Contents

As we can see the logos from the table above, all logos except Jimma University have similar shape-circle. The logos of AAU and ASTU look similar and may confuse people at first glance. When we see these logos in terms of: memorability and simplicity, it is obvious that they cannot be easily identified and recognized as they are so complex full of a lot of items. All of the logos contain more than five items. Moreover, the logos are displayed in various colours. Thus, it will not be easy for the universities to identify a unique Colour endorsed as an identity.

On the other hand, it is difficult to say that they are unique identities as they have many similarities. In the first place, all the logos except Jimma University are circle. When we see the pictures incorporated in each logo, they contain similar items. For example, all of them contain ‘gear and book except BDU. Hence, the concepts which are thought to be represented in each symbol are similar. Accordingly, the common concepts that are possibly signified in the pictures are: knowledge, culture, industry and development.

When we come to the texts incorporated in the logos, we can say they are almost similar. Some universities applied texts in different ways. Bahir Dar University and Jimma University included

their Mottos in their logos. Besides, Jimma University used the English version of the nomenclature at the top unlike the others. All universities used the Amharic and English versions of their nomenclature, except ASTU which used there languages.

All in all, the logos of these universities cannot be said perfect visual identities. For one thing, they are not simple and easily recognizable. There are many items and colours included. For another, they may not be used as unique identities as they have not peculiar signs. Hence, they do not have their own unique concepts displayed.

Chapter Five

5 Summary and Conclusions

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The main purpose of this study was to assess the practice of educational branding and communication strategies in Ethiopian Higher Education. The study focused on how educational brands are designed, what contents are included in the brands, how these brands are communicated and what gaps are there. For this end, data were gathered using questionnaires, interviews and content analysis. The data gathered have been analyzed and interpreted in the previous chapter. In this chapter, major findings of the study have been summarized as follows.

5.2.1 Efficiency of Communication Strategies

One of a university's purposes for planning and employing communication strategies is to attract high caliber prospect students. As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, both prospect and regular students were asked how they decided to choose their preferred university. The result showed that universities are not doing well to convince and attract the students. For example, most new students have decided to choose their preferred university based on the advice from teachers, parents and friends (table- 2). The same is true for regular students (table-9). Similarly, students confirmed that they do not know much about their future universities. When new students were given statements to rate about their efforts of accessing universities' information directly, the majority "disagreed". That means they do not get information directly. Universities do not provide news students with various methods to know about the universities. For example, only 8.6% read news letters or brochures of universities (table-3). On the other hand, the interviewees have pointed out their poor communication strategies. As they stated, sometimes university top managers do not care about promoting and attracting students as they believe their university has already built 'good image'. They also admitted that their websites are not designed and updated well. This has been approved by the experts during the website evaluation.

Consequently, students decided to choose universities based on word of mouth information. The information they get from their family, friends and teachers influenced them to do so. That is

why they gave due emphasis for ‘reputation’ and ‘employability’ as their main criteria (table-4 and 11). The universities failed to target students and provide them with consolidate information using various communication strategies.

5.2.2 Symbolizing Problems

An effective branding and positioning captures the distinctive mission, aspirations, and strengths of an institution and appeals to the motivations and interests of the stakeholders. According to Haris (2001), corporate branding requires a holistic approach to brand management, in which all members of an organisation behave in accordance with the desired brand identity. Accordingly, a university’s brand has to be unique, recognizable and comprehensive. However, this has not been accomplished by the selected universities. As we have learned from the content analysis, there are gaps in symbolizing and communicating the identities of the selected universities.

First of all, the universities’ identities which include: the logo shape, color, typeface, unique mission, vision and core values have not been planned well. As it has been seen from Table- 14, the design of the universities’ visual identities has various gaps. The designs almost similar and do not represent uniqueness. The designs are not simple and precise. It is not clear why some shapes are incorporated. The universities failed to display their uniqueness as academic institutions. The items included in the logos do not show any unique feature of the university’s mission and vision other than general cultural concepts. As a result, both new and regular students do not have enough knowledge about the identity of each university. New students do not know about the mission and vision of their future universities. Similarly, regular students responded ‘*disagree*’ for the statement: ‘*I can easily demonstrate/explain the university’s brand for a stranger; logo, color, motto, vision, mission, font types/sizes*’ (table-12).

Secondly, there is inconsistency in selecting and applying typefaces and color. As it has been pointed out in the summary of the content analysis of printout evaluation, there are problems of consistency. In fact, most interviewee stated that they do not have approved editorial policy to manage all the printouts and displays in the name of their universities. In fact, Addis Ababa University and Jimma University have prepared editorial policies, but the policy has not yet implemented in all the campuses. Other universities do not have any regulation document at all. Thus, materials have not been prepared based on a unified editorial policy. Most, importantly the

universities visual identities are not planned and implemented well. As we have seen the analysis from table-14, the logos of these universities lack many qualities; simplicity, uniqueness and completeness.

Conclusion

As it has been pointed out in chapter one, the main purpose of this study was to explore the general practice and gaps of corporate branding of Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions. To this end, six universities were selected for the study. Data have been gathered using questionnaires, content analysis rubrics and checklists, and interviews. The findings of the study have been analyzed and interpreted in chapter four, and the interpretations summarized and chapter five respectively.

As the results show, students do not have sufficient knowledge to choose their appropriate universities. Hence, they choose universities based on ‘suggestions’ from others such as, friends, teachers and parents. This is because universities do not introduce their unique features and directions to the students. For example, students do not get brochures and newsletters. Similarly, the students cannot identify one university from the other using unique identities as they do not have that information. As it has been learned from the content analysis, the universities are not working hard to promote their universities using various methods. The websites are not planned to the standards of international universities. The print outs lack designing and content planning. Furthermore, the logos are not designed to be simple and unique.

As universities continued to expand with many campuses, establishing unified communication has been difficult in many universities. Each campus has less interaction with the central office; hence, the communication office cannot update the public with comprehensive information. Furthermore, symbolizing the university has been difficult as each campus tries to put its name and issues first.

Recommendations

The researchers have forwarded the following possible recommendations based on the conclusions.

- Universities have to plan and design their unique identities; specific core values, missions and visions have to be signified in the identities.
- Universities have to employ different media to promote themselves; e.g. new students have to be provided with up to date information via websites, printouts and mass media;
- Preparatory Schools have to try their best to provide their students with enough information about each university;
- Communication offices have to be integrated with each campus of the university so that unified message can be publicized to the audience;
- Further research has to be conducted on all universities so that a comprehensive branding problem of Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions can be identified.

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