

Brand Harmonization in the International Higher Education Market

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Abstract

Universities today are increasingly competing for international students in response to trends in global student mobility, diminishing university funding and government-backed recruitment campaigns. This trend has driven the need for universities to focus on clearly articulating and developing their brand, and developing harmony within the brand architecture. This case-study of one University focuses on brand architecture and found evidence of a move towards corporatisation, based on the pressure for UK universities to align with the notion of "a British Education", promoted through the British Council. However, the process of brand harmonization raises concerns about the potential impact on the marketing positioning and the autonomy of faculties and schools. The challenge seems to be to work on brand-building within the University with an understanding of two-way communication within the brand architecture: schools and faculties should be acknowledged contributors to the identity of the brand.

Introduction

The trends in global student mobility have contributed to a rapidly evolving market in international education, which, in turn, has created new opportunities, challenges and an increasingly competitive higher education environment (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). The increased competition within the education sector, diminishing university funds and the introduction of new government backed marketing campaigns to increase the number of international students at British universities, highlights the growing importance of branding within educational institutions (Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Mok, 1999).

In 2000, the UK government backed a £5 million three year world-wide campaign to attract more international students to the UK (BBC News, 2000). The intention was to “brand” higher education in the UK and to “sell” HE through the British Council offices throughout the world. The HE sector viewed this strategic marketing campaign as a critical step in achieving the targets set to increase the numbers of overseas students attending UK universities. The UK Government set the targets in 1999, and announced a drive to attract more international students which would be achieved and led by a ‘rebranding’ exercise for UK universities. The aims of the marketing campaign were to establish a clear and competitive identity – a brand – for UK education through creating awareness of what the UK distinctively has to offer, reinforcing positive perceptions and countering misconceptions.

Unsurprisingly, a number of authors have shown some resistance to these proposals, arguing that "Branding is anathema to higher education: it implies central control and consistency, whereas universities have to be about freedom and action. Branding in business is about creating personality where none exists but there's almost too much personality in universities" (Roberts cited by Lewis, 2003 p.21). Indeed, the whole notion of students as consumers has attracted criticism, for example Barrett (1996 p.70) lamented that, "It is both regrettable and ominous that the marketing focus, explicitly borrowed from business, should be accepted and even welcomed" and Gibbs (2002) reflects that the international market in higher education has commoditized education which has embraced a business model of competition almost without questioning the appropriateness of the tools being used. Such comments serve to highlight serious concern regarding the marketisation of higher education (HE) and the increasing use of business terminology, which has served to emphasize that HE is rapidly being regarded as a business, like any other. In some cases, opponents of the introduction of market forces in higher education believe that the business world morally contradicts the values of education; therefore, they would argue that educationalists ought to oppose any form of marketing in their institutions. In view of these arguments, the authors will keep the use of the terminology and glossary terms associated with branding (which are rapidly increasing in the business world) to a minimum in this paper. The paper will include terms which support the argument regarding brand architecture, but the subtleties of concepts such as umbrella brand; master brand; co-brand; brand endorsement and so on will not be discussed here because this would involve transferring these concepts directly to the HE context. This is because of the above concerns: i.e. that terminology developed from business

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examples are not welcome in the world of HE, and because the development of HE does not easily fit the models developed in the business world.

The authors find support, however, for the argument that the brand image portrayed by a university plays a crucial role in public attitudes towards that institution, and to the sector as a whole (Yavas and Shemwell, 1996; Landrum et al., 1998). A study of university image (Paramewaran and Glowacka, 1995) suggested that higher education institutions need to maintain or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market. This image is likely to impact on a student's willingness to apply to that institution; therefore establishing these images in the eyes of the stakeholders is of significant importance (Ivy, 2001). The basis of developing a brand in educational institutions is to enable that institution to be attractive to students and to differentiate British education and training from its major competitors, e.g. the USA and Australia (BBC News, 2000).

Review of the Literature on International Marketing of Higher Education

Empirical research papers dedicated specifically to HE branding are relatively scarce, despite the growing importance of this subject. The broader topic of international marketing of higher education has been a key topic for both empirical research (Mazzarol, 1998; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Gray et al., 2003) and theoretical papers (Nicholls et al., 1995; Mazzarol and Hosie, 1996; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Czarniawska and Genell, 2002). Much of the interest in research in the marketing of HE has been stimulated by increasing

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competition for overseas students, for example, Gomes & Murphy's (2003) study of potential HE students' use of the Internet to facilitate information searching and decision making. Theoretical papers have focused on: gaining competitive advantage (Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999; Czarniawska and Genell, 2002) institutional and sector image (George, 2000; Oplatka, 2002). However, following literature searches the authors identified very few papers (Gray et al., 2003; Lewis, 2003; Chapleo, 2004; 2005) that concentrated on the branding of universities or papers that attempted to apply some of the recent theories of branding to the international HE sector, and whilst these papers discuss branding, this was not the key topic of the research. Papers also tended to be theoretical rather than empirical.

Very few articles have explicitly explored the development of brands and branding of services. Those that do exist tend to be contradictory (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1989) and encourage service firms to develop multiple brands. Berry and Lefkowitz (1988) argue that in services, the company name is the brand name and that services do not lend themselves to individual branding the way tangible products do (Turley and Moore, 1995). The limited literature on the branding of universities internationally focuses on surveying international students – gathering their perceptions on a variety of marketing activities conducted in the recruitment of international students, and subsequently determining their effectiveness. On the demand side, a considerable number of papers have focused on the choice factors of the student-consumer (Baldwin and James, 2000; Umashankar, 2001; Pugsley and Coffey, 2002; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003); and studies conducted by researchers based in Australia have sought to identify key factors in the choice of higher education (e.g. Kemp and Madden, 1998; Soutar and Turner, 2002) and the UK (e.g. Ball et al., 2002), with some research on

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student choice in international markets (e.g. Gomes and Murphy, 2003). The research field on higher education branding, therefore, is still at a relatively pioneer stage with much research still to be carried out both from an exploratory and strategic perspective (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006).

This paper is based on the analysis of qualitative data from a study of corporate and faculty-level marketing of one University in the UK, which attracted over 6,000 Post Graduate applications to the Business School in 2004-2005; and has agents and distance learning centers in many locations throughout the world. This study aims to examine some of the key factors in the development of a strong brand for the University and the Business School in a global market for HE, and focuses on the development of brand architecture.

Methods

This multiple-method study relied principally on qualitative research and a case study of one institution from both the supply and demand sides. The researchers identified a random sample from the admissions system database: over 80% of applicants apply on-line, and the remaining data from hard-copy applications are entered onto the database by administrators. For the November 1st 2004 – October 31st 2005 academic year, the School of Management's on-line admissions system database stored a total of 6,195 applicants seeking registration for 2005-2006. After applying the sampling frame, (to exclude those no longer accessible through data protection, and those still being processed) the researchers isolated a population

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of 4,800 applicants (i.e. those accessible on the system on July 31st 2005) for sampling purposes.

The second author used SPSS to generate a random sample using only the ID numbers of applicants who applied between November 1st 2004 and July 31st 2005. SPSS selected sixty ID numbers (to allow for some which might not be accessible on the system) and searches were carried out until a sample size of 30 was achieved. The researchers retrieved 30 applicants' files and personal statements, from the School's database and copied them to a Word document; data also included the gender and nationality of the applicants and the program they had applied for. The researchers coded and analyzed qualitative data from personal statements to explore perceptions of the University brand, and the School sub-brand. The team jointly categorized the data and extracted quotes specifically relating to the topic of branding from the personal statements, and used only those extracts which referred to the University and the School, discarding all other information (an entirely electronic selection process).

The second author conducted in-depth interviews with managers from the case study university. The two interviewees were: the Director of the International Office of the University, and the Marketing Director of the Business School. The interview schedule followed a semi-structured format enabling the interviewee to develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the interviewer, providing an opportunity for the interviewee to elaborate points of interest. By gaining perceptions from these two key senior members of staff from the University as a whole and one school, this provided a sharp focus on the brand

architecture within the University. The interview schedule avoided directly asking the interviewees about international "branding" and therefore, the researcher did not use the specific term "brand" throughout the interviews – although the managers themselves did choose to use this term during the interviews. This approach aimed to avoid tainting interviewees' thinking, thus pre-determining the course of the interview sessions, and altering the responses. Instead the interviewees were encouraged to express their own views on the subject by identifying the importance of branding and the use of that specific term (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The plausibility of the data can be accounted for given that the two interviewees were chosen precisely because they are highly experienced in the research area – and therefore, their testimony carries a high degree of credibility (Milliken, 2001). (However, the authors acknowledge the limitations of the study below, and recommend that a larger study be carried out involving a sample of universities and faculties.)

The reason for this choice of method was to explore a substantive area about which little is known and where theory within the higher education sector is still relatively undeveloped: exploratory research is therefore deemed the most appropriate. In addition, qualitative research enables intricate details to be obtained about thought processes, feelings and motives which are difficult to extract through the use of quantitative survey research methods (Cresswell, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The concentration of efforts on one case rather than many allows in-depth insights to be gained from looking at the individual case, generating wider implications that may not have been brought to light with a larger sample of cases. Another advantage of case study research is the use of multiple research methods (analysis of statements, and interviews with managers) which can facilitate the validation of

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data through the process of triangulation (Denscombe, 2003; Ragin and Becker, 1992; Yin, 2003).

The use of multiple-methods enables things to be seen from a different perspective and the opportunity to corroborate findings can enhance the validity of the data. This gives some reassurance regarding the consistency of the data across the methods, effectively providing support to the analysis as oppose to taking data at face value (Riege, 2003). The next section covers some of the key definitions, for example the authors' understanding of the terms related to branding which were used for the study.

Brand Architecture

Brand architecture is the framework which enables the university to manage and market the programs and the services, and should align with the support structures, mission and strategies – but different strategies require different architectures. For the purpose of this study the authors identified two types of brand architecture systems (Petromilli et al., 2002): first, monolithic or corporate where the corporate name – the university – is used on all programs and services offered by the university; all sub-brands (departments/faculties/schools) are linked to the “corporate brand” (the university) by means of verbal and visual endorsement; and secondly, freestanding, or house-of-brands where the corporate brand, the university, operates more as a holding company, (sometimes with some invisibility) and each product or service is individually branded for its target market – so each of the schools, faculties or departments would have autonomy in terms of verbal and visual identity. Each department or

school would also be in a position to identify separate target markets based on the subject discipline for example, and the programs offered. The latter house-of-brands approach, the authors argue, has given a certain amount of autonomy and individuality to schools and faculties, but a move towards the former, the corporate system, is likely to contribute to the erosion of this individuality.

The authors argue that a process of harmonization has been taking place, which has focused not only on the visual identity, but also on the values, vision and mission of the university. However, although the harmonization process can be achieved through the rhetoric, this is not always as easy to achieve in practice. Brand harmonization is defined for the purpose of this study, as ensuring that all products in a particular brand range have a consistent name, visual identity and, ideally, positioning across national and international markets. The authors argue that managers believed the rhetoric: that they should seek to develop a coherent and consistent brand identity for the university, which is uniformly delivered across all stakeholder groups to create a favorable reputation. Communicating a homogeneous brand, and the process of harmonizing the brand, was the key process being undertaken by managers to achieve corporatisation, and extracts from students' applications provide further support for these arguments.

Secondly, as a result of a holistic approach to developing the brand of the case-study University and the School, by focusing on internal marketing as well as external relations management and promotion, the process of corporatisation is in progress: the university is moving from a blend of the house-of-brands/corporate approach, towards a more fully

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corporate approach. In line with researchers in the business field, the authors acknowledge the possibility that the legacy of past management decisions of a University would have a strong impact on the brand architecture, as well as the competitive realities of the market for HE. The wider concept of branding was clearly understood and was currently being implemented by senior management, but their focus on the "brand" was not purely limited to visual identity. The manager-respondents expressed a strong belief that senior management embraced the brand values from the top of their institution, with this sentiment flowing throughout all avenues of the university to provide a strong sense of synergy within the institution. This suggests that the managers were attempting to harmonize and dove-tail the different conceptual and visual identities of the schools and departments.

Finally, the authors found some support and justification for the corporatisation of the University, based on the increasing internationalization of HE and the need to present the University as part of a "British Education" through the British Council. This was also supported by evidence from students' personal statements where the notion of a British Education was articulated and assumed to be closely aligned with the HE provided at the case-study University. (Theories of branding indicate that this relationship is 'co-branding'.)

Harmonization: Aligning the School's Brand with the University Brand

Gray et al., (2003) argued that institutions with extensive experience in offering courses offshore or by distance education tended to develop global brands in order to be more

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effective in the international market. He claimed that this approach was largely based on a fear of inconsistent brand positioning in different markets, and had led to a focus on achieving greater consistency across the university in terms of the brand image.

This research found some support for this perspective and in terms of the rhetoric a process of harmonization seemed to be taking place within the university, especially regarding the brand identity and positioning. One of the managers explained that the School's image was pulling in the same direction as the university's technological image with the recent introduction of distance learning, which was pioneered by the School, in addition to the use of other new technologies. The Marketing Director of the School confirmed that the School "dovetails its image with the University". He explained that the mission statement tied in with the university's mission statement which sets out the values of the university which are also encompassed in the school's mission statement.

Based on interviews with managers, this research revealed that the school had utilized the mission statement, and focused on core values as a key tool for market positioning and for providing a focus for the strategic direction. The Marketing Director of the School explained that, "those values are incorporated there [in the mission statement] and you can see the flow right the way through the university to the school, to the teaching and so on". Interviewees viewed the integration and harmonization of the brand across the university as an important factor in conveying a clear and consistent brand – a corporate brand. Both respondents stressed the importance of exhorting the values of the school and the university in the activities undertaken, through an integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach.

Marketing activities included: research activities, attendance at overseas events and exhibitions, recruitment fairs run by the British Council, use of overseas agents, brochures, website development and public relations (PR). The two senior managers explained that this could only be achieved by aligning the values and brand identity of the School with the University so that they work in harmony; and this approach would enable the University to compete more effectively in international markets. The School had also changed its visual identity significantly in the last three years, from a logo which reflected the school's mission and values and incorporated a globe (and excluded any reference to the University as a whole) to a logo which largely relied on the University logo with the name of the School added.

Evidence from the personal statements provided by students further revealed an expectation that the School and the University were in alignment regarding the values and reputation of the institution. Applicants had used the statements provided in the School's marketing communications to make claims about the University as a whole. That is, they had made assumptions that they would be aligned, but they had also copied the terms and phrases used in the advertising to support their applications! For example applicants had taken phrases from the School's website, and then stated that the University: "[has] a global reputation for both teaching and research in this sector"; and "Enjoys a high reputation of proven excellent teaching quality and stimulating learning environments". A number of comments also illustrated that the core values of the University had been communicated to the applicants. One applicant believed that: "Having a MSc from the University of (...) on my CV could improve my employment prospects"; and another claimed that "the courses which your school offers are distinctive and I have confidence that it will enhance my future career path";

confirming perhaps that the School and the University are in alignment in terms of the focus on employment in the marketing communications which is that: "(...) is the 'University for Jobs', with over 98% of our graduates enjoying full time employment six months after graduation".

However, the research team found evidence of conflicting views, and problems of aligning the missions and values of the School and the University. Evidence from the study suggested, therefore, that the rhetoric of alignment did not necessarily match the current situation. The manager-interviewees provided contrasting opinions when asked what they believed the most important contributing factors were in delivering the values of the school. The Marketing Manager of the School believed that "it's probably the staff - both academic and non academic (...) we try to push the message out as much as we can" in all the marketing communications: the website, brochures and so on. On the other hand the Director of the International Office believed that the most important factor in delivering the values was student satisfaction. He argued that they would ultimately be the marketing tool for the School and University in providing word-of-mouth recommendations and thus promoting the values of the university as a whole.

Secondly, aligning the School with the University had been challenging because of the heritage of the School and the University. The Marketing Manager explained that the School of Management had once been two separate schools, (a Post Graduate Business School and a Management School) and the business school treated marketing, particularly international marketing, as a main priority for the recruitment of students: i.e. a market-driven approach.

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For these reasons, despite the rhetoric, the integration of the brand had not been fully achieved due to the conflicting visions of the original two schools – in the new combined School of Management a less marketing-led approach had been adopted.

Corporatisation

Researchers argue that the alignment or harmonization of the values and visions of the school and the university appear to be important in reinforcing the overall brand of the University, and in ensuring the quality and consistency of the brand: thus enabling the University to be recognized internationally. In the for-profit sector, authors have frequently analyzed the benefits and weaknesses of corporate brands and house brands, and debated whether they should be linked or entirely separate, therefore the finding that this should also raise concerns in the not-for-profit sector, is not surprising. The debate about the optimum relationship of corporate and house brands is ongoing: many examples of success in the business world exist where the corporate owner is invisible (e.g. Proctor and Gamble) but the sub-brands are very visible; and where the corporate owner or parent company is very prominent (e.g. Sony) and mainly provides brand endorsement to sub-brands (Rajagopal and Sanchez, 2004). In the past the University played a less visible role in branding, thus allowing some Schools to develop a strong brand image of their own. A change to this practice may cause conflict where different schools and faculties within a University experience both a loss of independence, and pressure to align their market positioning with that of the University.

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As part of a more corporate approach the University's corporate identity needs to be more coherent and with these developments, internal marketing becomes more important. Corporate identity encapsulates "a company's ethos, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate the organization within its competitive environment" (Balmer, 1998 p.985). A clear identity is an important corporate asset, which provides both an internal focus for employees and an interrelated and comprehensive network of consumer perceptions (Love and Roberts, 1997; Harris and De Chernatony, 2001). The findings suggest that the University is moving towards corporatisation or a corporate brand approach, where all the departments and schools are expected to be more strongly aligned with the brand identity and brand values of the University.

Both interviewees in this study reiterated that no difference should be apparent between the School's identity and that of the University. A re-branding exercise had been undertaken to pull together the differing brand images of the School and the University under one consistent image. However, the key to corporatisation is that the vision of the new corporate identity must originate from the staff because they are the critical stakeholders given that brand consistency is dependent on understanding the brand throughout the organization. The University appeared to have given little attention, however, to situations where strong sub-brands are not yet aligned with the market positioning of the parent brand.

Authors found little evidence of internal marketing, but some evidence of discussions regarding the potential importance of internal marketing. Based on evidence from this study, internal marketing had not been a priority in the corporatisation process, although the need for

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internal marketing was identified by respondents. For example one manager claimed that he hoped that "the academic staff would convey those values through the teaching" and pointed out that the School had employed a number of "non British academic staff, [which] assists in the process of making sure we've got a global outlook". According to the findings, the move towards corporatisation appeared to be justified on the basis of the need for UK universities to align with the notion of "a British Education" promoted through the British Council.

Co-Branding with the British Council

A good marketing strategy can often help to identify profitable new markets, and achieve economies of scale within international markets. Most universities wishing to attract overseas students to their home campuses might be expected to adopt standardized or adapted brand strategies. In the latter case, the degree programs and courses offered would remain consistent across all markets, but additional components such as delivery methods, entry requirements or previous qualifications could be adapted to the needs of various target markets (Gray et al., 2003). By standardizing activities across international markets and linking other enterprise functions to support the overall marketing effort, universities can often achieve economies of scale and a wider scope (Takeuchi and Porter, 1986). For example, the marketing activities of UK universities have been enhanced by coordinating their activities through the British Council (Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999).

The Director of the International Office explained that "The British Council are trying to promote higher education in the UK. So, they are trying to promote British education as a

whole". He further explained that after applicants have been persuaded to consider coming to the UK for HE, "thereafter, we've got to persuade people of the value of this university compared with others". The British Council carries out collaborative work with other universities, to promote higher education in the UK, and British education as a whole. This collaborative effort is intended to collectively increase the pool of overseas students.

The applicants' personal statements provided further evidence of the link between the University's marketing and the British Council's marketing. The researchers found clear evidence in this study, that the marketing communications used by the British Council was being used in personal statements by students when applying to the University. For example, the British Council website claims that: "Quality standards for UK institutions are among the best in the world"; "wherever you choose to study, you will be able to study relevant, world-class qualifications of exceptional quality" (British Council, 2006). The findings show that the phrase "best in the world" had influenced applicants when writing their personal statements as the following example shows: "Britain provides the best education in the world". Another example was based on the same claim: e.g. "Universities in Britain offer the best education and post-graduates from it (sic) have exciting prospects".

The authors argue therefore, that not only are the statements presented in the School's marketing communications assumed to be referring to the University as a whole – but the claims presented by the British Council regarding a "British Education", are also assumed to be true for individual universities in the UK. So, this phenomenon provides some explanation for the University's move to align and adjust the brand values to ensure that the

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British Council and the University are in alignment, and to ensure that Schools are also working in harmony with the University as a whole.

Discussion and Conclusion

First, this study identified evidence of the process of brand harmonization within the university, to align the brand identity of the university with the brand identity of the school. This was viewed as a way of consolidating the market position of the university on the assumption, however, that the individual schools would take similar market positions. The house-of-brand approach has been reduced and a move towards a more corporate approach seems to be taking place, whereby the values, mission and vision of the University are imposed on Schools. The opportunity for different schools to take different market positions nationally or internationally is therefore reduced as the Schools within the University are forced to seek to recruit in similar market segments, based on the market positioning of the University as a whole. For some individual schools and faculties this approach is likely to have a serious impact on recruitment, especially if a school was operating in a niche market.

Second, the authors argue that without brand harmonization, any one school in the University, or the University itself could potentially damage the brand image of the whole, for example, through negative press coverage. Based on a house-of-brands model any one School could potentially also earn a poor reputation – but with a house-of-brands model a failing brand could be changed, re-branded or closed without damaging the University brand as a whole. (However, frequently in the business sector a house-of-brands approach has been built on the

basis of purchasing existing strong brands, rather than building them within the company.) A corporate model may also potentially constrain the innovation and entrepreneurial activities of any one School, which (under the house-of-brands model) might seek new markets using the reputation, vision or mission unique to the School. The challenge, therefore, is for Schools to retain their individuality within the corporate model, during the process of erosion of their identities through aligning or dovetailing their missions and visions with the University – for the purpose of retaining or building on their existing markets.

Third, although the harmonization process can be achieved through the rhetoric this is not always as easy to achieve in practice; and the legacy of schools, faculties and the university is likely to continue to influence the process, and perhaps become a source of conflict. This study, however, found some evidence of harmonization from students' applications – or at least an *expectation* of harmonization. The mission of the University was viewed as a mission achieved by the School (e.g. the focus on employment). This study further provided some support for the finding that the harmonization had not occurred purely in terms of visual identity, but included some of the key mission statements and values claimed by the school – which were subsequently associated with the whole university. This suggests that the values, mission and vision of individual schools can also impact on the perception of the University as a whole; the process seems to be a two-way process. However, the managers were working with a model whereby the process of harmonization was generally one-way: i.e. the missions, values and vision of the University were intended to be cascaded downwards to Schools.

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The authors suggest further that the current co-branding model seems to be based on the notion of gaining credibility and marketing benefits through associations with the British Council. The challenge however, seems to be to work on brand-building within the University with an understanding of two-way communication within the brand architecture: schools and faculties should be acknowledged contributors to the identity of the brand – communication is a two-way process.

Finally, to some extent this study found some justification for the University's drive to consolidate the brand, although the erosion of individual schools' and faculties' identities may be a cause for concern. The corporatisation of the University may be driven not principally by a need to consolidate the identities of the Schools, but through the increasing internationalization of HE, and the need to present the University as part of a "British Education" through the British Council. The University's brand identity has been affected by the British Council (as a co-brand or a parent brand). Thus the University is placed between the School and the British Council, and is affected by the brand identities of each.

Applicants seemed to assume that the core values and image of the British Council applied to the University (as a "British" University); and they further seemed to assume that the values, benefits and image of the School within the University, applied to the University as a whole. Applicants made little distinction between the different levels within the brand architecture.

Thus, findings from this study suggest that as the identity of the University emerges from the world-wide campaign to attract more international students to the UK, the brand of the University has undergone a transformation which can be better understood by examining the

brand architecture. The brand architecture has been extended to incorporate the British Council, which has necessarily impacted on the identity of the University. The importance for universities of clearly articulating and developing their brand, by designing clear and effective brand architecture; and maintaining strong and harmonious links within the brand architecture, are some of the key insights to emerge from this case study of one UK case study university. However, the process of brand harmonization continues to raise some concerns about the potential impact on the marketing positioning and the autonomy of faculties and schools within the case study university. The authors would suggest, therefore, that future studies focus on the impact of brand harmonization on the differentiation and market positioning of faculties and schools, across a sample of universities.

Limitations

The qualitative approach used for this study provided some in-depth insights into HE branding, both on the supply-side and the demand side. However, the restrictions on access to managers and applicants resulted in only one case study institution being used for the research, which clearly has a number of limitations. First, the authors acknowledge that the respondents were prospective students seeking admission to the university, which may have biased the content of their personal statements. The study was also carried out in one institution, with only two key managers, and that institution was currently very successful in attracting large numbers of overseas students. However, for future studies, the target sample should perhaps be widened to include other institutions and different levels of study, and by increasing the sample size. The research could also target a wider spectrum of positions across

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several faculties and departments to include more risky entities, for example, which might provide richer data for comparison.

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