

## **THE STRUCTURE OF CORPORATE IDENTITY PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA HAVE ADOPTED.**

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**Abstract**

Faced with growing competition, universities are beginning to adopt Corporate Identity as a means to attract and maintain competent employees to drive their mission and goals. This study therefore seeks to examine the structure of Corporate Identity that public universities in Kenya have adopted. The research was carried out through the mixed methods design which comprised a descriptive survey for the qualitative data, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis for qualitative data. The target population consisted of ten public universities in Kenya. The sample size was 386 participants which included lecturers, administrative staff, registrars and public relation managers drawn from three older universities and seven recently chartered universities. The findings indicated that even though the universities have visible visual identity markers, they share similar colors as well and the various meanings and interpretations of colours, logos and symbols are not well cascaded to the staff members, again as universities the visual Corporate Identity is also geared towards academic advancement and this leads to a disconnect from the administrative staff who may not be able to connect their services directly with elements of academic advancement such as research or curriculum development. The study recommends that the differentiation that exists in the meaning of university colours be fully cascaded to employees to create the unique association.

**Keywords**

Corporate Identity (CI), Public Universities, Visual Identity, Employees

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) define corporate identity (CI) as the group of attributes and values a company has: its “personality”, its reason of being, its spirit and soul. It is the image reflected by the “company’s personality” and will make the company identifiable, different from the rest and it will also determine its importance in the business world. They further assert that CI is the group of pieces, aspects, ideas, methods and techniques that a brand needs to be identifiable. An organization’s CI encompasses a wide range of symbolic manifestations ranging from graphic design, office décor to cultural artefacts. Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) also include the pieces that form a communicational style: logo, letterhead, business cards, folder, inserts and envelopes to be part of the symbolic manifestations.

According to Balmer (2008) CI manifests itself in three dominant ways, namely; visual identity, stakeholder identity and corporate branding. First Balmer (2008) points out that visual identity is concerned with utilizing corporate symbols and image projection to represent the essence of an organization. Moreover, these graphically designed symbols and names have the potential to purposefully influence the perceptions held of the organization by stakeholders.

Giving an elaboration on how visual identity can be forged, Einwiller and Will (2002) state that a corporate identity program is a system of signs that involves a combination code and criteria that, together, are the structure of the identity. This means that it is necessary to form a precise regulation for the program to be inserted in the different supports of communication. A strong identity strengthens the brand, becoming recognizable to the target audience. It is advisable to begin with the creation of a logo or company brand since the development of the identity will depend on them.

The logo will be present in all the pieces that form the corporate identity system. The logo eventually includes the institutional colors of the brand and the complete corporate design is based on them.

Stakeholder identity is the second element of CI, as Balmer and Geysler (1997) as quoted in Balmer (2003) state. They add that the visual identity represent the trappings rather than the substance of CI. Stakeholder identity constitutes a number of elements namely ownership, leadership style of management, organizational structure, business activities and markets covered, the range and quality of products and services offered and overall business performance.

Corporate branding is the third element of CI and emerges from the various aspects of CI discussed above as Balmer and Grey (2003) explain. They state that the focus of corporate branding is on the consumers. Einwiller and Will (2002) further explain corporate branding is 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.

On the other hand Simoes and Dibbs (2008) posit that the structure of corporate identity is embedded in three constructs; the dissemination of mission and values, consistent image implementation, and visual identity implementation. The domain of these constructs is concerned with the controllable aspects of corporate identity. These are dimensions within the company's control that affect its image. This study adopts this structure as it examines the structure of corporate identity in public universities in Kenya.

### 1.2 The Dissemination of Mission and Values

Corporate philosophy concerns the business values and beliefs embraced by top executives and commonly expressed in a company's mission statement. This is a critical feature to convey internally, as the corporate culture—common values and beliefs held by organizational members—should ideally reflect the organizational philosophy (Gray & Balmer 1997 in Simoes & Dibbs 2008). The rationale is that corporate identity is strategically driven by each organization's unique corporate philosophy, which is reflected in its mission, values, and goals. This dimension, which is a key element of corporate identity, internally diffuses the sense of purpose and singularity of the company motivating commitment to organizational goals. This creates a basis for developing consistent behaviors among employees emphasizing their role in conveying the right business messages.

In Turkey, for instance, the enrollment to universities was altered by the passing of the Turkish Higher Education law in 1982. This has led to the creation of new twenty-three private universities as well as forty-five new state universities by the year 2000 (Atakan & Eker, 2007). In this context the Istanbul Bilgi University was founded in 1996. Since then it has grown to attract four hundred and thirty academics to its faculties as well as eight thousand and two hundred students. The university is located in two shanty towns in the end of city (Atakan & Eker 2007).

Atakan and Eker (2007) noted in their study of this university that the founders at the outset set forth a well established and distinctive identity that was to be the base to counter the negative criticism due to the location of the university. The founders of the university used the corporate identity to link the objectives of the university to invest in society and to focus specifically on the economically and socially excluded individuals. They achieved this by enacting a mission statement

which clearly set out its philosophy on focusing on the social responsibility and fostering a culture of service to the community.

Further, the founders encouraged each department to contribute and come up with social responsibility initiatives as opposed to the initiatives coming from the management. This has created a culture of social philanthropy as is stated in the university mission statement. Examples of how employees have embraced this philosophy is in the offering of evening English courses to adults of the surrounding low income area of the university's location. Another department began offering music and visual arts to the children of the surrounding areas and some other departments have sponsored renovation of the local primary classrooms and donated equipments and books. The students are also required to participate in a community involvement activity with the aim of focusing on provision of remedies for the problems facing the local community (Atakan & Eker, 2007).

The university manages communication of these initiatives to employees through avenues such as leaflets, posters, newspapers coverage and has allocated a Director of Communications who handles these communication avenues. The awareness of these initiatives has led to an increased willingness of the faculty to be associated with the university. In this instance, the university corporate identity is a combination of its logo, communication efforts, philosophy, mission and values. The social responsibility initiatives are part of its corporate culture and thus its identity. The university has transformed its mission statement into a focal point of benefits to its employees, students and local community (Atakan & Eker 2007).

### 1.3 Consistent Image implementation

Developing corporate identity must start with a thorough analysis and understanding of the underlying mission and culture, the existing organizational identity, rather than rushing into communicating what might be thought to be the company's core values in a superficial manner. Equally, whatever picture is projected to external stakeholders has an effect upon the beliefs and values of employees, and thus on the organizational identity, as employees mirror themselves in whatever messages are being sent out to external stakeholder groups (Dutton & Dukerich 1991 cited in Cornilissen 2004).

A sense of identity, and the core values that underpin it, provide an anchor around which all activities and communications can be structured and carried out. Everything a company says, makes or does leaves an impression with stakeholders, or, put differently, 'communicates' in the broad sense of the word. Identity, when permeating all of the diverse behaviours, communications campaigns and products and services issued by the organization, facilitates the process of ensuring that consistent messages are being sent out (Cornelissen, 2004).

Melawar and Akel (2005) in their study of the change of the university logo found out that the University of Warwick had been experiencing considerable tension between the academic and non-academic staff members. This tension was due to a perception that each group had different motives for working as well as value systems. The vice-chancellor then appointed an internal communications officer to strengthen the internal communications channels; this would help bridge to gap between the two types of employees. Activities such as 'meet the vice-chancellor were also introduced to provide opportunities for staff to communicate with the vice-chancellor and the top management in an informal capacity.

The consistent image implementation dimension is concerned with the consistency with which all aspects of image are presented. Companies need to have a broad understanding of every form or representation of image if they are to successfully manage their corporate identity. Each member of staff has a role to play in this process and so needs to understand all of the elements used to create the image. In order to achieve this, ongoing scrutiny is needed of facets such as marketing and promotional activities, staff, and the visual presentation of branding through the logos and symbols that are used (Scott & Lane 2000).

According to Hatch and Schultz (2001) successful corporate branding is typically based on the alignment between the strategic goals of the top management level (strategic vision), the knowledge and attitude of the employees (corporate culture) and the perceptions of external stakeholders (image). 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 (2001) call this corporate branding approach the VCI method. The key for a strong corporate brand are closed/ 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). Collins and Porras (1998) define strategic visions within organizations as a description of a future objective. The function of a defined strategic vision is to provide organizations with inspiration and decision making criteria that can be applied in the entire organization. Defining strategic visions is a vital element of strategic management as it is the basis for all decisions within organizations and applies to all units, departments and sectors equally (Collins & Porras, 1998).

Hatch and Schultz (2001) argue that alignment of the strategic vision and the existing corporate culture can be a source of competitive advantage. When both aspects are aligned, strong corporate brands can develop. Jones (2010) also argues that the strategic vision is powerful to connect existing perceptions of brands to the corporate culture. In Jones' (2010) view, the strategic vision is the most important aspect in corporate branding as the vision can connect all existing perceptions with the internal culture.

#### 1.4 Visual identity implementation

Due to the globalization of business, particularly in the western world, universities in the United Kingdom have had to develop customer oriented service approach to education and an increased emphasis on corporate image (Melawar & Akel, 2005). The University of Warwick is one of these universities. It launched a new corporate logo which focused on corporate visual identity as the appropriate approach to merge the university's brand values and perception. The new university corporate logo was created with the aim to project the University of Warwick as high quality and responsible, forward looking and innovative, confident, creative, accessible, professional and business like.

The new logo used a style that featured simplified use of the university logo, clear modern typeface with blue as the dominant corporate color, use of photography and layout and height professional feel (Melewar & Akel, 2005). There was also a greater emphasis on the name "Warwick" to

differentiate it from its competitors. Since some academic departments had developed individual reputations as well as logos, they would also retain their individual brands identity alongside the new image. The choice of university colours was also an important element of consideration. This was informed by the perception of blue as evoking positive associations of intelligence, coolness, reflection and calm.

However the university was unable to change much of what was contained in its mission statement due to the need for it to emphasis certain accepted criteria for quality education rather than characteristics of their unique identity (Melawar & Akel, 2005). Whereas the focus on only visual identity has been criticized due to its one dimension and corporate identity is a multi-dimensional, the university management was quick to point out that it is a first step of an evolving corporate identity programme and it provided a better point for the university employees to have a common reference.

Closer home in Africa, Makgosa and Moflehi (2012) undertook a study to examine the impact of rebranding an institution of higher education in Botswana, the University of Botswana. They stated that institutions of higher education in Botswana operate in an increasingly competitive educational environment. Therefore in a bid to remain relevant the University of Botswana decided to modify its logo, symbols and corporate colours. The original University of Botswana logo comprised of three key symbols: a cow's head which symbolized strength and depicted the history of "One Man, One Beast", sorghum leaves which symbolized growth and a book which symbolized learning.

After the rebranding exercise in 2008, the cow's head was replaced with a symbol of a shield or horns which still conveys the meaning of the "One Man, One Beast" concept. However, the sorghum leaves and the slogan of "*Thuto ke Thebe*" which means "education is a shield" still remained. Additionally, corporate colors were changed from burgundy and cream to lime green and blue representing the rain and agriculture that are essential to life ( Makgosa & Molefhi, 2012).

Makgosa and Moflehi (2012) found out that students were also more loyal, attached and affectionate to the old logo than the new logo and that fewer students were knowledgeable about the new brand. Those who were knowledgeable about the logo were likely to have a positive attitude about the University of Botswana. Based on these findings they recommended that the institution should continue to communicate with students in order to increase the ownership and acceptance of the new logo. Messages aimed at students should explain what the new logo stands for and the rationale for the change of logo. Moreover they suggested that this could be done through conducting awareness campaigns around campus for each faculty and also including the background of the institution as well as explanation of the new brand as part of the orientation program for first year students. This study would have been richer had it included other important key target markets such as the employees, the alumni and the general public.

Against this background, Chege, (2009) states that most higher education institutions in Kenya have a mission, vision, core values and objectives well stated, and some pasted on walls, receptions, institutions' handbooks, and websites among other places. Ideally, these visions, missions, core values and objectives should act as navigators for these institutions to achieve their goals and realize their dreams. However, his study on leadership revealed that many students in these institutions echoed that 'high school was better than university and college in terms of facilities and services offered' and wondered what is wrong especially with such well written down roadmaps. This makes

it clear that there is a disconnection between development of CI structures and their implementation to benefit the universities.

## 2.1 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

This research used a mixed methods approach which permits the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study (Creswell, 2009). The mixed methods approach was selected for this study as it enabled the researcher to collect well rounded and detailed data that was not only numerically descriptive but also enabled the study to gather multiple views and different perspectives (Creswell, 2009).

The target population was ten universities comprising of three older universities and seven recently chartered universities. The study also used purposive sampling to select the registrars either academic or administrative and the public relations officers in the selected universities. 3 registrars (academic/administration) and 3 public relations officers were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling was used to select strategic plans and communication policies documents of the selected universities for accumulation of secondary data.

The researcher used three types of research instruments; questionnaire, an interview schedule and an observation guide. The researcher constructed a questionnaire for the university employees who are lecturers and administrative staff which collected quantitative data. The questionnaire was appropriate for this large number of respondents. The researcher used structured closed questions as well as the rating scale in the questionnaire. The closed- ended type of questions facilitated consistency of certain data across respondents. The rating scale was used to measure perception, attitude, values and behavior of the respondents (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

Interview questions were used to interview the university registrars and public relations officers because these are the officers who are involved in the formulation of corporate identity and also oversee the implementation of the structure of corporate identity in the universities. This research instrument enabled the researcher to collect in-depth qualitative data on ways of harnessing the corporate identity structure to enhance service delivery, employee use of corporate identity structure and communication feedback from employees. This information enhanced the quantitative data collected by the questionnaire.

The researcher employed documentary/ content analysis using observational schedule to extract first-hand information on corporate identity structure, communications methods on disseminating corporate identity structure and expectations on service delivery on the employees from the university strategic plans and communication policies. This data would also enhance the quantitative data collected by the questionnaire.

### 3.1 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1

*Visual identity implementation for lecturers*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	143	78.6	78.6	78.6
NO	39	21.4	21.4	100.0
Total	182	100.0	100.0	

The table above shows that 143 (78.6%) of lecturers can name the symbols found in the university logo and 39 (21.4%) cannot.

Table 2

*Visual identity implementation for administrative staff*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	143	76.9	76.9	76.9
NO	43	23.1	23.1	100.0
Total	186	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 above presents the administrative staff take on visual identity implementation. The table above shows that 143 (76.9%) of the administrative staff can name the symbols found in the university logo and 43 (23.1%) are unable. This could be because the university logo is present in most official communication documents handled by both lecturers and administrative staff.

Table 3

*Dissemination of mission and values for lecturers*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	129	70.9	70.9	70.9
NO	53	29.1	29.1	100.0
Total	182	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 above presents data on lecturer's awareness of the mission and values an indicator of the second construct of the structure of corporate identity which is the dissemination of mission and values. The table above shows that 129 (70.9%) of lecturers can state their university's vision, mission and motto while 53 (29.1%) cannot.

Table 4

*Dissemination of mission and values for administrative staff*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid YES	116	62.4	62.4	62.4
NO	70	37.6	37.6	100.0
Total	186	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 above presents data on administrative staff awareness of the mission, vision and motto. The table above shows that 116 (62.4%) of administrative staff can state their university’s vision, mission and motto while 70 (37.6%) cannot. This could be because the university vision and mission are clearly displayed in most university spaces.

Table 5  
Consistent image implementation for lecturers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
STRONGLY DISAGREE	4	2.2	2.2	2.2
DISAGREE	13	7.1	7.1	9.3
UNDECIDED	10	5.5	5.5	14.8
AGREE	85	46.7	46.7	61.5
STRONGLY AGREE	70	38.5	38.5	100.0
Total	182	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 above presents data on lecturers’ awareness of the strategic goals for their specific department which is a key indicator on the third construct of corporate identity. The table above shows that 70 (38.5%) strongly agreed with the strategic goals, 85 (46.7%) agreed with the strategic goals, 10 (5.5%) were undecided, 13 (7.1%) disagreed and 4 (2.2%) strongly disagreed.

Table 6  
Consistent image implementation mean for lecturers

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you agree with the strategic goals for your department as stipulated in the university strategic plan?	182	1	5	4.12	.956
Valid N (listwise)	182				

Table 6, shows that the mean of the respondents is 4.12 which is very near the maximum mark of 5 and this shows that the respondents clearly agree with the strategic goals of their departments.

Table 7  
*Consistent image implementation for administrative staff*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY DISAGREE	6	3.2	3.2	3.2
	DISAGREE	14	7.5	7.6	10.8
	UNDECIDED	9	4.8	4.9	15.7
	AGREE	114	61.3	61.6	77.3
	STRONGLY AGREE	42	22.6	22.7	100.0
	Total	185	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		186	100.0		

Table 7 above presents data on the administrative staff awareness and agreement of the strategic goals of their department, an indicator of the third construct of corporate identity; it shows that 42 (22.6%) strongly agree, 114 (61.3%) with the goals, 9 (4.8%) are undecided, 14 (7.5%) disagree and 6 (3.2%) strongly disagree.

Table 8  
*Consistent image implementation mean for administrative staff*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you agree with the strategic goals for your department as stipulated in the university strategic plan?	18	1	5	3.93	.933
Valid N (listwise)	18				
	5				

Table 8 above shows that the mean of the respondents is 3.93 and illustrates that the respondents are aware of the strategic goals and agree with them.

Table 9  
*Mean of consistent image implementation*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
Administrative Staff	185	3.93	.933	.069	3.79	4.07	1	5
Lecturers	182	4.12	.956	.071	3.98	4.26	1	5
Total	367	4.02	.948	.049	3.93	4.12	1	5

Table 10  
*Analysis of Variance of Groups*

	Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3.352	1	3.352	3.760	.053
Within Groups	325.427	365	.892		
Total	328.779	366			

Table 10 shows that there is a significant difference in respondents' awareness and agreement with their departments' strategic goals between groups at  $0.053 > 0.05$ . This could be because most departmental strategic goals could be geared towards academic achievements which the administrative staff feels they contribute little towards achieving.

From the open ended questions, a majority of respondents (lecturers) interpreted in their own words the university's goals as, the university being a centre of excellence in teaching research and innovation, thus being directly informed from the various motto which most stated as aiming to be centers of excellence. Others interpreted the university goals as achieving technological excellence as well as pioneer innovative ideas. This could be because they are familiar with the wording of the motto but does not imply an internalization of what the words mean and then linking these words to what they do on a daily basis.

The same scenario is reflected in the administrative staff responses where majority of respondents stated that the university hopes to be the best globally or be a world class university or produce world class graduates, all these stemming from the university motto. This is also comes from the fact that they are aware of the university motto but have not internalized it and linked those words to what they do on a daily basis.

On university colors, most lecturers could identify the various colors of the university as opposed to the administrative staff who identified only one main color among the various university colors. This could be because one main color is normally emphasized when they are given branded items. It also emerged that most universities share similar colors which they have attached different meanings according to their specified mandates e.g focus on agriculture or technology. These meanings have not been disseminated properly to the administration staff. This could be why respondents from the same university give various scales of similar colors as the university colors

The responses above echo the observations made by the researcher on the structure of corporate identity adopted by the universities. The universities had ensured visual presence of the university colors, starting at the entrances and in buildings. In all the universities visited there was also the visual presence of the university vision, mission and motto on the notice boards and offices. Items such as pens, shirts worn by employees were also clearly branded.

Further the findings concur with the interviews whereby the registrars were confident about their lecturers and administrative staff being aware and approving of the corporate identity established by the universities. One registrar reiterated the staff had a positive attitude towards the university and were particularly proud of the university's brand which represented innovativeness. Another registrar stated that the management emphasized over and over the university's corporate identity in their speeches to staff as well as in their communication. They had also initiated a day where

administrative staff wore branded shirts provided by the university and this had proved very popular that staff took to wearing the shirts on other days as well “on some days our cleaners look smarter and more official than the professors” he quipped.

On the other hand, the public relation officers brought out the issue that although majority of the staff between lecturers and administrative staff were aware of the structure of the corporate identity, some staff who had initially been in the universities for a longer period or for those universities which had formally been technical colleges, there was a resistance to the changing face of the university and therefore an element of negative attitude and lack of awareness of the university’s corporate identity structure.

These findings concur with Bulotaite (2003) in Tahtinen (2014) that university brands have the potential to create a stronger feeling than most brands, Argenti (2000) in Tahtinen (2014) also reiterates the value of a strong brand in being able to attract the best faculty and have fewer crises.

Balmer and Gray (2003); Hatch and Shultz (2003), in Tahtinen (2014) also state that the success of a brand depends on the extent to which there is harmony between the managerially defined values and the implementation of those values by employees.

Furthermore Melawar et al (2006); Cornellsen 2011 in Tahtinen (2014) reiterate that clear corporate identity breeds employee motivation and their role in delivering the corporate brand’s values is crucial as they are a link between an organization’s internal and external environments.

Waithaka (2014) also adds to this view that corporate identity is an asset which gives the organization a chance to differentiate itself and as such requires adequate attention by the Kenyan universities management.

#### 4.1 CONCLUSIONS

The findings on the structure of corporate identity adopted by the universities imply that the universities have instituted the first and second construct of CI but have not properly constituted the third; which is consistent image implementation, hence the sense of disconnect between the visual identity and actualization of the messages.

Most universities share similar colors, imaging in their logo and missions. The data suggested that the differentiation that exists in the meaning had not been cascaded to the employees for internalization which is the third construct of CI (consistent image implementation). The researcher therefore recommends that universities concentrate more on relaying the meaning of the colors and symbols to their staff.

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