Brand Reputation Management within the Higher Education Sector: A Review of the Literature on Higher Education Brand Reputation Management

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Abstract - The purpose of this systemic review was to explore the nature of brand reputation management literature and how the appraisal will help higher education practitioners and brand reputation researchers to engender and refine research thoughts. The paper reviewed a number of issues such as the concept of branding in the context of higher education, commercialisation and marketisation, brand reputation management and the importance of branding in the higher education sector. An attempt was made to identify and integrate the arguments into a very consistent synthesis which shows the uses and impact of brand reputation management on higher education institutions' brand value.

Keywords - Higher Education Institutions, Brand Reputation Management, Brand Value

1. Introduction

Although internationalisation is not new at all to universities and higher education policies, the forces and tensions understood by the umbrella concept of globalization constitute a dramatically different environment for higher education institutions (HEIs) and policy makers to operate in. Globalization is a phenomenon of increasing worldwide interconnectedness that combines economic, cultural, and social changes (OECD, 2009). The changes to which higher education (HE) all over the globe is exposed are complex and varied, even contradictory, and the comprehensive concept of globalization is far from being clear and well defined. HE drives, and is driven by globalization.

The cross border flows of ideas, students, faculty, and financing, coupled with developments in information and communication technology, are changing the environment for higher education. This therefore implies both increased collaboration and competition between countries and institutions on a global scale. Hemsley-Brown and Optlaka (2006) argued that higher education institutions now recognize that they need to market themselves in a climate of international competition. The objectives of this paper are to systematically exhibit awareness of the contemporary state of knowledge in the domain of brand reputation management, its precincts, and how brand reputation management in higher education fits in the wider milieu of brand management research. It was also imperative for this paper to document and analyze the current research literature on brand reputation management, establish the scope of brand reputation management within the HE sector, identify gaps in the current research literature and subsequently recommend areas for future research in this domain.

2. Definition of Higher Education Branding

The American Marketing Association describes a brand as "a name, term, symbol or design or a combination of these items intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (Keller, 2003:3). A brand is a cluster of functional and emotional benefits that extend a unique and welcomed promise (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2003). The Oxford Dictionary (1990) defines the concept of 'brand' as follows: "…Brand (noun): a particular make of good, and identifying trademark, label etc. An identified mark burned on livestock or former prisoners etc. with a hot iron, a piece of burning smoldering, or charred wood." In a more modern context, a brand can be defined as an asset that does not have physical presence and the value of which cannot be determined exactly unless it becomes the subject of a specific business transaction in the likes of a sale or acquisition.

It can be noted that the concept of 'branding' clearly evolved over time indicating that the concept has a commercial acquiescence. A review of past studies shows no concurrence among scholars about what a holistic and complete definition of a higher education brand should be and what dimensions it must comprise. Despite this lack of consensus among scholars and practitioners in this domain, HEIs appear to be extremely concerned about their standing and image in the marketplace. To this end, their 'name' or reputation often underpins their existence. In recent times administrators of educational institutions have been increasingly challenged to view the development and execution of marketing and advertising programmes as a means of building an institution into a brand, as well as to recognize the implications of branding for the recruitment process (Cook and Fennell, 2001; 2002). This necessitates an overview and critical analysis of the practices in higher education branding and how they resultantly impact on the brand value of an institution.

A higher education brand is a "perception or emotion maintained by a buyer or a prospective buyer describing the experience related to doing business with an academic institution" (Beneke, 2011 citing McNally and Speak 2002). Apart from this attempt by McNally and Speak (2002) there has not been a working definition about a higher education brand. Much literature on higher education branding focuses on the awareness, taglines and mission statements (Shampeny, 2003). A good educational brand in the HE sector however needs to resonate well with its external audiences in burnishing the institution's image and at the same time it has to speak to its internal audiences (i.e. faculty, staff and students) and instill pride in the institution.

A university brand is "a manifestation of the institution's features that distinguish it from others, reflecting its capacity to satisfy students' needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education, and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions" (Bennett and Ali-Choudhury, 2007:4). While other researchers such as Bulotaite (2003) have gone on to suggest that 'when someone mentions the name of a university it will immediately evoke 'associations, emotions, images and faces' and that the role of university branding is to build, manage and develop these impressions. However, it remains true that there has been no consensus about what constitutes the working definition of a higher education brand and therefore it becomes a very fertile area for future research.

3. Brand Reputation Management

Branding is a long term process with the goal of increasing brand knowledge, favourability and sales over time (Keller, 2009). A strong brand symbolises the promise of not only what a product will deliver, but also the type of experience that will be delivered when consumers use the branded product. Because the brand communicates a commitment to

provide a certain experience, it is critical that the firm assures consistent performance that matches customer expectations (Keller, 2009). In order for a brand to be effective, brand messages must be credible and resonate with customers (Keller, 2003). For example FedEx has branded itself as "the reliable provider of overnight shipping services". This brand message is believed by and is salient to customers, benefiting both FedEx and its customers. When managed correctly, branding positively affects the value perceptions and subsequent actions of current and prospective customers.

It must be noted that a strong institutional brand is key to inveigling customers into a relationship given the global competitive environment in which HEIs are operating. Pulley (2003) noted that a strong institutional brand is also key for strong customer relationships and this ideology has been further accentuated by de Chernatony and McDonald (2003), who claimed that a brand is an imperative relationship lubricant. If customers can be inveigled to become passionate about the brand, and if they want to actively be associated with it, they are more predisposed to enter into a relationship with the organization. Hence, preferably, the brand should act as a magnet supplementing relationship marketing efforts and drawing all constituents closer together. However, literature on branding efforts by HEIs and its subsequent effect on building customer relationships has been too scarce. Not much research has been done on how HE brands are able to magnetise and supplement marketing efforts.

Although brand reputation management is not extensively researched in the context of the HE market, it is generally used as a tool for creating brand value. Arguments highlighted and provided for in the marketing and brand management literature point to the use of brand reputation as a value creating tool which has a positive influence on the organization's equity. Moreover, brand reputation is used as a tool for promising good quality products and service to customers. Devine and Halpern (2001) also support the idea that a firm's reputation is used as a promise for good brand quality and good service levels.

4. The Concept of Branding in the Higher Education Sector

The concept of branding is not new because it has been in use for many centuries. William (2002) argued that, due to the perceived risks attached to the purchase of services, consumers preferred to use such services which are familiar to them and which they can trust. HEIs and governments in different parts of the world have started developing attractive policies, especially based on the provision of quality education in neat, clean and safe environments. Globalization has made higher education a tradable commodity (OECD, 2009). Therefore, HEIs have started marketing activities to position themselves in the global market while analyzing their strengths and weaknesses and identifying the unique selling points. For this purpose they are focusing on "Brand Value

Development" in an attempt to get prominent positions in the global market. Muller and Woods (1994), while talking about brand management, emphasized the importance of creating brand image and the reliability of the brand name in service industries. In another paper they recommended that for strong brand value, a service brand should concentrate on three main issues, that is, quality, service delivery and image (Muller and Woods, 1998). Muller and Woods (1998) further suggested that quality, service delivery and image collectively help in developing the brand's trustworthiness.

Branding is a management concept that has gained increasing popularity in HEIs over the last few years (Chapleo, 2004). In the face of increased national and international competition, universities and colleges in all parts of the world have begun a search for a unique definition of what they are in order to make a distinction of themselves and create a center of attention for students and academic staff (Chapleo, 2004; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). A new lexis such as branding, brand management,corporate communication, brand identity and brand reputation management has emerged in academia, making higher education organizations more aware of the link between what they ''stand for'' in terms of values and characteristics, and how they are perceived. Branding means to make known the attributes of the organization's identity in the form of a clearly defined branding proposition and in an attempt to do so, the organization must first define for itself the quintessence 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 constant as possible, and communicated very consistently. It goes without saying that it is not sufficient for only top management to know the brand essence; all employees must, in a sense, become brand managers and preferably ''live the brand'' (Ind, 2004). This may not be easily achievable, especially in higher education organizations that typically are very intricate.

The branding of HEIs is occurring within a context that is characterized by an increasing transfer of ''good'' business practices from the private sector. Universities and colleges not only seek to become accustomed to a more established national and international education market (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Jongbloed, 2003), they must also adapt to new government policies that address how HEIs should be run and organized. Reasonable research has gone into practices such as performance management (Guthrie and Neumann, 2007), managerialism (Anderson, 2008), entrepreneurialism (Clark, 1998), and new models of financing and governance (Sorlin, 2007) butthe issue of why HEIs are increasingly behaving like corporates especially in terms of brand reputation management has not received significant research attention as yet despite the fact that it is one of the reform waves that contribute to the transformation of HEIs today. The attempt by Gumport (2000) to suggest that the HE sector has begun to function like an industry has not been enough to explain this behaviour by HEIs. The fact that the modern university now seems more like a ''stakeholder university''

than a ''republic of scholars'' as claimed by Bleiklie and Kogan (2007) requires a further investigation and inquiry.

However, despite the fact that branding efforts in academia are easily observable for example, through the use of vision statements, visual designs and core values, there is a striking scantiness of research on branding in higher education. There is a general consensus among brand scholars in the HE domain that branding is as important in educational institutions as it is in commercial business (Gopalan *et al.*, 2008). Branding provides an institutional identity and differentiates it from competition (Curtis *et al.*, 2009; Judson *et al.*, 2009; Gupta and Singh, 2010).

Specifically, a strong brand increases an institution's ability to compete for the best students, gain alumni membership and support and financial support from donors (Judson, *ibid*). From the students' viewpoint, branding serves as a promise to meet their expectations and facilitates decisions relating to the selection of which institution to attend (Gupta and Singh, *ibid*). Branding is also more critical for higher education institutions, since education as a product is experiential, intangible and its perceived value is difficult to assess prior to consumption (Gopalan, *ibid*; Lowrie, 2007).

A growing number of published studies have demonstrated the remarkable application of branding in institutions of higher education (Opoku, Abratt and Pitt, 2006). In a paper based on South African business schools, competence emerged as the most communicated brand personality dimensions in the schools' websites while sophistication was the least communicated (Opoku, Abratt and Pitt, 2006). An investigation of brand strength, favourability and uniqueness on brand equity in Malaysia revealed that the effects of brand strength and favourability on brand equity were higher in private institutions while brand uniqueness was a strong predictor of brand equity for public institutions (Teh and Salleh, 2011). Sharaai and Areni (2009) found that business schools associated with highly-ranked, prestigious universities such as Manchester Business School, Harvard Business School, and Stanford Graduate School of Business portrayed the university brand either solely or in conjunction with a less prominent school brand. However, business schools associated with less prestigious universities or not associated with any university featured their school brand. In the case of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in United States, the administration of the website, marketing of the programme and positioning of the corporate brand were significantly addressed in the process of managing the institutional brand (Curtis *et al*., 2009). Melewar and Akel, (2005) noted that the reputation of being an innovative and radical institution was not captured in the University of Warwick's corporate visual identity and there was lack of consistency across departments.

Existing studies either confer branding policies in general or in specific institutions (Belanger *et al*., 2002; Chapleo, 2004; Judson *et al*., 2006) or focus on external aspects of branding (Bulotaite, 2003; Gray *et al*., 2003). Limited researches have been done to try and elucidate the impact that

brand reputation management has on the brand value of an HEI. The researchers believed that such a paper should be explored more in detail, particularly with respect to the impact of brand reputation management on the institution's brand value. Paucity of research on why HEIs across the globe are reconfiguring and reengineering their mission and vision statements should also direct future research on HE branding.

There is a general conformity among scholars that research exists in the area of higher education branding. However, not all of this work is easily transferable to the brand reputation management of the higher education sector. Branding HEIs has been a contentious issue with some scholars questioning the significance of branding as a concept and its applicability to the HE sector (Jevons, 2006). However, mounting competition among HEIs for domestic and international students in response to diminishing government funding and internationalisation of the student market has driven HEIs particularly the UK universities, to focus on clearly articulating their brands (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). It has been suggested that "HEIs need to be administered more and more as corporate brands", but despite the fact that there have been a number of studies that examined image and reputation, the notion of branding has barely made its scratch on higher education marketing literature (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), and empirical papers that relate to HE branding are scarce (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, *ibid*). This seems strange when one considers that higher education and branding go back a long way (Temple, 2006). Certainly there seems to be an accord that marketing's adoption by diverse sectors, including education, is no longer under debate (Shepherd, 2005) although it is approved that actually implementing techniques of branding may still be the subject of opposition. Future research in this domain should seek to verify if the factors that have been driving branding in other countries notably the West can be the same factors that are driving brand reputation management efforts in the rest of the world.

Notable scholars such as Opoku, Abratt and Pitt (2006) argue that branding as a concept applies well to the HE sector as to other sectors, and the typical functions that brands perform apply equally well. To the contrary, scholars such as Maringe (2005) and Jevons (2006) argue that brands for higher education institutions are intrinsically more complex and that conventional brand management techniques are inadequate in this market, having been borrowed from the business sector but not necessarily adapted. Image and reputation of some universities have been argued to be more important factors than actual teaching quality (Mazzarol, 1998) and reason would read aloud that communicating the image would therefore assume high importance – suggesting a necessary role for branding. Indeed, researchers such as Bulotaite (2003:451) believe that HEIs are multifarious organizations but that branding can simplify this intricacy and promote "attraction and loyalty to the organization". The involvedness could; however, be an argument for branding's impact and role to clarify positioning, as overall perceived

quality is arguably a more abstract concept than individual attributes of a university.

Johnston (2001), however, believes that UK universities have a long way to go in terms of understanding and incorporating the branding concept. It seems that inevitability is forcing UK universities to espouse the concepts and practices of branding, but that the current perceived acumen may not necessarily be suited to the specific needs of the university sector. It has been suggested that providing information to assist students in choosing educational institutions requires the development of matchless selling points, and the effective communication of these to potential students (Veloutsou, Lewis and Paton, 2004). This arrival at unique selling points and neat communication of these through the brand is in itself not necessarily straightforward, however – it can be argued that "much of what is described as branding in the higher education sector would be better labeled as public relations" (Temple, 2006:18). Temple (*ibid*) argues that the brand of a university emerges as a function of how well the institution performs in meeting client needs, and is therefore the *result* of being effective as an institution, rather than its *basis*.

The importance and application of branding concept to HEIs has been challenged by some researchers (Jevons, 2006). However, increased competition among higher education institutions in the West has driven HEIs towards a concern for creating, sustaining, and growing HEI brands. Although the importance of branding is recognized by leading experts of the field, but still, very little pragmatic research work has been done that relate to HEI branding (Goonawardana, 2007). Branding HEIs is the real contributing factor in creating brand image and differentiation. Students are the ideal group of stakeholders to be considered for managing the branding efforts of HEIs. Taking feedback from students not only enhances their satisfaction with the HEI but also adds towards the development of a positive brand image in front of its major stakeholders; the students (Rowley, 2003).

Numerous challenges in the educational environment have increased the emphasis placed on branding of institutions of higher education. In particular, the decline of students' enrolment, increased competition, and decreases in government funding have forced institutions of higher education to exploit marketing strategies for achieving competitive advantage and ensuring customer satisfaction, (Curtis, *ibid*; Judson *et al*., 2009). The dynamics of globalization such as privatization, diversification, decentralization, and internationalization of education have also fuelled competition in higher education institutions (Gopalan *et al*., 2008; Gupta and Singh, 2010). Consequently, success in the educational marketing environment depends on the ability of an institution to recruit and retain the best students, faculty and staff (Jevons, 2006; Melewar and Akel, *ibid*) and to provide students with challenging and quality education that will enable them to pursue productive careers (Pesch *et al*., 2008). Institutions also need to build and maintain widespread public and legislative support, and keep

a loyal and close connection with alumni and donors (Judson, *ibid*).

Higher education across the globe is experiencing rapid expansion and growth. It must be noted that HEIs are under pressure to obtain funds as alluded to before. Everywhere, the byword in the HE sector is competition–competition for students, faculty, staff, research dollars, and donors among an endless list (Beneke, 2011). The market now matters in the HE sector even in matters where they do not understand the markets (Zemsky *et al*., 2001). The globalization and internationalization of the HE sector is bringing new competitors into the tussle, and it has been noted by Tagwireyi (2000) that applications from new students at some institutions in South Africa are declining. Thus, there is a lot of research work that must be done to find out if the decline in applications from new students is universal across nations. The responses by the HE sector to globalization challenges in Africa need more academic attention too.

It goes without mentioning that the expansion and growth trend of the HE sector is being reflected worldwide. The trend to acquire a tertiary qualification has taken hold and minority groups in particular are being enticed to enter the HE market in a quest to effectively empower and better their lives. Seemingly, it is no longer a foregone conclusion that students will apply at an institution because there has always been demand in the past. Beneke (2011) argues that the status quo has been affected by the shift in students' preferences, shifting demographics and ultimately the ever changing requirements of the job market. It is critically important for future research to make comparative studies across nations and find out how brand reputation management efforts by HEIs have been influencing choice of an HEI. More substantiation is required on whether brand reputation management is being used to respond to issues of shifting preferences of students and how it is helping in employability outcomes in the face of ever-changing requirements of the job market.

To achieve this, it is imperative for higher education institutions to create a consistent, powerful brand identity that provides them with a competitive advantage (Gopalan *et al*., 2008). However, the concept of branding as applied to education institutions is different from branding in the commercial sector (Gupta and Singh, *ibid*). In particular, it is about who the university is and what it stands for rather than what a particular product offers to the market place. Argenti (2000) cautioned that conventional branding techniques alone are not suitable in the education market because of the greater scrutiny from customers and internal resistance from non-business oriented faculties. Similarly, internal factors such as lack of understanding of branding, variance in the roles of executives in brand management, lack of acceptance of branding concepts by non-business faculties, sub-brands being emphasized by faculties, and lack of a clear brand principle limit the application of branding in educational institutions (Chapleo, 2007). Furthermore, institutions of higher education have been criticized for lacking relevance (Lowrie, 2007) as a majority of graduates fail to secure employment and rarely exhibit entrepreneurial skills by initiating their own business ventures after completing their studies. There is also a growing concern that scarce financial resources are diverted to branding programmes as opposed to teaching and research activities (Gopalan, *ibid*).

These challenges provide credence for investigating how students perceive educational institution brands as it will signal whether the intended purpose of meeting the needs of the primary consumers through branding is achieved. Although, the research of branding in institutions of higher education is notable, a substantial number of published studies discuss the subject conceptually (Argenti, 2000; Gupta and Singh, 2010; Jevons, 2006; Nicholls *et al*., 1995). Among the available empirical studies, the concentration is on branding initiatives in institutions of higher education in the United States (Curtis *et al*., 2009; Judson *et al*., 2009; Pesch *et al*., 2008) and the United Kingdom (Chapleo, 2007; Melewar and Akel., 2005). In the United States, university brand management is of great concern (Jevons, 2006) and universities are ahead of those in the United Kingdom in terms of espousal of the concept of branding (Chapleo, 2007). In Asia, however, academic interest in higher education branding is only a recent phenomenon (Teh and Salleh, 2011), as is the case in South Africa, where higher education branding has received limited academic attention (Opoku *et al*., 2006). Future research work should contribute to the body of knowledge on higher education branding by investigating the impact of brand reputation management on HEIs' brand value.

Despite the growing importance of branding in academia, literature searches reveal very few papers that specifically address higher education branding in general and brand reputation management in particular. There is an established literature on marketing of higher education (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) that can be divided into papers that focus on marketing communications (Klassen, 2002; Mortimer, 1997), marketing models (Mazzarol, 1998), strategic marketing including segmentation (Balwin and James, 2000; Reindfleisch, 2003), market planning (Maringe and Foskett, 2002), positioning and finally, branding. Branding literature available, however, is dominated by a focus on external aspects of branding rather than in-depth studies within HEIs. The few empirical studies that exist focus on the communication of university brands (Belanger *et al.,* 2002; Bulotaite, 2003), branding policies including identity or brand architecture (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Chapleo 2004; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007), and international branding (Gray *et al*., 2003). Other papers are more theoretical by nature, discussing the emergence of brand identities in moments of articulation (Lowrie, 2007), the pros and cons of branding (Stensaker, 2007), and whether universities can have successful brands (Chapleo, 2005). Thus, the research on brand reputation management in the higher education sector is still very much at a pioneer stage and needs more academic attention.

The views on higher education branding fall broadly

within the established dividing lines when it comes to interpreting the general transformation of higher education. Several writers are optimistic, seeing branding as an instrument for improving competitiveness and reputation. For example, Melewar and Akel (2006:41) stated the following: "In a market where students are recognised as customers, universities and colleges have to implement strategies to maintain and enhance their competitiveness". They need to develop a competitive advantage based on a set of unique characteristics. Furthermore, universities and colleges need to communicate these characteristics in an effective and consistent way to all of the relevant stakeholders. Under these circumstances, universities have finally realised the role of corporate identity as a powerful source of competitive advantage.

A differing analysis would be to accentuate that branding is not a logical tool, but just a myth or a symbol that HEIs use to demonstrate conformity to their institutional environments (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). From this viewpoint, it is more important to be similar to others than to differentiate, which may explain why branding may lead to rather bland and clichéd self-presentations. It is a paradox that branding, which is meant to lead to differentiation, may lead to a conformity trap that prevents organizations from expressing their unique features (Antorini and Schultz, 2005). For example, there is a clear tendency for universities to present themselves as ''the best'', ''world-class'', ''leading'' etc. (Belanger et al., 2002). Not much research has been done to authenticate these claims by universities and HEIs in the world.

On the other hand, if branding is a logical tool and not just a fairy tale, critics may argue that its implementation challenges the traditional values that exist within academia in general and within specific HEIs in particular. While HEIs traditionally have been institutions characterized by loose couplings or ''organized anarchies'' (March and Olsen, 1979) and a variety of values and priorities related to differences between academic disciplines, branding leads to a search for a limited set of values and a very precisely defined identity. It could thus be questioned if general academic values have a place in brand reputation management processes, and whether such processes would build on the cultural heritage that primarily confirms a leading institutional brand.

Today HEIs are in unvarying competition with each other on the world stage for resources, rankings, reputations, staff and students. This culture of competition has led HEIs to become more aggressive and entrepreneurial, following the beckon of new managerialism that has crashed upon the seaboard of higher education in recent years (Harsha and Shah, 2011: 156). This entrepreneurial deportment has resulted in a number of initiatives revolving around international education; however, an avenue that has been aggressively pursued is the recruitment of international students. The "battle for brainpower" is increasingly becoming common as higher education moves centre stage in the geopolitical contest for a growing share of the global market (Hazelkorn, 2008).

The branding of higher education the world over also follows the trajectory of consumerism that has increasingly inundated the higher education sector. New managerial philosophies have led to the higher education sector beginning to function like an industry (Gumport, 2000). The creation of a brand and its management is undoubtedly important to maintain a steady influx of international talent and branding plays an important role. Future research must question the extent to which such branding is helping HEIs in maintaining and building an influx of international talent.

Effective branding in institutions of HE requires a critical understanding of the perceptions of its key target markets such as students, employees, employers, alumni, donors and the general public (Pesch et al., 2008). Although considerable research has been done on branding in institutions of higher education (Argenti, 2000; Chapleo, 2007; Judson et al., 2009; Melewar and Akel, 2005, Pesch et al., 2008), published research on HE branding in Sub–Saharan Africa is still comparatively scarce. Conversely, HEIs operate in an increasingly competitive educational environment and need to meet the needs of the direct and primary consumers of higher education better than their competitors. Thus, in order to improve the cumulative body of literature on brand reputation management in institutions of higher education, the primary objective of this paper was to investigate and document what has been done in terms of brand reputation management research in the higher education sector.

5. Conclusion

"Knowledge does not exist in a vacuum and one's work only has value in relation to other people. One's work and findings will be significant only to the extent that they are the same as, or as different from, other people's work and findings" Jankowiczs (2000:128). This paper's thrust was to provide a review of related literature from other researchers' works in an attempt to highlight gaps and suggest areas for future research. In this regard, the paper gave credibility to the researchers who did the groundwork as their works paved the way for discovering explicit recommendations for further research on this topic.

Importantly, the review of works from a variety of perspectives indicates that work on brand reputation management has not been widely looked at. It appears there is limited work highlighting the relationship between brand reputation management and brand value on one hand and the development of brand reputation management strategy on the other hand. Okano et al. (1999), Michell et al. (2001) and Davies and Chun (2002) attempted to address the relationship between these constructs but they appear to have done so without any sound empirical evidence explicating the relationship between these constructs.

Through the literature review the paper observed that predecessors mainly researched on the marketing of higher education (Hemsley–Brown and Oplatka, 2006) focusing mainly on marketing communications (Klassen, 2002;

Mortimer, 1997), marketing models (Mazzarol, 1998), strategic marketing including segmentation (Balwin and James, 200; Reindfleisch, 2003), market planning (Maringe and Fosket, 2002) and branding. Branding literature available is however dominated by a focus on external aspects of branding rather than an in-depth paper for specific HE organizations. The few empirical studies that exist on branding focus on the communication of university brands (Belanger *et al*., 2002; Bulotaite, 2003), branding policies including identity or brand architecture (Baker and Balmer, 1997; Chapleo, 2004; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007), and international branding (Gray *et al*., 2003). Other papers are more theoretical by nature, discussing the emergence of brand identities in moments of articulation (Lowrie, 2007), the pros and cons of branding (Stensaker, 2007), and whether universities can have successful brands (Chapleo, 2005). Thus, the research on higher education branding is still very much at a pioneer stage (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006), and therefore a gap was left on how brand reputation management can impact on the HEI's brand value.

Hemsley- Brown and Oplatka (2006) noted although that there have been a number of studies that examined image and reputation, the notion of branding have barely made its mark in higher education marketing. These researchers noted that a number of concepts associated with higher education branding are yet to be explored.Fill (2003) cited by Hemsley–Brown and Oplatka (2006) noted that not much research has gone into the HE sector in relation to issues like the development of product lines, product extensions, raising brand awareness, brand recognition and brand recall. All these topics could provide platforms for future research. Clearly, much research is needed to examine the impact of brand reputation management on the brand value of HEIs.

6. Directions for Future research

There are still many areas that require further research, for example: the effect of brand reputation management on the employability outcomes; brand reputation management and country of origin effect; brand positioning of HEIs; the relationship between brand reputation management and public private sector partnerships; the re-engineering and re-configuration of mission and vision statements–its subsequent effect on brand reputation management, when all this is contrary to the mission and strategic direction of the institution. The research field of higher education branding is relatively at a pioneer stage and much research work has to be done in the context of HE branding.

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