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Positioning Public University's Brand Through Marketing Communications: Practical Recommendations and Implications

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Introduction

Universities are the foremost public institutions expected to contribute to society, co-creating knowledge and shaping leaders of tomorrow (Olaleye et al., 2020b). Even though there are growing numbers of private universities and transnational partnerships, universities are still seen as public institutions that need to be funded by the governments (Ndofirepi et al., 2020). Therefore, this often puts universities' responsibilities to showcase their values and contribute to society (Hinson & Mogaji, 2020).

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Showcasing value involves positioning the brand to attract prospective stakeholders (Mogaji, 2021a) and for higher education institutions, this involves positioning their brand through strategic brand management. Powell and Dusdal (2017) noted that brand management in higher education is gaining much interest as universities are making effort to improve their brand equity, remain competitive globally, and attract great talents. It is not surprising to see many universities rebranding and changing their logo (Wayne et al., 2020), showcasing their world ranking on websites and prospectuses (Kiraka et al., 2020), and even university leaders using social media to engage and build their brand (Sharma et al., 2022a). Institutions around the world are spending huge amount of money to improve their brands and enhance their brand image as they engage with their different stakeholders.

Different stakeholders expect different things from the universities (Farinloye et al., 2020b), and there must be effective communications from the universities to engage their stakeholders. These are all attempts to position the university as a brand that can attract better staff, students, and funds (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019). However, the question remains that considering the growing competition within the higher education market, how can public institutions like universities position their brands through marketing communication. This chapter aims to address the question with a specific focus on Nigerian universities.

Focusing on Nigerian universities in this chapter is essential for specific reasons. First, Nigeria is one of the largest emerging economies in the world (Mogaji, 2020). Second, with over 200 million people, the country is the most populous nation in Africa (Soetan et al., 2021). Third, it has the largest higher education system in Africa, with over 170 universities. These characteristics make the Nigerian university system unique to study (Adeyanju et al., 2019). One university that stands out in Nigeria with regard to their brand positioning is Covenant University; they take pride in showcasing their world ranking, publication records, and their achievements. Aririguzoh (2020) explored how Covenant University, a Christian private university, is making itself appealing to prospective students, using products, people, work processes, and serene physical location to attract new students.

Considering Nigeria is an emerging economy, there are limited funds for the universities (Olaleye et al., 2020b) and especially the public universities; many reports have highlighted how the Nigerian universities are underfunded, with the troubled sector receiving a meagre 5.6 per cent of the total budget, much below the recommended international benchmark which is between 15 and 20 per cent (Olufemi, 2020). In addition, with the growing population, there are limited spaces for prospective university students, and there are many prospective students who are unable to attend universities because there are no spaces at the public universities and the private universities can be expensive (Adefulu et al., 2020; Adeyanju et al., 2019; Olaleye et al., 2020b). These inherent challenges of Nigerian universities present an opportunity to explore how universities with these challenges can position their brands and engage with stakeholders with these types of challenges.

This study adopts the university stakeholders' communication model (Mogaji et al., 2021) as its theoretical underpinning and an integrative literature review approach to critically review and synthesise the literature on higher education brand positioning and stakeholders for marketing communication which enables us to develop a new theoretical framework and perspective (Snyder, 2019) Nguyen & Mogaji (2022). The study recognises that universities need to engage with various stakeholders to build their brand. This study makes a theoretical contribution to public institution marketing communications (Ndofirepi et al., 2020; Kiraka et al., 2020), especially from the education sector and an emerging economy perspective; it recognises how public institutions saddled with many challenges can still communicate their brands. Likewise, there are managerial implications for university administrators, university brand managers, and practitioners working on higher education brands to enhance their brand values and communicate with stakeholders.

The remainder of this chapter is as follows. Section “[Higher Education in Nigeria](#)” explores relevant literature around marketing higher education. Section “[Stakeholders for Marketing Communications in Nigeria](#)” discusses the theoretical framework underpinning this chapter, and Sect. “[The Marketing Communication Plan for Public Universities in Nigeria](#)” highlights the practical steps and recommended action plans for university managers in developing their brands. Section “[Conclusion](#)”

concludes the chapter with concluding remarks, limitations, and an agenda for future research.

Higher Education in Nigeria

The higher education sector in Nigeria is the largest in Africa, with over 170 universities; the sector has the highest quantity of universities of any country in Africa but maybe not the quality of universities as seen with universities in South Africa and Egypt being ranked among the top universities in the world (Farinloye et al., 2020a; Adefulu et al., 2020). Though Nigerian private universities are doing well globally, this has not been cascaded down to most public universities. There are some pre-existing notions about public universities in Nigeria which overshadows their achievements and their huge possibilities. There is consensus about the underfunding of universities (Olufemi, 2020). The public universities often owned by the state or federal government have not received enough funds for their operations (Farinloye et al., 2020a). This is not an isolated case considering the economic nature of the country and how much is provided for other vital sectors like health. Nigeria has often struggled with funding its universities to cater for the growing population, and this has provided room for many private universities to fill the gap (Olaleye et al., 2020b).

In addition to the inherent challenges with the funding structures, Olaleye et al. (2020a) observed that the public/private dichotomy in higher education in Nigeria presents a marketing dynamic that often excuses the public universities to put effort into their marketing strategy. It is observed that the demands for higher education places in public universities are more significant than the supply. It is not surprising that students are waiting to be admitted even if these public universities do not market themselves (Olaleye et al., 2020a). This idea of the market dynamics has often questioned the motivation for public universities to develop marketing communication strategies and position their brands. Perhaps there are no pressing needs for them because they have many prospective students they cannot admit.

However, it is essential to recognise that marketing higher education is not just about administering students or marketing the courses and programmes offered by the university; it's about building brand equity and improving the universities' reputation. The best universities worldwide are still investing resources in building their brand, and even more prominent brands in the commercial scenes are still advertising. Therefore, it is no excuse for public universities in Nigeria not to develop their brand.

The inherent challenges in developing and implementing marketing strategies are, however, acknowledged. The motivating may not be present, and likewise, the human resources and financial resources may not be insufficient. It is, however, important that awareness about the need for marketing communication is not considered a challenge. University administrators should be aware of their stakeholders and communicate and ultimately build their brand equity effectively. This is an area this chapter aims to address. It contributes to more knowledge about marketing communications, albeit from a public institution perspective, allowing managers to build their university brands.

It is essential for university managers, including the vice challenger, to take responsibility for their university's brand equity. The VC being the chief fundraiser needs to explore opportunities to reposition their university to attract grants, endowment, and another form of support (Chattopadhyay et al., 2022; Oginni et al., 2022). This chapter presents initiatives that individual universities can adapt without relying on the government, the Nigeria university commission or any other regulatory board. This task involves university administrators taking responsibility for their brand and doing their best to communicate their values and effectively engage with stakeholders.

Branding Higher Education in Nigeria

Brand management in higher education institutions has been gaining attention over the recent past due to increased global competition among learning institutions (Powell & Dusdal, 2017). Currently, a university is not only regarded as an institution of higher learning; instead, it is also a business (Chapleo, 2010). Since these institutions exist in a competitive

marketplace, they have become aware of the business metrics. Rankings by various publications (Chapleo, 2010; Kiraka et al., 2020; Mogaji & Yoon, 2019) and change in brand identities (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020; Punchng, 2021) have become major benchmark for higher learning institutions regarding their brand management. Therefore, the institutions are spending huge on branding budgets to enhance the brand image and improve their rankings.

Covenant University is known to often flaunt their ranking on the Times Higher Education Ranking, showcasing being one of the best universities in Africa (Aririguzoh, 2020). Likewise, the interest in Nigerian university logo design is growing. For example, upon joining the Honoris United Universities network, Nile University of Nigeria rebranded and changed their brand identity replacing its predecessor which had been in use since 2016. The university unveiled its new logo on June 21, 2021, while retaining the blue (representing the ‘sea of knowledge’) and green (representing the widely acclaimed African vegetation) colours of its former logo; the university included ‘Honoris United Universities’ to its base, symbolising Nile University’s affiliation to the Honoris network (Punchng, 2021). The National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has also made considerable effort to integrate their brand identity; the university recognises the logo as ‘the soul of the institution’. The logo had colours of green and white which are the national colours of Nigeria (NOUN, 2022). Likewise, the Federal University Lokoja shared the interpretation of their logo on their website and acknowledged Ben Okubile Atanu, a Chief Lecturer, Department of Industrial Design, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja, as the designer (FUL, 2022).

It is, however, imperative to understand that branding is more than just having a logo; it encompasses the overall FEEL of the university from the student experience, the staff branding, and stakeholder perception. If you mention university of XYZ, what comes to mind? Though there has been a considerable effort and a growing body of work to understand branding in Nigerian higher institutions, there is still a huge gap in our knowledge. Vasudeva and Mogaji (2020) reported on how African universities are on the quest for world domination and so they make huge claims and aspirations on the mission and vision statements. Aririguzoh (2020) has also explored the strategies being adopted by how Covenant

University, one of the Christian private universities, are building their brands through marketing communications, using serene physical location to attract new students. Olaleye et al. (2020b) and Farinloye et al. (2020b) also explored how universities in Nigeria are using marketing communications on social media to build their higher education brands, engage with students, prospective students, and advertise their programmes and call for application, but Mogaji (2019) was of the notion that branding universities in Nigeria is still an unexplored territory, suggesting that despite the competition and the privatisation drive within the higher education sector, Nigerian universities are yet to fully adopt branding as an essential element to distinguish the universities and offer a competitive advantage.

Ajilore and Suleiman (2020) examined the corporate identity of Nigerian universities and linked it with students' enrolment and concluded that university administrators should put effort into strategic formulation and projection of a distinct corporate identity to attract students and increase their enrolment figures. This aligns with the need for university to look beyond their brand identity when conceptualising their marketing communication strategies, to recognise it's a holistic approach that requires the effort of all stakeholders. There are still many unexplored areas and the need to better understand the stakeholders responsible for managing and integrating Nigerian universities' brands (Farinloye et al., 2020a). To address this gap in knowledge, this study adopted an integrative literature review approach to critically review and synthesise the literature on higher education brand positioning and stakeholders for marketing communication which enables us to develop a new theoretical framework and perspective (Snyder, 2019; Nguyen & Mogaji, 2022).

Stakeholders for Marketing Communications in Nigeria

Mogaji et al. (2021) presented a typology of university stakeholders for marketing communication highlighting that universities engage in recruiting, retaining, and reporting to their stakeholders. Specifically,

they recognise that universities engage with students and parents to recruit, engage with staff and students to provide updates and information, and alumni research partners and press are provided with reports about the universities' activities. This present chapter adopts this theoretical underpinning to evaluate the stakeholders in public university communication strategies.

Prospective students are critical stakeholders for the universities. They need to be updated about the university's progress, but the question remains around the effective way of engaging with these stakeholders in Nigeria. As Adefulu et al. (2020) found, students will often rely on word of mouth through parents, families, and siblings to choose a Nigerian university they will attend; this question if prospective students are following and engaging with social media content of a particular university, to see various activities going on in the University or if they have (Mogaji, 2016b). Notwithstanding, universities need to change these dynamics and endeavour to provide relevant information and nudge students to engage (Anyogu & Wayne, 2020).

Present students at the universities also have a role in this communication ecosystem, especially around their user-generated content, about activities going on campus, various events, and the quality of facilities notwithstanding; universities also need to engage with these students (Farinloye et al., 2020b). Likewise, it is anticipated that parents will keep themselves abreast with information about the universities their children are attending; perhaps they are expected to subscribe to newsletters from the universities, follow them on social media, or rely on their children to give them information (Olaleye et al., 2020a). However, the universities must engage with parents in one way or the other, perhaps to consider the parents as external stakeholders that need to be updated about the progress of the universities.

There are also many other external stakeholders that universities need to engage with and communicate with, but it is essential to understand the level of communication and what may be available in the public domain (Mogaji et al., 2021). Universities engaging with the funder, regulatory bodies, and government parastatal should be through different channels, but outcomes of these engagements need to be communicated to the broader university community, perhaps a visit from the regulatory

body, accreditation of a new programme, or a visit from research partners. These are relevant information for the university wider community to build brand awareness and ultimately brand equity (Olaleye et al., 2020a).

The role of the university press team cannot be underestimated at this level. Universities are expected to share this information strategically and consistently across all media platforms (Mogaji et al., 2021; Olaleye et al., 2020a). Working with different media organisations, including news media and bloggers, is essential, but the idea is to achieve a coherent message. The responsibility for this coherence should, however, be within the marketing communications team. This department within the university needs to ensure that all information is well managed and distributed among the stakeholders. The question, however, remains, how many universities have a dedicated marketing communications team? It is essential also to recognise that this is different from the public relations or media team but a whole team responsible for coherently communicating messages to internal and external stakeholders. The following section explores this part of the university business operations and identified key questions that need to be answered to communicate the university brand effectively.

The Marketing Communication Plan for Public Universities in Nigeria

The Marketing Communication Plan is a holistic plan that involves a lot of stakeholders, starting from the Vice-Chancellor. Figure 4.1 illustrates a conceptual framework of strategic marketing communication for a university. It highlights the marketing communications team's marketing communication plan, aligning with the university's strategic plan. This section highlights four critical constructs of the conceptual framework: the university's strategic plans, the marketing communications team, marketing communication plans, and the key performance indicators.

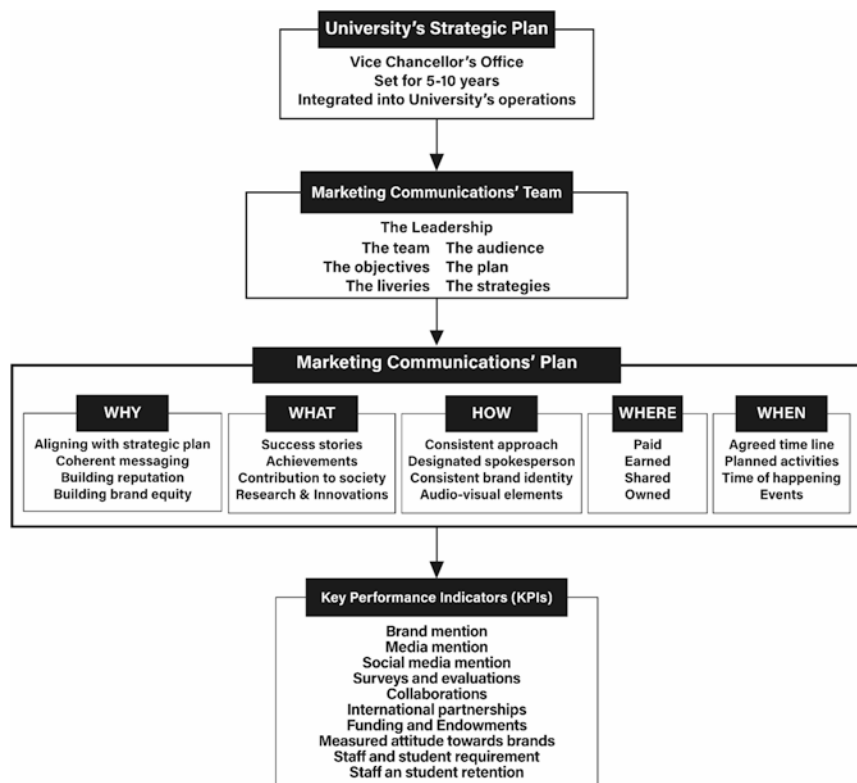


Fig. 4.1 Conceptual framework of strategic marketing communication for a university

The Strategic Plan

Universities should have set plans and future aspirations and highlight what they plan to achieve and how they will accomplish this (Kiraka et al., 2020). The plans are often set out in a strategic plan. Universities often develop this strategic plan as a long-term declaration of what they aspire to be. There are critical features of this plan.

First, it is set out for a five- to ten-year period, allowing for long-term changes and improvement to the university. Lancaster University's

Strategic Plan 2021–2026 was for sustainable and transformative change. The University of Hertfordshire has the Strategic Plan 2020–2025 to support a diverse range of students, staff, businesses, researchers, and community members.

Second, these are plans cascades to all business operations, faculties, and departments of the university. Oxford University has a strategic plan 2018–2024 which sets out a framework of priorities for the university, its divisions and departments.

Third, considering its encompassing documents, there is engagement with all stakeholders through staff input and focus group meetings. Ensuring stakeholders' involvement allows for an inclusive, practical, and achievable plan.

Fourth, this plan is strategically led by the vice-chancellor. New leadership or vice-chancellor often develops these strategic plans to set an action plan for their administrative tenure.

Fifth, as a form of accountability and desire to make the plan work, these strategic plan documents are readily available for the public, often shared and made available for download on the university websites. This is no secret to this plan.

As part of the strategic plan, marketing communications play an essential role. Often, there could be plans to create a new identity for the university, setting out rebranding strategies that may include changing the logo, setting a new vision and mission plan, and core values of the universities (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020). It is also essential to recognise that it should emerge and align with the university's strategic plan before implementing any marketing communication plan. The question now remains if public institutions have a strategic plan and what measures they have put to achieve this.

The strategic plan is the foundation upon which all other plans are built. Therefore, universities should endeavour they have this plan. As indicated earlier, these are plans set out by the vice-chancellors and a huge buy-in from all stakeholders. This is a plan that should not be rushed but developed with caution. Understanding the available resources and inherent challenges of the universities should also be reflected in the plan. For the university to implement and actualise its marketing

communications plan, there must be support from the university's leadership through its strategic plan. The university administrators should be mindful of their resources when setting the plans; ultimately, this should be specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (SMART). These plans should outline the desired overall goal and set out outcomes and impacts.

The Marketing Communication Team

The marketing communications team is the bridge to actualise the expectations between the university's strategic plan and the marketing communications plan. This team within the organisation plays an important role, and it is paramount for universities to evaluate the part of this team and make a possible effort to have a dedicated team tasked with the responsibility of internal and external communication with stakeholders (Olaleye et al., 2020a; Farinloye et al., 2020a). This section highlights seven key considerations for the marketing communications team.

The Team

It is essential to have a designated team within the university to address all the internal and external communications strategies. This may, however, depend on the size of the university and the size of the stakeholders they want to communicate with. In some cases, there is the internal communications team that engages with the staff and students. At the same time, the external communications departments also develop and implement an external relations strategy to enhance the university's reputation regionally, nationally, and internationally. Irrespective of their job description or their target stakeholders, it is essential to have that designated team.

The University of Manchester established the Division of Communications and Marketing and Communications and Marketing Leadership Team (CMLT) as the bodies responsible for the leadership, governance, strategy and coordination of university communications and marketing activity, including approval of marketing plans and campaigns,

and coordination of resource. To achieve this type of set objectives for the team, it is expected that the team with experiences around marketing communications, public relations, communications designs, and even digital assets management like the social media and websites are assembled (Farinloye, 2018). The team should be tasked with developing an integrated Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that supports a consistently high-quality experience for all stakeholders.

The Leadership

The marketing communications team needs a leader that can ensure the university's strategic plan is reflected in the university's marketing plan. Ultimately the leader needs to be experienced, especially in higher education marketing and be aware of the dynamics within the higher education, media, and target audience. Again, as earlier indicated, depending on the university's size, the university may need a designated Chief Marketing, Communications Officer, Head of the marketing communication team, or Heads for other internal and external communications stands. In 2015, the University of Limerick, a higher educational institution in Ireland, appointed a Director of Marketing and Communications with the purpose of 'leading the development and performance of a university-wide marketing and communications strategy and plan'.

A 2021 advertisement for the role of Head of Communications and External Relations at the University of Creative Arts expects the selected candidate to 'lead on the development and delivery of corporate communications, internal communications and PR, as well as overseeing our content development strategy, and will work with the Vice-Chancellor and our Leadership Team on a range of corporate communications issues' and 'to bring the experience of creating and delivering PR strategies across global markets and a proven track record of achieving press coverage to enhance reputation. [The candidate] will have experience of digital, print and social media and the ability to work with senior stakeholders on complex corporate communications'. Here, the vacancy indicates the typical job description of the head of communications and, notably, the

unique set of skills and experiences the university is looking for to reposition their brand through various marketing communications strategies.

The Audience

As Mogaji et al. (2021) indicated, universities communicate with various stakeholders, including the staff, students, partners, and regulators. This audience could be internal stakeholders like staff, students (undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD), student union, governing council, and external stakeholders like alumni, parents, prospective students, prospective staff, professional bodies, donors and prospective donors, funding agencies, regulators, competitors, news media, and visitors. Considering this diverse group and limited access to resources in public institutions, it is essential for the marketing communications leadership team to properly evaluate the audience with which they will want to engage and how best to do that with their limited financial and human resources (Olaleye et al., 2020b; Mogaji, 2016a).

There are often internal and external communications strategies to understand who and how to communicate with a diverse audience. Would a university want to invest more in their external communications to position their brand to external stakeholders, funding bodies, and international bodies and highlight their innovative research, events, and activities? Would they want to use a foreign media platform to curate a global brand based in Africa? Do they have the resources to do this, or better still, would they want to focus on their internal stakeholders and anticipate improving their brand perception through word of mouth? Ultimately both external and internal stakeholders are essential, but there should be a strategic direction on how to go about this.

The Plan

Ultimately this marketing plan needs to be documented as it highlights the key stakeholders, target audience, and what needs to be achieved. This plan should be based on the university's strategic plan, and the

objectives of the marketing communications need to be presented and shared with the team. The University of Virginia noted that in support of their institutional strategic plans, their University Communications' plan shared priorities will develop focused distribution strategies for delivering stories across owned, paid, social, and earned media to reach and influence our key audiences effectively. This connection between the marketing and strategic plan should be recognised and integrated within the marketing communications team.

The Liveries

These are all the brand elements and channels of communications for the university. It is anticipated that the marketing communication teams will be responsible for managing these liveries, which includes the mission and vision statement of the university (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020), ensuring that stakeholders are aware of the university's vision and are working towards it. The brand identities of the university, including its logo and coat of arms, are also included in the liveries that need to be managed by the marketing communications team (Mogaji, 2021b). Digital assets like websites, social media, email, marketing, and other digital media must be managed by the marketing communications team to ensure a coherent message to all stakeholders (Ndofirepi et al., 2020; Olaleye et al., 2020a). The University of Virginia planned to 'develop a cohesive, distinguishing, and timeless style and tone through design, video, photography and marketing copy that communicates, is authentic and dynamic and presents UVA uniquely and compellingly'. This highlights the value of the brand guideline to ensure this consistent approach across all the universities' brand liveries (Mogaji, 2021b). It is also essential to inventory these liveries, know who is responsible for what, know when they need to be updated, and, if possible, things to be discarded.

Marketing Communication Plan

The marketing communications of a university is expected to address five key questions, which are addressed below. It highlights key considerations for the university's managers and the marketing communications team.

Why Are We Communicating?

This is a question for the marketing communications team that has been set up. The leaders and the team member need to understand the reason behind their team and their reasons for communicating the university's message. Provided all the team members are professional, it will not be difficult to answer this question. As indicated earlier, this should align with the university's strategic plan as it would have aligned the university's key objectives and strategic goals. The team needs to recognise the need to have a coherent message to all stakeholders across the different communications channels. These messages should be coordinated by the team and reflect the values of the university and their attempt to reposition the university brand. The university marketing communications team need to recognise their ultimate goal is to contribute to the brand equity of the university (Mogaji, 2021b) by using their marketing strategies skills to enhance the positive attitude towards the university brands (Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020) to build affiliations and networks and position the university brand as a global brand open to collaboration and investments (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019).

What Are We Communicating?

Considering the marketing team has provided answers to why they have to communicate, it is essential to identify what needs to be communicated. As Mogaji et al. (2021) shared in their model around stakeholders' communications, universities should endeavour to communicate their success stories, and this could be news around accreditation, partnership with another university, or gaining a form of recognition, achievement of

staff, and students also need to be communicated for the stakeholders. The team needs to recognise the prospects of framing their messages to present the university in the best possible way.

Universities may also want to highlight resources, organisations, and international partners that directly support their students, student access, and opportunity (Adeyanju et al., 2022). The university may also want to showcase its resources, infrastructures, and facilities that support student excellence, perhaps telling what they can achieve with their limited resources. The university can also highlight the students, programmes, and staff that have contributed to the growth of the university and society. In addition, the university needs to communicate its contributions to the community and their research findings and innovations. No matter how small it may be, these are news worth sharing and can build the brand awareness of the university. Ultimately this news needs to be strategically shared and aligned with the core values of the university (Mogaji & Farinloye, 2017).

How Are We Communicating?

These are strategic approaches to communicating a brand message (Mogaji, 2021a). Universities need to recognise that there is much possible news out there, and there are many contents to be curated and shared, but there should be a strategic approach to this, albeit a consistent approach to the messages; this could be achieved by having a spokesperson or press officers who are responsible for dealing with messaging and enquiries professionally. Notably, the university should be creative, concise, clear, coherent, and consistent with its messaging, and it should avoid jargon and technical language that its target audience may not understand. Keeping it simple is also an excellent idea about how to communicate with diverse stakeholders.

The brand identity of the university also influences how the messages are communicated (Ndofirepi et al., 2020; Mogaji, 2021a). This influence may involve using a consistent template and design; for example, when the university has to release a statement, the messaging should be shared with consistent elements like font, colour, and design, which may

have been highlighted with the university's brand guidelines. Images and photographs also shape how these messages are communicated. The choice of images to convey the correct meaning is essential. This involves the conscious creative effort at commissioning a photograph or getting a professional photographer to capture the events and activities. Storytelling should also be integrated into these strategies, developing engaging, emotionally appealing, and enticing content for people to share with their network.

Where Are We Communicating

This question addresses the need for auditing the liversies to identify what the university has and how best to use it. Often the university may have a newsletter as part of the internal communication strategies, but it is essential to evaluate if it will be in paper form, shared across the department, pasted on notice boards, or shared digitally through emails. This approach further questions if the university students have an official email address to communicate. These are issues around the digital transformation in Nigeria and higher education (Abdulquadri et al., 2021). How about student portals on university websites? What are the measures put in place to engage the students and also the staff? Where to communicate will be determined by the university's access to different. This can be structured around the Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned (PESO) media model.

Marketing messages can be shared on paid media like TV, newspaper, radio, and even social media. This paid media also includes strategies such as search engine ads (SEA) and retargeting. Accessing paid media is when the university will pay the media owner to share their messages on the platform. The most pragmatic way to reach a large audience that may have never been aware of the university brand is using paid media. This, however, needs to be used strategically—ensuring the chosen paid media aligns with the target audience. Are the students watching TV to see the university's latest invention, or perhaps the intention will target the parents and partners?

Earned media are exposure that the university received through other sources which the university cannot control. This could be a form of review from a study body, blogpost, or user-generated content. The universities are not paying for this, so they may not be able to influence whatever the source is saying about their brand; it is only anticipated that the right messages are being communicated.

With the rise of social media platforms, universities need to recognise the growing prospects of shared media, and it will continue to play an important role in university communications strategies and, likewise, the user-generated content from the students (Farinloye et al., 2020b; Olaleye et al., 2020a; Gökerik et al., 2018). Shared media recognises the huge possibilities of users engaging with the university's content, retweeting, and sharing it on their page. It gives additional exposure to the university brand. Shared media integrates content marketing, social media, and earned media where customers share information about the university to their audience.

Owned media is the ultimate of all these media in terms of control (Timson, 2018). The owned media includes websites, blog, prospectus, newsletter, and social media account. These are the media platforms owned and controlled by the university, and they can use these platforms to enhance the narratives about the university. Angela Wiesenmüller, EMEA Marketing Director, Meltwater, said that 'owned media is powerful because it allows brands to communicate controlled messages to their audience'. It is expected that universities will use all these media platforms to share their message coherently.

When Are We Communicating

Many factors can influence when the university decides to communicate, and ultimately the university should aspire for a consistent and coherent communications strategy. In some cases, there could be a need to have a content planning strategy or a content calendar that highlights when a message will be published and how it will be published (Beckingham, 2017; Farinloye, 2018). This approach is essential for activities and content planned ahead of time, which may be the usual regular social media

post that needs to go on all social media platforms and other owned media. There could be an agreed time and scheduling mechanism to know what media to use, how long to keep communicating the message and the duration for using the media. This scheduling strategy allows the marketing communication team to plan and put actions in place. Managers should set a realistic timeline and milestones split into 'preparation', 'implementation', and 'review' and factor in a bit of flexibility (Beckingham, 2017).

In another situation, the content could be shared and messaged communicated as a matter of urgency, maybe when there is an incident on campus. The university needs to send out some press releases on the earned media and their owned media, which may not have been planned. Still, measures should be put in place to recognise hierarchy and measures for quality control, and there should be chains of command in place to ensure that a coherent message is passed out. Activities on campus can also be integrated into the content calendar to cover the event and possibly organise a press release. This part of the marketing communication plan involves a lot of planning, and that is why it is essential to have the right team to coordinate these activities.

Key Performance Indicators

It is acknowledged that universities will want to see rewards of their investment in a marketing communication team and in their marketing communication plan (Ndofirepi et al., 2020; Farinloye et al., 2020b); there are key performance indicators (KPIs) that indicate how well the team is doing and possibly how their work can be improved to enhance the brand of the university. The team should record quantitative and qualitative impacts, write case studies, and demonstrate return on investment (ROI) (Beckingham, 2017).

Brand mention is one KPI for the universities—to understand how often people remember their names and mention it in news, social media, and on different media; brand mention tools can be used to understand better how the brand is being spoken; these tools can track and analyse relevant conversations about the brand and providing insights that can be

used in updating the plans. This brand mention can also include social media mention, evaluating the key metrics of the campaign, how people are commenting, liking the universities social media pages, social media referrals to the website, and the number of unique website users.

This evaluation also includes the open rate, click rate, and bounce rate of the email marketing communication strategies, perhaps to understand how these stakeholders engage with the newsletter sent to their emails. Google Analytics, for example, can also provide deep insights into the marketing communication strategies, allowing managers to track their organic, referral and paid traffic. Universities can also use many of these third-party options to gain readership analytics, content consumption, viewership, social media influence, engagement and sentiment assessments, and track their performance across any number of advertising platforms (Timson, 2018). Having a brand consultancy agency to value the university brand could also be a good idea, maybe to compare it at the start and the end of the strategic plan duration (Mogaji, 2021a).

Universities can also survey their stakeholders to understand how well their marketing communications change the perception about the university, attitude towards the brand, and willingness to engage with the university. It could also be a form of employee culture survey to measure employees' points of view and establish their commitment, motivation, a sense of purpose, and passion for their work and organisation (SHRM, 2020). While public universities may not want to measure student enrolment success, they may explore student retention, staff hiring, and so on. A survey as a form of evaluation could include measuring attitude towards the university brands, how well the students will recommend the university to their siblings, or how staff will recommend someone to work at the university. Universities want their stakeholders to feel compelled to engage with and support; this can take the form of enrolling at university, aspiring to work, or conducting research at the university.

Likewise, universities can measure the effectiveness of the marketing communication strategies through opportunities opened for collaboration, partnership, funding, and awarded grants. The marketing communication would have put the university on the radar of many other stakeholders, and they may now be more interested in working with them (Jain et al., 2022b). However, university managers need to recognise that

it takes time to build a brand, some of these KPIs may not change in a year or two, but consistency is essential. Little success should be celebrated while learning from mistakes (Beckingham, 2017).

Conclusion

This chapter recognises the need for public universities to enhance their brand reputation and reposition their brands to appeal to diverse audiences. Even though the market dynamics suggest that they have many students willing to fill their limited spaces (Olaleye et al., 2020b), they still need to improve their brand assets and, therefore, beyond their abounding student number and have a holistic view about the changing and evolving higher education landscape (Anyogu & Wayne, 2020; Wayne et al., 2020).

Theoretical understanding of the higher education market in Africa is still in its infancy, but there is a growing effort to extend knowledge about this subject area (Jain et al., 2022a; Olaleye et al., 2020b). This chapter presents a key theoretical contribution to ongoing bodies of work around higher education marketing. First, it recognises the unique market dynamics of higher education in Nigeria (Olaleye et al., 2020a), which may suggest why marketing communication is not considered an essential part of the business operations because even without marketing, the universities have a huge number of prospective students. Second, the studies extend the stakeholder communication framework developed by Mogaji et al. (2021) to present the conceptual framework for marketing communication in higher education, highlighting the link between the university's strategic plan and the communications plans with the marketing communications team saddled with the responsibilities of effectively engaging with the internal and external stakeholders. Last, the study presents the PESO framework that aligns with the communication strategies of universities, providing insight into relevant media that can be used for integrated marketing communications.

The chapter raises critical questions for university managers on the motivations and values for developing their marketing communication plans. The study presents insights for university managers and

practitioners on developing public university brands. Specifically, the study suggests some checklists and questions for managers to consider regarding their communications strategies. These questions include:

- Does the university have a strategic plan for five years?
- Does the university have a recognised mission and vision statement
- Does the university have a dedicated marketing communications team
- Does the university have a Marketing Communications Manager?
- Does the university have an inventory of their owned media?
- Does the university have a brand guideline?
- Does the university provide the information their stakeholders want?

Addressing these questions will make universities evaluate their marketing communications strategies and possible act. This implementation could involve having the vice-chancellor take a leadership role or perhaps a new vice-chancellor taking over the leadership of a university to develop the strategic plan. Having this plan is not just enough but ensuring that there are resources to follow them through. Importantly, a university can also hire a brand consultant and other professionals to work with them on this project; it could be worthwhile having input from professionals, especially for universities who may never have had to develop a strategic plan. They are also needed to support the staff and equip them with resources to become a good ambassador of the university, for example, those presenting at international conferences using the university power-ing sides (Mogaji, 2021b). Universities should also consider the prospects of integrating technology, digital transformation, and artificial intelligence into their marketing communication strategies (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2022b).

Specifically, there are key recommendations for university administrators who are concerned and interested in branding their public universities.

1. *Carry out a brand audit*—This could involve working with a brand consultant, non-academic and professional staff within the marketing communication department or academic staff and researchers within the business faculty. You want to understand stakeholders' perception,

association, experience, brand equity, and salience towards the university (Brandão et al., 2020; Suhardi et al., 2022).

2. *Create a strategic plan*—based on your brand audit; you want to develop a strategic plan for the university. While the plan may be encompassing, the marketing communication section should be clearly presented. This chapter has provided detailed information about the strategic plan; additionally, see Morphey et al. (2018) for strategic plans of research-intensive universities in Northern Europe and North America.
3. *Consider creating a new brand identity*—It will not be surprising that many public universities have been using the same logo since they were established. The administrator must consider creating a new brand identity. Remember, this is just beyond the logo, but the logo is always a good place to start. You want to bring a new and refreshed identity. It is imperative not to fall into the trap of the familiar shapes and icons of school logos (see Wayne et al., 2020, who analysed the logos of the top 200 universities in Africa to understand the creative elements adopted in creating the visual brand identities for these universities). The new identity should be well thought through; stakeholders must be involved and get professional help if needed. The logo doesn't need to be designed by a staff or student.
4. *Communicate the new identity*. It is essential for stakeholders to know of the new identity, to be aware that something is changing. Therefore, the university should put effort into building its digital presence. This effort includes updating the website (see Anyogu & Wayne, 2020. Mogaji, 2016b and 2021b about university website design) and ensuring the social media presence of the university is well-curated (see Farinloye et al., 2021; Olaleye et al., 2020a, Mogaji et al., 2021, for social media strategies and Sharma et al., 2022a, for the usage of social media channels by higher education leaders). Other marketing communication strategies (including press releases, email marketing, and newsletters) will be essential at this stage.
5. *Continuously build the brand*—Simply having a logo is not just the end. Branding is a continuous process (Mogaji, 2021a), and the administrator must ensure that the strategic directions are followed through. Staff and students should be continually reminded about the

mission and vision of the university. Staff should be obligated to use the provided brand identities (including on PowerPoint slides and complementary cards). Stakeholders should be encouraged to take pride in the brand and be a good representative of the university brand wherever they go.

It should be noted that this is a conceptual piece based on various literature reviews, research, and practitioner experiences of the authors. Further research may be conducted to empirically establish the prevalence of Nigerian universities' marketing communication plans and strategic plans. Secondly, this chapter is not based on any particular institution, but instead, a holistic understanding is provided with practical implications that are relevant for universities with an existing marketing communication plans and those who may be considering developing their marketing communications plans. Future studies could be carried out to understand the lived experiences of universities in managing their university brands and to understand better how this conceptual framework can be modified to address their immediate needs.

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