Original Article

Exploring rationales for branding a university: Should we be seeking to measure branding in UK universities?

Chris Chapleo
is Senior Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Portsmouth. His research interests are in marketing in general, and branding in particular, in the education sector. As a former higher education (HE) marketing practitioner he has published a number of papers on aspects of HE marketing since joining academia, and is involved in ongoing consultancy projects in the sector. Before education he held marketing roles in the publishing and leisure sectors, as well as on the agency side.

ABSTRACT   **Although branding is now widespread among UK universities, the application of branding principles in the higher education sector is comparatively recent and may be controversial for internal audiences who question its suitability and efficiency. This article seeks to investigate how and whether the effectiveness of branding activity in the higher education sector should be evaluated and measured, through exploratory interviews with those who often drive it: UK University marketing professionals. Conclusions suggest that university branding is inherently complex, and therefore application of commercial approaches may be over-simplistic. While marketing professionals discuss challenges, they do not necessarily have a consistent view of the objectives of branding activity although all were able to clearly articulate branding objectives for *their* university, including both qualitative and, to some extent, quantitative metrics. Some measures of the real value of branding activity are therefore suggested, but a key debate is perhaps whether the objectives and role of branding in higher education need to be clarified, and a more consistent view of appropriate metrics reached? Various challenges in implementing branding approaches are also highlighted.**
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Correspondence:
Chris Chapleo
Portsmouth University Business School, Richmond Building, Portland Street, Portsmouth PO1 3DE, UK
E-mail: chris.chapleo@port.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

Despite the unclear purpose … vast quantities of money are spent on promoting whatever it is that universities are, do, and how they do it, without publicly available research on the efficiency or the outcomes of these investments. (Jevons, 2006)

In recent years there has been a trend among most UK universities to seek to employ the techniques of branding, often

expending considerable sums in the process. Although branding activity in UK higher education (HE) is arguably as relevant as in the commercial world, (Roper and Davies, 2007) it is a sector that arguably may not easily suit all such principles. Branding in HE, as an area that may be controversial, has so far received limited scrutiny among academics. Although this is changing, however, there is little evidence of much work to investigate how and whether the effectiveness of branding activity in the HE sector should be evaluated and measured. This article seeks to take initial steps to remedy that situation through exploratory work designed to highlight issues and offer suggestions for further empirical work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Branding in higher education

There is a reasonable body of work concerning marketing in higher education (Brookes, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) that focuses on distinct areas of marketing planning (Maringe and Foskett, 2002), marketing communications (Klassen, 2002), positioning and corporate identity (Gray *et al*, 2003; Melewar and Akel, 2005) university selection requirements and student satisfaction (Beerli Palacio *et al*, 2002; Veloutsou *et al*, 2004) and, to some extent, the associated discipline of branding. The body of work in the academic literature concerning branding of higher education does seem to be limited, however (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008) despite branding's rise up the strategic agenda for UK universities (Rolfe, 2003). Aspects of branding have been explored: the role of websites in university branding (Opoku *et al*, 2006), the role of heritage (Bulotaite, 2003), the emergence of brand identities (Lowrie, 2007), and harmonisation within brand architecture of universities (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007).

There is also a growing body of work that questions the suitability of commercial branding concepts for higher education (Jevons, 2006; Temple, 2006; Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008).

This arguably stems from a fundamental examination of the applicability of market principles to higher education (Gibbs, 2001) and indeed whether attempts to apply commercial style branding to higher education can actually challenge the institutional integrity of universities (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008).

When considering the applicability of branding to HE a tension that quickly becomes apparent is that of whether *reputation* and *brand* are the same thing? The literature suggests that an organisation can define and communicate *brand*, but that *reputation* is harder to manage as it results from impressions of organisation's behaviour (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004). However, there seems to be little doubt that there can be a degree of overlap between the terms when used in a university context, and that *reputation* is often more comfortable for internal audiences to discuss.

Another fundamental issue may be argued to be communicating a naturally diverse and complex university's corporate brand to multiple stakeholders with differing perceptions (Roper and Davies, 2007), which inherently adds to the challenge of branding activity (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008). One may call into question the very notion of what universities mean by branding and whether their understanding is the same as that for many commercial organisations (Chapleo, 2004). Although too broad to fully explore in this article, this is an area that may need consideration when one seeks to understand whether branding can be measured in terms of its effectiveness for a university?

Certainly, there is evidence of barriers to implementation of branding in universities – not least frequent, 'internal resistance' to the very concept (unless, seemingly, termed 'reputation') or a rather simplistic implementation of branding by university marketing practitioners that is marketing communications led (Chapleo, 2007), although these practitioners arguably increasingly understand branding in a fuller context.

In summary, it seems that universities are expending considerable amounts of resource on branding their institutions (Rolfe, 2003), but the literature on branding in higher education is limited, despite the assertion that 'higher education and branding go back a long way' (Temple, 2006).

Objectives of branding

Any examination of the objectives of branding for UK universities should take account of what branding in a wider context seeks to achieve. Initially, branding was conceived as a means to establish a product's name and to convey the legitimacy, prestige and stability of the manufacturer. However, this evolved into the modern paradigm built upon abstraction and cultural engineering, while products embodied people's ideals and were only tenuously linked to functional benefits (Holt, 2002).

Most conceptualisations of brand are reasonably explicit when it comes to the advantages of branding, but generally relate more to a commercial arena. De Chernatony and McDonald (2005) assert that a successful brand delivers sustainable competitive advantage and invariably results in superior profitability and market performance. These concepts, although arguably challenging to measure in any sector, become particularly so when applied to higher education.

Holt (2002) argues that, to be socially valued, cultural content must pass through brands; post-modern consumer culture insists that meanings must be channelled through brands to have value. In short, those brands will be more valuable if they are offered not as cultural blueprints, but as cultural resources – as useful ingredients to produce the 'self' one chooses.

De Chernatony and McDonald (2005) and Keller (2003) agree that it is important to measure brand performance, but suggest that monitoring systems should suit the organisation in question. Keller (2003) offers the *brand value chain* as a means to ultimately understand the financial impact of brand marketing expenditure. A number of other models such as Millward Brown's *Criteria to assess the strength of a brand* (1996) and Young and Rubicam's *Brand Asset Valuator* (1994) are widely known. However, all of these models, while having a degree of applicability to the HE sector, are primarily focused on commercial brands, and upon close examination do not wholly suit the particular situation of universities. Variables such as 'market share', 'price premium' and 'loyalty' are examples of the metrics alluded to in these models, which may be a degree of need re-conceptualisation for HE markets.

The marketisation of UK higher education (Stamp, 2004) may change the way that branding activity is quantified, as price comes into the equation. When consumers have limited prior knowledge of a product or service category, brand name may be the most accessible and diagnostic cue available. Strong brands get preferential attribute evaluation, generally higher overall preference and can charge price premiums (Hoeffler and Keller, 2003). The price premium theme may become increasingly relevant as many countries adopt a market system for university tuition fees.

Despite the wealth of literature on strong or successful brands, the literature is more limited when it comes to discussing the specific area of brand metrics or specific objectives of brand spending. This situation is exacerbated when it comes to considering specific objectives in less traditional

marketing fields such as education. This is perhaps surprising when one considers that spending university budgets on branding activity can be controversial (Jevons, 2006).

Jevons believes that branding is a shorthand measure for the whole range of criteria that go to make up the quality of the university, whereas Bennett *et al* (2007) suggest that universities require strong brands to enhance awareness of their existence and course offerings, to differentiate themselves from rivals and to gain market share. All of these offer a rationale for branding activity, but again actually measuring outcomes or return on investment are elusive.

It may be that conventional brand management techniques are inadequate in higher education owing to brand proliferation, media fragmentation, rising competition, greater scrutiny from 'customers' and internal resistance to the concepts (Jevons, 2006).

Perhaps the better brands gain in quality of student and raise the overall academic standing of a university? (Bunzel, 2007). Bunzel essentially associates branding in US universities with enhancing reputation and possibly positive influence on university ranking, but concedes that there is little evidence in rankings to support branding activity.

It seems one cannot ignore the relationship between brands in universities and league tables. The question, in the context of this research, would seem to be the extent to which branding activity seeks to influence league table position. Does the presence of league tables change the conception of branding in the sector, as there is an increasing focus as league table position as a measure of success among some target groups? (HEFCE, 2008).

The HEFCE suggest that commercial league tables in the United Kingdom 'avoid disrupting the dominant expectations too much' – this includes assumptions such as that 'Oxbridge' will come near the top and that most pre-1992 universities will be above most post-1992 universities.

However, there certainly seems to be a role for branding over and above a focus on league table positioning alone. The HEFCE argue that league tables may be influential, but are only part of the complex decision-making process, and are often used to confirm a decision already made. A strong brand should communicate far more about strengths in key areas than the often narrow league table-placing indicator. If used appropriately, branding could build upon league table positioning, whether that be high, middle or low, by emphasising unique selling points? This perhaps illustrates the essence of the difference between a successful brand and a league table position, as it may be argued that an institution that is comparatively lowly placed in the league tables can nevertheless have a successful brand with niche target audiences.

Effective branding can use considerable resources and it is therefore important for managers to monitor their brands. However, brands are complex, and any monitoring system should be tailored to suit the organisation's environment (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2005). Whether we should seek to quantify all branding activity in universities is therefore debatable, but is seems evident that some appropriate metrics are desirable.

The literature reveals some work on measurement of branding activity in general, but very little for university branding programmes. The competitive situation in UK higher education has arguably forced UK universities to adopt a more professional approach to their marketing activity (Bakewell and Gibson-Sweet, 1998). However, whether this extends to branding objectives in debatable. Although it is conceded that not all branding activity can be quantified, surely when it has been claimed

that 'vast sums are spent without clear purpose' (Jevons, 2006) investigation is necessary and timely?

METHODOLOGY

This research utilised a phenomenon–driven inductive approach that sought to understand the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The focus was exploratory, seeking to explore perceived objectives and measurement of UK university branding activity through a 'deeper understanding of factors' (de Chernatony et al, 1998; Christy and Wood, 1999).

Specific objectives of the research were:

- To explore the current objectives of branding activity in UK universities.
- To explore the clarity of rationale for branding in UK universities.
- To explore whether appropriate metrics for university branding activity can be articulated.

Ultimately, the aim is to investigate the degree to which the value of branding activity can be articulated by those who often drive it, university marketing professionals. The sample involved 20 interviews with those charged with responsibility for university marketing programmes – university heads of marketing or external relations. The sample size is broadly in line with McGivern (2003) as appropriate to understand interviewees' collective views on a topic. Although appropriate for an exploratory qualitative study, it is conceded that results are indicative, and it is accepted that boundaries are never quite as solid as a rationalist might desire (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The sample broadly reflected that in Chapleo (2005), where UK universities were segmented into three sub-groups based on date of incorporation, and therefore comprised nine new universities (1992 and post-1992), five 1960s universities and six older universities (incorporated before 1950). The UK higher education sector has a great variety of institutions, in terms of age, mission and market position (often reinforced through league tables), and grouping these into three categories (similar to other studies) was considered to add value to results and help identify similarities and differences (Bennett et al, 2007). Within these categories the respondents were a convenience sample, accessed through contacts from the author's previous work and making the most of opportunities to ask potentially useful informants where access may be difficult (Daymon and Holloway, 2004). This meant that 38 potential respondents were approached to obtain the required interviews. Senior marketing, external relations and careers personnel were selected as they represented experts with a breadth of experience who can draw on their specialist knowledge to define the fundamental characteristics of relevant matters (Tremblay, 1982; de Chernatony and Segal–Horn, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews were considered to be most suitable, as 'complex and ambiguous issues can be penetrated' (Gummesson, 2005), providing an illustration of the participant's true feelings on an issue (Chisnall, 1992). This technique is reinforced by other branding studies such as Hankinson (2004). An interview guide was used to steer the discussion, but respondents were also invited to expand upon ideas and concepts as they wished. A pilot study was not considered essential, owing to the exploratory nature of the work and the corresponding broad questions elicited from previous research (Chapleo, 2005).

The interviews were conducted between August 2008 and January 2009 and the average duration of interviews was 24 min. It is accepted that this is comparatively short for exploratory work, but includes

interviewees who gave particularly succinct answers to aspects of the questions.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to assist content analysis (Goodman, 1999). Analysis was informed by Miles and Huberman (1994) who advocate coding that identifies any trends in responses, and the qualitative approach of Schilling (2006) to 'reduce the material while preserving the essential contents' and then structuring the content analysis by coding and attaching each statement or phrase to one of the defined dimensions. The dimensions were derived from theory and prior research and led to the themes in the findings. Once initial content analysis was undertaken, the results were assessed by an independent research assistant, and findings drawn out by viewing the summary in the context of the interview questions. This part of the process utilises the benefits of qualitative research by allowing a degree of subjective judgement on the part of the researcher (Flick, 2006), and therefore data of a 'richer' nature (Daymon and Holloway, 2004).

The anonymity required by some participants (in discussing specific details of marketing plans) made the attribution of direct quotes difficult. However, a number of pertinent quotes were assigned by age category of university in an attempt to partly address this issue.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
As discussed in the methodology, the themes evident in the findings related to the questions explored and these were elicited from an exploration of the literature surrounding measuring brands, especially in an educational context.

Objectives of branding programmes in UK universities in general
The respondents were asked to identify what they considered to be the objectives of university branding activity in general in

Table 1: The most frequently identified objectives of university branding

To explain or clarify what the university 'does' or 'is'
To communicate a clear position
To communicate a competitive advantage
To enhance reputation
To communicate the various 'facets' of what the university does
To increase awareness

the United Kingdom. The most frequent responses are summarised in Table 1.

Some of the responses were broad, such as 'to create a framework of discipline to enable stakeholders to understand what they can expect and will get at the university' (older university) or indeed the most comprehensive response, from a new university, that suggested that the objective of university branding was:

- To create the correct image of the university.
- To communicate to audiences the performance of the university.
- To communicate to audiences the types of education offered.
- To communicate to all the different audiences the different facets of the university.
- To educate members of the organisation how to communicate the brand.
- To create a competitive advantage.

It was interesting that there was, even after paraphrasing and grouping, a wide variance in the responses. These ranged from wider objectives, 'to achieve clarity' (new university) or 'to be more competitive' (new university), to far more specific objectives, 'for stakeholders to recognise the university' (old university). Some of the responses may therefore be reasonably straightforward to measure (given sufficient resources), such as 'awareness' or 'recognition', but the majority of suggested objectives were fairly broad and therefore difficult to quantify. This is perhaps typified by

a 1960s university that argued that 'university branding activity can mean different things to different institutions. We have a good idea what we are seeking to achieve and have to justify a case for that, but many competitors might choose to spend their money somewhat differently'. There was a tendency for the older universities in the sample to talk more in terms of managing reputation, although when questioned on this the term brand was embraced. It seems that the wide interpretation of the term 'brand' has led to a degree of overlap with 'reputation' (despite respondents often articulating a distinction), although the literature portrays this as unsurprising (Rankin Frost and Cooke, 1999).

It is to be expected that there will be no simple answer to the question of what the objectives of branding in universities are. However, this lack of commonality in answers does little to help justify the case for spending money on branding.

Objectives of branding programmes in respondent's particular universities

Responses to this question, not unexpectedly, showed a degree of overlap with the previous question. In considering objectives of branding in their specific institutions, however, respondents offered some interesting points. These can be classified in two broad categories: specific scenarios affecting individual institutions, and broadly applicable objectives.

In terms of specific scenarios, or reactions to challenges of particular institutions, several respondents talked of trying to 'change a negative' or 'undesirable' position, such as 'bad media coverage' (New University). This is significant in terms of associations with 'place brands'(Hankinson, 2004; Mighall, 2008), as two of the institutions concerned also mentioned the negative or erroneous perception of their location city/town.

Again, specifically, one respondent talked of 'amalgamating distinct parts of the institution'. This alludes to a specific role for branding at a time when institutions may merge or be involved in takeovers.

One respondent also discussed the wish 'to position the institution as world class in an international arena' (older university), clearly indicative of the increasing international competition UK universities now face (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003).

Other respondents discussed the objectives of branding in their institutions on broader terms: There was talk of 'communicating what the university does in all its breadth' (1960s university), but one particularly interesting objective was 'capturing stakeholders and get them on brand; in other words to enable and encourage them to communicate the brand message'. A new university put this well: 'the role of branding used to be to try to maintain consistency of imagery and message, and to communicate to people what the university stands for, but today the aim is to get the stakeholders of the university to communicate the brand'. This alludes to an interesting conceptualisation of how to manage university brands in practical terms.

Finally, the need to 'establish a unique/clear position' was expressed by several institutions. This supports elements of the literature that argue that UK Government policy is driving these changes (Stamp, 2004).

Overall, there was an indication among this sample of a genuine grasp of branding in its wider context (NB: beyond marketing communication alone), and while clearly this is an exploratory sample, this is encouraging to those who fear a narrow simplistic view of branding is too often prevalent in the sector (Chapleo, 2007).

Is the university sector generally clear about branding objectives?

The view of interviewees was that the sector generally was not particularly

consistent concerning the objectives of branding programmes. To expand upon this, six respondents answered with a straight 'no', justifying this with comments such as 'there is confusion between brand and brand identity' (new university) or that 'there are misconceptions, even at a senior level' (new university). One respondent was quite strident in his view that 'the sector is totally unclear about it' (new university).

However, this was not the unanimous view, with four respondents making generally positive responses about the level of clarity on objectives, although this was qualified by comments such as 'marketing professionals are totally clear about it!' (1960s university).

The overriding consensus was that 'there has been improvement, but there is still along way to go, in terms of clear branding objectives that help to quantify its value to the institution' (new university).

Certainly, the theme of a focus on elements of brand 'identity' instead of 'whole brand' was suggested by several respondents, and this is worthy of exploration, as the whole area evidently has a high degree of subjectivity.

How should the success of branding in universities be measured?

This is a crucial question in the context of this research – and one that elicited varied responses. Overall, there was a real sense from respondents of attempting to measure or quantify the success of the branding activity, but there seemed to be great variance in what specific metrics should be employed.

Some offered measures such as 'regularly measuring brand perceptions' (older university), or generic commercial branding measurement tools such as 'brand audit'/'perceptual audit', or comparison with other universities (1960s university).

There was a degree of cynicism, however, evident through such comments as

'standard, oversimplified measures such as attitude measurement' (new university). This shows some congruence with commercial branding where there is a clear need to measure and track metrics such as brand equity but variability in methods and dimensions that should be tracked (de Chernatony and McDonald, 2005).

One older university respondent listed a number of specific activities to evaluate brand success, including staff survey, student survey, graduate employers survey, key stakeholder survey and indicative study, and this was echoed by others who cited 'user surveys for website' (new university), or an older university who talked of 'league tables, National Student Survey (NSS), how many short listed awards, press cuttings'. Research into opinions of the prospectus was also suggested.

The difficult area to quantify in terms of these metrics is what part in any improvement is attributable to branding activity, and indeed what benefits these actually bring with respect to institutional strategic objectives? One old university did cite the above activities, underpinning what was referred to as 'link to increased business'.

An interesting area was that of internal metrics, with respondents citing 'internal stakeholders speaking consistently about the university' (new university), and this was expanded upon by a new university who talked of 'how well the brand message is communicated by the universities' own internal stakeholders and if it is communicated back to the university in a correct (desired) manner'. The problem with metrics such as this may be the effort and thus expense required to attempt to actually measure them, and many universities struggle to find funding for this 'extra stage' (new university).

Others referred to measures of success that were particularly qualitative in nature, such as 'key brand messages in the university outputs' (1960s university), and 'watch if

people are living the aimed for university culture' (new university).

This perhaps demonstrates the widely varying expectation of what branding activity can and should achieve for the university. However, it was interesting that there was, despite the varying expectation of what branding should achieve, comparatively little mention of linking back to overall university strategic objectives. A clearly identifiable link between spending on branding and university objectives should surely be expected (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003) and further work on whether branding is really a strategic activity in UK universities seems to be called for.

Does university branding borrow too heavily from commercial branding models and practice?

Broadly, respondents did not consider this to be the case. In fact, there were interesting comments that it 'actually probably does not borrow or learn enough' (1960s university) or that 'commercial services marketing has a number of lessons to teach universities' (new university).

It was conceded by several respondents that there is a danger of trying to use inappropriate models for university branding, typified by a new university view that 'some lessons can be learned', but it was felt that 'intelligent application of branding theory' is important owing to the nature of the higher education sector.

Several respondents did feel that universities have tried simple application of commercial branding models, but that these are not wholly appropriate and 'universities must learn from current marketing practice, but apply it judiciously, being mindful of the particular nature of UK universities' (older university).

Is branding in universities a fad?

The majority of respondents unequivocally thought that university branding was not a 'fad', qualifying this with statements that 'it is a necessary process, given current Government HE polices' (1960s university) or that, 'whilst it can be seen as superficial, it is actually a necessary long term process' (new university). Several others were a little more ambiguous, but were generally supportive of some aspect of the long-term value of branding activity, or saw it as closely related to reputation management.

However, approximately a quarter of respondents were quite cynical, with older institutions in particular supporting this view. This is an area where there was evidence of a differing attitude among age categories of university and is interesting when it is considered that the respondents are those who in general are likely to be 'driving' or 'championing' branding at the university management level. However, this would correlate with older universities' seemingly greater focus on 'reputation' as opposed to 'brand'. Ultimately, a crucial question is how 'branding' is conceived and conceptualised and whether it therefore links to the long-term strategic needs of the organisation?

CONCLUSIONS

It is argued that university branding concerns defining the essential and distinct essence of the institution, encapsulating this and clearly articulating it through distinct, clear and consistent messages to multiple stakeholders externally and internally.

Applying this principle to HE is inherently challenging; however, universities are arguably too complex to express in a succinct brand proposition (Waeraas and Solbakk, 2008), they have a culture that does not easily support branding approaches and they lack the resources to implement branding strategies in the way that many commercial organisations do, leading to the assertion that conventional brand management techniques may be inappropriate for this sector (Jevons, 2006). They also have multiple stakeholders, including employees

who may have limited allegiance to the organisation, but can potentially damage the brand (Roper and Davies, 2007). This is recognised as a factor by interviewees in this sample, but there was little evidence of how it could be considered in evaluating branding. A multiple stakeholder approach, although challenging to manage, may be most appropriate.

There was evidence that the sample in this research understood and tried to implement branding in its full context, and that they do largely view brand as distinct from reputation. Brand was viewed as something that could, to some degree, be constructed, whereas reputation was viewed as based on historical legacy and therefore more 'difficult to manipulate' (older university). Newer universities in particular (and 1960s universities to a lesser extent) were motivated and articulate when discussing branding. Older universities talked of brand, but were often more concerned and focused on reputation. This is one of the main distinctions evident between the three categories of university but one that has implications for associated brand dialogue and activity.

A lot of money has been spent on branding activity in recent years, but the sector professionals do not necessarily have a consistent view of the objectives of this activity, although all were able to clearly articulate several objectives for *their* university branding.

There is clearly a role for branding as a tool for institution-specific tasks such as to 'correct a negative perception' or 'to increase international standing', but there is a danger that branding becomes seen as a tool to fix all problems. Defining the role of university branding better may help to limit sometimes unrealistic expectations, and this would seem to be one pertinent area for future research.

If it is increasingly desirable to seek to qualify and quantify the purpose and value of branding, then higher education branding, it seems, may have some way to go.

While universities increasingly communicate as commercial organisations, a real understanding of branding in its fullest context is important as it should identify what is distinct, articulate this and communicate it efficiently and consistently. This is challenging to undertake for many organisations, but it seems particularly so for universities. While practitioners can articulate what they see as the purpose and ways to measure effectiveness of their branding programmes, it is argued that this may present an over-simplistic picture in the HE sector. Branding clearly has a role to play in specific tasks for universities, but there is no simple panacea of what branding a university can and should achieve. Before real understanding of the best ways to evaluate effectiveness of university branding activity can be identified, further empirical investigation of models of branding a university that link to metrics is called for.

Implications for practitioners

The key implication is argued to be that we need to really understand the essence of a university brand better before linking this to appropriate metrics. Nevertheless, the financial implications of university branding are significant, as it can be a costly activity. The literature argues that it is reasonable to expect a rationale of the benefits of branding activity, and, if appropriate, clear objectives and linked measurable outcomes. The results in this work suggest that, while UK universities set branding objectives of some kind, these vary greatly in their detail and degree of measurability. However, while simple metrics are not always easy to identify for a university, the following broad recommendations for education marketing practitioners are offered as appropriate initial steps:

- In times of increasingly accountability and scrutiny of university spending, effort should be made to clearly articulate

objectives for branding work wherever possible. These could, this work suggests, be approached under the two headings of wider objectives (for example, 'to achieve clarity') and specific ones (for example, 'to increase web hits by X%'). This is an initial step but at least forces consideration of objective setting in a wider (strategic) context and a specific task-orientated context.

- Identify suitable metrics that take account of sector-specific issues and link these to strategic organisational objectives. This may not be easy to do, but a clearer understanding of branding metrics is highly desirable.

Many practitioners would probably rightfully assert that they already undertake these steps, but results suggest that this is not consistently the case, and a degree of objective examination of branding activity may not only be pertinent, but very valuable in these times of increasing scrutiny of UK university spending.

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