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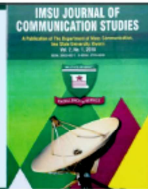
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## BRAND MANAGEMENT IN PRIVATE TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF BINGHAM UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

There is evidence in the reviewed literature that organizations struggle to formulate and implement their corporate branding strategies. This study focuses on brand management as incorporated in private tertiary educational institutions, most specifically with reference to Bingham University. The study examined the promotional strategy for Bingham University, which ultimately leads to their brand management in the wider perspective. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary source comprises literature review which includes branding concepts such as brand identity, brand personality, identity and image, brand perception among others. The primary source of data collection was done through an in-depth interview targeted at non-teaching senior staff and management staff of the University so as to get a better idea of their perceptions and beliefs about the effects of branding and promotional strategy on their selection process. A total number of thirty (30) staff members were randomly selected out of the total population of senior management staff using the purposive sampling method. Brand identity model and Keller's brand equity model are the two models that guided the investigation. Results of the study show that engagement of brand management has been effective, with affirmation from a large number of the participants. It also indicates that Bingham University has been able to manage its brand over the years with advertising being the major tool and public relations as a subsidiary instrument. It was recommended that Bingham University should constantly review its brand management strategies as trends constantly evolve in respect to customer's behavior, and change in the marketplace which is highly competitive.

**Keywords:** Brand, brand management, private tertiary institutions, Brand Equity, Bingham University

### Introduction

In today's world market, the role of brand management has been raised to a new level of importance. The fundamental change in the last 20 years in higher education is the increasing global competition in the higher education market and the consequence is that universities must adopt marketing practices including branding, Sufrin (2020). It is therefore evident that brand management has increasingly become a stimulant for rapid growth in all sectors. As such, brands being a powerful asset which represent the essence of a company must therefore, be carefully developed and managed.

Without a doubt, any organisation that needs or desires an expansion must be ready to maintain, sustain and improve on its brand management strategies. In today's highly competitive society, brand management has become eminent leading to institutions staying on the top of their games. According to Makgosa & Molefhi (2012) and Mogaji (2018), the intense competition in the higher education market, has forced institutions to modify elements of their brands. Universities are under intense pressure to set themselves apart from others in the light of changing market conditions. They, therefore, seek to improve their public image by changing their corporate visual identity (CVI) (Idris & Whitfield, 2014), as such, private sector strategies such as rebranding and adopting new identities are adopted (Furey et al., 2014). The significance of reputation for an organization cannot be trivialized. If their image is entirely perceived as negative, it is unlikely that such organization will be able to attract any audience. The impression created in the minds of the public by an organization, would determine if the organization will be accepted or not. It therefore

becomes important that the right perception be created in order to gain acceptance. Whisman (2007) noted that, given the increasingly complex and highly competitive marketplace, universities and colleges have turned to branding as a solution in coping with today's global challenges. This is evident through the use of trademarks to market and promote an institution to the public. Similarly, Keller (2013), states that, as one of a company's most valuable intangible assets, a brand functions as a powerful differentiator for the business and as a decision-making tool for customers. Differentiation helps an institution get a niche in the market place. In view of this, will one say that private universities going by their ever increasing turnout are making significant efforts in building a strong brand that makes them stand out from their counterparts? As private universities are competing with government universities, so does competition exist amongst the private universities. This then necessitates for private universities to have strong brand management in place which can give them the competitive advantage that is desired. Many universities have to undertake embracing branding strategies. So, increasing competition between universities and higher education makes institutions have the need to understand, manage, and leverage a strong brand position. Consequently, more and more universities apply common marketing techniques including brand management to compete effectively (Chapleo, 2015). According to Oluwasanmi (2016), the term "branding" is no longer restricted to commercial interpretations; the idea has become increasingly important in the tertiary education industry in Nigeria, especially the privately owned. 21st century tertiary education in Nigeria has gone beyond the monopolistic syndrome into a competitive state, which is now a matter of survival of the fittest. Scholars from a broad perspective have noted that most private universities in Nigeria and in diaspora, base their source of income solely on students enrolment. This then, therefore, becomes important that the private universities strive hard in ensuring that they consistently present and maintain a good image that differentiates their brand from their other counterparts. McCarry (2022) asserted that, to survive, colleges must make a positive impression on students and differentiate their institutions.

University branding is key to elevating image and enrollment. Thus, it takes consistency to build the right image in the minds of the public over time and to be accepted by them. It then becomes, worthy of note to state that, no organization irrespective of industry, can survive without a good brand management in place. Mogaji, et al. (2017), postulated that, there is lack of understanding about the brand strategies of private universities in Africa. The paper explored brand management in private tertiary institutions in Nigeria, with Bingham University being the case study and to further evaluate it if it utilizes brand management in its operations and the level of effectiveness.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the brand management process in Private Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria.

The study is further premised on the following specific objectives, to:

1. Identify the strategies for brand management in Bingham University
2. Find out the effectiveness of brand management strategies in Bingham University
3. Ascertain the challenges encountered in the process of utilizing brand management

### **Literature Review**

#### **Brand**

Brand is that mark that differentiates or distinguishes a product from another. It is a product, service or concept that is publicly distinguished from other products, services or concepts so that it can be easily communicated and usually marketed. Brand is a complex entity that gives meaning to the offer it is associated with. It is not surprising that various experts do not seem to agree on how a brand should be defined (Walker, 2010; Jones & Bonevac, 2013), while researchers see the brand as a constantly evolving concept with high level of complexity (Veloutsou & Guzmán, 2017). However, the real essence of a brand is actually the associations customers have with the product. Thus, the association customers have with a product guides the customer to make choices about which item to purchase. The American Marketing Association (2016) defined a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to distinguish them from those of competitors." For a college or university, the name and all the symbolism attached to it represent the brand. Suffice it to say that, an organization's brand does not only include how customers perceive the organization, but how the employees think of the organization. Anholt (2007) distinguished between four aspects of a brand, which are **brand identity, brand image, brand purpose** and **brand equity**.

**Brand Equity:** According to Keller (2013), brand equity is the value that consumers associate with a brand; thus, the power of the brand lies in what customers have learned, felt, heard, and responded to regarding the brand over time. Aaker (in John 2016) defines brand equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm’s customers”. These assets are brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, brand loyalty and other proprietary assets. Herremans et al (2017) noted that ‘brand equity’ emerged first in the 1980’s and has today become one of the most important assets of an organization. Therefore, it is important for the brand to provide some value to customers in order for it to have a high equity level.

**Brand Image:** Udit, Aanchal and Rahul (2018), postulates that, Brand image is a subconscious thinking or image of the brand that leads to customer retention. Experiences and prior knowledge about the brand form the basis for a strong brand image. Brand image is based on several factors like the brand efficiency, brand service, reputation of the brand. Aaker (2018) opined, that the competition in higher education, both domestically and internationally, causes universities to find ways to attract students, students to study at the university, find more partners. Therefore, building a brand image is vital for universities. Brand image building is a mixture of distinctive identity, unique selling proposition and the trusted brand name attached to it. These can conquer competitors once built effectively.

**Brand purpose:** It is referred to as corporate culture, which Anholt (2007) conceives as the internal equivalent of brand image. It is the shared values, common purpose of organizational members. It is living the brand, and process of internalizing brand values. According to Qualtrics (2023), Brand purpose is a company’s reason for being and the things it stands for aside from the usual business goals and objectives. Brand purpose begins with an organization belief, and radiates out through company culture, codes of conducts and business decision.

**Brand Identity:** Aaker (1996) differentiates brand Identity and brand image by simply dividing the level of perception that how brand wants to be perceived is brand identity whereas how it actually is perceived by the customers is brand image. He further adds that brand identity results in provision of “direction, purpose and meaning of the brand”. This set standards for a target market at which branding should be done in a more structured way. The brand image aims to promise the customer (Ghodeswar, 2008) and a brand identity often comes out to be an output of experiences which customer shows with it in terms of trust enhancement between the producer and customer, as a result of which brand attains the status of competitive advantage (Ghodeswar, 2008).

### **Private Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria**

Private universities as viewed by Grove (2017) are institutions in which funding comes from tuitions, investments and private donor not from tax payers but subject to government regulations. To Belfield and Lenin (2013), private universities are autonomous universities that do not receive funds from the government and are often managed by secular board and operated for profit motive. They are universities owned, financed and managed by individuals, corporations and religious organizations with the purpose of making profit within a short period of time (Olaniyan, 2016). These assertions therefore amount to saying that private tertiary educational institutions are wholly funded by the proprietors with limited or no government grants. The increasing demand for universities admission in Nigeria which involves a process through the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB), led to the establishment of private universities as the public universities could no longer accommodate/ meet up with the increasing demands. This also was to help cover the gaps in student’s enrolments with the public universities inadequate carrying capacity. It was in May 10<sup>th</sup> 1999, that the first three sets of private universities were given certificates of registration and approval for operation by the then Nigerian government under the political administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. These private universities comprises Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State; Madonna University, Okija, Anambra State and Babcock University, Ilisan-Remo, Ogun State, (Ajadi, 2010). The approval to establish these universities were as a result of the failure of public universities to absorb the increased number of applicants, Obasi (2006). Thereafter, other private universities began to emerge with the likes of Achievers University, Owo; Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti; Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State; Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin; Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State; University, Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State, Veritas University, and many others. These private universities in their various capacity, has helped raised the standard of education in Nigeria and are been ranked accordingly in terms of the quality of education rendered. Private universities operation in Nigeria today according to (Oladimeji, 2014) is a huge business enterprise, though plagued with its own associated problems of legal status, quality assurance, and cost of service. It is believed that despite the challenges faced by these private universities, they possess better equipment, newer buildings and better facilities than their public counterparts. The private sector as reported in the aftermath of a latest world-wide assessment is the rapid developing sector in tertiary institution globally (Kitaev, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). The growing quantity of these establishments so exceeded the government

universities that changes in political scenario is pinpointed as an influencing factor (UNESCO, 2015). As at 2019, there were 79 private universities in Nigeria compared to 1999, when the country had only three privately owned universities (Arikewuyo, 2019; National Universities Commission, 2020). Presently, the total number of private universities in the country has risen to 111 with others underway (National Universities Commission). Having said this, National Universities Commission (NUC) is the only regulatory body in Nigeria in charge of the establishment of universities, be it private or public.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Brand Identity Prism model and Keller's brand equity model are the two models that form the basis for this study. **Brand Identity model** – The brand identity prism model was developed in 1986 by Jean – Noel Kapferer, a professor of marketing strategy. He developed the concept in order to visualize how a brand is expressed through specific facets. The concept is a well know marketing model, also referred to as '**Kapferer's brand identity prism**'. It remains an indispensable aid for organizations in the reinforcement of their brands in ways that are consistently reflective of their core values and origins. The model states six (6) key elements which make up brand identity. The six key elements are: Physique, Personality, Culture, Relationship, Reflection, and Self-image. The prism model depicts how a brand is developed that enables customers to instantly recognize its personality and its value in the mind/lives of its customers. It shows a clear way on how to design a branding strategy that is aligned with the brand mission. Kapferer noted that the best way to represent how the six key elements interact as part of a whole was by putting them in a prism form. The prism which serves as a guide, helps the brand grow in line with the strategy and monitor how the brand prism facets changes over time by making sure each one consistently supports the brand overtime. In essence, the purpose of the prism model is for brands to recognize the parts of their identity and make them work together in achieving the brands goal.

**Brand Equity Model** as put forth by Keller Kevin in 1993 asserts that, in order to build a strong brand, you must shape how customers think and feel about your product. You have to build the right type of experiences around your brand, so that customers have specific, positive thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about it. It is believed that, when there is a strong brand in place, customers will buy more from such organization, recommend the organization to other people, they become more loyal and as a result, the organization is less likely to lose its customers to competitors. This is the case seen in private tertiary institution that provides services of education- if it has been able to sell itself well to the customers, it then gains customers' attention, retention, loyalty, value and others. All these are pointer to having a strong Brand Management in place. The model depicts the four steps that organizations need to follow to build strong brand equity. The four steps include:

1. Identity (salience) – who are you?
2. Meaning (performance & imagery) – what are you?
3. Response (judgments & feelings) – what about you?
4. Relationships (resonance) – what about you and me?

The relevance of both models to this study is based on the fact that brand management set a pace by creating an identity through a process, thereby projecting the brands to the audience which enables them identify with the brands and the services it offers. This further enables them take decision on whether to associate with the brands or not. This therefore calls for a strong brand management in place to gain customers retention, association and loyalty.

### **Importance of Brand Management**

Organizations all over the world irrespective of the kind of services been rendered, recognize the essential role brand management plays in the course of business. A significant benefit of branding is its capability of turning students into university ambassadors by providing a sense of belongingness or identification with the university (Wilkins et al., 2015). In the present day marketing practice, brand management has become an active weapon used by firms to strengthen their competitive advantage and thus, improve the accomplishment of their prearranged objectives. According to Hamann et al. (2007), branding contributes greatly to providing security and assuring customers of the quality of products. The development of powerful brands in a market arises from consistently providing a compelling experience to customers. The experience is achieved through the distribution channels, the services on offer, physical environment, employees' behaviour and brand communication. These factors largely contribute to making the brand tangible to consumers (Abimbola & Vallaster, 2007). Having a high-quality brand is not only a prerequisite to being competitive in a market; it also enables the company that owns the brand to become attractive in the marketplace (Urde, 1994). Various studies done by scholars in private tertiary institution, has further justified the importance of brand management. According to a research done in California, Lamboy (2011) established that brand management

promotes the identity of an institution by generating positive memories and linkages with the corporate brand, hence enhancing its distinct competences. In a similar study, Pinar, et al. (2011) noted that brand management leads to an increase in universities' enrollment of students. A strong brand for a university will make new students very attractive and this will also increase retention rate. Brand management engagement contributes to creating clearer and reliable image in customer mind which gradually, results in increased attraction towards an organization's offering. In the long run, such practice influences consumers' judgment towards the brand (Stephen, Justus, Mary and Joseph 2019). The brand of the university is a manifestation of the appearance of the institution and reflects the capacity of the institution to satisfy student needs, build trust and assist the institution in the recruitment process. When someone mentions the name of the university, the name will give associations, emotions and a good image.

### **Challenges of Brand Management**

An exploratory study of various literatures states that, challenges in university branding are different from commercial branding related to cultural issues, branding concepts, frameworks and brands architecture. According to Aaker and Joachimsthaler (as cited in Chikwe, 2018) challenges faced by brand managers in constructing a brand are: to get the brand to be noticed, to be remembered, to change perceptions, to strengthen attitudes, and to create a deep relationship with the customers. No matter how a brand might be strong at a given point in time, it can be vulnerably destroyed as a result of inadequate brand management (Keller, 2013). Building and maintaining brands of Higher Education Institution sector is very challenging. Activities that focus on commercial aspects such as branding are inherently difficult for universities if there is no need to build relevant linking departments that do not have commercial objectives. Equally, articulating real differences is often a challenge (Brookes, 2003). L'oreal (as cited in Poojitha, 2017) stated the challenges of brand management to be: Complex, expensive to design, difficult to maintain, difficult and expensive to change. Similarly, Kotler and Fox, (in Sufrin, 2020) highlighted the challenges to include: **Time and energy consuming**; as it takes a deep understanding of an organization target market. Brand Management been the relationship with the target audience thus the need to nurture and maintain it. **Inability to control audience reaction to the brand**; it is often difficult to control audience perspective toward a brand. Successful brand management requires strategy, research and analysis to not only cultivate positive brand equity, but sustain it. However, an organization can learn from the responses of audiences to improve their offerings, stay ahead of potential issues, and improve the brand reputation in an honest and authentic way. **Lack of clarity**; this involves the inability of the brand to clearly differentiate itself from other brands/competitors. This is a key challenge in brand management being faced by brand managers. They find it difficult to offer unique value/services to their customers. It is believed that understanding customer needs is an essential part of creating a strong brand image and reputation. **Inability to maintain a strong brand strategy**; without this in place, it becomes difficult to effectively management a brand over a long period of time, which includes defining the brands target audience, creating a unique brand positioning, and developing a consistent brand message. Developing and executing marketing strategies is amidst challenges faced by brand manager. All of these amongst many others have been seen to be the challenges confronting brand management faced by brand managers.

### **Brand Management Strategies/process**

Brand management strategy involves the design and implementation of marketing programmes and activities to build and measure brand equity. It is the adept inclusion of techniques where a brand choses and measures a suitable branding strategy to gain brand recognition to beat competitors and become successful. Neither type of branding strategy is better than the other; rather suitability of the branding strategy depends on the matching of the branding strategy with the characteristics of the offering. Adopting the right brand management strategy by an organization will help create awareness, retention and acceptability of the organization with its customers. It will help promote trust between the consumers and its brand, which will ultimately lead to value perception and brand loyalty. According to Keller (2013), a Brand Management Process has four main steps: Identify and Establish Brand Positioning and Values, Designing and implementing brand marketing programs, Measuring and interpreting brand performance, and growing and sustaining brand equity.

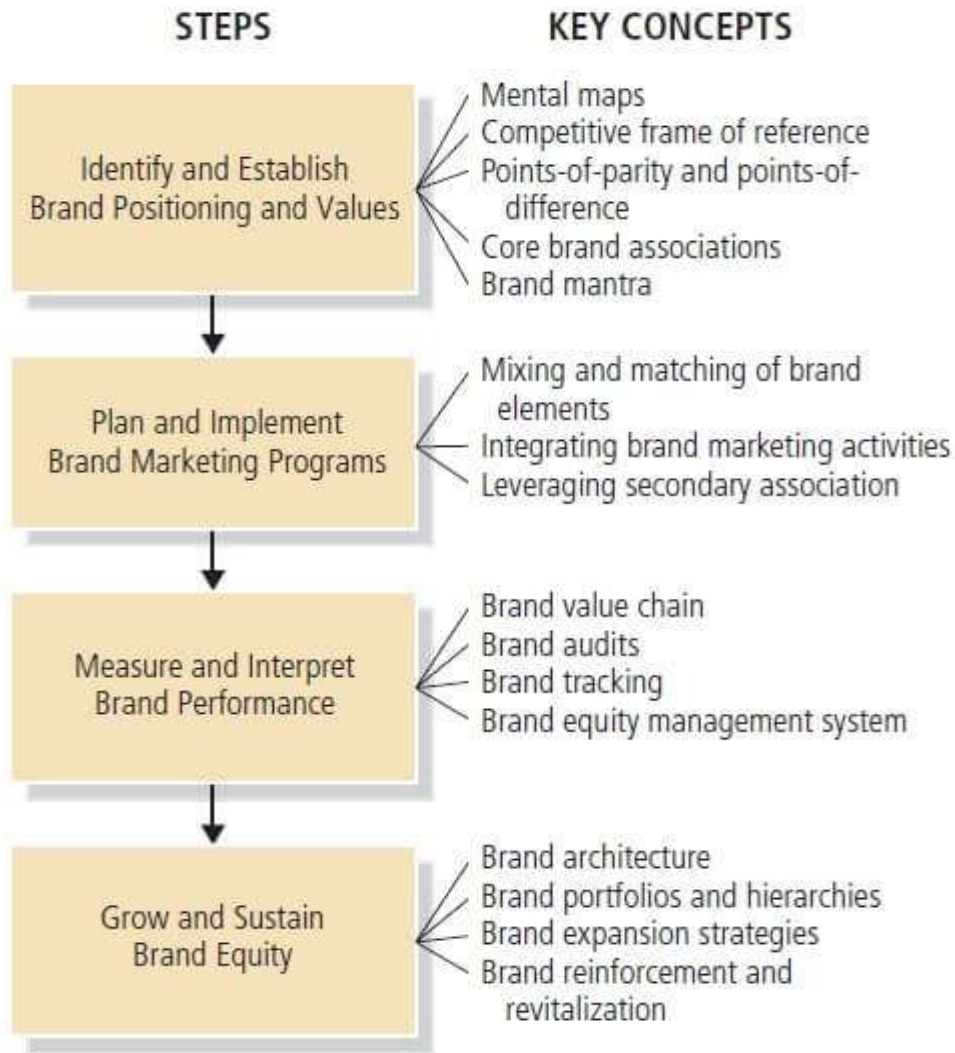


Figure 1: *Strategic Brand Management Process*

Source: <https://www.geektonight.com/4-steps-strategic-brand-management-process/>

Jamie M. (2022) on the other hand noted that there are five (5) strategies in building a university brand. They include:

1. **Integrate mission with messaging** - A school's mission statement and values are the foundation of the brand. The mission establishes the brand's identity, which guides a school's strategic messaging. This can further drive messaging for other key marketing pieces, including: Digital and print advertisements, social media copy, Headlines on posters, and emails
2. **Develop strategic value propositions** - A value proposition is a statement that communicates a school's benefits to a specific audience subset. Value propositions can strengthen college branding by emphasizing a program's unique offerings—and ensuring messaging is as strategic as possible. Value propositions are research-based and tailored to students' needs, interests and preferences. Student personas, which profile different types of students, are a good place to start.
3. **Establish a distinctive voice and tone** - A school's voice and tone also convey the brand's personality. Voice is how messages are consistently expressed; tone adapts voice to the media, such as social media or email, to convey different attitudes. A strong, consistent voice helps differentiate the brand and form an impression. Voice and tone can shape a brand by impacting how a school is perceived.

4. **Create a strong visual identity** - A visual identity is how a brand is represented graphically. Many mistakenly assume visual identity as “the brand,” in and of itself, while it’s merely one component of a larger whole. Your visual identity combines several graphic elements to tell your brand’s story: Logo, Color palette, Typography, and Photography. Logo and colors are the foundation of visual identity, which should reflect overall brand personality and be easy to apply across various media. Typography complements logo and color by determining how text appears graphically. On-brand photography is especially important, as much of a brand’s story is told through images. Additional photography tips include: Use a consistent, cohesive visual style, ensure imagery is high quality and high resolution, and be mindful of inclusive representation.
5. **Create a comprehensive style guide** - Inconsistent experiences and messages undermine the brand’s effectiveness. So, consistency across touch points is crucial for college branding. A college brand style guide helps ensure uniform branding. The style guide provides stakeholders with resources to apply consistent branding practices, such as logos, typeface names, and voice best practices.

As university brand keeps evolving, it therefore becomes eminent that universities schedule a routine content audit to evaluate competitors’ messaging and visual identities, research community perceptions, and keep building the brand. Effective brand management requires a strategic plan, including clear brand guidelines, as well as alignment as a company on the organizations desired brand identity. This is crucial to the survival of any organization as it looks forward to appealing to an ever increasing and diversified public, customer or audience.

### University Branding

Effective university branding goes far beyond a logo, work mark or catchphrase; it is the story being told about an institution, the distillation of its most prominent value, characteristics, and its identity as a place of learning. According to Surfin (2020), the brand of the university is a manifestation of the appearance of the institution and reflects the capacity of the institution to satisfy student needs, build trust and can assist the institution in the recruitment process. This then implies that a strong brand for a university will make new students very attractive and this will also increase retention rates. Branding of universities as a recent marketing tool aims to attract, engage, and retain students and position universities (Wilson & Elliot, 2016; Sultan & Wong, 2014). As a result, university administrators have realized that relying only on external marketing and branding efforts are not sufficient strategies for building strong university brands and brand equity (Pinar et al., 2014), so they are turning to branding efforts as the relatively simple promotional approaches of the past no longer seem to work. Ng and Forbes (2009) assert that the focal point of university branding is the learning experience as a part of core value-creation. Universities being solely a service organization, depends on their distinct service elements to differentiate themselves from their competitors. As such, brand managers of higher educational institution undertake various activities to enhance the institutions brand equity. In any business, customers trust strong brand and the educational sector is not different. Branding requires a long process, with the aim of increasing brand knowledge, favorability and sales over time. Universities all over the world continuously thrive to build their reputation in order to make it a centre of attention/attraction. Thus, due to rightful positioning, branding has become important for private universities in the market place. Ivy (2008) identifies seven distinct factors that students find important in the selection of a university. The factors are the programme (choice of majors, electives), prominence (reputation), price (tuition), prospectus (communication through direct mail), people (interactions with faculty, staff, and other students), promotion (publicity and e-media), and premiums (mixture of various offerings). Hence, other studies focused on the importance of facilities, the importance of emphasizing people (i.e. faculty, staff, others. In the same vein with respect to brand positioning, academic instruction and learning environment, campus life, reputation, and career prospects for graduates has been identified to be the most salient dimensions in higher education. A university brand is a perception or emotion that is maintained by consumers or the perspective of consumers based on their experience with the university.

### Methodology

The method of the study is qualitative which focuses on interview (semi structured), and the population of the study comprises management staff and non-teaching senior staff of Bingham University. A total number of thirty (30) staff members were purposively selected out of the total population of management staff and none teaching senior staff using the purposive sampling method. The in-depth interview targeted senior management staff of the university so as to get a better idea of their perception, expectation and beliefs about the effects of branding and promotional strategy on their selection process. An interview guide with structured questions was used to guide the interview and follow up questions were asked for clarification where necessary. Face-to-face method was utilized in administering the interviews. Each interview section lasted for maximum 45 minutes and all conducted within April, 2023.



**Data presentation and Analysis**

**Table 1**

Demographic data of participant

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
23 – 34	3	10
35 – 44	11	36
45 – 55	10	33
55 and above	6	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	19	63
Female	11	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Years of experience</b>		
5 – 10	8	27
11 – 15	10	33
16 – 20	9	30
21 – 25	1	3
26 and above	2	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Qualification</b>		
B.Sc.	9	30
M.Sc.	17	57
Ph.D.	3	10
Professor	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

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**Source: Field Survey, 2023**

Table 1, shows the demographic analysis of the interviewees, comprising their age, gender, years of working experience, and educational qualification. 10% of the interviewees are within the age of 25-34, depicting the minority, while 36% of the interviewees constitutes majority within the age bracket of 35-44. Majority of the participants are male constituting 63% of the whole participant. Majority of the participants have a work experience that falls between 11-15years constituting 10 (33%) of the entire participants. Only one (1) participant’s work experience falls between 21-25years constituting 3% which is the least. Also as seen in the table, majority of the interviewees are Master degree holders constituting 57% of the entire interviewee. 9 of the participants are B.Sc. degree holders; 3 are Ph.D. holders, while 1 of the participants is a professor constituting 3% which formed the least.

The interview revealed the interviewees disposition on brand management approaches in Bingham University.

### **R01. Awareness on BHU brand management strategies**

The first objective of the study is to identify the strategies for brand management in Bingham University. In order to address this objective, respondents were asked about their knowledge on brand management, if the University has a brand management unit, whether the university employs brand management strategies in its operations, to indicate the university's brand approach, how familiar they are to the brand approach, and to state which of the brand approach is most suitable for the university. Responses from the interviewees informed that they have a good knowledge of brand management and that the University has a brand management unit. The interviewees also affirmed that the university employs brand management strategies in its operations. While asked to indicate the brand approach of the university known to them, majority indicated 'Enrolment information for student' as being the brand approach of the university known to them. Six (6) options were made available for them to choose from, which include: marketing, campaign, student's alumni day, and enrolment information for students, inaugural lectures, and opportunities for graduates, corporate social responsibility, and all of the above. Similarly, majority of the respondent asserted that they are familiar with the brand approach of the university using a Likert scale of: Very Unfamiliar, Unfamiliar, Somewhat Familiar, Familiar, and Very familiar. The interviewee's noted that there was no specific brand approach of the university that was most suitable as earlier indicated. They were of the view that all brand approaches presented were suitable for the operation of the University.

In responding to the first question, one of the interviewees, R3 expressly states,

"I believe all of the brand approaches presented are suitable for the operations of the university".

This view shows that the interviewee is fully aware of the brand management approach adopted by Bingham University. Similarly, another interviewee, R14 responded by saying

"Suitability is a relative term. I am totally of the view that all the brand approaches are suitable for the University's operations."

These views indicate that the interviewees have similar opinions about the brand management approach by Bingham University (BHU). Majority of the interviewees have the same view about the brand management approach by Bingham University, though expressed differently.

### **R02. Effectiveness of Brand Management in BHU**

The second interview question was framed to evaluate the views of the interviewees about the effectiveness of brand management in Bingham University. The interviewees were asked if Bingham University has been able to utilize brand management in its operations, how effective the engagement of brand management in Bingham University is, how Bingham University has been able managing its brand over time and what are the challenges encountered in utilizing brand management.

In responding to the aforementioned questions, the interviewees believed that the university has been able to utilize brand management in its operations and also affirmed to its effectiveness. The questions were designed to obtain the views of the participants about the brand management approach by BHU, such as advertising, marketing, corporate identity, public relations, product designs, and customer support; in order to determine ways in which the University has been managing its brand over time. In responding to this, the interviewees were of the view that, advertising has been used by the university mainly to manage its brand over the years.

### **R03. Challenges of utilizing Brand Management in BHU**

In stating the challenges encountered by the University in utilizing brand management approach, different responses were given by the interviewees. One of the participants R5 opines that:

"the cost of brand management against limited resources, increasing competition and harmful use of social media by students" are some of the challenges being faced by the University in its brand management.

Similarly, another interviewee R8 affirms that,

"Building a digital strategy, building your own brand internally, and maintaining brand relevance could pose huge challenge in brand management".

Furthermore, interviewee R23 expresses the challenge of trust by customers and consumers stating that,

“the challenge of making your audience to believe in your brand as the best among competitors”.

Speaking further on the challenges Interviewee R27 stated that:

“One of the major challenges is maintaining relevance which is highly associated likely with service quality decrease”.

Other challenges mentioned by the interviewees includes: Inability to control how the audience perceives the brand (audience control over brand), Inadequate funding on the part of the university been channeled to its brand management, Lack of orientation for staff on brand management, Inability to maintain a strong brand management positioning, Inappropriate use of the right communication channel, Change in technology, and building internal brand. The implication of this is that, challenges exist in brand management and that such challenges are peculiar to each organization and the approach adopted.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The main objective of this study is to investigate the brand management process in private tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. The study adopts Bingham University as the private institution of higher learning for the investigation. Findings from the study indicate that majority of the interviewees have a good knowledge about brand management. The study also reveals that Bingham University has a brand management unit (though not robust) and that it employs brand management in its operations.

The first specific objective of the study was to identify the strategies for brand management in Bingham University. Data analysis shows that enrolment information for students is the main brand approach of the University and that the participants are familiar with the brand approach. The investigation also reveals that apart from the mainly used brand approach by the University, other brand approaches can be incorporated as well for effective result. The participants were mostly of the view that all brand approaches are suitable for the university’s operation as there is no one approach that is most suitable.

These findings agree with that of Surfin (2020), who posits that managing a brand of university is a manifestation of the appearance of the institution and reflects the capacity of the institution to satisfy student needs, build trust and can assist the institution in the recruitment process. However, the findings disagree with those of Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2018) who argue that, challenges are bound to occur while Brand Managers construct and apply a brand awareness campaign. Interestingly, the findings confirm to theoretical postulations that a clear way to design a branding strategy is to align with the brand mission (Brand Prism Model). The implication of these findings is that providing the right information to the right people or target audience has a significant effect on the brand awareness and management, and helps to further boost the confidence of customers, consumers or the publics of institutions of higher learning.

The second objective of the study was to find out the effectiveness of brand management strategies in Bingham University. Findings show that engagement of brand management has been effective, with quite a large number of the participant affirming to it. It also indicates that Bingham University has been able to manage its brand over the years with advertising been the major use and Public Relations been a subsidiary use. These findings are in tandem with Wilson & Elliot (2016) and Sultan & Wong (2014) who assert that branding of universities is a recent marketing tool aimed to attract, engage, and retain students and position the institution. The findings also confirm theoretical assumptions that in order to build a strong brand, you must shape how customers think and feel about your product. You have to build the right type of experiences around your brand, so that customers have specific, positive thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions about it. Therefore, advertising and public relations should form the core of the strategies for branding Bingham University because they help to position the Institution in the scale of preference in the minds of its publics.

The third objective of the study was to ascertain the challenges being encountered in the process of utilizing brand management. Findings from the study identify time, inability to control audience reaction to the brand, lack of clarity, and inability to maintain a strong brand strategy as some of the challenges faced by brand awareness managers. These findings agree with Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2018) and Kotler and Fox, (2020) who ascertain some of the challenges faced by brand managers to include the aforementioned.

Obviously, there is a significant level of harmony between the result of the study and the views and positions of some established researchers. The implication is that no matter how a brand might be strong at a given point in time, it can be vulnerably destroyed as a result of inadequate brand management. It also shows that brand management has been utilized by Bingham University being a private tertiary institution in promoting its services which are seen

to have impacted upon its nearly two decades of existence resulting in drastic change in both brand awareness and reputation management.

### Conclusion

The broad aim of this study was to examine the brand management approach adopted by Bingham University to ascertain its effectiveness as well as challenges encountered in the implementation of the brand management plan. Using qualitative research design with interview as the research instrument for collecting data, the result of the investigation indicates that Bingham University has brand management approach as affirmed by majority of the interviewees who have a good knowledge about brand management. The outcome of the research has also shown that Bingham University has a brand management unit. In implementing the brand management plans, many media and channels of communication are being used such as digital media, online, and the traditional media. The result also confirmed that BHU encounters quite a number of challenges in brand management. The paper therefore concludes that in spite of the fact that the University utilizes brand management in its operations, there is need to improve more by having a robust brand management system in place.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends as follows:

1. There is the need for the Department of Public Affairs (DPA), Bingham University to increase brand awareness through the various digital communication platforms such as the institution's websites, emails, blogs, online and offline press releases and so on.
2. It is imperative that Bingham University should strengthen the capacity of its Public Relations Department to effectively engage advertising and public relations for the branding of the institution.
3. It is compelling for the management of Bingham University to sustain the Brand Management of the institution in order to avoid vulnerability of the institution in the face of competition from other institutions.

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