**Renaming a Higher Education Institution in Africa:**

**A Rebranding catalyst for the technological development of a country**

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**Introduction**

According to the UN Millennium Project (2005) Africa was either stagnant or retrogressing as far as technological and economic developments are concerned, yet recently has been experiencing a tremendous economic transformation (Letiche, 2010; Kapstein, 2009). The historical continent image of poverty, disease, and desperation (Maiello, 2009; Rundell, 2010; Powel et al., 2008) can mislead outside observers, opposite of the way that corporate reputation must be positively maintained (Omar et al., 2009). This incorrect continent image can dissuade foreign investment in individual countries (Nevin, 2010), and establishing a positive country brand image in Africa offers potential to attract tourists, investment and skilled workers, as well as increase exports (Fetscherin, 2010; Pappu and Quester, 2010). Thus individual African countries must project specific positive brand associations while down-playing or rebranding negative associations by first selling the brand to their own citizens and implementing changes (Collins and Gbadamosi; Willis and Moore, 2008) while maintaining vigilance against resistance by brand saboteurs (Williams and Omar, 2009; Hankinson et al., 2007; Pryor and Groosbart, 2007), which for example appears to be occurring in Nigeria (Rundell, 2010). In the effort to compete, relative to other countries, countries can be branded (Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008; Pappu and Quester, 2010), and within and outside the country can influence the perception of citizens and other people (Pitt et al., 2007). For example, the country of Ghana has been characterized as peaceful, safe, and democratic (Rundell, 2010), and is being encouraged to promote such a positive image (Nevin, 2010).

**Objective**

This paper will conceptually explore the use of the Renaming Process Model (Williams, et al 2011) as a template to survey key stakeholders regarding the renaming of the African HEI Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). In particular, we will investigate how the Motivation Drivers and Early Decision Factors at KNUST impact the eight Principles of Renaming, the extremely radical renaming timing, and the retro form of naming transition involved in this case. Additionally, an effort would be made to address coincident issues of national pride and nation-branding. Thus this work will apply the model not only to an organization renaming, rather we will investigate an organization renaming in terms of its relationship to nation branding.

**Literature Review**

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) provide a lens to view corporate brand issues as they relate to brand management and growth within service organizations. In the non-profit HEI sector marketing is a societal activity (Kotler and Levy, 1969), and a competitive market for postsecondary education has developed (Ruch, 2001; Hoxby, 2002; Dill, 2003) with multiple stakeholders (Kotler and Fox, 1985). HEIs are moving toward a model of corporatization (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Brookes, 2003; Geiger, 2004), and marketing themselves very aggressively (Ruch, 2001; Naude and Ivy, 1999). A growing body of work focuses on increased “managerialism‘ in HEI, (Mok, 1997; Meyer, 2002; Constanti and Gibbs, 2004). HEI administrators increasingly recognize the need for brand management (Williams and Omar, 2009; Chapleo, 2007; Lowrie, 2007).

**HEI Branding**

As Higher Education Institutions become more marketized, they have become increasingly promotionalized, brand building gains in importance (Toma, et al., 2005), and names become increasingly important (Finder, 2005; Morphew et al., 2001). A strong brand is also attractive to current students, and increases retention rates (Toma et al., 2005; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Sevier, 2002; Cobb, 2001). Higher Education is a service (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999) and Lowrie (2007) purports that HEI branding must pay attention to the intangibility and inseparability aspects of HE services. As a service brand HEI brands require greater emphasis on internal marketing, in part since all employees become consumer touch-points and service brands play a role in reducing the risk of intangibility (de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003; Berry, 2000). While consumers appear to some extent to value [HEI] brands less, brands seem to be essential to their social status (Hamann, et al., 2007), and Ivy (2001) recommends developing situation analysis to establish position, and enact effective strategies to present the HEI image and develop their position in the public mind.

**Renaming Definition and Drivers**

Most of the existing literature involving corporate renaming is descriptive and involves a discussion involving a corporate turnaround, from the rebranding point of view. There has not been much focus on major rebrandings involving renaming, which has a greater impact on brand equity than rebranding or repositioning alone. Between 1,000 and 2,500 companies worldwide change their names each year (Enterprise IG 2004 as quoted in Muzellec, 2005). When an institution changes its name (brand) it is offering a variation of a New-To-The-Market brand. Successful name changes necessitate that a company have a clear idea of why, and what, the results will be (Margulies, 1977). Many components comprise a brand, and the name alone does not constitute the brand (Kapferer, 2008). It signals external stakeholders that something has changed in the corporation and reflects a new direction (Dowling, 1996; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004; Daly & Moloney, 2004; Koku, 1997; Morphew, 2002). Williams & Omar (2011, p13) define renaming as “an action which changes identity as a means to alter image in order to create utility through sharing and grading.” Changing the name, which is a key symbol, sends a powerful message that old associations of value and promises are being discarded; the breaking of affiliation (Dowling,1996).

Many, if not most, of the drivers to rename an organization are the same as the drivers for rebranding and repositioning. The difference is that rebranding or repositioning keep the same name; thus they keep the same associations and brand equity built up over time. The name change, combined with the change in vision, is used to lead the change process, and highlights “where change in image – the desired future image – is used as a means of attempting to change the identity of the firm” (Kulvisaechana and Stiles, 2003, p17). A new name provides an opportunity to define new associations (Robinson & Wu, 2008; Kilic & Dursun, 2006). Yet, since the name is only a single factor in a corporate brand, perhaps the name (rename) alone does not change the corporate identity (Margulies, 1997; Melewar and Saunders, 2000).

**Background of KNUST**

The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) was originally established by a government ordinance on 6th October 1951 as the Kumasi College of Technology (Agyen-Gyasi, 2011) to provide higher education focused on science and technology, and to generally promote the technical development of Ghana. It grew quickly by adding the School of Engineering and the Department of Commerce in 1952, a Pharmacy Department, Department of General Studies, and Department of Agriculture in 1953. By 1957 the School of Architecture/Town Planning and Building was inaugurated, and in 1961 the Faculty of Science was established to teach specialized courses in Biochemistry, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics. In 1961 the Government established two independent Universities, with the Kumasi College of Technology officially becoming the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology by an Act of Parliament. The name honors Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of Ghana and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast, from 1952 to 1966. Overseeing the nation's independence from British colonial rule in 1957, he was the first prime minister and later president of Ghana. However, this name was altered during the revolution of February 24th, 1966 to become the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. Eventually the name reverted back to KNUST in March, 2000 after elections ushered in the first democratic presidential change of power in Ghana's history. (PLAN2K14).

The renaming of an HEI after renowned past and current African leaders, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Nelson Mandela is perceived to be beneficial to the institution. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Business School was part of South Africa’s vision to become the most sought after business school, and influenced the decision to associate itself with the image of hard work, integrity and sincerity of the country’s first black president (Opoku, *et al*., 2006). KNUST also has a similar vision, not only by believing that they are the best in Ghana, but by strategically increasing their reputation on the international stage. Their association with the man voted “African Personality of the Century” therefore seems plausible in achieving this intention. (<http://www.knust.edu.gh/pages/sections.php?siteid=knust&mid=14>)

In their 2005 Strategic Plan (PLAN2K14) KNUST has proposed four strategic points:

1. Position the university to ensure it serves a meaningful and relevant role
2. Determine how the founding objectives should be reinforced, refocused, or radically altered.
3. Position it as a teaching institution, and determine how it should calculate the tuition fee structure, in terms of government/student/private sector contribution,
4. Explore methods of funding diversification in order to reduce dependence on the government.

Points 3 and 4 address the issue of increasing HEI marketization, which is in agreement with the increasing need for universities worldwide to compete for students, resources and recognition.

**Methodology**

The research design is a semi-structured, qualitative, multiple-case study format that incorporates open-ended interview questions with stakeholders from KNUST and secondary research data from printed documents, web sites and outside media sources. The open ended format of the questions allows flexibility for the interviewee to digress or to emphasize particular items or themes (Kvale, 2007; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The case study method has been recognized as very useful in management research, especially in theory-building and in understanding complex phenomena (Aastrup and Halldosson, 2008; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003). The interviews will involve key members of staff in the Registry who are members of the University Council, and are custodians of the information relating to the history, vision, strategies and marketization of the University. Though there does not appear to be a single best way of doing a case study research (Piekkari, *et al.*, 2010), following ‘best practice’ guidelines, such as those given by Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) and Yin (2003) is useful. These guidelines, especially relating to the need to involve different levels of management or stakeholders to establish convergence, validity and reliability will be used in this research. Therefore apart from members of the registry, other stakeholders such as alumni will be interviewed.

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