**HEI Branding as a component of Country Branding in Ghana:**

**Renaming Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.**

**Abstract**

As Higher Education Institutions (HEI) become more marketized and increasingly promotionalized, brand building gains in intensity and names become increasingly important. This conceptual paper plans to explore the application of the Renaming Process Model (Williams, 2012) which depicts the key components that impact the organization brand renaming process, regarding the renaming of the African HEI Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). This work will apply the model not only to a service organization renaming, but will investigate it in terms of its relationship to nation branding regarding the potential to rebrand Africa such that its virtues would be widely communicated to the international community to enhance the brand equity of the continent. Additionally, the individual African country’s ability to create brand awareness, unique competitive identity and customer loyalty is crucial in today’s competitive global environment, thus the role of renaming one of its most important and visible institutions will be explored.

**Keywords**

Renaming; country branding; principles of rebranding; Africa; higher education

**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 (Kapstein, 2009; Letiche, 2010). The historical continent image of poverty, disease, and desperation (Maiello, 2009; Powel et al., 2008; Rundell, 2010) can mislead outside observers, opposite of the way that corporate reputation must be positively maintained (Omar et al., 2009). This incorrect continent image can encourage net migration of the continent’s top talent or 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). It also aids in the global competition for Higher Education students. 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 (Osei and Gbadamosi, 2011; Wills and Moore, 2008) while maintaining vigilance against resistance by brand saboteurs (Hankinson et al., 2007; Pryor and Groosbart, 2007; Williams and Omar, 2009). In the effort to compete, relative to other countries, countries can be branded and within and outside the country the country brand can influence the perception of citizens and other people (Pappu and Quester, 2010; Pitt et al., 2007; Zeugner-Roth et al., 2008). For example, the country of Ghana has been characterized as peaceful, safe and democratic and is being encouraged to promote such a positive image (Nevin, 2010; Rundell, 2010). Further, Higher education is repeatedly positioned by the international community as a central site for facilitating the skills, knowledge and expertise that are essential to economic and social development in low-income countries (Roberts, 2005; UNESCO, 1998; World Bank, 2002; Bloom *et al*, 2005; Commission for Africa, 2005).

This paper will conceptually explore the use of the Renaming Process Model (Williams, 2012) which depicts the key components that impact the renaming process a Higher Education Institution service organization follows, as a template to survey key stakeholders regarding the renaming of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana, Africa. It is critical to relate all factors of the renaming process from early factors through all eight renaming principles (Naming Criteria, Stakeholders, Heritage, Internal Marketing, Resources, Timing, and Management Team) to the strategic goals of the institution and ensure that all stakeholders, including the very critical internal stakeholders as well as the external ‘political’ stakeholders support and can clearly articulate a consistent message.

The goal of KNUST is to promote the technical development of Ghana in order to advance their citizens and build upon the general image of the country. In particular, we will investigate how the model phase of Define and Decide in conjunction with the Plan and Align phase of the renaming process model (Williams 2012) impact KNUST, given the extremely radical timing, the retro form of naming transition, and the implications of the renaming on the country brand identity efforts. Thus this work proposes to apply the model not only to an organization renaming, but 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 with multiple stakeholders (Ruch, 2001; Hoxby, 2002; Dill, 2003; Kotler and Fox, 1985). HEIs are moving toward a model of corporatization and are marketing themselves very aggressively (Brookes, 2003; Geiger, 2004; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Ruch, 2001). A growing body of work focuses on increased “managerialism‘ in HEI, (Constanti and Gibbs, 2004; Meyer, 2002), and HEI administrators increasingly recognize the need for brand management (Chapleo, 2007; Lowrie, 2007; Williams and Omar, 2009).

As Higher Education Institutions become more marketized and have become increasingly promotionalized, brand building gains in importance and names become increasingly important (Finder, 2005; Morphew et al., 2001; Toma et al., 2005). A strong brand is also attractive to current students, and increases retention rates (Cobb, 2001; Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001; Sevier, 2002; Toma et al., 2005). Higher Education is a service industry (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 (Berry, 2000; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). 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 HEI should develop a situation analysis process to establish position and enact effective strategies to present the HEI image and reputation, and develop their position in the public mind (Ivy, 2001; Sirkeci, 2011).

To develop country branding Avraham and Kelter (2008) suggest it is very important for Africans to exhibit nationalism in order to modify images of places branded as unsafe. One way is for Africans to create a system of academicians, celebrities, and sports athletes to talk about Africa and enhance the image of their country (Fetscherin and Marmier, 2010; Osei and Gbadamosi, 2011). Other methods include creation and maintenance of trust and credibility through Multi-National Corporation partnerships, sporting event hosting and sponsorship, celebrating African success stories, and general marketing communication (Andersson and Ekman, 2009; Gbadamosi, 2007; Kasanganayi, 2009; Omar et al., 2009; Rein and Shields, 2007). One method to brand the continent of Africa as a competitive force is to start creating unique competitive brands for individual African countries (Osei and Gbadamosi, 2011).

**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 rebranding involving renaming, which has a greater impact on brand equity than rebranding or repositioning alone, even though between 1,000 and 2,500 companies worldwide change their names each year (Enterprise IG 2004 as quoted in Muzellec, 2005). Many components comprise a brand, and the name alone does not constitute the brand (Kapferer, 2008), nor does changing the name (rename) alone change the corporate identity (Margulies, 1997; Melewar and Saunders, 2000). Successful name changes necessitate that a company have a clear idea of why, and what, the results will be (Margulies, 1977). Changing the name, which is a key symbol, sends a powerful signal to external to external stakeholders that old associations of value and promises are being discarded and redefined; something has changed in the corporation and reflects a new direction (Daly & Moloney, 2004; Dowling, 1996; Kilic & Dursun, 2006; Koku, 1997; Morphew, 2002; Robinson & Wu, 2008; Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). Williams & Omar (2011, p13) define renaming as “an action which changes identity as a means to alter image in order to create utility through the sharing of names that have been learned and graded.” Many of the drivers to rename an organization are the same as the drivers for rebranding and repositioning. The difference is that rebranding or repositioning keeps the same name; thus they generally keep the same associations and brand equity built up over time, yet modifies those brand meanings. The name change, combined with the change in vision, is used to lead the change process (Kulvisaechana and Stiles, 2003; Williams and Omar 2009).

There is a lack of literature regarding higher education branding and renaming (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawanda 2007; Toma et al., 2005; Williams and Omar, 2009), renaming (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006; Williams 2012), and (re)branding Africa (Anholt, 2007; Osei and Gbadamosi 2011), which this investigation will address.

**Methodology**

The research design is a semi-structured, qualitative case study format that incorporates a set of 21 open-ended interview questions with stakeholders from KNUST along with secondary research data from printed documents, web sites and outside media sources. The open-ended format of the questions allow flexibility for the interviewee to digress or to emphasize particular items or themes (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Kvale, 2007). The questionnaire will be adapted from the U.S. version, and piloted to eliminate any uncertainty (Kvale 2007). 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 the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Registrar, College Provosts, key members of staff in the Registry, and 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 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. While there is no figure for the number of qualitative interviews to conduct before theoretical saturation occurs (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) the study has a goal to generate a total recommended by Thomson (2011). Therefore apart from KNUST employees, other stakeholders such as alumni will be interviewed.

**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. The Kumasi College of Technology now KNUST was the second institution of higher learning established in the country. It grew quickly by adding the School of Engineering and the Department of Commerce in 1952, and 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 Nkruah, who from 1952 -1966 was the leader of Ghana and its predecessor state, the Gold Coast. Overseeing the nation's independence from British colonial rule in 1957, he was the first prime minister and later president of Ghana. However, this HEI 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 naming 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 is 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 university 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. (KNUST.edu)

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

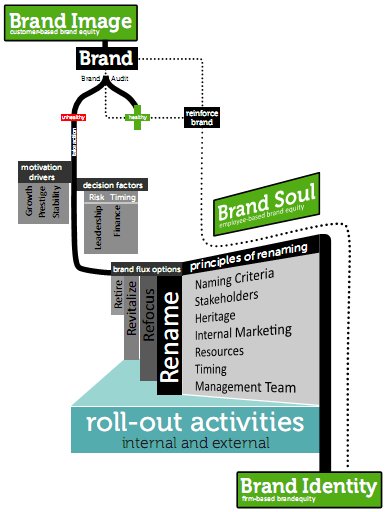
1. Position the university to ensure it serves a meaningful and relevant role.
2. Determine how founding objectives should be reinforced, refocused, or radically altered.
3. Position it as a teaching institution, and determine how it should calculate the tuition fee structure, in terms of government/student/private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

**Preliminary Findings**

Points 3 and 4 of KNUST’s 2005 Strategic Plan address the issue of increasing HEI marketization (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawanda 2007; Williams 2012) which is in agreement with the increasing need for universities worldwide to compete for students, resources and recognition. This view is also reinforced by Edu-Buandoh (2011), who conducted discourse analysis of the aims, objectives and visions of public universities in Ghana, including KNUST, as contained in these universities’ strategy documents. The results confirmed that there is a significant shift from the traditional academic discourse to marketization discourse. She continued that the changes were to portray KNUST, and the other public universities as corporate bodies in a business marketplace. These were in response to the Ghana government directive that each of the three main public universities, namely KNUST, University of Ghana and University of Cape Coast should issue a Corporate Strategic Plan (Edu-Buandoh, 2011: 86).

The renaming of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology is somewhat unique given that it was not specifically a result of actions taken in light of an unhealthy brand audit, as the Renaming Process Model suggests (Fig. 1). Rather the renaming was an action to return to an earlier name (prior to its change during the country’s revolution). In this sense it has a stronger motivation relevant to the nation brand (Kwame was Ghana’s first President) rather than to the HEI brand. However, it has been stated that the constant naming and renaming of KNUST confirms the power embedded in naming (Edu-Buandoh, 2011).

Figure 1. Renaming Process Model (Williams, 2012)



The motivation drivers, in as much as the renaming replaced the name back to what it was prior to the revolution, signified from a nation brand point of view a return to stability. The early decision factors are similarly more strongly influenced. The timing and risk factors involved with the renaming appear muted. Since the key driver was the change of government power, there was little need to analyze the decision factors, and the decision was quickly made. Therefore we will proceed to a preliminary review of the 8 Principles of Renaming.

There did not seem to be any need to consider many of the principles in this renaming, such as Stakeholders, Internal Marketing (other than informative), Resources, Team Management, and Detailed Rollout. Timing was not really a factor, except that it was only possible to rename after the revolution, and then it was done fairly quickly. In this case the Naming Criteria was not an issue, given that it was a retro substitution situation (Williams 2012). The name choice did, however, send a powerful signal that the HEI renaming was supporting the rejection of the earlier revolution. Heritage, however, was a key factor in the KNUST renaming decision and process, given the selection of Kwame Nkrumah.

**Summary and conclusion**

Review of the existing literature indicates that the image of Africa as a continent is constantly being negatively being portrayed with characterisation that revolves around issues like underdevelopment, poverty, famine and corruption. Consequently, this negative reputation has not been very helpful for the brand “Africa” in relation to attracting foreign investments in the continent, nor in stopping the ‘brain drain’, let alone attracting university students or faculty. There is a need to espouse potentials by rebranding Africa such that these virtues would be widely communicated to the international community to enhance the brand equity of the continent, and of major institutions within Africa. Furthermore, the individual African country’s ability to create brand awareness, unique competitive identity and customer loyalty is crucial in the competitive global environment.

In order to help promote science and technology in the country of Ghana, the case of renaming the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) is an example of the conclusion that repositioning or rebranding alone is not sufficient to accomplish the identity and image goals felt necessary to address the potential of the HEI, and by association, influence the Ghana country brand. “Policy makers and employers have a high regard for the Alumni of this University [KNUST] for their good performance.” (PLAN2K14, p.9) and it has “recently embarked upon an exercise to transform itself into an efficient, contemporary, high quality national institution in science and technology that would serve as a key platform for the industrial and socio-economic development of the country”. (PLAN2K14, p.1)

**Future studies**

This article is positioned to highlight the gap in the literature on renaming Higher Education Institutions and rebranding Africa, and should also spark discussions to help understand issues relating to the global impact of an emerging Africa. Collecting relevant data from all stakeholders in various African countries to explore rebranding and renaming efforts in order to strengthen brand equity should also be explored.

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