

ABSTRACT

The thesis considers the multiple perspectives of the brand and evaluates their relevance for the development of university brand promises. It finds that contrary to existing published presumptions, there is considerable potential for the application of branding within the university context.

Qualitative data collected from four English universities, two pre-1992 universities: Durham University and The University of Manchester, and two post-1992 universities: the University of Bedfordshire and Oxford Brookes University provide empirical support for the institutional and product related categories around which university brand promises can be defined, categories brought together in the development of an Institutional and Product Dimensions Model. The thesis presents universities' own perspectives on university branding to assess the level of buy-in, resonance, and understanding of sector fit. Primary evidence is considered against a series of perspectives and models including Product Dimensions and a Differentiation Perspectives Model to identify the breadth and depth to which differentiation is actually achievable in a university environment.

Supported by an analysis of 85 English university websites, the research also identifies the 33 characteristic categories around which university brand promises are defined, characteristics brought together through the development of The Brand Promise Characteristic Model. Coupled with that finding is the risk to differentiation that high characteristic convergence around a relatively small set of characteristics presents. The development of The Characteristic Convergence Model captures the areas around which high characteristic convergence is most prevalent. While the research identifies that there is considerable potential for the development of university brand promises, it is in relation to the delivery that the challenges are most acute. The conceptualisation of the factors influencing the delivery of the brand promise identifies the unique sectoral challenges to the application and delivery of university brand promises, concepts such as delivery demarcation, visual identity flouting, jurisdictional impotency, functional irreverence, academic disparateness, subject fixation, and parochialism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Christine Parsons and Professor Paul Springer for the positive support and encouragement provided from day one. Their relaxed insightful supervision not only made this a thoroughly enjoyable and intellectually stimulating experience, but helped me realise a potential I only ever hoped was achievable.

I would like to thank Laura Bray whose support and efficiency is the backbone of the research department and whose enthusiasm is invaluable to the research experience.

My thanks to Durham University, The University of Manchester, the University of Bedfordshire, and Oxford Brookes University not only for agreeing to participate in the study, but for the enthusiasm shown for the research and making me so welcome.

Last, but by no means least, my mother for the encouragement she gave me when I was considering going to university as a mature student and again when I was considering staying on to undertake this Ph.D. Throughout she believed in me and has been a constant source of encouragement and support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT		x
Chapter One	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	The Research Purpose	1
1.2	Academic Research	2
1.3	Global Competition	2
1.4	The Brand Understanding Question	3
1.5	The Brand Application and Brand Relevance Questions	5
1.6	The Research	5
1.7	Thesis Chapter Summary	7
1.8	Use of Italics	9
Chapter Two	THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT	10
2.1	Introduction	10
2.2	Expansion and Funding of Higher Education	11
2.3	University Rankings	13
2.4	The Contextual Challenges	13
2.5	Chapter Summary	17
Chapter Three	BRAND PROMISE AND BRAND PERSPECTIVES	19
3.1	Introduction	19
3.2	The Literature Review	20
3.3	The Brand Promise	22

3.4	The Philosophical Perspective	23
3.5	The Assurance Perspective	24
3.6	The Affective and Functional Perspectives	26
3.7	The Value Perspective	27
3.8	The Essentia Perspective	27
3.9	The Implicit Perspective	28
3.10	The Connotational Perspective	30
3.11	Brand Definitions	35
3.12	Philosophical Approaches	37
3.13	Brand Conceptualisations	38
3.14	Chapter Summary	42
Chapter Four	PRODUCT-RELATED PERSPECTIVES	44
4.1	Introduction	44
4.2	Brand as Product	45
4.3	The Added Value(s) Perspective	46
4.4	Unique Added Values	48
4.5	Customers' Needs	49
4.6	Areas of Relevance for the University Brand Promise	51
4.7	Higher Education Brand Elements	53
4.8	Differentiation	54
4.9	Brand Promise Categorisation	57
4.10	Chapter Summary	58

Chapter Five	IDENTITY-RELATED PERSPECTIVES	59
5.1	Introduction	59
5.2	Brand Identity System	59
5.3	Brand Identity Prism	67
5.4	One Word Encapsulations	69
5.5	Brand Image	72
5.6	Brand Promise Categorisation	75
5.7	Chapter Summary	76
Chapter Six	EXPERIENCE-RELATED PERSPECTIVES	78
6.1	Introduction	78
6.2	Service Environment	79
6.3	The University Service Categorisation	81
6.4	Experiential Branding	81
6.5	Pleasurable Experiences	86
6.6	The Service Encounter	88
6.7	Customer Touchpoints	88
6.8	Pre-Purchase Experience	90
6.9	Internal Branding Process	92
6.10	HR Role in Internal Branding	93
6.11	Brand Ambassadors	94
6.12	Brand Promise Categorisation	94
6.13	Chapter Summary	95

Chapter Seven	CORPORATE-RELATED PERSPECTIVES	96
7.1	Introduction	96
7.2	Company Brands	96
7.3	Brand Enactment	97
7.4	Core Values	99
7.5	Vision, Image, and Culture	104
7.6	Conventions of Corporate Branding	106
7.7	Corporate Identity	109
7.8	Brand Promise Categorisation	112
7.9	Chapter Summary	112
Chapter Eight	METHODOLOGY	114
8.1	Introduction	114
8.2	Philosophical Stance	114
	8.2.1 Research Paradigms	114
	8.2.2 Postpositivist Paradigm	115
8.3	Research Approach	116
	8.3.1 Qualitative Approach	116
	8.3.2 Inductive Approach	117
8.4	Research Strategy	118
	8.4.1 Strategies of Inquiry	118
	8.4.2 Case Studies	119
8.5	Research Design	119
	8.5.1 Introduction	119
	8.5.2 Units of Analysis	120
	8.5.3 English Universities	120
	8.5.4 Categorising Universities	120
	8.5.5 Website Investigation	125
	8.5.6 Coding System	126
	8.5.7 Case Selection	126
	8.5.8 Purposive Sampling	130
	8.5.9 Final Selection Criteria	130
	8.5.10 Multiple-Case (Holistic) Design	131
	8.5.11 The Case Study Protocol	133

	8.5.12 Selection of Respondents	133
	8.5.13 Pilot Interview	136
	8.5.14 Data Collection Phases	137
	8.5.15 Semi-Structured / Unstructured Interviews	137
	8.5.16 Interview Questions	139
	8.5.17 Observations	140
	8.5.18 Documentary Evidence	141
	8.5.19 Data Analysis	143
	8.5.20 Data Analysis Software	144
	8.5.21 Coding	145
	8.5.22 Reliability, Validity, and Rigour	147
	8.5.23 Ethical Issues	148
	8.5.24 Reflection on the Methodology	149
8.6	Chapter Summary	150
Chapter Nine	DURHAM UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY	151
9.1	Introduction	151
	9.1.1 Durham University	151
9.2	The Branding Process	152
	9.2.1 The Change Drivers	152
	9.2.2 Methodological Influences	153
	9.2.3 Brand Evolution	153
	9.2.4 Engineered Brand	155
9.3	Brand Promise Terminology	158
	9.3.1 Brand Promise	158
	9.3.2 Terminological Confinement and Ambiguity	160
9.4	Brand Promise Elements	162
	9.4.1 The Defining and Characteristic Elements	162
	9.4.2 The Differentiation Element	164
	9.4.3 The Relevance and Alignment Elements	165
	9.4.4 The Realistic and Reflective Elements	167
	9.4.5 The Fusion Element	168
9.5	Brand Promise Delivery	169
	9.5.1 Resonance Factors	169
	9.5.2 Articulation Factors	171
	9.5.3 Engagement Factors	174
9.6	Chapter Summary	175

Chapter Ten	THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER CASE STUDY	177
10.1	Introduction	177
	10.1.1 The University of Manchester	177
10.2	The Branding Process	178
	10.2.1 Brand Determination	178
	10.2.2 Brand Engineering	179
10.3	The Terminological Context	184
	10.3.1 Terminological Avoidance	184
	10.3.2 Terminological Linkage	185
10.4	Brand Promise Elements	186
	10.4.1 The Defining Elements	186
	10.4.2 The Differentiation Element	188
	10.4.3 The Relevance Element	191
	10.4.4 The Characteristic and Centric Elements	191
	10.4.5 The Authenticity Element	196
	10.4.6 The Substantiation Element	196
10.5	Brand Promise Delivery	197
	10.5.1 Articulation Factors	197
	10.5.2 Integration Factors	198
	10.5.3 Cultural and Contextual Factors	201
	10.5.4 Engagement Factors	201
10.6	Chapter Summary	203
 Chapter Eleven	 UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE CASE STUDY	 206
11.1	Introduction	206
	11.1.1 University of Bedfordshire	206
11.2	The Branding Process	207
	11.2.1 Brand Evolution	207
	11.2.2 Brand Engineering	208
	11.2.3 Methodological Influences	211
11.3	Brand Promise Terminology	213
	11.3.1 Terminological Absence	213
11.4	Brand Promise Elements	215
	11.4.1 The Defining and Characteristic Elements	215
	11.4.2 The Differentiation Element	216
	11.4.3 The Relevance Element	217
	11.4.4 The Fusion Element	218
	11.4.5 The Centric Element	219

	11.4.6 The Substantiation Element	223
	11.4.7 The Truth Element	223
11.5	Brand Promise Delivery	225
	11.5.1 Articulation Factors	225
	11.5.2 Engagement Factors	225
	11.5.3 Integration Factors	227
	11.5.4 Resonance Factors	229
11.6	Chapter Summary	230
Chapter Twelve	OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY	232
12.1	Introduction	232
	12.1.1 Oxford Brookes University	232
12.2	The Branding Process	233
	12.2.1 Brand Engineering	233
	12.2.2 Brand Evolution	235
	12.2.3 Brand Refinement	236
12.3	The Terminological Context	238
	12.3.1 Terminological Absence	238
	12.3.2 Brand Resistance	240
	12.3.3 Brand Promise	242
12.4	Brand Promise Elements	243
	12.4.1 The Defining and Characteristic Elements	243
	12.4.2 The Differentiation Element	245
	12.4.3 The Centric Element	247
	12.4.4 The Relevance and Flexibility Elements	248
	12.4.5 The Factual Element	251
12.5	Brand Promise Delivery	254
	12.5.1 Articulation Factors	254
	12.5.2 Context and Cultural Factors	255
	12.5.3 Engagement Factors	256
	12.5.4 Integration Factors	258
12.6	Chapter Summary	261
Chapter Thirteen	CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS	263
13.1	Introduction	263

13.2	The Branding Process	264
	13.2.1 Introduction	264
	13.2.2 Evolved Strengths	264
	13.2.3 The Branding Processes	265
	13.2.4 The Methodological Influences	267
	13.2.5 Emphasis Refinements	268
13.3	The Terminological Context	269
	13.3.1 Introduction	269
	13.3.2 Terminological Avoidance	270
	13.3.3 The Implicit Brand Promise	275
	13.3.4 Terminological Ambiguity	275
	13.3.5 Terminological Linkage and Interchange	277
13.4	The Elements and Manifestations of the Brand Promise	279
	13.4.1 Introduction	279
	13.4.2 The Core and Secondary Defining Elements	279
	13.4.3 The Characteristic Elements	281
	13.4.4 The Differentiation Element	287
	13.4.5 The Centricity Element	293
	13.4.6 The Territorial Elements	295
	13.4.7 The Adaptive Elements	296
13.5	Brand Promise Delivery	299
	13.5.1 Introduction	299
	13.5.2 Brand Articulation	300
	13.5.3 Brand Engagement	302
	13.5.4 Brand Integration	303
	13.5.5 Brand Authenticity	305
13.6	Chapter Summary	306
Chapter Fourteen	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	308
14.1	Introduction	308
14.2	The Term Brand Promise	309
14.3	The Elements of the Brand Promise	312
14.4	Factors that Influence What the Brand Promise is	323
14.5	Factors Influential in the Delivery of the Brand Promise	326
14.6	Contributions to Knowledge	329
14.7	Relevance to Practitioners	332

14.8	Further Research and Research Limitations	334
REFERENCES		337
APPENDICES		382
A	Higher Education Branding Literature Overview	382
B	The A-Z of Brand Conceptualisations	384
C	Factors Influencing Student Choice	392
D	Elements of the University Brand	396
E	Product-Related Brand Promise Categorisation	402
F	Traits / Characteristics Comparison	403
G	Brand Identity Comparison	405
H	Identity-Related Brand Promise Categorisation	406
I	Experience-Related Brand Promise Categorisation	408
J	Corporate-Related Brand Promise Categorisation	409
K	Coding Tables	410
L	Analysis Tables	417
M	Website Elements of the Brand Promise	429
N	Request for Participation Email Letter - Universities	431
O	Interview Schedule	432
P	Advice to Respondents	436
Q	Consent Form	437
R	Interview Transcript	439
S	Differentiation Diversity - Durham	450
T	The Manchester Branding Process	452

U	Differentiation Diversity - Manchester	453
V	The Bedfordshire Branding Process	455
W	Differentiation Diversity - Bedfordshire	456
X	Differentiation Diversity – Oxford Brookes	457
Y	Branding Process Comparison Table	459
Z	Terminological Avoidance	460
AA	The Terminological Ambiguity Continuum	462
BB	The Brand Promise Terminology Web	463
CC	1 st Level Brand Promise Delivery Model	464
DD	Articulation Challengers	465
EE	Engagement Challengers	467
FF	Integration Challengers	470
GG	Authenticity Challengers	476
HH	Authenticity Enablers	481
II	Articulation Enablers	486
JJ	Engagement Enablers	491
KK	Integration Enablers	499
LL	Differentiation Scepticism	502
MM	Characteristic Dimensions	503
NN	Brand Promise Definition Model Dimensions	511

LIST OF FIGURES

3.1	The Literature Territory	21
3.2	University of Cambridge Advertisement	33
3.3	The Brand Perspectives Hierarchy	37
4.1	Augmentation Model	47

4.2	The University's Publics	50
5.1	Brand Identity System Extract	60
5.2	Dimensions of Brand Relationship Quality	65
5.3	Brand Identity Prism	68
5.4	Extraordinary – The University of South Dakota	70
5.5	Beyond – University of Pittsburgh Bradford	71
5.6	Beyond – Website Extract	72
5.7	Dimensions of Brand Knowledge	73
5.8	Benefits of Positive Customer-Based Brand Equity	74
5.9	Customer-Based Brand Equity Pyramid	75
6.1	The Servuction System Model	79
6.2	The Service Offering	80
6.3	The University Service Categorisation Model	82
6.4	The Most Important Aspects of the University Experience	83
6.5	The Customer Experience Touchpoint Chain	89
6.6	Product Attribute Continuum	90
6.7	Successful Service Brand Model	93
7.1	Defining and Enacting the Corporate Brand	98
7.2	Aspects of the Values Relationship	100
7.3	Corporate Brand Building	101
7.4	The Core Values Grid	103
7.5	Values System Alignment	105
7.6	The Six Conventions of Corporate Brand Management	107
7.7	Brand Conditioning	108
7.8	Needs Aligned Brand Promises	109
7.9	University of Oxford – Bringing the Brand to Life	111

8.1	The Web Content Pyramid	125
8.2	Case Selection Criteria	131
8.3	Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model	143
8.4	Streamlined Codes-to-Theory Model of Qualitative Inquiry	146
9.1	University College Durham (Durham Castle)	152
9.2	The Durham Branding Process	154
9.3	Durham University Benefits or Our Promise	155
9.4	The University's Logos	157
9.5	Durham University – Identity Elements	159
9.6	The Durham Difference	161
9.7	Durham Brand Promise Fusion Hierarchy	168
10.1	Oxford Road Buildings Manchester University	177
10.2	The University of Manchester – Proposition	180
10.3	The University of Manchester – Identity Elements	181
10.4	The University of Manchester – Logo	182
10.5	The Cover of the 2010 Undergraduate Prospectus	183
10.6	The University of Manchester – Proposition and Mission	187
10.7	The University of Manchester – World Ranking	187
10.8	Personality Characteristics and Prospectus Headlines	192
10.9	“Influential” – Prospectus Extract	193
10.10	“University Section” - Prospectus Extracts	194
10.11	“The Manchester Degree” – Prospectus Extract	195
10.12	Welcome Presentation Excellence Slide	200
10.13	The University of Manchester – Values	202
11.1	Bedfordshire's Luton Campus Building	206
11.2	University of Bedfordshire – Values	208

11.3	New Futures	209
11.4	University of Bedfordshire – Brand	210
11.5	University of Bedfordshire – Logo	211
11.6	University of Bedfordshire – Mission	215
11.7	Bedfordshire Business School – Putteridge Bury Campus	218
11.8	2008 Prospectus Extracts	220
11.9	2010 Undergraduate Prospectus Extract	221
11.10	2010 Undergraduate Prospectus Extract	222
11.11	Testimonial Extracts	224
11.12	Bedfordshire’s Campus Development Plans	224
11.13	University of Bedfordshire – Mission and Vision	228
12.1	Gipsy Lane Campus Building Oxford Brookes	233
12.2	Oxford Brookes University – Logo	234
12.3	Oxford Brookes University – Mission 2004	235
12.4	Oxford Brookes University – Brand Identity	237
12.5	Brookes Messages	238
12.6	“Support” Banner – Oxford Brookes University	239
12.7	The Old Brand Symbols	241
12.8	Message Combination	244
12.9	The Brookes Experience - Prospectus Extract	248
12.10	Great Learning and Teaching – Prospectus Extract	249
12.11	Testimonial Extracts	252
12.12	Back Cover – 2010 Undergraduate Prospectus	253
12.13	Space to Think – Gipsy Lane Campus Hoardings	257
12.14	Space to Think – Trees and Captions	258
13.1	The Branding Process Matrix	267

13.2	The Emphasis Refinement Model	269
13.3	Academic / Consumerist Perspectives of Students	272
13.4	Radley Yeldar – Booklet Cover	273
13.5	Radley Yeldar – Booklet Captions	273
13.6	The Terminology Integration Ladder	274
13.7	The Characteristic String	282
13.8	The Modernity Characteristic Visually	284
13.9	University of Bedfordshire – Prospectus Extract	288
13.10	University of Bedfordshire – Prospectus Extract	289
13.11	The University of Manchester – Prospectus Extract	290
13.12	The Differentiation Perspectives Model	292
13.13	The Brand Promise Centricity Continuum	294
13.14	The Brand Promise Territory Model	296
13.15	The Brand Promise Hierarchy Model	297
13.16	The Brand Promise Fusion Hierarchy Model	298
14.1	The Brand Promise Matrix	311
14.2	The Brand Promise Characteristic Model	313
14.3	The Institutional and Product Dimensions Model	315
14.4	The Characteristic Convergence Model	322
14.5	The Brand Promise Influencing Factors Model	323

LIST OF TABLES

3.1	Advertising Analysis Methods	31
3.2	Different Interpretations of What a Brand is	42
4.1	Factors Influencing Student Choice	52
5.1	Brand Personality Framework	62
5.2	The Corporate Character Scale	62

6.1	The Experiential Grid	84
8.1	The Categorisation of English Universities	121
8.2	Case Selection Table	128
8.3	Participant List	134
8.4	Documentary Evidence	142
9.1	Durham University's Personality Traits	164
9.2	Brand Management Control Styles	173
12.1	Oxford Brookes University – 2010 and 2020 Values	243