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Branding in Higher Education

Testing the Effectiveness of Corporate Visual Identity

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Abstract

Research in environmental psychology indicates that characteristics of a setting (e.g. a room) are transferred to a person in that setting. Thus, an executive office conveys social standing, intelligence, and power upon its occupant. The effect has not been investigated for other forms of implicit communication, such as Corporate Visual Identity (CVI). This research project investigates the effects of CVI upon person perception, using similar methods to those originally employed in this field. Its focus is upon CVI systems applied to universities and their effect upon lecturers associated with it. This is a live research project involving a Public University in Malaysia, the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) or Sultan Idris Education University. The main intention is to rebrand and therefore to reposition the university via a new CVI and other devices. This is a mixed methods research; qualitative methods were used during the preliminary stage to support design development of the new CVI, and later two of the CVI including traditional (heraldry) and modern logo were tested using a quantitative survey. The results indicate a positive association for heraldry in relation to perceived intelligence and trustworthiness, providing substantiation of the 'CVI Effect'.

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Signed Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of thesis. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previous published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of thesis.

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Table of Contents

i *Abstract*
ii *Acknowledgements*
iii *Signed Declaration*
iv *Table of Content*
vi *List of Abbreviations*
viii *List of Tables and Figures*

1. Introduction

002 Aim and Scope
009 Structure of the Thesis

2. Branding in Higher Education

011 Globalisation and Internationalisation in Higher Education
018 Malaysian Higher Education
031 Evolution of Brand in Higher Education
049 Summary

3. Design Context

051 Evolution of Designers' Roles
058 Initiating a Live Design Project with UPSI
062 Signalling the Designer as a Facilitator
070 Design Guidelines and Evaluation for Corporate Visual Identity
079 Summary

4. Methodology and Qualitative Enquiries

Stage 01 – Exploration Phase

081 Research Methodology
085 Triangulation in the Qualitative Research
090 Observation Method – Designers as an Active Participant
108 Summary

5. Design: Process and Outcomes

109 A Brief History of the University's Logo
110 The Logo Design Process
123 The Logo Selection
125 Summary

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

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6. Quantitative Research

Stage 02 – Validation Phase

126 Research Question and Additional Research Questions
132 Quantitative Survey Method
138 Ethical Considerations
139 Summary

7. Pilot Research – Paper-based Survey

140 Respondent, Questionnaire, Procedure, and Analysis
152 Interpretation of the Results
153 Summary

8. Actual Research – Online Survey

155 Online Survey
156 Respondent, Procedure, and Analysis
170 Interpretation of the Results
175 Summary

9. Discussions and Conclusion

176 Summary of the Research Findings
179 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research
180 Managerial Implication
181 Conclusion

182 *Bibliography*
193 *Appendices*

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

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List of Abbreviations

9MP	9th Malaysia Plan
AKePT	Akedemi Kepimpinan Pengajian Tinggi (Higher Education Leadership Academy)
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ARES	Academic Reputation Survey
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BOD	Board of Directors
CVI	Corporate Visual Identity
DMI	Design Management Institute
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EM	Expectation-Maximisation
FFM	Five Factor Model
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GLC	Government Link Company
HE	Higher Education
HEFC	Higher Education Funding Council, UK
ICHEM	International Conference of Higher Education Marketing
IP	Internet Protocol
MCA	Malaysian Chinese Association
MDS	Multi Dimensional Scaling
MIC	Malaysian Indian Congress
MoE	Ministry of Education, Malaysia
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia
MOSTI	Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, Malaysia
MQA	Malaysian Qualification Agency
MSC	Multimedia Super Corridor
NEAC	National Economic Advisory Council
NVP	National Vision Policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAL	Phase Alternating Line
PI	Performance Indicator
PTPTN	Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (National Higher Education Fund Corporation)
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise, UK
R&D	Research and Development
SHJT	Shanghai Jiao Thong
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
RRP	Recommended Retail Price

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RSE	Researchers, Scientists, and Engineers
RU	Research University
THE	Times Higher Education
UM	University of Malaya, Malaysia
UKM	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
	(National University of Malaysia)
UTM	University of Teknologi Malaysia
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UPM	Universiti Putra Malaysia
	(Putra University, Malaysia)
UPSI	Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris
	(Also refers to Sultan Idris Education University or SIEU)
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
USM	University of Science Malaysia
USP	Unique Selling Proposition
SIEU	Sultan Idris Education University
VC	Vice Chancellor
WWW	World Wide Web

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List of Tables

2.1	Timeline for related policies and events in Malaysian education and HE	019
3.1	UPSI current and future main niche	059
4.1	Sorting and Ranking tools for Semi-Structured Interview	089
7.1	Questionnaire	141
7.2	Stimuli with eight different combinations of independent variables	142
7.3	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Total Variance Explained	145
7.4	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Factor Matrix	147
7.5	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Descriptive Statistic of 'HE Reputation' scale	147
7.6	Mixed ANOVA results, significant effects and interactions	148
8.1	Questionnaire	157
8.2	Stimuli with eight different combinations of independent variables	158
8.3	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Total Variance Explained	161
8.4	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Factor Matrix	163
8.5	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Descriptive Statistic of 'HE Reputation' scale	164
8.6	ANOVA results, significant effects and interactions	165
8.7	ANOVA results, significant effects and interactions for the male lecturer	172

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

List of Figures

1.1	Research background and its clusters	004
2.1	Result of the overall respondent perceptions towards Malaysian Public Universities	029
2.2	Result of the overall respondent perceptions towards research quality of the Malaysian Public Universities	029
2.3	The evolution in consumer demand	033
2.4	Model of meaning transfer	036
2.5	Brand Personality framework	038
2.6	Model for service branding	042
3.1	Comparison between two operational models for the designer	052
3.2	The evolutionary roles of the designers	053
3.3	Levels in design practice	054
3.4	UPSI strategic planning proposal for effective external communication	063
3.5	A comparison of the 'look and feel' between universities' websites (i. Harvard; ii. Pittsburgh; iii. Swinburne; iv. UPSI)	066
3.6	User exploring universities' virtual environment	066

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

3.7	An example of THE magazine cover and insert	067
3.8	Model for university corporate identity formation	068
3.9	The corporate identity model	071
3.10	Six possible combination of motive/statement for identification	072
3.11	BP old green shield and the new Helios logo	073
3.12	Left – one of the many Starbucks franchise store. Right – imitation of the Starbucks brand, 'Setarbak' found at a rural area called Alor Setar, Malaysia	074
3.13	A Louis Vuitton handbag and one of the many Louis Vuitton franchise fashion boutiques	076
3.14	University logos on t-shirts as an act of social identification and prestige	077
3.15	Coca-cola product and its international brand image	078
4.1	Research strategy using mixed methods research	084
4.2	Methodological triangulation for the qualitative research	086
4.3	Visual audit from existing external CVI applications	094
4.4	Visual audit from everyday events and people in UPSI	095
4.5	Visual audit from university promotional and corporate communication materials	096
4.6	Visual audit of 200 logos of the Times Higher Education (THE) – World Universities Rankings in 2007	097
4.7	Visual audit of logos of Malaysian Public Universities	097
4.8	Model for Perceptual Mapping	101
4.9	Logo Mapping	102
4.10	Logo Mapping and its clusters	102
4.11	Logo Mapping and the repositioning task	104
4.12	The Mood Board containing brand values	106
4.13	The Mood Board visualising personas	106
4.14	The Mood Board for UPSIs logo design	107
5.1	Logo evolution for UPSI from the establishment in 1922 to 2009	109
5.2	Example of pencil sketches photographed from designer's workbook	111
5.3	Example of a logo constructed using Adobe Illustrator CS3 software	112
5.4	Exploring the use of typeface	113
5.5	Examples taken from the semi-comprehensive sketches	113
5.6	30 selected semi-comprehensive logos design	114
5.7	Examples of logo variations in the comprehensive stage	117
5.8	Examples of logo variations in the comprehensive stage	117
5.9	Examples of logo variations in the comprehensive stage	118
5.10	Examples of logo variations in the comprehensive stage	118
5.11	Examples of logo variations in the comprehensive stage	118
5.12	The brand values analysis technique	124
5.13	Using Logo Mapping to indicate the new logo positioning for UPSI	124
6.1	Mixed methods research strategy	126
6.2	Examples of modernised heraldry for university logos	127
6.3	THE–QS four pillars of world-class universities	134

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

6.4	Room Effect method using superimposed photographs	136
6.5	Two newly proposed logos/logotypes for SIEU	137
6.6	Sample of Asian male and female photos for human model selection	138
7.1	Stimuli with eight different combinations of independent variables	143
7.2	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Scree Plot	146
7.3	Repeated Measures output for HE Reputation – Logo and Name for Gender	150
7.4	Repeated Measures output for Intelligent – Logo and Name	150
7.5	Repeated Measures output for Attractive – Logo and Gender	151
8.1	Respondents' country of origins and percentages	156
8.2	Stimuli with eight different combinations of independent variables	159
8.3	Example of the survey's pop-up window	160
8.4	Exploratory Factor Analysis output, Scree Plot	162
8.5	Univariate ANOVA output for HE Reputation – Logo	166
8.6	Univariate ANOVA output for HE Reputation – Name	166
8.7	Univariate ANOVA output for Attractive – Name and Logo	167
8.8	Univariate ANOVA output for Attractive – Gender	167
8.9	Univariate ANOVA output for Intelligent – Name and Logo	168
8.10	Univariate ANOVA output for Intelligent – Gender and Logo	168
8.11	Univariate ANOVA output for Trustworthy – Gender and Logo	169
8.12	Univariate ANOVA output for Trustworthy – Name	169
8.13	Univariate ANOVA output for HE Reputation at Male – Logo	173
8.14	Univariate ANOVA output for Intelligent at Male – Logo	173
8.15	Univariate ANOVA output for Trustworthy at Male – Logo	174
8.16	Univariate ANOVA output for Trustworthy at Male – Name	174

05-4506832 pustaka.upsi.edu.my Perpustakaan Tuanku Bainun Kampus Sultan Abdul Jalil Shah PustakaTBainun ptbupsi

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Higher Education (HE) is increasingly in demand. According to UNESCO figures, in 2006, globalisation and student mobility led to over 2.5 million students receiving tertiary education outside of their home countries. The Malaysian Government has the ambition to become a regional education hub, aiming to have 100 thousand international students by 2010. To achieve this vision, the government has taken all the necessary actions to prepare the groundwork for Malaysian universities to improve their education quality and services by establishing several new divisions within the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) and through strategic planning and increasing the annual budget. These new divisions include the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA), to monitor the standard of qualifications and accreditations for HE providers, and Akedemi Kepimpinan Pengajian Tinggi (AKePT) or Higher Education Leadership Academy, to oversee issues in HE including policies, talent management, leadership, governance, and innovation. Branding is another important issue that needs to be addressed, along with marketing and promotion strategy to ensure the message reaches its target.

Current literature indicates branding in HE is still in its nascent stages. Despite many discussions about the brand in the corporate and commercial world, non-profit, and service oriented organisations are somehow being left behind. However, recent studies show a significantly increasing range of literature on implementing branding into non-profit and service oriented organisations (Chiagouris 2005), the charity sector (Stride & Lee 2007), clinics and health care (Berry & Seltman 2007), museums (Caldwell & Coshall 2002), commercial and non-profit partnerships and alliances (Dickson & Baker 2007), and branding labour-intensive services (Berry & Lampo 2004). Hayes (2007) believes that the same trends will eventually happen to HE providers.

While Corporate Visual Identity (CVI) appears to be one of the key components to rebrand HE institutions (Baker & Balmer 1997), there are many issues within this area that need more attention from researchers. CVI is the most distinct and recognisable way a company presents itself. CVI has been defined as the "way in which an organisation uses logos, type styles, nomenclature [and] architecture and interior design etc. in order to communicate its corporate philosophy and personality" (Balmer 1995 p. 26). CVI elements include name, tag line, and

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graphics, incorporating logo and/or logotype, typeface, colour, image including static and non-static, as well as to some extent, aspects beyond the visual sense, such as ambiance. These are applied to corporate facilities, media advertising, and various operational areas and devices.

Rosson & Brooks (2004) demonstrate the relationship between Corporate Identity (CI), image and reputation. Identity is how a company thinks and what it would like to be projected about itself. In contrast, image describes how others perceive a company. One of the issues with the identity and the image of a company is that these are not always aligned, and sometimes conflict with each other. Reputation involves the collective perception of people about a company's actions and achievements. A positive reputation is also known as an intangible asset or brand equity (Aaker 1991). For example, Coca-Cola's brand asset is believed to be worth US$80 billion. Temple (2006) argues that brand is all about perception, and that branding in HE would be better off being labelled as reputation management. However, in this thesis, the author indicates that reputation management is one of the essential elements in the branding, along with CVI. This argument is also supported by other empirical studies that show a close relationship between CVI and reputation (Alessandri, Yang & Kinsey 2006; Bosch, Jong & Elving 2005).

This research project involves a Public University in Malaysia, the Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI), otherwise known as Sultan Idris Education University. The intention is to rebrand and therefore to reposition the university, via a new CVI plus other devices. Moreover, this study provides an alternative way of evaluating the image of a university, by exploring the effect a CVI has upon a person associated with that university. Traditionally, the means for evaluating a CVI focus on the elements used in designing the CVI such as name, tag line, and graphics.

Aim and Scope of the Research

This research is derived from a live project situated in Malaysian Public HE. However, during the preliminary research similar concerns were found to be relevant to HE global institutions. There are clear indications that HE institutions worldwide, including the subject of this study in Malaysia, are aggressively responding to the same motivations and moving towards improving their performance in terms of academic scholarship, research and development, infrastructure and facility, as well as funding and sponsorship. Consequently, areas like marketing and promotion are now becoming more popular among HE providers to ensure that they are to be seen as 'good', not only by stakeholders such as governments and the public, but also within the potential international market.

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Figure 1.1: Research background and research clusters

Supported by the strategic plan document produced by the Vice Chancellor (VC) of UPSI in 2007, this research is intended to improve general perceptions of the university by:

I) Identifying the most effective practices in marketing and branding in HE from other countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia that embrace high standards of quality.

II) Identifying some of the key factors that influence human perception of a university's image and reputation.

III) Proposing possible methods for measuring the effectiveness of a university's CVI in order to form a positive impression.

As a live research project, this challenge creates an opportunity for designers to actively participate in terms of both strategy and design. This research will first study the content of the strategic planning documents of UPSI and extend these by making recommendations in terms of repositioning and branding to the VC and Board of Directors (BOD), and later design a new CVI as a tool to communicate the changes. The following discussions will give explanation to important matters, which are to be considered in this research:

Significance to knowledge: Both, the Malaysian Government and UPSI have recently produced their own strategic plans as a way forward to secure excellence in HE and to compete with current global changes. As a starting point, a new division within

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the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) was established in 2008, the Akedemi Kepimpinan Pengajian Tinggi (AKePT) or Higher Education Leadership Academy. The focus of this division is to provide advice on the formulation of HE policies, dealing with talent management, leadership, governance, and innovation. One of the key interests of this new division is to reposition Malaysian HE through branding. Implementation of these strategic plans, however, may bring problems in communication, perception, and attitude, both within Malaysian universities and externally. This study will not only provide crucial insight for the governance of HE institutions within Malaysia, but also for the Malaysian Government in reconsidering their future plans for promoting national HE. UPSI in particular will benefit from this research, as it will provide assistance and guidelines for managing the CVI, and repositioning the institution.

Research Gap: Brand has evolved from tangible form such as logo and product name to intangible form such as emotion and personality (Aaker 1997; Keller 1993). At the same time the focus on branding issues has moved from the commercial or for-profit sector to non-profit organisations such as charities, government services, health and cultural institutions which include overseas aid, post offices, hospitals and museums (Chiagouris 2005; Stride & Lee 2007); and eventually brand has also evolved in HE (Hayes 2007). Branding and marketing in HE are still in their early stages and require more attention from institutions, scholars and researchers to search for deeper understanding through both theoretical and empirical studies.

Whilst there is increasing evidence that branding has been adopted by non-profit organisations including HE providers, it would appear that some of the key players involved in the governance of HE institutions may have little or no knowledge of how to implement a brand apart from changing the logo and CVI, and how branding works for them (Chapleo 2006). HE institutions need to clarify why and how they intend to use branding within their strategic planning and marketing, as Jevons (2006) argues:

> We owe it to the universities that employ us, or provide us with essential resources for our businesses, to help, and insist, that they clarify just what branding of their particular university means, and how it is meaningfully different from alternative providers. It is a disgrace to those who fund these expensive institutions if this is not done, and an embarrassment to the marketing and branding experts who work within them (p. 467).

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Allen, Fournier & Miller (2008) argue that brands are rather unique according to the context in which a brand resides, and the nature of brands is not static in terms of pre-formulated management, but dynamic and active arising from the characteristics of individual organisations. In this case, it is important to focus on two significant areas:

I) Each branding project may need different methods to test effectiveness, and

II) Branding models and strategies for each university need to be addressed and developed based on the individual core brand value (or values) of the institution.

This means that each HE provider needs to develop their own brand values in order to effectively communicate their unique brand identity, to differentiate them from their competitors, and to develop a proper strategic plan for further improvement based on their current situation. Brand management in the specific context of HE has received only limited academic attention compared to the business context (Chapleo 2006). With the massive amount of funds and effort employed to change a university's CVI as a part of a rebranding process, it is crucial to know how effective it will be as a means of promoting a positive image for the institution. However, while acknowledging the importance of branding in HE, this study will focus upon CVI as one of the key components in branding.

There is extensive evidence indicating that over the last decade a significant number of universities worldwide have changed their image or have repositioned themselves. Reasons for changes include achievement of university status by colleges or polytechnics, change of future direction, governance restructure, internationalisation and focus on different markets. However, despite the common practice for universities to revamp their CVI in order to communicate the new changes, there is little research examining or supporting such decision. In particular, a study of the effect of CVI upon people associated with the university has not been undertaken. This present study seeks to address this gap by exploring a method called the 'Room Effect' adopted from environmental psychology.

Research in environmental psychology indicates that the characteristics of a setting, for example a room, are transferred to a person in that setting. Thus, an executive office bestows social standing, intelligence and power upon its occupant, hence the term referred to as the Room Effect (Canter 1977). Although the Room Effect has been

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used in judging the effects that photographs of interiors and architectures have on the perception of a person associated with that place, the effect has not been investigated for other forms of implicit communication including the CVI.

This research project will investigate the effects of CVI upon person perception, using similar methods to those originally employed in this field. The focus will be on CVI applied to the sign system of universities, and its effect upon persons associated with it. Different sets of the CVI of a university will be shown as a background and depicted along with a lecturer from that university to see whether these stimuli change the way respondents judge the lecturer. This research is also intended to make an academic contribution within the field of experimental aesthetics.

Research Question: This exploratory research derives from the intention to reposition and therefore to rebrand UPSI. The main motivation behind this research project is to understand to what extent HE institutions, and UPSI in particular, can benefit from marketing and branding. This research also aims to address a more specific issue regarding the effectiveness of the CVI, which is:

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Does a Corporate Visual Identity (CVI), as the most visible tool in branding, have an effect on the perception of people associated with it?

In the process of clarifying the primary research question, a number of additional research questions were also considered during the study. These additional research questions were:

I) **Does the influence of the logo on perception of the university differ according to whether it is traditional (heraldry) or modern?**

II) **Does the influence of the logo on perception differ according to the name of a university?**

III) **Does the influence of the logo on perception differ according to gender?**

Design/method/approach: This study sits within social science research and is a practice-based project. The research was undertaken in two stages: the first stage was 'research-led-design', and the second was 'research-in-design'. The first is the design

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process, which involved adopting research methods from qualitative enquiry to gain in-depth knowledge, and to assist with the design outcomes. The second, which was the major methodological approach of this research, applied a quantitative method to answer the primary research question and the additional research questions derived from the first stage. As a mixed methods research combining qualitative and quantitative frameworks, this research strategy can be described as 'confirm and discover' (Bryman 2008).

According to Bryman (2008), there are many ways of combining quantitative and qualitative research, namely offset, completeness, instrument development and credibility. In this particular approach, the qualitative data are used to generate additional research questions and stimulus materials, and quantitative research is used to test and validate, the primary and additional research questions within a single research project. Although the weight of these two types of approaches may differ during different stages of the research, both are important to this study.

Research limitations/implications: Time constraints formed one of the major obstacles in this research. In order to achieve an adequate balance between a live project and research requirements, and between qualitative and quantitative research approaches, the researcher acknowledges that limitations were placed on the research. These included lack of user involvement during the qualitative data collection and the design process. Limitations to this study are discussed in detail in the last chapter of this thesis – Discussions and Conclusion.

Originality/value: This research explores a new means of testing CVI derived from environmental psychology, namely the Room Effect method, developed by Canter in 1977. Thus, the research is proposing an alternative method for CVI evaluation. This is different from conventional ways of looking at the CVI, which focus solely on the design elements such as shape, colour, and font, and the designer's intuitions, such as good, bad, and beautiful. This research also offers an insight into a live design project by demonstrating how the designer can benefit from a proper research method that can be used in the design process.

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Structure of the Thesis

This thesis mounts the argument that branding in HE is an important field of research, especially in relation to CVI. There are nine chapters in this thesis and each one will be summarised and structured as follows:

1. Introduction; has briefly explained this research project under three main topics I) Background, II) Aim and Scope, and III) Structure of the Thesis.

2. Branding in Higher Education; reviews relevant literature on issues related to HE including globalisation and internationalisation. Also in this chapter is a review of branding literatures in the broader sense, which later moves to a more specific discussion on the context of HE. Also included is discussion of non-profit and service oriented organisations, which differ from the 'for-profit' sectors, and are similar to government services, health and cultural institutions, as well as HE institutions.

3. Design Context; reviews relevant published knowledge within practise-based design for the commencement of a live rebranding project for UPSI. This chapter outlines the discussion regarding design management including design thinking in relation to this research project. Eventually, seven strategic plans for the university's external communication are identified and put forward to the VC and BOD, which encompass three major areas:

I) Technology: developing a new web site, and a virtual university presence.

II) Marketing: investing in print advertisements in the Times Higher Education (THE) magazine, and establishing a city campus.

III) Management: repositioning the university, restructuring the organisation, and creating a new Faculty.

With the strategy being put forward, a new CVI is developed to communicate the changes and to provide a design solution reflecting these new directions. Discussion regarding CVI design guidelines and evaluation are also presented in this chapter.

4. Methodology and Qualitative Enquiries; illustrates why research in design needs to adopt theories as well as methods from other well-established disciplines, including

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in this case psychology and marketing. It is necessary for designers to improve their professionalism and to be able to assimilate other methods into their work processes. The qualitative methods adopted in the research project are imperative in order to form a better understanding and to support the development of a new CVI for UPSI.

5. Design Process and Outcomes; reflects on the design process derived from the qualitative approach. This section illustrates the steps that were involved in the development of the new CVI. Several options for the CVI were presented to the VC and BOD for consideration. Two of these CVI options are tested in the quantitative study.

6. Quantitative Research; demonstrates how this research has been executed with a quantitative approach in order to validate the primary research question and additional research questions. This chapter also presents a proposed new method of CVI evaluation derived from environmental psychology, called the Room Effect, explaining how the method works and also design strategies applied in answering both the primary research question and additional research questions.

7. Pilot Research; explains the use of a paper-based survey as a pilot study to test the feasibility of the research questionnaire and stimuli and improve the research design before conducting a large-scale survey. The administration of the survey, data analysis, and results are presented, followed by discussion of the research findings.

8. Actual Research; explains the administration of the actual survey and discussion of the findings. An online survey was selected as the main data-gathering instrument in this study. Graphs and charts for the results are presented, followed by discussion of the most significant research findings.

9. Discussion and Conclusion; presents a summary of research findings and their contribution within the design field. This chapter also discusses the research limitations and reflects how this research could be extended for future research. The thesis concludes that as universities' direction and funding have increasingly changed the way they operate, so does the management of universities' image and reputation. The competition between universities to prove their credibility and scholarship has become so intense that every aspect that can help to improve their performances as well as perceptions should be taken seriously, and one significant element is the CVI.

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