

MARKETING &
COMMUNICATION IN
HIGHER EDUCATION

UNDERSTANDING BRANDING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

◀ Marketing Identities ▶

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Marketing and Communication in Higher Education

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This series seeks to critically address marketing and communication related issues in higher education. The series aims to be broad in scope (any aspect of higher education that broadly connects with markets, marketization, marketing and communication) and specific in its rationale to provide critical perspectives on higher education with the aim of improving higher education's emancipatory potential.

The concept of emancipation and higher education's contribution to it is one of the important themes in this book series. Yet, it is difficult to think of being emancipated without being emancipated from something that denies or oppresses that emancipation. In exploring higher education's emancipatory potential, I would also encourage authors to explore the darker side of higher education. Consider, for example, the failure of diversity in many institutions of higher education in many countries, the 'McDonald' rates of pay for adjuncts, and brand inequality, i.e., the name matters.

Innovation and globalization are impacting higher education in immense and often unpredictable ways. Some argue, including Carey (2015) in *Education Policy* at the New America Foundation, that there is a long overdue and welcome shakeup coming from the new technology platforms based, if only metaphorically, in 'Silicon Valley' and its equivalents across many countries. Opinions such as these along with public concern about the increasing costs and questionable outcomes, now evident in many countries, occupy the thoughts of higher education administrators, politicians and citizens. Whether you agree or disagree with the theories and perspectives driving such notions, concepts of innovation and globalization form part of what shapes the debate around higher education. Such debates and communication position higher education in the public mind, but how much of this debate and communication is an accurate representation is a matter of conjecture. The editor would like to encourage a plurality of approaches to understanding higher education marketing and communication dynamics including, but not limited to, anarchist, critical theory, feminist, labor process, Marxist and post-Marxist, post-structuralist, postmodern, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic perspectives. Quantitative approaches are welcome if the intent has a critical theory perspective.

I believe that there is a critical market of readers who want a more nuanced and intellectual understanding of higher education's role in society. Authors are encouraged to consider how the idea of higher education is marketed and communicated, how the above plays out in institutions and why and how institutions of higher education are marketed as they are and how institutions of higher education may improve their position in society. If the main social and economic function of higher education is to 1) higher educate the general population on a just and equitable basis, not some of the population and not some provided with a better higher education than others, and 2) develop and distribute knowledge/power on an equitable basis, then how can this be achieved? From a policy perspective at the local, national and international level, readers will be interested in how to expand the higher education offer to more people and improve the quality of that offer for a plurality of constituencies. I encourage authors to submit manuscripts that address these issues from a critical perspective.

Authors are invited to submit manuscripts that provide critical insight into the marketing of higher education and communication in relation to the social, economic and political functions of higher education, what it means to be higher educated and how higher education fulfills an emancipatory role while (re)producing and distributing power/knowledge within and across diverse and plural communities.

Single or multiple authored or edited books are welcome. Contact the Series Editor, Anthony Lowrie, at a.lowrie.02@cantab.net.

More information about this series at
<http://www.springer.com/series/15431>

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For Sinéad, Eugene, and Cleo

PREFACE

The main issue addressed in this book is the formation of identity through naming. My approach and motivation comes from a long-standing dissatisfaction with positive theories of identity creation and analysis, especially in the creation and management of brand meaning. A secondary motivation draws on the criticism voiced by critical theorists interested in the marketing of higher education, which is that marketing academics when researching and writing about higher education import methods used in a business context. Taking account of Adorno's critical thinking, the method used to investigate an object configures the object, I have sought to avoid the criticism of configuring higher education as a commercial enterprise and provide a more innovative approach congruent with the idea that higher education is a social good and not a commercial practice. We do not need to make it more profitable; we need to make it more socially viable. I recall in 1998, when tuition fees were first enacted into law in the UK and charges introduced in the academic year 1999–2000; the worry was that the introduction of fees was the thin end of a very large capitalist wedge. Oh, no, no, no, came the replies from the then government, and besides government ministers said, fees are capped at £1000 per year, *circa* \$1600 at the then exchange rate. In 2017–18, the cost of university tuition fees in England is capped at £9250.00 per year plus inflationary increases, and students face similar levels of debt as US students. The lesson for all of us in every country is that if we treat our higher education systems as commercial enterprises, then that is precisely what we will get, a commercial enterprise and not an enterprise for the education of citizens for their own good and the good of the community.

If we fail to look after our higher education in the USA, fight for all to be educated to the highest degree, and resist commercial intrusion, then it is a safe bet that the intrusion will not stop until there is nothing left but a shabby replica incapable of supporting the American democratic dream. We will have a form of higher education that further divides those with economic and cultural capital from those who do not have economic and cultural capital rather than creating self-reliant and united communities whose survival is inter-dependent and seen to be inter-dependent.

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September 2017

Anthony Lowrie

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Introduction

When writing a book about branding higher education, there is a presumption that there is the existence of something called higher education that you are branding. While education is a name drilled into our psyche from a young age, few if any of us would have a problem with its importance to our well-being, the qualifier ‘higher’ in higher education brings with it the baggage of much debate if not controversy. The comparative form implies that higher education is higher, above or indeed superior to other forms of education which are therefore by necessity lower. I am not convinced that this is an insightful way of conceptualizing education. It is a reasonable assumption that one form or aspect of education must come before the other, but this does not mean that one is superior. They are certainly different. In my childhood in Ireland, we attended primary school, and my daughter attended elementary school in the USA. It seems to me that a strong case can be made for elementary carrying a more primary or crucial meaning than higher. This book is about how we name, brand, and therefore think about higher education. More than anything else it is an exploration into the naming process. It is not a book on how to brand colleges and universities. If you are a reader looking for a book on how to brand the college, then this is probably not the book for you. No doubt there will be those readers who will attempt to decode and distill its theory into the dos and don’ts of branding colleges and universities.

The risk of writing a book on resistance to branding in higher education is the unpicking of the theoretical content for resistance by those who will build marketing promotions antithetical to the core purpose of higher education, which is to educate as many citizens as possible to the highest level. No doubt there will be those who will use the content of this book for the perfidious practice of getting the most selective bums on the most expensive seats. I acknowledge that administrators of colleges and universities, especially private not-for-profits, are in a difficult position, and it would seem they must go to market and set out their stall with their wares. But necessity, a concept I explore in the naming process in Chap. 4, is not necessarily the same as claims of necessity, and the latter is no excuse for either poor performance, lack of transparency, or downright unethical behavior when it comes to practice in higher education. I have always thought that doing the right thing is easy when it doesn't cost you anything. The test of ethical behavior comes when there is a cost attached. Of course, this is not to say that ethical behavior must always have a cost. That is to say something quite different but choices in the administration of higher education are often not easy and there are dilemmas to be faced, including how and who are selected to receive what form of higher education. Selection ought not to form part of the purpose of higher education, and this is an ethical position worthy of fighting for because it strengthens our democratic institutions by demonstrating that education, higher or otherwise, is not simply a question of money or merit. Moreover, it makes economic sense to educate as many citizens as possible to the highest level possible in a modern, democratic, knowledge economy. Democracy is strengthened by arming people with the cognitive ability to both shape and claim their rights and to help others do the same. While some may claim to love the uneducated, I have no love for ignorance or poverty, and often, though not always, they keep close company. There is a social and economic need to eradicate both ignorance and poverty, and higher education is a major contributor to that social and economic goal.

No doubt there are those who would argue that there is no point in allowing students into higher education who do not have the cognitive ability to complete the work. To those, I would say (a) that the normal range of human cognitive ability provides more than sufficient ability to complete a first degree albeit with the provision of some remedial work for those lesser academically qualified (see discussion of the Open University in Chap. 3); (b) a little higher education is better than none, and more is better than a little. If we are to break the endless cycle of generation after generation of family members not

attending college, then despite the educational attainment not being as good as it might be, the benefit will accrue to their sons and daughters, who would be more likely to attend college (see Chap. 3 and Table 6.1); and (c) the benefits of a higher education are not limited to the individual but are social (see Fig. 4.1).

Today, I read the cover story in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: ‘Where the journey to college is no fairy tale for seniors at one low-income high school, spring is marked by hope, frustration, and limited choices’ (Hoover, p. A14). Most if not all readers will be sympathetic to the plight of these potential students, but far too few are willing to do anything about it. There is hope from some directions such as the call by Senator Sanders to make college free, the free tuition policy in New York State and the call for college transparency by the latest cross-party committee on the Transparency Act for higher education in Washington. I discuss the notion of transparency in Chaps. 7 and 8 and make some suggestion about what needs to be made transparent and how it may be done. It is important to note that all the transparency in the world will not improve higher education for all where we still insist on supporting selection, as illustrated in *The Chronicle* article mentioned earlier. Offers of places are meaningless and are sometimes even a cruel use of marketing to enhance the notion of a non-existent diversity in a college, something I discuss in Chap. 6.

The removal of selection will encourage critical action as opposed to what is much referred to as critical thinking. At the bottom of individual performance lies selectivity, which by necessity is based on the few at the expense of the many. Individuals may well learn to think critically for themselves, but where selection is continuously discharged in an educational environment, students also learn to think of themselves and not others. We cannot complain about student behavior or attitude under current administrative and pedagogic circumstances in which we teach them that their academic survival is based on individual performance and not the performance of the community. They learn to game the system in favor of themselves and learn to use whatever economic and cultural assets are available to them. Group and teamwork under such circumstances will only engender performative compliance as community learning has no basis for meeting their need to do well; students continually learn that their interests are served by individual selection and competition. We know that in a modern democracy and knowledge-based economy, progress is made through collaboration and yet we play down the importance of community in favor of the individual innovator and name the

entrepreneur as a social and economic messiah (see Chap. 4). It is the fantasy of the name that supports the illusion that we depend upon the entrepreneur when in fact it is the work and contribution of ordinary people multiplied by hundreds of millions who generate the wealth and knowledge of the country.

The point of a brand name is to promote something, to attract buyers, to somehow encapsulate a meaning that will communicate what buyers recognize as satisfying what they need and therefore want. Under normal commercial circumstances, it does not matter that everyone does not have the capability to turn this need and want into a demand so long as there are sufficient people who have the resources to make the demand and complete an exchange, usually in the form of money, for the product. But as outlined in *The Chronicle* article, far too many students do not have the economic or cultural resources to make the demand and enable the exchange. Chapter 2 explores the concepts of needs, wants, and demands and their applicability in the marketing of higher education. The chapter offers the basis for an alternative model for the marketing of higher education in the form of desire as the primary concept of concern. In this chapter, I further consider the major marketing literature that addresses the subject of desire and find this marketing literature as theoretically and conceptually confused. In my exploration of the concept of desire, I specify desire by way of Freudian and neo-Freudian theory and set out the foundations for a more radical conceptualization of desire which is developed in Chaps. 3 and 4, culminating in a set of theoretical propositions in Chap. 5.

I explore the concept of relevance in Chap. 3 in terms of desire as a split concept. I take the Freudian concept of *wunsch*, and Lacan's concept of desire, and develop desire as an analytical concept split between the unconscious and the conscious. While we cannot easily get to our unconscious minds, I argue that the meaning of the unconscious is in the form, which is to say that what occupies our unconscious mind can only have meaning for us through interpretation of form, which must always be our conscious naming of the form of the *wunsch*/desire. What gets named, I argue, is what is relevant to us. Because higher education is of enormous importance to our own and our children's well-being, indeed survival, I connect relevance and desire to higher education and use the concept of split desire to explore higher education, the desire for emancipation, and the pursuit of conscious self-interest. Split desire is a position where the form of unconscious desire meets the naming of desire articulated in logics of equivalence and difference.

It is in the naming process that brands are formed. I explain the process in Chap. 4 and draw on the descriptive and anti-descriptive literature to develop the concept of the name as a political process. I illustrate how the name attaches to the rather problematic American idea and definition of a liberal arts education and introduce the notion that higher education at the liberal arts college is a bit of a gamble, encapsulated and expressed in my use of the generic name Roulette College. Currently, learning in liberal arts higher education has the potential to follow many random paths as curriculum and choice expand with no sure sight of educational outputs guiding the choice for the undergraduate. The gamble is the roll of the educational die across the board of choice that seems determined by marketing practice rather than educational logic and pedagogy.

Chapter 4 makes use of mathemes, a type of discourse function, to illustrate the process of naming in the development of *point de capiton*, also referred to as a quilting point, node of meaning, brand node, and empty signifier. I make use of some topical political discussions of President Trump and the naming of excellence and diversity in current higher education debates to illustrate the process of naming. Chapter 5 is the last core theoretical chapter. In this chapter I set out seven theoretical propositions, which have been developed from Chaps. 2, 3, and 4. Chapter 6 is a critical reading of the liberal arts idea that draws upon the previous theoretical chapters and points to an ethnographical account and a critical discourse analysis (CDA), in Chap. 7, of the names excellence and diversity. I make some suggestions for delivering teaching and learning ‘excellence’ in the form of transparency. Pedagogic and administrative practice can never be named excellent without radical transparency. In order to achieve a radical form of excellence, we need to remove the structural gaming of administrators, faculty, and students, all of whom follow their self-serving interests. The latter is particularly problematic with administrators as they are in a position to take advantage of information others do not have. Others do not have information because administrators refuse to share it, collect it, or are blinded to its import by their self-interests. For diversity to be entirely inclusive, I argue that selective practices based on affordability and merit must end and that the meaning of the name diversity must be extended to all otherwise it is not diverse at all. However, such a form of diversity does not suit the interests of administrators.

I recommend that chapters are read in the order they appear, as the book develops interlocking concepts to advance the argument for a higher education open to all regardless of gender orientation, ethnicity, religion,

and income. Some readers may see this book as having a rather gloomy outlook for the prospects of higher education. I do not see it that way. I hope this book encourages the reader to think about what type of higher education they would like to see for themselves, their families, and their community, and then work to move it in that direction. The insistence on transparency is the first step. With transparency, we will be able to see what our higher education looks like rather than depend upon those with too much self-interest telling us what it is and is not and who name what it is in their own interest. When we get transparency, then we can figure out as a community what we want our higher education to be.

The Desire for Relevance

DEMANDS, NEEDS, WANTS AND DESIRES

In the discipline of marketing, the conceptual framing of needs, wants and demands are considered central to understanding both customers and consumers, and developing strategies for satisfying needs. This has been the intellectual position for decades: ‘But it should be remembered that the need leads to the drive, and therefore needs are what must be satisfied ... Regardless of how the needs develop, consumers want them satisfied. Their motive (drive) leads to what we call consumer behavior’ (McCarthy 1964, pp. 239–240). Similar framing is evident in Kotler along with many marketing textbooks that include classical explanations of consumer behavior and decision-making based on habitual decision-process behavior (H-D-P-B) models such as Engel et al. (1968). Emphasis and resource is focused on determining the need for brands that range from detergent to chocolate ice-cream and then building resources around satisfiers of that need. The driving force, or motivator, for the process and the demand for these satisfiers is thought to be consumer need, as per McCarthy, as need leads to the drive. A demand in marketing is a resource-backed want that enables exchange. The concept of companies determining what the customer need is and developing delivery mechanisms to satisfy that need has been with us so long that we hardly question it, until that is, something grates the ethical teeth of the consumer. What is acceptable for many in one context, detergent and ice-cream for example, can become disconcerting in another context such as the marketing of higher education.