

Branding the university: relational strategy of identity construction in a competitive field

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Delivering his speech to celebrate the inauguration of Spangler Hall, Harvard Business School's newest building, on 22 January 2001 the famous architect Robert A.M. Stern was most contemplative about the place of architecture in conveying and constructing the brand of the university. "Can a building promote a brand, and should it? After all, a lot of building is about functional accommodation", Stern muses and then continues: "[A building] can take a symbolic role, it can become an emblem, it can become a part of a brand and even be a brand in itself. A building can express the identity of an institution through a stylistic language; it can express both an institution's inspirations and its aspirations; it can reflect a system of values and place those values in a continuum".⁴ Although Stern's speech focuses on architectural expressions of the brand of the university, his thoughtful commentary reveals much about the current institutional conditions of the university. Specifically, his commentary redirects the current 'hot' debate on the changing nature of universities to the issue of branding: how are universities creating a brand? Why are they engaging in branding? And, what are the implications of the coming of 'the brand society' onto the field of higher education? In this chapter, we wrestle with such issues by commenting on the role of the university brand as an embodiment of the university's evolving sense of community and of identity. Drawing on a survey of university iconography, we describe the institutional character of the branding of universities. Specifically, we argue that the change in the iconography of universities from emblem style into logos reflects the redefinition of the social role of the university and of higher education: universities are currently defined as organizations and higher education is defined as a product or commodity. We also argue that these symbolic changes towards branding of universities draw from the professionalization of university management and from the culture of globalization.

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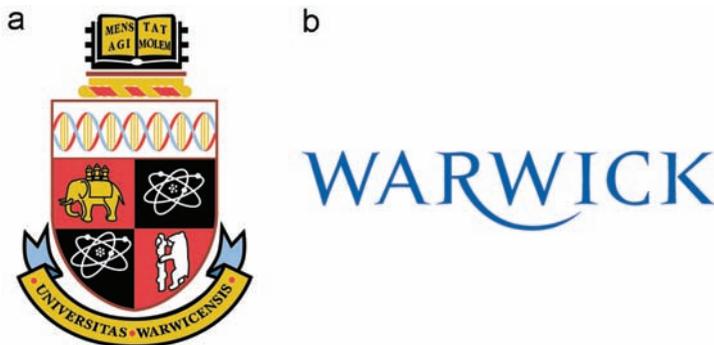
⁴We thank Rakesh Khurana for referring us to this speech. Time indication for quote: 8:25 min.

From emblem to logo: branding trends in the iconography of universities

What are the symbolic expressions of the coming of marketing and branding to the university? Stern highlights such expression in architectural style: he notes how the choice of design elements for the façade, layout and spaces of Spangler Hall declare its identity as a Harvard school. Still, since ‘brand’ is formally defined as a unique visual representation that captures the essence or character of a product or an organization, the brand of a university can be embodied in different artefacts of a university: building architecture, as noted by Stern, but also a university’s webpage, newspaper advertisements, sports mascot, merchandise, formal dress and alike. Although all these are iconic artefacts of universities, we draw attention here to the most formal of the university’s icons, namely the seal. Originally created for authenticating formal documents, the seal is the most formal of the university’s icons. The seal is designed as the distinctive symbol of the university, commonly combining various expressions (motto and images, organized in a particular arrangement and accentuated with specific colours) and arranging them to uniquely identify the university and celebrate its singular character, history, mission or other features.

Reviewing the historic changes in the seals of universities, we find several general patterns. Most importantly, we observe a change in the aesthetics of university seals: we identify a change in the style of university seals and a change in the images that are included in university seals. Such changes are evident in the redesign of university icons. For example, Melewar and Akel [1] tell of the corporate identity strategy of the University of Warwick, which replaced the university’s old and traditional crest with the simplified marque that includes only the shorthand word ‘Warwick’ (Figure 1). Whereas the traditional crest includes several hints at the University (name and stylized atom circles), it was interpreted as “not reflect[ing] Warwick’s modern and entrepreneurial spirit and character”

Figure 1



From emblem to logo

The crest (a) and marque (b) of the University of Warwick (U.K.). Reproduced with kind permission from the University of Warwick.

and thus is now reserved for events “where the Britishness of the university is seen as a differential advantage” [1]. The content simplification also came with a change in the colour scheme: from red and black to a blue and white scheme, as blue is understood to “awaken positive associations as intelligence, communication, trust, efficiency, serenity, duty, logic, coolness, reflection and calm” [1]. Overall, among universities that redesigned their seals, we observe a trend towards stylistic simplification and contraction of content. The new format for university icons is, therefore, a logo, namely an ideogram (graphic or wordmark) that is stylistically simplified and thus is intended to promote instant public recognition.

Among such marketing-driven branding campaigns, one in the U.S.A. became a target for public ridicule. Drake University chose to use the image of a ‘D+’ in the branding for its 2010 undergraduate admissions campaign. Whereas the intention was to simplify the brand with ‘D’ standing for Drake and ‘+’ representing the ample opportunities that the University offers students, the association with a failing grade brought much scorn to this attempt for an attention-grabbing brand image.

Accompanying these stylistic changes to seals are also (i) proliferation of university iconography and (ii) formalization of the seal’s use. First, not all rebranding campaigns have resulted in the replacement of the old or traditional seals; rather, mostly owing to resistance from the university constituents, newly designed iconography was added to the traditional seal. In such cases, the seal is used for official documents, such as diplomas, whereas the new, modernized iconography is used for media advertising or public announcements. For example, after a branding campaign, Rice University reserves its traditional seal solely for formal documents (Figure 2a). Most of Rice’s publicity material uses its logo, which simplifies the organizational icon: the name is shortened to ‘Rice’, rather than Rice University, and the ornate details of the seal are reduced to a colourful yet simplified crest (Figure 2b). Furthermore, Rice University, similar to many American colleges, also created athletic logos, which adapt the core symbols to the



Figure 2

Differentiation among university icons

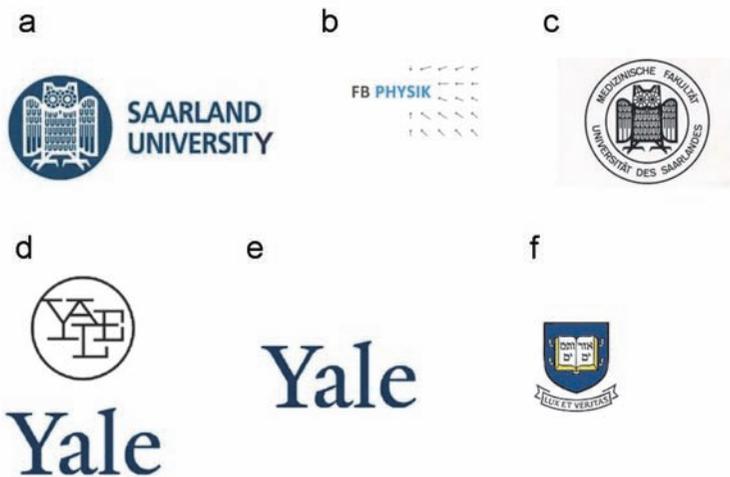
(a) The seal, (b) logo and (c) athletic logos (top panel, primary; bottom panel, secondary) of Rice University (U.S.A.). Reproduced with kind permission from Rice University.

aesthetics of sports. Rice's primary athletic logo is a customized version of an old English letter 'R', which also appears in the secondary logo, the owl of erudition transformed into a bird of prey (Figure 2c).

This proliferation of iconography is allowing university units to rethink their affiliation with their parent institution. On the one hand, some university units, particularly professional schools, distinguish their seals from that of their home university. For example, the seal of the Physics Department of Saarland University, which won the 2009 Wolda Award, includes no reference to the university's logo, whereas other faculties and departments of Saarland University, while still creating unique seals, incorporate the University's traditional image of the owl of wisdom and knowledge (Figure 3). On the other hand, non-academic university units align their symbols with those of the university. For example, Yale University Press recently adopted Yale University's typographic logo, thus keeping with the notion that "the old logo puts an emphasis on design and proclaims the press's independence from its university, while the new logo fixes the press within a larger Yale brand" [2].

The various redesigns of university seals are then formalized by the creation of official policy, often titled 'identity guidelines' or 'brand standards'. Such policies commonly distinguish between (i) the official seal, shield or crest

Figure 3



Branding of university-affiliated units

(a–b) Examples from Saarland University (Germany) of rebranding resulting in intra-university differentiation: (a) the main university logo, (b) the logo of the Physics Department and (c) the logo of the Faculty of Medicine. Reproduced with kind permission of Saarland University. (d–f) Examples from Yale University (U.S.A.) of rebranding resulting in intra-university alignment: (d) the old (top panel) and new (bottom panel) logos of Yale University Press, (e) the logo of Yale University and (f) Yale's traditional ceremonial shield. Reproduced with kind permission of Yale University.

and (ii) the logo or wordmark, with American colleges frequently adding specifications for athletics logos and mascots. Most such documents also specify fine details of university icons: from colour to size proportions to typography to use. Most importantly, such explications of the seal are tied to its proprietary protection: current rebranding initiatives are not only exercises in clarifying identity and direction through visual symbols, but rather they also involve assertions of legal terms. And with such legal protections come legal battles, with a few recent court cases bringing the issue of university branding to public debate. The most publicized cases are those of the University of Florida and Florida State University, which served cease-and-desist letters to numerous primary and secondary schools throughout the American Gulf states whose sports teams use of images of alligator, spear or Seminole (indigenous tribe) warrior was contested. The claims made by both universities that the use of these University of Florida and Florida State University registered trademarks by small schools “will dilute the distinctiveness of the marks that the public associates with the university”⁵, ignited a public debate about the place of profit-seeking practices in public universities. In this manner, the previously ceremonial symbols of universities became the ‘turf’ for a legal, not merely an identity, battle.

In summary, we find that universities are redesigning their iconography into a new category of style: in regards to seals, those universities that sought a change to their iconography chose to redesign their traditional seal into a stylistically modern format. In addition, even if many universities chose not to redesign this core icon, the majority of these universities still modernized the style of their other visual material: we observe similar trends of modernizing the aesthetics of iconography in university websites, tag lines, letterhead graphics and other publicity material. We label such change in the iconography of universities as a move from emblem to logo: we find that the iconography of universities changes from ‘emblem’ (an iconographic style that represents abstract concepts, such as truth, enlightenment or scholarship) to ‘logo’ (branded iconographic style, concerned with recognition and visibility and with the translation of both into value). The stylistic features of this branding trend are: graphic or visual simplification (less figurative or detailed, more abstract), modern style (fewer ornamentals and typographic serifs, more linear simplicity) and universalistic (less expressive identification that discloses details of sector affiliation or mission, more ‘crisp’, business-like and general in approach). Frequently, logos are borderless, textless and colourful, all of which enhances the semiotic expression of branded identity. In these ways, university logos are disembedded icons: they hardly inform us about the substantive context of the institution, shedding semiotic references to learning or research, as well as to home country or heritage. With that, they convey a disembedded and universalistic identity, which lends itself to marketable recognition.

5 See, among other reports, <http://www.copyrightcommunity.com/?p=2045> (accessed 26 January 2013).

Branding as strategy

Why are universities changing the iconographic expressions of their identity? And why is the trend of change from emblem to logo style? Stern, in his address, delivers the common interpretation of branding: universities, he argues, rely on branding as a tool to create differentiation among their otherwise similar practices and products. He explains this with reference to the Jeffersonian construction of the University of Virginia: this ‘brand new university’ was made unique and distinct from its competitors by the application of particular classical architectural markers to the building of its campus in Charlottesville in the early 1800s.⁶ The explanation rests therefore on the competition among otherwise similar institutions: since by definition all universities teach advanced studies, all members of a university faculty are distinguished scholars and all universities offer similar academic degrees in a similar range of academic disciplines, universities must labour to distinguish themselves by declaring their distinction and proclaiming their reputation. Competition is the driver for branding; branding is a technique of market differentiation.

Brand-based, market differentiation is expected to have a direct impact on recognition. For example, at the Spring 2010 launch of its new logo, President of Roosevelt University, Chuck Middleton, pronounced that “[i]n the not-too-distant future, people will see the R [the University’s logo] and know immediately that it’s us.”⁷ The branded logo is therefore interpreted as unique; it is also interpreted as being identified specifically with university ‘X’. The essence of a brand, particularly as captured in a logo-style icon, is its ability to establish easy recognition.

Through recognition, branding is inextricably linked to marketing; the reason to create a (recognizable and unique) brand is to establish a marketable feature, and such a feature is necessary under conditions of intensifying competition over resources (funding, renowned academics etc.) and consumers (students). Hanze University Groningen, for example, explains its branding strategy in such exact terms: “The increasing competition for students, as well as the battle for ever scarcer staff and resources, require us to create a clear market position for ourselves. Now more than ever, we must be aware that Hanze University is just one of over 4000 knowledge institutes in Europe”.⁸ In this example, branding and marketing are functionally interchangeable concepts: the text may refer specifically to branding, but the logic of the branding exercise in Hanze is not recognition, rather the market value of brand recognition for the recruitment of students and faculty.

For several decades, the value of branding and marketing in higher education has been the premise of much research. Such studies reinforce the notion that higher education is a marketable commodity and that foreign students

6 Time indication for quote: 11:40 min.

7 http://www.underconsideration.com/brandnew/archives/roosevelt_university_turns_a_corner.php (accessed 26 January 2013).

8 Spelling mistakes in original document are herein corrected.

can be lured in by effective branding and marketing campaigns (e.g. [3,4]). With this dominant logic, ‘education-starved’ countries were targeted by western universities. Since the 1990s, universities have directed their marketing campaigns towards the Eastern European so-called education markets despite former Communist countries having expanded university systems, and currently this marketing approach is being applied specifically to Chinese students (e.g. [5,6]).

Marketing of universities is also directed at the university’s internal audiences, with the goal of consolidating organizational identity and allowing for constituent buy-in. A recent example is that of National University of Singapore, which engaged the business catalytic agency *Activiste* to create a series of workshops for university staff from various departments and units, with the formal goal for such workshops being ‘changing the internal mindset’ towards ‘living the National University of Singapore brand’. Although the target population is different – internal, rather than external – the themes and logics are the same: brand creates identification of, and with, value, revenue or other forms of gain.

Overall, branding initiatives in universities and the related redesign of university seals to take a branded, logo style are drawing on the assumption that branding is a strategy to create differentiation and to claim value. Although competition among universities is not a new phenomenon, branding is a recent fashion for universities to position themselves in the field of higher education; the ‘entrepreneurial university’ [7] transitioned into a ‘promotional university’ [8]. Such recent positioning is not only strategic in nature; most importantly, it attaches value (proceeds and return) to what is otherwise university identification. Branding commodifies education and research, creating visual and symbolic kernels of commercial property that are subsequently marketed as products. This is particularly evident in the proprietary claims made in regards to university icons. Still, to what extent is such branding driven by market value? What sort of a market is higher education? In the following section we challenge the marketing logic by pointing to the institutional characteristics of university branding.

Branding as myth and ritual

These days, branding undoubtedly hits organizations like a tidal wave, for-profits and not-for-profits alike. Yet, is the expansion of branding activities in higher education the result of the efficacy and success of this practice in yielding the expected results? In other words, is branding demarking universities by their need for marketing and for carving out a competitive niche? Not quite.

It seems that whereas market differentiation is repeatedly used in justifying the branding of universities, branding is a prevalent practice across national university fields, regardless of university size and scope, and beyond academic specialization or distinction. First, branding is evident even in small and highly localized universities, which therefore have only a limited market to claim. For example, the 2010 rebranding campaign of Armstrong Atlantic State University, which is located in Savannah, Georgia, and draws 84% of its students from within the state of Georgia, was explained by the University’s President as “[taking] us out there. We have an international mission. We love working with

the region of Savannah, but we want our influence as educators to go up further than that”.⁹ Secondly, branding is also equally common in private and in public universities: although the prevailing assumption is that private universities work harder to capitalize their assets, we observe branding in both public and private universities alike. Thirdly, branding initiatives and marketability explanations including the redesign of seals are taking a similar direction in different academic fields such as Malaysia [9], Norway [10] or Italy [11]. In these ways, branding is divorced not only from the features of the university it supposedly identifies, but also from its market position. Branding became a ritualized practice of 21st Century universities, as they too, similar to other not-for-profit organizations, become immersed in the culture of globalization and of marketing.

With marketing logic reigning, any unique feature will suffice to justify the launch of a branding strategy. Rebranding initiatives highlight the university’s unique location (remoteness and wilderness as natural laboratory), the official language of their country (English as the language of instruction) or the history of the university (age as expression of a tradition of excellence) as features that uniquely identify their brand and will attract attention and subsequently resources as well. This articulation of uniqueness exposes the dialectics of the ‘universalism of particularism’ [12] or the ‘totalizing and individualizing’ character of branding [13], which simultaneously call for differentiated articulations of identity while offering standardized formats for such differentiated articulations.

In relying so heavily on marketing practices and drawing from marketing logic, branding of universities further distances itself from the particularities of the sector of higher education or the uniqueness of particular universities. For example, a 2011 branding workshop for higher education¹⁰ explicitly distances itself from the traditional sources of legitimacy for universities, by marketing itself with the claim that “[n]o matter how good the student experience, research or overall profile, Higher Education Institutions will struggle in the marketplace unless they stand out from competitors and make sense to stakeholders.” Indeed, the list of benefits of attending this branding workshop is also devoid of any tailoring to the uniqueness of education, research, science or any other feature of universities. The organizers set the goals to be to “understand key features of branding particular to higher education; explore how stakeholders perceive distinctiveness; gain insight into the relationship between distinctiveness and market positioning; learn strategies for developing stakeholder engagement with brand management; and, discuss best practice for developing your business model” – none of which are specific to the core tasks, practices or traditions of universities.

In many ways, branding in general and seal redesign in particular are only loosely coupled with university-specific features, practices, products or processes. Rather, the redesigned seals come to idealize the emerging global model

9 Interview quotes from: http://www.armstrong.edu/Departments/president_news/president_news_wjcl_fox_interview_about_new_marketing_campaign

10 A workshop titled “Distinctiveness and branding in higher education: securing your position in the future”, organized by Guardian Professional Higher Education and the Leadership Foundation. Event details are available at <http://guardianseminardirectiveness.eventbrite.com/> (accessed 26 January 2013).

of the university [14]; becoming such “an innovative ‘world-class’ university acts as an imaginary incentive” for branding campaigns [15]. We contend that this universalized model, which is preoccupied with ranking and branding, draws on the culture of globalization.

The social context of branding

Branding logic is enhanced and branding practices are expanding owing to the relationship between branding and other powerful social processes. In this section, we note some such global social processes and explicate their support for the culture and praxis of branding universities.

First, branding of universities is propelled by professionalization, both of university administration and of the marketing and branding sector. For one, the penetration of marketing operations into universities aids in the specialization of branding universities. For example, the American Marketing Association has hundreds of collegiate chapters in the U.S.A. and some 20 collegiate chapters in Canada, Puerto Rico and Mexico, all of which bring American Marketing Association’s marketing and branding ‘gospel’ to their university campuses and thus professionalize the manner in which universities relate to their constituencies. Similar training of university marketing people has been occurring in Europe and Asia.¹¹ As a result, in-house branding units sprout up on university campuses, offering services, often for a fee, ranging from logo design to brochure production to media relations to trademark registration. Increasingly, universities also solicit the aid of professional firms to attend to the particulars of design, opinion surveys, trademark registration and other specialized techniques in logo redesign or branding campaigns. For example, to strategize its 2010 rebranding campaign, Roosevelt University relied on the expertise of the Chicago-based Studio Blue, a graphics consultancy that has worked with other educational and cultural institutions on similar campaigns. Even the notorious 2009 logo redesign campaign of Drake University was guided by the outside professional consultancy Stamats Communications, which tested several logo design options with high school students before advising Drake to abandon its traditional seal for the ill-famed ‘D+’ logo. Overall, service professionals bring to university branding not only ideas of marketing and administrative reform, but they also bring the aura of credentialed expertise to an otherwise bewildering process of strategizing organizational identity.

Secondly, the rationalization of universities transforms them into organizations, administered according to ‘best practices’, structured in standardized

11 For example, since 2006, several European partnerships, such as the European University Association in association with the British Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and the Academy of Marketing’s Special Interest Group on the Marketing of Higher Education (U.K.), have been holding marketing and branding workshops for university leaders and managers. Similarly, the Asia-Pacific Association for International Education is now offering many opportunities at its annual meetings for learning about ‘building strong college and university brands (successful branding)’ and ‘managing university identity and reputation’.

forms and governed by the aspiration for quantifiable excellence. Such rationalization is embodied in various practices that produce formal accounts, such as annual reports [16], and expect connections between means and ends. Such rationalization anchors universities within the logic of universal organization, for example universities increasingly reorient their operations towards global rankings, imagining that such scales capture the essence of excellence rather than construct a discursive universe of quantification and comparability (see [17]).

Thirdly, by establishing a logic of competition, agency and commodification, marketization further enables the branding of universities. In the age of the knowledge economy, universities increasingly commercialize their products, through technology transfer and patenting [18,19]. And, as noted earlier, universities also increasingly see themselves in competition with other universities over resources, from students to renowned faculty to state sponsorship to research grants. In the spirit of market competition, universities comfortably operate in spite of the dissonance created by the branding of academia. Seal redesign for example is routinely justified by market conditions, thus mitigating ontological dilemmas of ‘flattening’ erudition.

Finally, mediatization positions the marketized, rationalized and professionalized university within a communicative universe, where messages and images are filtered through the news and other public media. Such mediatization is driving the university to change from being an ‘expressive organization’ [20] to being an all-out ‘promotional university’ [8] that is focused on ‘outformation’ (public relations machinery and the manipulative power of knowledge and data [21]). Mediatization not only introduces practices and routines that were until recently reserved solely for for-profit corporations [19,22], but also enables the transition into the simplified logo iconography because the overload of information demands that messages, even of identity, are quickly recognizable and rapidly consumed. In addition, since mediatization is on the basis of the premise of communicating with a wide world, it reinforces the change in tone of academic communication from being within the boundaries of the profession (emblem) to relying on universalized codes of meaning (brand).

In all, in a global society infused with neo-liberal themes of the market, discussions of universities too are saturated with themes of professionalization (managerialism), rationalization (performance and ranking), marketization (commercialization) and mediatization (promotional). All these come to be encapsulated in the iconographic artefacts of universities, as these are being transformed from emblems into logos.

Concluding comments: visualizing trust and the identity of academia

The content of the artefacts of universities – university buildings and seals – visually captures the identity of the institution. The construction of such visual artefacts – architecture for buildings and branding for seals – is a social process that articulates the vision or values of the related organization and of the institution. Here, the seals of universities and the process of branding universities

tell the story of the globalization-induced changes that confront this organization and the institution of higher education. Seeing market demands not as functional imperatives, but rather as institutional constraints, we here offer an institutionalist interpretation of university branding and of the global sociocultural forces that drive branding. Such an interpretation changes the focus of the analysis: from a focus on the strategic impetus and strategic outcomes of university branding (resources and competition-driven needs) to a focus on embedded identity (meanings of the university and of knowledge, as institutions, in the context of the culture of globalization and markets).

University seals serve, today as in the past, as an organizational artefact that captures, and is used to signal, organizational identity. This strategy of identity signalling relies on the deciphering of pre-existing cultural codes, or 'trait laws' [23]. The seal is therefore a marker not only of the identity of the particular organization, in this case a university, but also the social context with which this identity is conversing, namely the field of higher education, the historical era and the nation. Such a conversation, or cultural exchange of meanings and the related signalling of identity reflects a sense of trust in society or the relevant community; trust in relevant others is crucial to any form of social exchange [24], in this case, to the display of organizational identity. Trust and semiotic codes, or meaning, are therefore interlaced and both are evident in the organizational artefact of the university seal.

Both emblem- and logo-style seals reveal the trait laws that are relevant to the era and community by whom they were drawn. The drive towards branding of the university captures the transformation in the trust and semiotic codes of this institution: the change from emblem-style to logo-style representation of identity reflects a transformation in the referential categories for academia. Traditionally, academic identity was conceived in communitarian terms and thus defined in terms that were substantively meaningful to the 'Republic of Scholars'. The relations of trust that bind academia were built on shared values, reinforced by the ethos of science and formalized into a professional code of conduct [25]. Such communal tightness is reflected in the stylized representation of the identity of the university: university seals commonly included insignia of learning, science and the enlightenment, thus carrying a substantive meaning and revealing that communal trust rested on a shared interpretation of these cues of erudition and professionalism. At present, with the consolidation of the global brand society, seals of universities are transformed to take a branded style. Yet, this embedded identity of the university nevertheless reflects the cultural characteristics of the current era, namely professionalization, rationalization, marketization and mediatization. These brand-style seals are devoid of substantive references to higher education, but rather are reoriented towards universal managerialized images of the university as an organization [26,27]. In this current social context, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between identity elements that are 'internal' to the university or to academia and what is 'external' and thus promotional [28,15]: brand marketized promotion is still directed towards recruiting of academics and students, yet branding relies on techniques and criteria of reputation that are imported into academia from, in this case, the world of management and marketing. This signals the porousness of the boundaries of academia and of the university; and, this openness redefines the relations that hold academia together. Indeed, even when communal ties within the

university are strategically designed to rally behind branded slogans and symbols, they do not fully correct the impression that “[th]e joint spirit is missing” [15]. In addition, branding is a pathway through which professionalized managerialism permeates the university, changing the role of scholars in university leadership, let alone administration. Managerialism changes the authority of academics within their own professional domain and alters the relations of trust within the academic community. This too is expressed in visual codes: academics no longer speak to their close academic community with the traditional signals of their trade, but rather academic insignia speak to a broader community that is immersed in a market logic and its brand images. In this current social context, trust and the related sense of community in academia are reoriented towards the globalized and universalized market, and thus the trait laws of branding and marketing signal the identity of the 21st Century university. Overall, therefore, branding is an undertone in the search for legitimacy and for building trust, with each era providing a unique visual ‘vocabulary’ for expressing this relational affinity.

Although these major transformative processes are evident in symbolic artefacts, university seals are not, by any means, at the heart of the marketization of universities, the commercialization of their knowledge and the redefinition of the boundaries of the academic community. Rather, university research and the related products of publications and patents are clearer sites for such trends of mercantilism [29], administrative tools such as annual reports better analyse the trend of managerialism [27], and attention to the ranking of universities better conveys the sense of a new quantified version of academic competition [17]. It is therefore curious to find the extent to which such processes have still imprinted, quite literally so, the formal icons of universities: these various, slight yet meaningful, changes to the identity and social role of universities are revealed in semiotic analysis of even such ceremonial artefacts as seals. Seals, in their representational and stylized way, reveal and capture the recent social changes that are inundating this millennium-old social institution.

Comments by Inge-Bert Täljedal¹²

Thank you, Professors Drori and Delmestri, and Mr Oberg for your succinct exposition of iconographic trends at universities. I think your observations and interpretations are largely correct. However, I should like to try to add some nuances. In particular, I should like to challenge the startling overall thesis that liberal globalization is driving a profound redefinition of the identity of universities, i.e. the idea that relations of trust have to date been built on shared academic values, but are presently being redefined by branded slogans and symbols. Although there is an element of truth in this observation, I should like to seriously raise the question: in whose eyes?

But first, a minor comment; the very simplification of university seals and logos may not in itself be very ominous, as the analogous phenomenon is occurring

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in all kinds of organizations. By examining the Internet it is easy to find as many illustrative examples of this phenomenon as one wishes, e.g. time series of the logos of AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft), Adidas, IBM (International Business Machines) and FIAT (Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino). Presumably, this ubiquitous pattern of simplification has several causes. To a significant extent it probably reflects a change in our general aesthetic preferences, permeating all corners of society after having first emerged in modernistic art. For example, this is epitomized by Piet Mondrian's well-known progression from a kind of realism to abstract patterns.

What matters more in the present context is the fact that universities are at all mimicking the promotional behaviour of companies to an unprecedented degree. Undoubtedly, this underscores the tendency among some to view the university as a kind of company under allegedly rational business-like management, rather than as a guild of truth-seeking seniors and juniors who essentially govern themselves, collegiately, with the ultimate purpose of increasing knowledge for knowledge's sake. However, before venturing a guess as to precisely how branding may influence trust in a university, it would seem useful to reflect a little on the things for which universities could and should be trusted, ideally speaking.

As the typical academic sees it, and that includes myself, universities must honour truth as their supreme value. Literally nothing, not even undeniable utilitarian achievements, can justify the slightest compromise with honest truth-seeking in research and education. Whatever your theory of truth happens to be – one of correspondence or coherence, or whatever – truth is an indispensable regulatory idea, a *sine qua non* for universities. Mendacious or slanted research is simply not research at all. In this respect, the rationale of universities must always differ from that of virtually all other organizations, perhaps other kinds of schools excepted. Others too certainly hold truth in esteem, but without being logically self-defeating they can consider themselves licensed to compromise when, for instance, profits or political power so require.

This being said, of course universities should also be trusted to have many other more specific ambitions of importance to various stakeholders: e.g. high-quality education of students in general, reproduction of scientific and scholarly elites, education programmes adapted to market demands, contributory involvement in local and regional development, innovative contributions to business and economy. It appears to me that branding need not have the same effect on all of these objects of trust. There is more than one side to branding, and they may relate differently to the various objects of trust.

Branding for commercial or political aims usually, or at least often, has an air of seduction about it. Its purpose is not merely to inform truthfully about facts, but to increase visibility and attractiveness. When used by a university, by analogy with the branding of companies, it can be felt as signalling a less than ideal steadfastness in keeping to truth as the supreme value. This effect must be considered negative and explains why scientists and scholars are often annoyed by branding activities. To typical academics, the perceived identity of a university has very little, if anything, to do with seals and logos and advertisements, and all the more with the great discoveries and names of famous faculty members.

Many years ago, long before I became Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University, I was very worried by what I felt to be a change in the external view of the identity and mission of universities and so wrote a debate article in one of the leading Swedish newspapers, the *Svenska Dagbladet* (16 April 1994). There I heavily criticized the emerging preoccupation with marketing and branding in the field of higher education. The headline of the article was, in Swedish, ‘Should universities produce company ties?’

What prompted me was a decision by our government to alter its provisions for how the universities could use a certain part of their state funding. Up until then, certain moneys had been intended exclusively for enlightening the public about scientific and scholarly research. That grant could now be used for advertisements and propaganda to increase the competitiveness of the individual university on the markets of potential consumers of university services. I saw a switch from an ideal goal of objective information to one of branding. Among other things, I wrote: “We are used to, and can generally bear, the fact that companies and politicians mix information and propaganda [...] The fact that universities exhibit increasing difficulties in keeping the distinction clear clashes with their identity as bastions of serious truth-seeking” (my translation from Swedish).

I still believe this. However, after having been Vice-Chancellor for 6 years, experiencing the need to take the institutional competition seriously, I cannot entirely shut my eyes to the fact that there are also positive aspects of branding. If nothing else, branding demonstrates a wish to be counted on in contexts reflecting societal involvement of the university. This aspect is likely to be appreciated mostly by administrators and politicians, but also by many academics and students, who realize that societal involvement is by no means a new side to university life.

So, in conclusion, I see a contradiction between two different effects of branding on the trust to which universities are entitled. From a logical point of view, the way out of the dilemma is obvious, although perhaps not so easy in practice. It is all a matter of getting the priorities right. I should say that branding is all right and indeed compatible with the traditional trust of universities as essentially and primarily truth-seeking communities, as long as the actual design of branding is not so vulgar as to seriously threaten this view.

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