



**ASHESI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

ASHESI UNIVERSITY (INTERNATIONAL STUDENT) BRAND AUDIT

UNDERGRADUATE APPLIED PROJECT

B. Sc. BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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Applied Project Report submitted to the Department of Business Administration, Ashesi University College in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration

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**Declaration**

I hereby declare that this Applied Project Report is the result of my own work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

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Date: .....

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the Applied Project Report were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of applied projects laid down by Ashesi University College.

Supervisor's Signature: .....

Supervisor's Name: Mr. Anthony Ebow Spio

Date: .....

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### **Executive Summary**

Ashesi University needs to establish ways in which it could address its limited brand awareness in many parts of the African continent, with the help of its international students. This led to the need to understand the perceptions, attitudes and relationship of international students towards the brand of Ashesi. This would help in identifying sources of brand equity for Ashesi University, and opportunities in which the external relations office could use to promote brand awareness.

This project therefore is a study of the perceptions and attitudes of international students towards the Ashesi brand. The findings from research will help in developing recommendations on methods of capturing value through international students, as well as how any negative issues arising could be solved.

The research revealed that majority (95.7%) of international students feel proud of Ashesi of Ashesi and 82.6 % regard Ashesi as Special. 63.5% believe that Ashesi provides a unique, useful high quality education. Generally, concerns were raised on the inactive student social life at the campus.

Some of the opportunities for brand awareness include transformational marketing as well as the use of Ashesi international students as Brand Ambassadors in their own countries. Key issues that needed to be addressed, touched on the low satisfaction of international students with regards to current student social life at Ashesi.

The final compilations of the analysis and findings are compiled into a report using Keller's Brand Resonance Model/ Customer-Based Brand Equity Model.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Overview of The Higher Education Sector in Ghana**

Higher education is essential, in that it helps develop skilful human capital for economic development. Enrolment in higher education sector in Ghana has been improving over the years. As of 2013 109,298 students were admitted to public universities in Ghana, 47,294 students gained admission into polytechnics, 26,159 admitted into private universities (Amoah-Darkwah, 2014). Additionally, Enrolment in Universities increased by 436% from 1991-2004, from 11,857 to 63,576 students respectively. Increase in the demand for higher qualifications in the competitive job market, attracted private universities into the field.

Internationalization is growing globally, so is the mobility of students especially in higher education (Marshall, 2013). The increased ease of mobility within Africa has especially made it possible for students to seek quality education from other countries in the continent. Ghana has positioned itself as one of the major providers of quality higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ankomah-Asare, Larkai, & Nsowah-Nuamah, 2016). Arguably, Ghana hosts some of the most recognized universities in the continent such as University of Ghana and Ashesi University. External examiners at Swarthmore and the University of California Berkeley for instance rated the quality of Ashesi University on an equivalent level to that of top universities in the United States (UNESCO, 2006). Thus, the higher education industry has experienced increased patronage in terms of international students seeking college/university education from countries such as

Nigeria, Cameroon, Guinea and East Africa. This sets high expectations from Ghana's Universities as students expect unrivalled quality for their money and effort.

Ghana needs to invest in quality infrastructural development in Higher education institutions, to meet and maintain a global quality standard. This will help in improving both local and international students' experiences, and ensure their satisfaction. Ghana's total expenditure on education in 2014 was 5.3% of GDP. Currently the average spending on education is 6% of the Gross Domestic Product. However, this funding is mainly focused on basic and high school education, with little focus on public higher education institutions. Thus, like private universities, public universities have increased innovative ways for financing their operations, moving away from overdependence on government funding.

Therefore, due to economic liberalization, higher job market demands, and increase in international student patronage, higher education sector in Ghana, continues to thrive.

### **External Environment**

The general environment consists of factors in general environment that can indirectly influence and industry and the firms consisting an industry.

### **PESTL Analysis**

A PESTLE analysis is a framework or tool used by marketers to analyse and monitor the external marketing environment of a company or organization. This analysis is important to Ashesi in that, it is an opportunity to adequately assess the business environment and decide whether it is favourable for its operations.

### ***Political Environment***

Higher Education is perceived as the best agent of social and economic development and poverty reduction in Africa, Ghana is not excluded Ajakaiye, & Kimenyi(2011). As such the higher education sector in Ghana attracts politics especially in Party Campaign Manifestos competition between the main parties. This creates a favourable environment in which higher education institutions can benefit from reforms promised in campaign manifestos. In 2016, Ghana ranked number 70 out of 176 countries in the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. Its 43 points however dropped from 47 out of 100 in 2015 (Ansah, 2017). This signified an unsuccessful fight against corruption in the country in the year 2016. This makes a strong case for Ashesi university's effort or mission for developing ethical entrepreneurial students.

### ***Economic Environment***

In the 21st centuries where government funding is dismal, public and private universities are left to discover options for sustainable funding. This has also affected the ability of most public universities to meet the ideal quality standards through their operations (Atindanbila, 2011). Economic liberalization on higher education in Ghana, has led to the rise of private universities and institutions that cater for a diverse range of students. However, the rise of inflation and power outage in the country, also raises the cost of operations for universities, especially self-funding or private universities. As such private universities are thrust into an aggressive struggle of cutting costs, without compromising education quality.



### ***Social Cultural Environment***

Increased focus on women education and empowerment in the 21st century, has influenced the gender equity in higher education in Ghana. Currently most universities take into consideration, the balance between male and female in their intakes. The under-representation of women in Science and technology has led to affirmative action by the College Entrance Board, in terms of requiring lower cut-off points for women, compared to men, in admissions (Doroba, Muhwezi, & Modungwa, 2015). On the other hand, internationalization is growing globally, so is the mobility of students especially in higher education (Marshall, 2013). Ghana has positioned itself as one of the major providers of quality higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ankomah-Asare, Larkai, & Nsowah-Nuamah, 2016). Consequently, it has experienced increased patronage in terms of international students seeking college/university education from countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Guinea, and East Africa. This sets high expectations from Ghana's Universities as students expect unrivalled quality for their money and effort. As such Universities in Ghana should respond to this by ensuring they offer globally competitive experience and curriculum to attract and retain such students

### ***Technological Environment***

Technology has been the biggest disruption in Africa. It has brought about change in how higher education is conducted and how learning is done in the continent. For universities, technology has helped improve how students work on the assignments and collaborate on group works (Wilson, Tete-Mensah, & Boateng, 2014). As such both students and faculty

can efficiently conduct research using technological tools which adds value to their work. This has helped improve delivery and quality of higher education in the country.

### *Legal*

Many governments, private sectors, and non-governmental organizations, in the interest of public welfare and to improve policy, are involved repeatedly in formulating and altering education policy and legalities. Ghana is no exception. To encourage the private sector participation, the government established policies such as tax exemptions on imported books (Hallberg-Adu, 2009). This lowered cost of importing books for universities. This is a favourable policy especially for Ashesi University whose books purchases originate from the US and Canada, where the liberal arts curriculum thrives.

## **Organisational Context**

### **Ashesi University Profile**

Ashesi University is a private, not-for profit undergraduate institution of higher education, established in Ghana in 2002 by Patrick Awuah Junior and the Ashesi University Foundation. Its mission is to educate a new generation of ethical, entrepreneur leaders at in Africa: To cultivate the critical thinking skills, the concern for others and the courage to transform Africa.

Ashesi University's core curriculum consists of courses that help students in ethical, innovativeness, critical thinking and communication skills development. The founders believe these skills are necessary for a lifetime leadership career. The 7 learning goals guide this liberal arts curriculum:

Ethics and Civic Engagement	Communication
Critical thinking and Quantitative Reasoning	Curiosity and Skill
Leadership and Teamwork	Technological Competence
Innovation and Action	

These learning goals are incorporated into every course taken by students across the 6 degree majors, in Computer Science, Business, and Engineering. As such students learn to think critically and approach problems with curiosity and problem solving attitudes. Every student at the university learns how to code and develop technological understanding, an effort by Ashesi to ensure that every student becomes technologically competent.

According to Ashesi University, 100% of graduates find jobs, start businesses or further their studies within 6 months of graduation and about 90% remain in Africa (Ashesi University College, 2017). The institution has been recognized in Ghana and generally in Africa, due to its unique approach to undergraduate college education. Some of the notable awards include the university being ranked as one of the top ten Most Respected Companies in Ghana (Ashesi University College, 2017). Similarly, its founder and president Dr. Patrick Awuah is a recipient of many recognitions, including 2 honorary doctorate degrees from Babson College and Swarthmore, and Member of the Order of the Volta award in 2007, one of Ghana's highest awards given to individuals who demonstrate ideal service to the country

Ashesi University demographics as at September 2016 (Ashesi University College, 2017).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Over 20 countries represented, including: Benin, Cameroon, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe</li> </ul>		
<b>Students</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>791 students</li> <li>48% women, 52% men</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>29% on full scholarships</li> <li>22% on partial scholarships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20% international</li> </ul>
<b>Teams</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32 full-time faculty</li> <li>39 faculty interns</li> <li>63 administrative staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>44% women on staff and faculty</li> <li>50% women on the Executive Team</li> <li>40% women on the BoD (Ashesi University, 2017)</li> </ul>	

### Objectives

Ashesi University in its 10-year strategic plan (2002-2012) outlined diversity as one of its goals where 50% of the student body would be Africans from outside Ghana by 2022.

However, by 2012 only 10% of the student population came from outside Ghana. The diversity goal also makes up the 8 strategic goals for the period (2012-2022). For Ashesi to increase the number of international students they need to meet or exceed their

expectations. It is therefore pertinent to assess and understand the perceptions of existing international students about the Ashesi brand and its value proposition.

**The main objectives of this Project therefore are:**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To assess the attitudes of international students, with respect to Ashesi as a brand.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To determine the potential and possibility of Ashesi University International Students to act as Ashesi International Brand Ambassadors, and informal marketing medium.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To determine most effective brand communication channels to reach out to prospective African International students from all countries in Africa.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To use the research outcomes to develop programs aimed at promoting international student's life in Campus (Merola, 2016).</li></ul>

**Rationale For Selecting Ashesi University**

The mission of Ashesi University is to educate a new generation of ethical entrepreneurial leaders in Africa. It aims to achieve this through a highly globally competitive liberal arts curriculum coupled with quality campus experience.

Ashesi University's focus on Africa, signifies that it aims to attract a highly diverse African Student Population that will co-exist in its campus. The institution needs to attract the right prospective applicants through the best communication means and by offering a relevant and competitive education and campus life experience. This signifies the necessity for assessing and understanding the current sentiments and perceptions of the current African International Student.

This project also offers me an opportunity to put into practice the analytical, research and problem solving skills I have learnt over the four years at Ashesi.

### SWOT Analysis

SWOT ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS (+)	WEAKNESSES (-)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unique personal mission and vision</li> <li>• Unique liberal arts approach that bring real</li> <li>• Highly skilled graduates with globally acknowledged skills</li> <li>• 100% of graduates find jobs 6 months after graduation</li> <li>• Small classes, that encourage student lecturer interaction</li> <li>• Strong ethical culture, and brand reputation</li> <li>• Global college experience opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long distance from town which discourages some students.</li> <li>• Unreliable transport for students to and from town.</li> <li>• Lack of infrastructure to attract sport inspired students.</li> <li>• Limited brand awareness in some parts of the continent</li> <li>• Relatively high cost of education.</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES (+)	THREATS (-)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World Bank endorsement of Ghana as a top destination in Africa for tertiary education (Dery, 2014).</li> <li>• Increased acknowledgement of ethics and innovativeness in work places, places advantage on Ashesi students (Ghana News Agency, 2013)</li> <li>• Immense entrepreneurial opportunities for graduates to put into use the innovative skills from college (Oppong &amp; Sachs, 2015).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erratic power supply that raises the school's cost of operations. This translates to higher cost of fees.</li> <li>• Depreciated Ghana's currency and poor performing economy (Ghana Web, 2016) (Fisher, 2010)</li> <li>• Lack of a Charter that might discourage prospective applicants.</li> <li>• Cheaper college alternatives in the country</li> <li>• Poor road infrastructure in the country.</li> </ul>

Table 1: Swot Analysis table

## CHAPTER 2: PROJECT NEEDS ANALYSIS

### **Problem Statement**

Ashesi University Long term goal is to make an impact in Africa, through creating ethical and entrepreneurial leaders, who can create positive change. It therefore is necessary not only to focus on recruiting bright students, but also diversifying to all parts of the continent with regards to recruitment. In reaching this goal, Ashesi University's 2012-2022 strategic plan, outlines goals for the decade. Two of these goals are related to international students:

- i) Creating an immersive college experience
- ii) Achieving 30-50% African International student population

Ashesi also values the need to establish itself as the first choice for an international education, amongst bright African students, with passion for the continent. It already competes for the same applicant pool in the continent, with universities such as University of Cape Town, University of Ghana, University of Nairobi and a few others. The need to make impact in Africa has also attracted new entrants, who may share the same goal as Ashesi University. For instance, the newly established African Leadership University also focuses on creating leaders for the continent who can make an impact. This ultimately points out to the need for Ashesi to explore and understand perceptions and attitudes of its current international students, with regards to its brand.

### **Relevance of The Project.**

A brand audit is a research activity conducted to understand what consumers think and feel about the brand and its corresponding product category to identify sources of brand equity (Keller,2003).Carrying out a brand audit with regards to Ashesi University's International Student College experience is imperative because it will help the University evaluate the perceptions of international students with regards to Ashesi University's brand and values, ways of capturing value through international students, as well as discover avenues to address international students concern. These insights will also help determine the possibility of international students as brand ambassadors in their respective countries.

Finally, insights on the main communication channels through which the international students hear about Ashesi could help Ashesi better determine more cost effective and better reaching means of creating brand awareness in the continent.

### **Needs Assessment**

#### External Relations Department of Ashesi University.

The primary goal of the Alumni and External Relations Office is to communicate the work that Ashesi is doing with the world, and play a lead role in strengthening the relationship between Ashesi and its alumni.

The role and interest of the department in this project is important in that it aims to build a positive brand image of the school amongst the student population, so that they can positively contribute the institution's dynamic and growing student and alumni



population. Understandably, students are the immediate consumers of Ashesi University services. As such evaluating their perceptions and feelings is critical.

<b>Alumni &amp; External Relations Office</b>	
Short term goals	To maintain consistency in Ashesi storytelling
	Create stronger engagement with Ashesi alumni
Long Term Goals	Create a strong and more robust storytelling function at Ashesi
	Allow alumni to play a stronger role in university leadership and fundraising.

*Table 2. Alumni & External Relations office goals*

<b>Key Challenge</b>	<b>Effects of the Problem</b>	
Small Team	Inefficiency- Inability to pursue most goals.	4
Lack of efficient channel to consistently connect with non-Ghanaian alumni and students in various countries coupled with	It makes it inefficient to maintain story telling of Ashesi in other countries, without incurring high costs. Even though Ashesi University has for the last 5 years has run several advertising campaigns such as	4

limited brand awareness beyond Ghana.	<p>‘The Ashesi Advantage Series’ and the "Where Can Your Ashesi Education Take You" series.</p> <p>These marketing strategies have been largely effective locally, but very little impact has been felt in other African Countries.</p>	
Capturing the Advantage of the current international students.	<p>Per the Associate Director of External Relations at Ashesi</p> <p>University “International students at this point in Ashesi’s history, are going to be the frontline team for promoting Ashesi’s brand in their home countries. For many international students here, Ashesi is not as well known in their countries as it is in Ghana. Therefore, people will look to them and their output to measure the value of Ashesi and the quality of the institution.” As such their representation, of Ashesi outside Ashesi has very critical consequences on the overall quality of the University brand reputation. As such, finding ways to maximize their value is imperative, to the brand of Ashesi.</p>	5

Table 3: Needs Analysis

The focus of this project will be to assist Ashesi University to leverage on its international student population as a source of brand equity.

### **Possible Solutions**

- An international student satisfaction survey.
- A brand audit

#### ***An international student satisfaction survey.***

Satisfaction surveys are research tools of getting customer or client feedback with regards to their general satisfaction or content towards a firm's services and facilities (Aldridge, & Rowley, 1998). In satisfaction surveys customers give their views on the firm and indicate how well the firm is fairing with regards to meeting their needs and expectations (Linton, 2017). Feedback from surveys is important because it helps the business remain consistent with regards to meeting customer needs.

To an extent relevant to this research project, an international student survey may not be the adequate research tool for this project. Satisfaction surveys are consumption focused (Sorout, 2014). Additionally, feedback from customer satisfaction surveys is temporary and specific to the good or service consumption experience and do not differentiate between satisfaction and loyalty (Sorout, 2014). However, this research is concerned about engaging international students with regards to promoting the brand of Ashesi, hence a focus on the whole organisation (Odindo, & Devlin, 2017). The research seeks to determine the international student satisfaction level with regards to Ashesi university

services, as well as, dig deeper into their awareness, loyalty and relationships towards the brand of Ashesi. This enables a brand to measure its performance to identify its sources of brand equity or value and align its strategies to the expectations of its customers/consumers.

### *Proposed Solution; A brand audit*

The issue raised from the needs analysis and which this project seeks to address, is how Ashesi can capture the advantage of the current international students. Therefore, the need for Ashesi to understand the perceptions and attitudes its current international students have of its brand, cannot be underestimated. The input with regards to international student's perspectives is imperative, and since it might be a guide to deploying resources to set up relevant programs and facilities that will be utilized and positively add value to international student's life. To achieve these goals a research tool in form a brand audit will be used in this research. This tool better explains not just whether the international students at Ashesi are satisfied with the current services at the university, but also determine various dimensions with regards to brand awareness, brand judgment, brand performance brand resonance, imagery, and feelings. As such, a brand audit beats the satisfaction survey, in that it delves deeper. The tool will diagnose any issues of concern in relation Ashesi University's overall brand health from the international student's perspective. The feedback will inform recommendations or solutions (inform of a brand audit report) that will help Ashesi build better brand image amongst its international student population, who will help promote the Ashesi brand in their respective countries in Africa

### CHAPTER 3: MASTERY OF SUBJECT MATTER

As discussed in the last chapter a brand audit was proposed as the final solution for the research over the satisfaction survey. A satisfaction survey is inadequate as it is consumption focused. This project goes beyond satisfaction and consumption to explore Ashesi brand relationship and management factors derived from Keller's Customer Based Equity Model, such as resonance (relationship) loyalty, awareness, and other dynamics such as judgement and feelings. As such a brand audit is a more appropriate tool, since it takes satisfaction as well as the relationship factors mentioned above into consideration, in measuring brand performance.

With backings from various literature works on the subject, this chapter will explore the concept of brand auditing and why it is important for universities to conduct brand audits with regards to student perspectives. Using a case study, it will support the relevance of brand audits to universities, the process, and what they entail. This is important with regards to achieving this project's objectives and Ashesi international brand management goals.

A brand audit is research directed at understanding the firm's overall brand health as well as what consumers think and feel about the brand and act toward it, to better understand sources of brand equity as well as any possible barriers (Keller, 2013). In an interview with Nielsen, Kevin Lane Keller recommended that "Top marketers must create formalized measurement approaches and processes that ensure that they continually and exhaustively monitor their sources of brand equity and those of competitors" to make sure they remain relevant, and achieve their goals (Keller, n.d). There is a debate on

whether it is possible and imperative to evaluate brand performance (Chapleo, 2011). More so, little academic work has been done on the scrutiny of how and whether higher education institutions should evaluate their brands. However, a research study by Valtere, (2009) revealed that students' role in higher education quality is imperative since they are both partners and clients. In the study, 66% considered that students were both clients and partners, when asked the role of students in higher education. 28% believed that students were clients, while the rest emphasized that students were both clients and partners. A similar study in 2012 by the author reinforced these results. As such Valtere (2012) recommended that universities consider students as both partners and clients, whose opinion and sentiment matter. Wallace (1999) also agreed that students are primary customers in education and therefore their opinion is imperative to the institution. Pereira, & Silva (2003) further reinforce this argument by stating that if students (like customers) are not listened to, they might go someplace else. This therefore reinforces the importance of university assessment with regards to brand image amongst its student population.

According to Wee, & Thinavan(2013) "a firm's presentation of a service brand is assumed to be the primary source of brand name awareness, whereas brand meanings are derived from a customer's direct contact with the services associated with the brand". Therefore, a student's decision making process is imperative to a university, with regards to its brand position, and providing an environment in which its target students' expectations can be met. Additionally, involving students in higher education branding affords students a sense of identification and a way to define themselves, not merely as

customers but as life-long organization members of a corporate ‘brand community’ (Williams, & Omar, 2014). This involvement involves taking their perspectives into consideration. Evaluation of a brand therefore is imperative for higher education institutions.

According to Chapleo (2011), several models such as Milward Brown’s Criteria (1996) and Young and Rubicam’s brand asset valuator (1994) have been established to evaluate the health of a brand. Though widely known, these models, whilst having a degree of applicability to the higher education sector, are primarily focused on commercial brands and upon close examination do not wholly suit the particular situation of universities (Chapleo, 2011). This is because “variables such as ‘market share’, ‘price premium’ and ‘loyalty’ are examples of the metrics referred to in these models, which may a degree of need re-conceptualization for higher education markets” (Chapleo, 2011). (Bosch, Venter, Han, & Boshoff, 2006) further state that the management of the corporate brand, which consists of periodic audits, is one of the most important tasks for institutions. Therefore, a brand audit became the ultimate first measure of brand equity, which can be effectively used in the higher education sector.

#### **CASE STUDY: Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University(ERAU), Daytona Beach, Florida, USA**

History: Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (ERAU), was started in 1925 as the Embry-Riddle Company in Cincinnati, Ohio by John Paul Riddle and T. Higbee Embry. During the Second World War, the school opened several flight centers and became one of the world’s largest training centres for pilots, mechanics and aviation technicians,

training US and allied countries' personnel. Roughly 25,000 aviation specialists were trained during the war, at the institution (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009).

In 2006, a change in the university administration alongside with new plans from the board of trustees, to expand the university's research facilities as well as degree offerings, inspired a corporate brand management project. Additionally, the new administration favoured a decentralized system, different from the initial different administrative structure. The ERAU Marketing department was reorganized and a new Marketing and Image Advertising Department, was formed and tasked to promote a brand positioning for the university and to help generate global brand awareness (Curtis, Abratt, & Minor, 2009). The biggest challenge for the university was to create and carry a unified brand image and identity, despite a structure that was decentralized and divided the institution into 3 individual running entities (two residential campuses and a worldwide campus). The goal was to maintain and enhance the university competitive advantage, and consistency. As such the brand audit must essentially uncover, whether the brand identity and brand image overlap.

## **Results**

The identified new concepts generated from brand audit feedback were presented to the board of trustees and the cabinet for approval. The university new positioning statement would be used to communicate and market the three campuses under one Embry-Riddle brand while each retains its own uniqueness. The process ended with the revision of the corporate brand, in line with the new direction the university was taking.



**Methodology:**

Both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used in the brand audit research to allow in depth investigations of brand perceptions. The audit took place in form of an online survey where a total of 198 surveys were distributed with follow up e-mails. The participants were asked about different areas of Embry-Riddle attributes, including the university past and present missions; what they would tell a prospective student; brand image and attribute sort; a description of the Embry-Riddle student; competitors and their strength; Embry-Riddle's biggest challenges and areas for improvement; and what they would also tell a prospective faculty member.

Based on the case of ERAU and through the provided literature review, brand audits are critical to universities especially because they are the foundation of the corporate brand management, and the first step to ensuring correlation between an institution's identity and its perceived image. It helps in assessing the overall brand health of an institution, as well as identify sources of brand equity. Additionally, the literature review demonstrates the importance viewing students not just as customers but also partners in developing a university brand image, hence they should be included in brand audits.

This brand audit process will form basis of this project's process, as it was done to a university, a higher education institution like Ashesi. Contents of the Ashesi brand audit process will be conform to all dimensions of a brand audit.

### **Project Research Design**

Ashesi University wishes to explore international students' perceptions and attitudes to the Ashesi brand. As well, it aims to identify ways in which it can promote its brand in Africa, through international students. The reason for involving international students is that, currently Ashesi University has very limited brand awareness in most countries in Africa. The institution views international students as the frontline team for promoting Ashesi University brand in their home countries. As such exploring their perceptions, attitudes, and judgements through a brand audit is important, as the university puts in measures to become more diversified and realize its mission of changing the African continent. Essentially, people will look to International students in their home countries and their output to measure the value of Ashesi and the quality of the institution.

### **Research Methodology: Data Collection**

Data for the project was gathered through various means, further explored below:

*A Needs Assessment* : A needs assessment was conducted to collect information regarding the main problems or challenges faced by the institution. After an initial conversation and an online survey with the Alumni and External Relation's office, the problem that ranked the highest importance was the need to increasing brand awareness in the continent, if Ashesi is to fully realize its high diversity goals. Additionally, the role of international students in promoting the Ashesi university brand is highly critical, especially in most African countries, where little is known about the institution. Consequently, this analysis led to the idea of conducting an exploration or study, with

regards to Ashesi University current international student population, to understand their perceptions, attitudes and loyalty towards the brand.

***Online Research (Mastery of Subject Matter):*** Online research was conducted to obtain the essential literature work done on brand audits, to inform Ashesi University College on brand audits, what they are, why they are essential and most importantly, why exploring student perception and attitude on a university's brand is critical to the institution. This research was also aimed at identifying the most efficient and appropriate methods and frameworks, through which a university brand audit can be performed. The sources of the information included the institution's website, journal articles, e-books, as well as case studies, on the subject.

### ***Qualitative Research***

**Focus Group Interviews:** A focus group interview was conducted where 13 people attended. All international students had been invited through the school e-mail and the international students WhatsApp group. The countries represented in the focus group interview included Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Gambia. This qualitative approach allowed in depth investigations of brand perceptions, and attitudes, experience, views, and ideas (Fontana and Frey, 2000). "This approach 'is critical in capturing consumers' viewpoints on their experiences' (Jung Jung, Lee, Kim, & Yang, 2014). The interview was semi- structured where a list of 10 open-ended questions was provided to structure the discussion and the responses recorded in phone audio recorder. The questions mainly explored the judgements, perceptions towards their experiences at Ashesi, and their relationship with overall brand. A moderator was present to guide the process. This setting

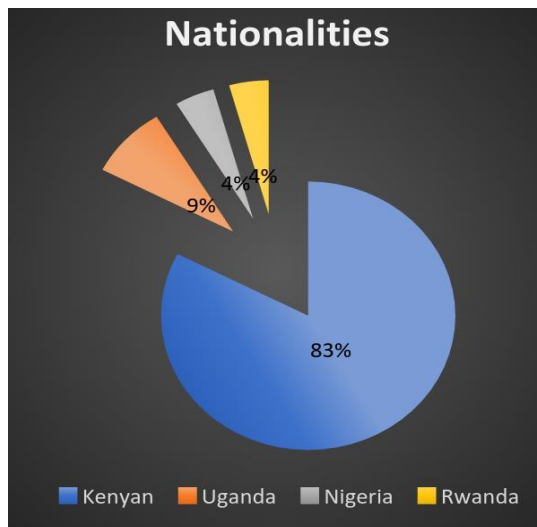
allowed the participants to interact with each other as well as further contribute to some of the responses given by participants.

### ***Quantitative Research***

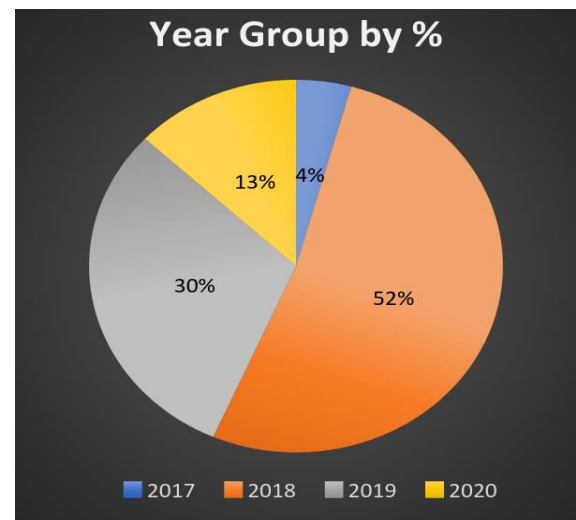
Online surveys: Quantitative methodology was also employed in the research. A questionnaire survey was sent to 100 international students, through the school email, as well as WhatsApp. The survey consisted of 33 questions. The survey had 23% response rate. A total of 23 respondents were recorded: 83% were Kenyans, 9% Ugandans, 4% Rwandese and 4% Nigerians. The aim of the survey was to explore the five dimensions of a brand audit: Brand Resonance (relationship focus), Brand Judgments and Feeling(response focused), Brand Performance, and Brand imagery(focus on brand meaning). These dimensions make up the brand resonance (equity) pyramid or the Customer- Based Brand Equity(CBBE) Model, developed by Keller to measure brand Equity, which is used in determining the overall brand health of an organization and opportunities for brand equity.

The online survey was computed using the strategic brand management text resource, but resources from survey sites such as Survey Monkey and Survey Planet also helped in structuring the questions. The online site used to deliver the survey was Survey Planet because it allowed more free questions compared to Survey Monkey which has a 10 free questions limit. The online survey questions are attached at the appendix.

## RESPONDENT PROFILES



**Chart 1**



**Chart 2**

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

**Keller's Customer -Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model**

This section presents the responses collected from the research using the dimensions in which the data was collected. As mentioned earlier, the factors that are used to measure brand performance and equity, are based on Keller's Brand Resonance/ Customer-Based Brand Equity model. This model helps in consolidating responses into brand equity concepts, that help assess brand health. The model is made up building blocks that are used to measure a brand's health. These are brand judgements, brand attitude, brand resonance, brand feelings, and imagery.

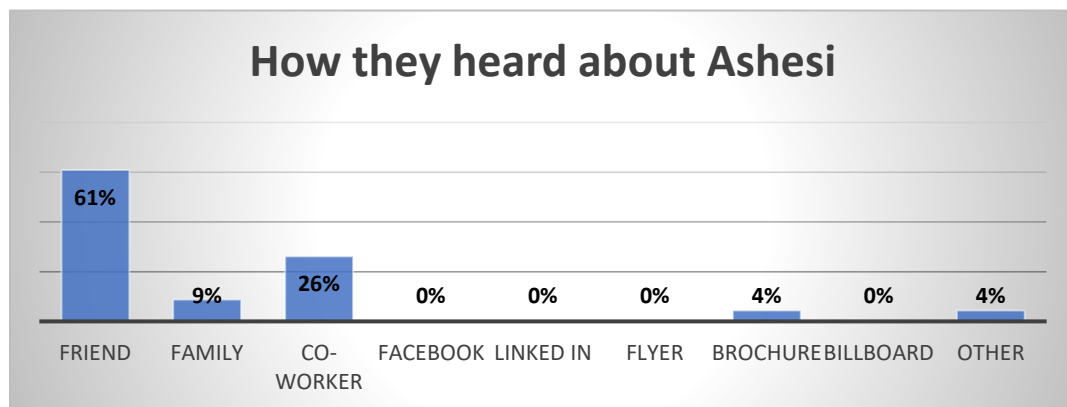


*CBBE model(Keller,2003)*

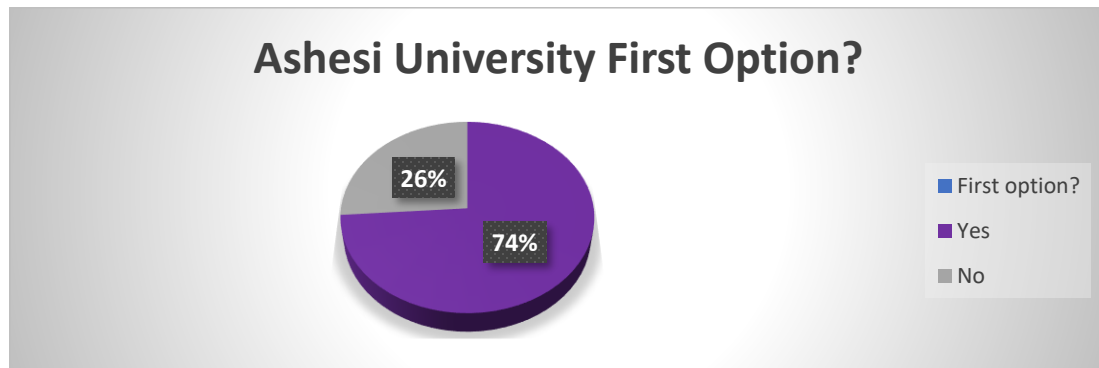
Determining Brand Identity

### Brand Salience

Brand salience means, how well the customer is informed about the product and how often it is evoked under the purchase situations. A highly salient brand has depth and breadth of brand awareness such that customers always think of the brand when they are exposed to a category in which the brand belongs to. This project research focused on brand salience with regards to the extent to how Ashesi is known in the respective countries represented at Ashesi. As such, it referred to questions such as how the respondents heard about Ashesi, as well as whether Ashesi to them was the first option when they were analysing university education options (See the titled graphs below).



**Graph 1. How respondents heard about Ashesi.**



**Graph 2. Whether Ashesi was first undergraduate option**

### **Results analysis**

Brand equity has an awareness dimension, it is debated that awareness is mainly promoted by marketing activities such as advertising, publicity, word of mouth and that these attributes have a high and critical potential influence on overall brand equity (Mourad, Ennew, & Kortam, 2011). From the quantitative analysis, 58.3% of respondents heard about Ashesi through a friend, 25% through a co-worker, 8.3% family, 4.2% a brochure, the rest (other) 4.2% (See the 1<sup>st</sup> graph above). This shows that telling the Ashesi Story, what its brand stands has been most effectively communicated through word-of-mouth. Ashesi is built on a culture of trust and ethics and hence its ability to tap into this as its source of brand equity. Ashesi was initially not the first option for university education for 73.9% of applicants (See graph 2 above). Some even already had offers to local universities as well as looking at universities elsewhere in the world. Yet they are currently students, that says a lot about the value proposition that Ashesi offers to international students Ashesi could capitalize on their international students in word-of-mouth advertising.

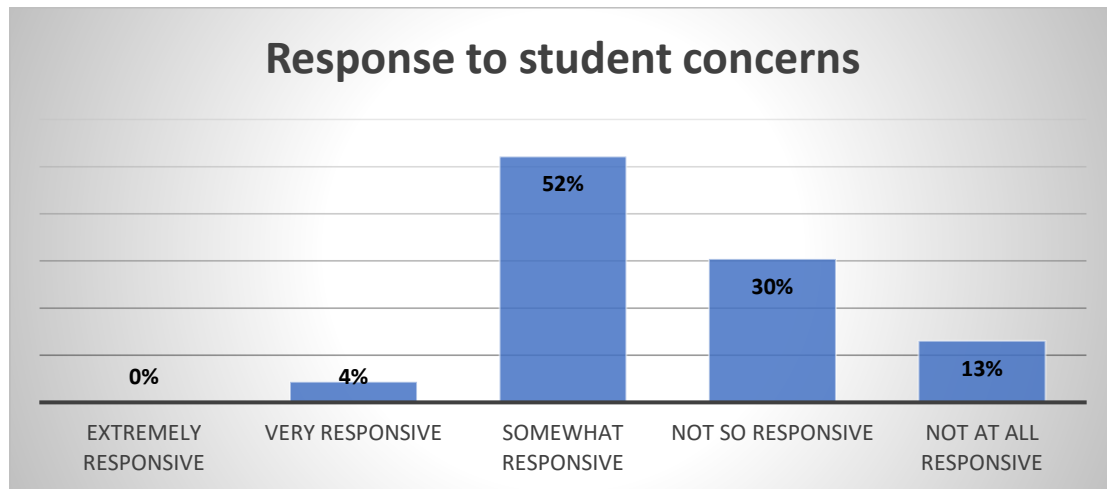


Determining Brand meaning: Brand performance and Imagery**Brand Performance**

According to (Keller,2013 pg111), ‘a product is at the heart of brand equity since it is the primary influence on what the consumers experience the brand, what they hear about the brand from others and what the firm can tell customers about the brand’. Therefore, Brand performance is the way in which a product or service attempts to meet the consumer’s functional needs. It has immense influence on how consumers experience a brand as well as what the brand owner and others say about the brand. As such, what international students say about their level of satisfaction with regards to services offered at Ashesi university and their overall university experience has a lot of bearing on brand perceptions in their respective communities and countries. This research explored the subject of brand performance with regards to education and campus experiences at Ashesi:

*Response to concerns.*

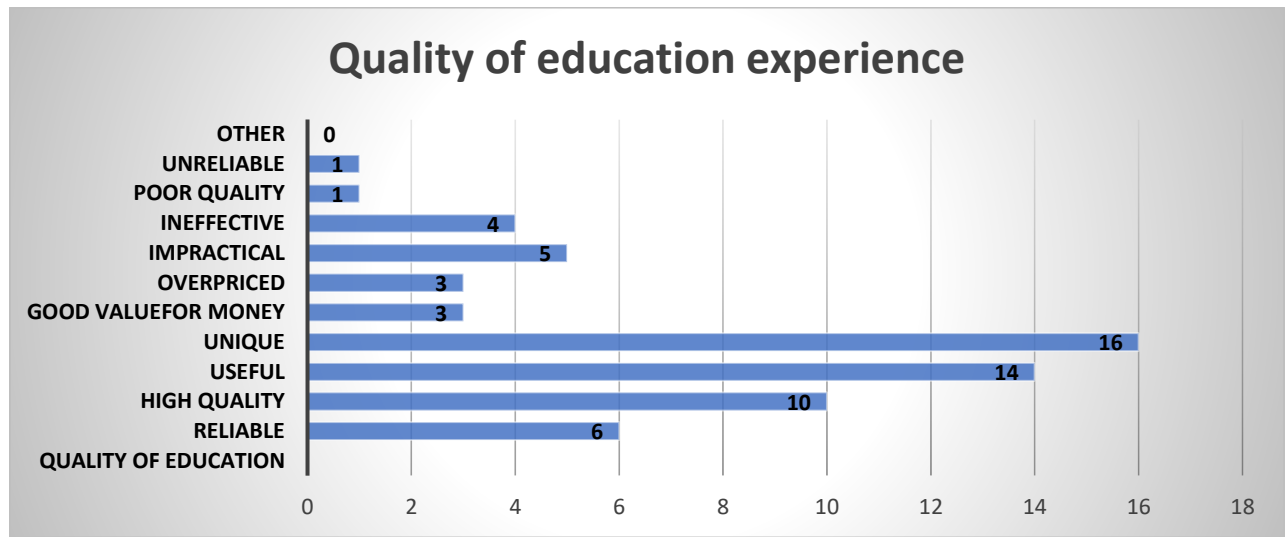
Response to consumer concerns and feedback is imperative to an organisation, so as to maximize customer experience and in turn, its brand image. Based on a on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is extremely responsive and 5 is Not all responsive, the research responses showed only 4.3% believe the school has been very responsive to student concern (See the graph (3). Generally, the highest number of respondent voted that the school has been somewhat responsive to student’s concerns.



**Graph3.How responsive the university has been to student concerns**

*Quality of Education experience.*

Education is the main product of a university, it determines the quality of skills of graduates, hence how students are taught is imperative. According to the focus interviews, one of the most common reasons for applying to Ashesi is due to its due to its **‘liberal arts education system’** and **‘small class sizes’**. A few students also expressed that **‘there is a platform and support system for interaction between lecturers and students’**. A further analysis of the survey questionnaire showed that 21.7 % of the international students believe that lectures at Ashesi University teach extremely well, while 60.9 % believe the lecturers teach very well. The rest opined that lecturers teach averagely. This is a positive outlook on the perspective of international students, towards the faculty .The quantitative research also showed that international students mainly (63.5%) associated their education experience at Ashesi as Unique (25.4%), Useful (22.2%), High Quality (15. 9%).However, several students (36.5%) feel that it is impractical, ineffective and overpriced (See the graph below).

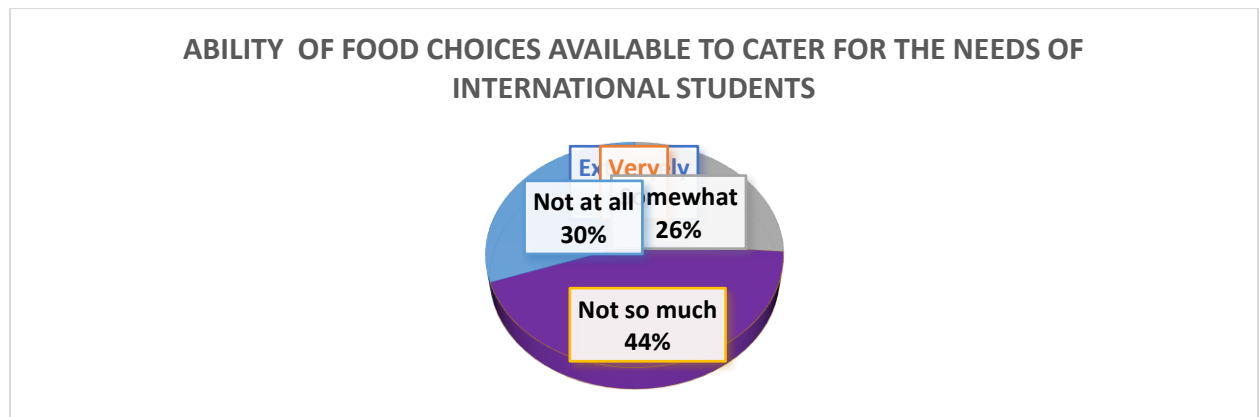


**Graph4.Quality of education experience**

#### *Quality of campus life*

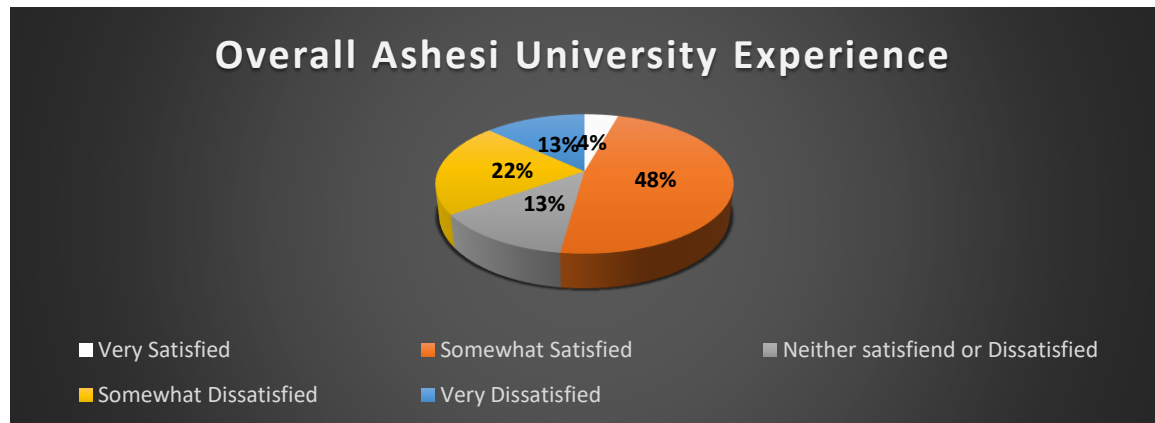
The focus group interview revealed that some international students feel deprived with regards to their social life. A student from second year summarised his campus experienced this way, **‘I feel like I have had a career and academic discovery but not a social discovery here at Ashesi’**, Another student from West Africa felt that, **‘too much work leaves no time for social engagement, social life is lacking’**. When asked on their opinion of the quality of their social experiences on-campus, a mention of the words **‘boring’** and **‘social segregation’** came-up frequently. Too much focus has also been put in the academic work, with little emphasis on school and social life balance. Other red flag signs came up when students were asked to mention the nationalities they identify with the most. Only 4.35% of the responses mentioned Ghanaians. This raises concerns on whether Ghanaian students appreciate and understand diversity, or whether the university setting promotes a divide between the locals and

international students. Or generally, whether the international students themselves keep distance from the local students. Another key issue raised was the catering services at the university. International students spend most of their time at Ashesi. Most international students generally expect more diverse food offerings, given that the university has over 20 nationalities represented. Generally, majority (74%) feel that little has been done with regards to accommodating diversity in international food choices. The rest feel that somehow, they have adjusted (See the pie chart below).



**Graph5. DO Food choices available cater for the needs of international students?**

With regards to overall satisfaction of the respondents with their Ashesi University experience as International students, most students were between somewhat satisfied and very dissatisfied. Only 4% of the students were very satisfied with their overall Ashesi University Experience.



## 6. Satisfaction with regards to overall university experience

Despite the high-quality education ratings by international students, the ‘boring’ social life according to the international students. This should clearly send a message that international students regard the quality of social life highly hence the need for Ashesi to improve on its current offerings.

### Brand Imagery

Brand imagery is a type of brand meaning, which involves how people think of a brand abstractly, rather than what they think the brand does. It refers to more intangible aspects of the brand and consumers can associate the brand with. For instance: Personality and values, or history heritage and experiences. During the focus interview, when asked about what came to their mind when they think about Ashesi, some of the responses were ‘Ethics & Integrity’, ‘Too much Work’, ‘Liberal Arts’, ‘Success’, ‘Opportunities’, ‘Patrick Awuah’ ‘Honor Code’. These are some of the aspects that make up Ashesi identity. Yet some of a few responses brought up red flags that could potentially cause a negative variation of Ashesi identity from its image such as lack of transparency and

accountability, and class divide. For instance, one first year student opined that **‘I just don’t like the social experience part of Ashesi, there is a lot of classism and MCF are thought to be very poor’**. Another male student highlighted that, **‘Sometimes I see the school acting against the values they promised us before joining’** Other mentions included ‘boring’ which should send a strong signal that international students, being far from home, expect an engaging social life, and regard it highly. As such how the social life at school is structured, can influence their perceptions and image of the school brand.

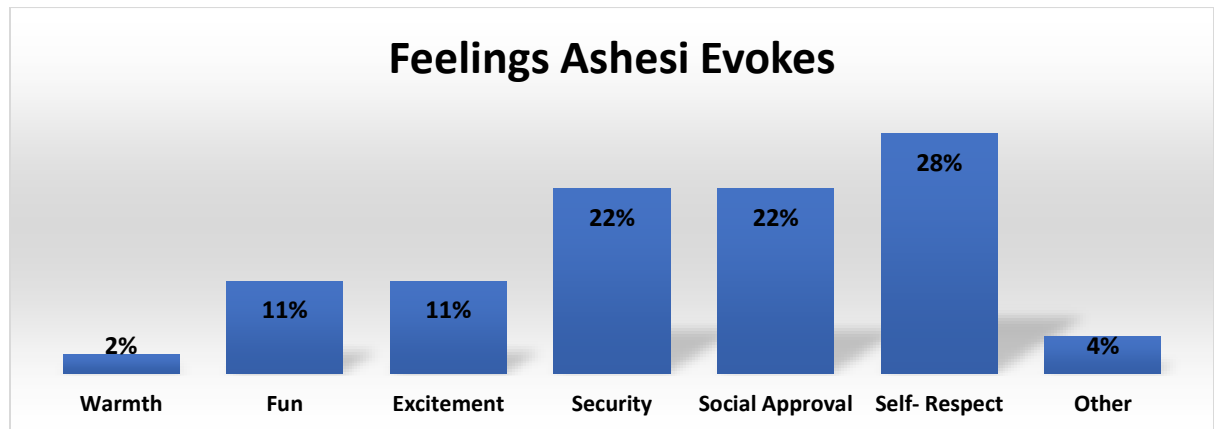
#### Determining Brand Response:

##### **Brand Feelings**

Brand Feelings are customers’ emotional responses and reactions to the brand. A firm can capitalize brand feelings by emotionally binding itself with the desires and aspirations of customers. Kevin Roberts as quoted in (Keller,2013: Pg. 118) reinforces the relevance of brand feelings by stating that ‘it is not enough for a company to be respected, the goal is to earn a “love mark” from its consumers’. Quantitative research explored brand feelings of the international students towards the Ashesi brand, based on the six types of brand-building feelings: Warmth, Fun, Excitement, Security, Social Approval and Self-respect. Majority of the international students feel that Ashesi gives them a sense of Self-respect (28%), Social approval (22%) as well as Security (22%). Fewer students exuded excitement, fun and warmth (11% 12% 2% respectively) **(See the graph below)**.

Generally, Ashesi international students feel a sense of self assurance, and a belief that others look favourably on their appearance behaviour for being student at Ashesi. Being

students at Ashesi also makes them feel good about themselves. However, feelings of fun, warmth and excitement are the least the students associate the brand with.



## 7. The feelings students have toward the brand

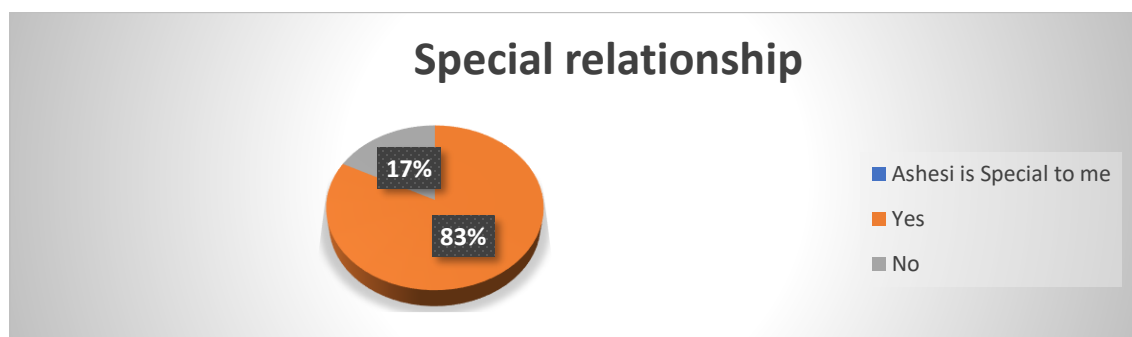
### Determining relationship(resonance) between Ashesi and International students

#### **Brand Resonance.**

Brand resonance focuses on the relationship level and level of identification that consumers have with a brand. It is characterized by the intensity or depth of psychological bond that customers have with the brand as well as the level of activity motivated by their loyalty (seek information on the brand, and recommend it to others).

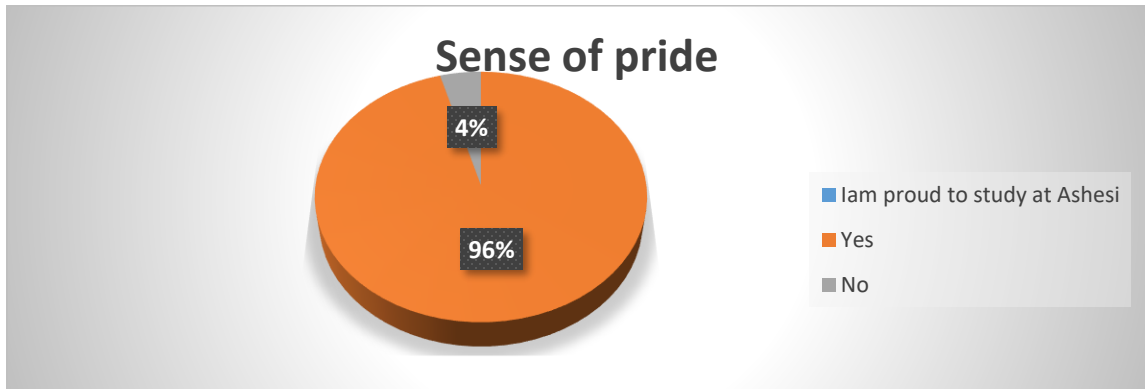
83% of respondents indicated that Ashesi is special to them some of the statements include, **‘It has given me an international experience I will never have again in my life’ (Kenyan student)** and **‘I feel like Ashesi has helped me discover some of my passions’(Ugandan student)**. However, some of the 17.4% that do not view Ashesi as Special think claim that, **‘I just don’t like the social experience part of Ashesi, there is a lot of classism and an MCF student is thought to be very poor’[third year**

**student]**.95.7% further highlighted that they are proud to study at Ashesi (**See pie chart below**). This signifies a strong attitudinal attachment of majority of the international students towards the Ashesi brand. Some of the reasons they gave include ‘**Ashesi is known for honour code, training and producing ethical and entrepreneurial leaders. I am proud of this.**’ [junior year student] A student from Southern Africa mentioned that *‘I believe that Ashesi is giving us some quality education and it is trying to inculcate in us certain values that would make us better people such as ethics which other universities don’t really pay attention to’*. On the issue of whether they follow news about Ashesi University closely, averagely, students somewhat follow Ashesi university news (See graph the last graph below). Generally, there is an attitudinal attachment to the quality of Ashesi education, but a sense of community needs to be improved upon, since some students feel left out. Additionally, there is average active engagement with regards to whether students follow news about Ashesi. However, behavioural loyalty can be promoted since most students identify and are proud of what Ashesi is about.

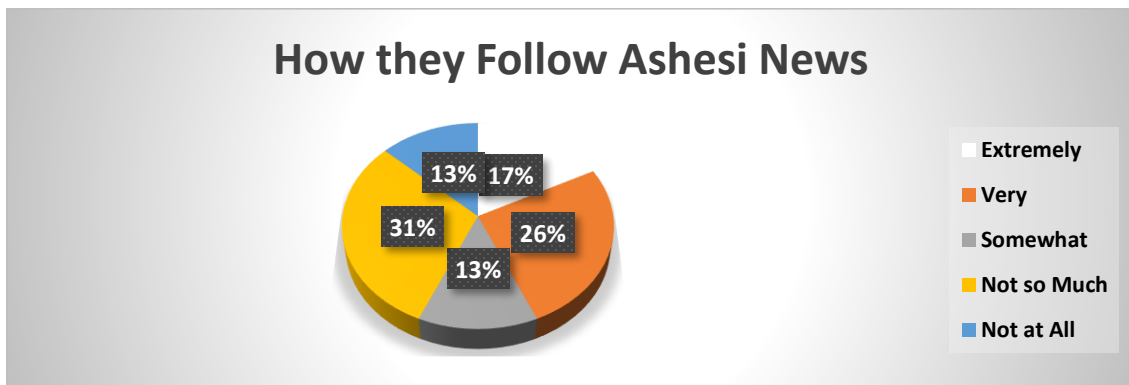


**Graph 8: Relationships toward the Ashesi brand**





**Graph 9: Sense of pride towards the brand of Ashesi.**



**Graph 10: The rate at which students follow news on Ashesi university**

## CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Transformational Marketing**

As seen in the data analysis, most international students are proud to be studying at Ashesi. Others also believe that Ashesi is special to them and that most of them would recommend Ashesi university to others. This shows the emotional attachment and loyalty that most international students have towards the brand of Ashesi. Additionally, majority of students interviewed heard about Ashesi through friends and family. Even though most of them already had a university in their mind, they chose Ashesi for what it stands for. As such the story of Ashesi has been the most effective through word of mouth. Per Nielsen (2012), 92 percent of consumers believe recommendations they receive from friends and family over the advertisements seen on TV or in a magazine. Ashesi University could capitalize on its current international, student population, through transformational ( emotional appeal) and word of mouth advertising to reach out to the right targeted personas.

For instance, the external relations can sponsor summer brand ambassador programs, where international students can spend travelling to specific schools and places of interest in their respective countries, to share the story of Ashesi to prospective students.

### **Internationalization of The Ashesi Campus.**

More often the focus group interviews revealed that some of the international students feel segregated. One of the reasons could be that majority of international students are MasterCard Sponsored. MasterCard Scholarship is a merit program, as much as it is targeted for students from challenging backgrounds. However, most of the beneficiaries

feel like they are often, left to interact with students from the same background since they are MasterCard. This dismantles the sense of community that Ashesi strives to promote, which could discourage many international students from contributing to diversity. The institution should therefore invest in orienting local students to embrace the concept of diversity. Such orientation programs, have mostly been provided for international students. Internationalizing the local students therefore is as important as localizing the international students. This could help in improving the social differences in the campus and improve the brand image of the Ashesi brand, with regards to international students.

### **Managing the Social Life Expectations Of International Students.**

As demonstrated in the brand audit report, international students rate the quality of Education at Ashesi highly, but rated the socials aspect the campus life very low. Thus, their overall experience was very low. This shows the bearing social life has on the perspectives of the International students. Additionally, brand feeling analysis showed that majority of the international students feel that Ashesi gives them a sense of Self-respect (28.3%), Social approval (21.7%) as well as Security (21.7%). Fewer students exuded excitement, fun and warmth (10.9% 10.9% 2.2% respectively). Ashesi is a small growing campus and therefore some of social activities may be restricted or limited. However, international students are not informed and come with unrealistically high social expectations. As such this may translate to an undesired brand image.

### CONCLUSIONS.

Generally, the international student population can be a source of brand equity for Ashesi, especially with regards to creating brand awareness in their respective countries.

Because international students have high social life expectations, with regards to campus experience, Ashesi should promote a more exciting social life for students on campus, as well as manage high expectations of the incoming international students.

The primary data obtained using research was 23 % of the target sample as such the opinions collected might not apply to all the international students. Only four countries participated in the survey which may also bring about bias, on the conclusions reached.

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## APPENDICES

### **Focus Group Interview Guide**

#### **Interview Guide for Ashesi University International Student Focus Group**

##### **interviews**

1. What attracted you to Ashesi University?
2. What comes to your mind when you think about your college life at Ashesi?
3. What do you like about studying and living at Ashesi University?
4. What do you not like about studying and living at Ashesi University?
5. What are your expectations, with regards to career, and social life as an International student, and what is your view on whether /how Ashesi has met these expectations?
6. What challenges, if any, do you have studying and living at Ashesi University and in Ghana?
7. What do you think is unique about Ashesi?
8. Describe your campus experience in one word.
9. What would you tell a prospective international student applying to Ashesi?
10. What would you like to be changed, increased, or introduced to improve your campus experience at Ashesi?

### Online Survey Questionnaire

I, Damaris Olting'idi, a final year Business Administration student of Ashesi University College would like to request your consent to participate in this research activity. The purpose of this study is to conduct a brand audit of Ashesi University with regards to International student experiences. Your participation will provide ideas in improving the international students experience here at Ashesi. You are free to be part of this activity, and you are free to stop at any moment during the activity. There is no risk involved in being a part of this study. The benefit of your participation is that effective strategies and recommendations would be deployed to create a better international life experience for you at Ashesi. This survey should not take more than 20 minutes to complete. For further information, you can contact my Supervisor, Mr. Anthony Ebow Spio, Head of Business Administration Department at Ashesi University College. This study and consent form have been reviewed by Ashesi IRB for Human Subjects Research to confirm that this survey does not infringe on your rights as a participant. For further information, contact the committee through or myself, through [damaris.olting'idi@ashesi.edu.gh](mailto:damaris.olting'idi@ashesi.edu.gh)

#### 1.What is your year group?

- ☐ 2017
- ☐ 2018
- ☐ 2019
- ☐ 2020

#### 2. Please state your:

a) Nationality. \_\_\_\_\_

b) Gender \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. How did you hear about Ashesi?

- ☐ Friend
- ☐ Family

- ☐ Co-worker
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Flyer
- ☐ Brochure
- ☐ Billboard
- ☐ Other

**4. Please state your reason(s) for choosing Ashesi University for your undergraduate studies**

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**5. Was Ashesi your first option? If not, name an (other) Universit(ies) you would have considered?**

**6. How likely is it that you would recommend Ashesi University to a friend or colleague?**

 Not at all likely - 
  1 
  2 
  3 
  4 
  5 
  6 
  7 
  8 
  9 
  Extremely likely - 10

**7.What do you view as most unique about Ashesi?**

- i)**
- ii)**
- iii)**
- iv)**
- v)**

**8. Ashesi University gives you a feeling of :(Please select all that apply)**

- ☒ Warmth
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Excitement
- ☐ Security
- ☐ Social Approval
- ☐ Self-respect
- |

**9. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with Ashesi University experience as an International Student?**

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied

**10. Which of the following words would you use to describe your Ashesi University education and experience? Select all that apply.**

- ☐ Reliable
- ☐ High quality
- ☐ Useful
- ☐ Unique
- ☐ Good value for money
- ☐ Overpriced
- ☐ Impractical
- ☐ Ineffective
- ☐ Poor quality
- ☐ Unreliable

**11. What values do you Associate Ashesi University with.**  
**i)**

ii)

iii)

iv)

v)

**13. How well does Ashesi University's experience and environment meet your needs? (Please give a brief explanation of your choice in the box below)**

- ☐ Extremely well
- ☐ Very well
- ☐ Somewhat well
- ☐ Not so well
- ☐ Not at all well

**14. How would you rate the quality of your Ashesi experience, with regards to your expectations?**

- ☐ Very high quality
- ☐ High quality
- ☐ Neither high nor low quality
- ☐ Low quality
- ☐ Very low quality

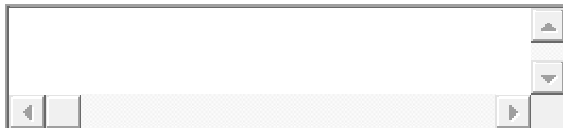
**15. How would you rate the value for money of the Ashesi education and experience?**

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Above average
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Below average
- ☐ Poor

**16. How responsive has the University been to your questions or concerns?**

- ☒ Extremely responsive
- ☐ Very responsive
- ☐ Somewhat responsive
- ☐ Not so responsive
- ☐ Not at all responsive

**17. What have been your most favourite experiences at this university?**



**18. How well do the professors teach at this university?**

- ☐ Extremely well
- ☐ Very well
- ☐ Somewhat well
- ☐ Not so well
- ☐ Not at all well
- ☒

**19. How helpful is your academic advisor?**

- ☐ Extremely helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Not so helpful
- ☐ Not at all helpful

**20. What other nationalities do you most identify with, at Ashesi University?**

**21. I am proud to have others know that I study at Ashesi.**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Please explain your response**

**22. How safe do you feel on campus?**

- ☐ Extremely safe
- ☐ Very safe
- ☐ Somewhat safe
- ☐ Not so safe
- ☐ Not at all safe

**23. How helpful is the staff at the on-campus health centre?**

- ☐ Extremely helpful
- ☐ Very helpful
- ☐ Somewhat helpful
- ☐ Not so helpful
- ☐ Not at all helpful

**24. As an international student, how useful are the services provided by the on-campus career center?**

- ☐ Extremely useful
- ☐ Very useful
- ☐ Somewhat useful
- ☐ Not so useful
- ☐ Not at all useful

**25. How healthy is the food served at this university?**

- ☐ Extremely healthy
- ☐ Very healthy
- ☐ Somewhat healthy
- ☐ Not so healthy
- ☐ Not at all healthy

**26. Do you think the food at Ashesi with regards to variety and taste, caters to your needs as an international student? Please briefly explain your choice**

- ☐ Extremely
- ☐ Very
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Not so much
- ☐ Not at all

- 
- ☒ Extremely crowded
  - ☐ Very crowded
  - ☐ Somewhat crowded
  - ☐ Not so crowded
  - ☐ Not at all crowded

**28. How happy are you with the choice of university extracurricular activities?**

- ☒ Extremely happy
- ☐ Very happy
- ☐ Somewhat happy
- ☐ Not so happy
- ☐ Not at all happy

**29. How satisfied are you with the policies that this university sets? Please explain your response in the box provided below.**

- ☐ Extremely satisfied
  - ☐ Very satisfied
  - ☐ Somewhat satisfied
  - ☐ Not so satisfied
  - ☒ Not at all satisfied
-



**30 .Overall, are you satisfied with your experience at this university**

- ☐ Extremely satisfied
- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☒ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- ☐ Somewhat dissatisfied
- ☐ Very dissatisfied
- ☐ Extremely dissatisfied

**31. Do you have any other comments, questions, or concerns?**

