

**THE BRAND AUDIT OF ASHESI UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE**

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ASHESI UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

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COLLEGE**

By

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DECLARATION

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

Candidate's Signature:

Candidate's Name:

Date:

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

Supervisor's Signature:

Supervisor's Name:

Date:

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ABSTRACT

Ashesi University College is a Liberal Arts private university located in Berekuso, the Eastern Region of Ghana. Ashesi offers three undergraduate degree programs namely: Business Administration, Computer Science and Management Information System and is the only university in Ghana that operates on an Honor Code System. This is a system intended to build a high-trust community, to put students in charge of their ethical posture and the reputation of their alma mater.

The main objective of this thesis was to assess the health of the Ashesi University College brand and to recommend ways by which the brand can improve. To achieve this, a brand audit was conducted to investigate how Ashesi`s clients (i.e. parents, alumni and students) perceived the brand and to identify the main sources of brand equity for Ashesi. This is because a consumer`s perception about a brand can make or unmake a brand.

Both qualitative and quantitative research techniques were used to collect data for the study. Parents, alumni and students were interviewed to gain an in-depth understanding of how they perceive the brand. A questionnaire for an online survey was designed based on the findings from the in-depth interview.

The findings proved that Ashesi`s target generally have a positive perception towards the Ashesi brand. Ashesi`s sources of brand equity were identified under brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations. A S.W.O.T analysis was also done for the brand to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Based on the findings, some recommendations were made to Ashesi University College. They were advised to consider expanding by introducing more undergraduate courses and to introduce postgraduate courses. It also recommended that Ashesi should

improve upon their marketing strategies by advertising more on radio and television, introduce more entrepreneurship courses and find ways to update and interact with alumni more frequently. It was also recommended that Ashesi should include entrepreneurship courses from the beginning of freshman year to senior year to help improve student`s entrepreneurial skills.

KEYWORDS: Ashesi University College, Branding, Brand Equity, and Brand Audit

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the entire study. The chapter gives a brief introduction on the background of study, research objectives, research questions and significance of study. It highlights the theoretical framework that was used in this study. The chapter ends with a plan outlining the organization of the report.

1.2 Background of Study

Education just like everything else in this 21st century has become a commodity. In order to sell, institutions of learning have to create brands, which set them apart from others. These brands have to be polished and maintained over time, to stay in the minds of consumers and to create a competitive advantage.

Globalization, the main driver of change is moving at a fast pace. Diversification, internationalization, privatization and decentralization have an effect on the way higher educational institutions operate, especially as a result of the change in people's attitudes (Harsha & Shah , 2011). In today's global market, institutions must differentiate themselves from their competitors in order to survive (Keller , 2013). As a result of this, most companies and institutions including universities have turned to branding as a solution for survival (Harsha & Shah , 2011).

Branding is the process by which companies/institutions/people distinguish themselves from their competitors (Keller , 2013). A brand is anything that resides

in the hearts and minds of consumers, which includes products and services (VanAuken, 2003). Examples of things that can be branded include educational institutions, people, organizations, geographic location, physical goods, services, ideas, causes, retailers, and distributors, amongst others. Some well-known brands include Samsung, Nelson Mandela, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Manchester United, Ghana, Coca Cola, Apple and Unilever. This research will focus on Higher Educational brands, particularly Ashesi University College.

Branding comes with numerous benefits to both the consumer and the company/firm/institution. To the institution, branding confirms credibility, motivates the buyer, stimulates consumer loyalty, increases brand extension opportunities, reduces vulnerability to competitive marketing actions and delivers the brand's message clearly (Tuominen , 1999). To the consumer, branding serves as a signal of quality and satisfaction, psychological rewards from ownership, search cost reducer, promise with the product maker and symbolic relevance (Tuominen , 1999)

In Ghana, the average secondary school graduate is exposed to over 60 Ghanaian Higher Educational Institutions to choose from at the beginning of each academic year (National Accreditation Board, 2012). Higher educational institutions include public and private universities, teacher training colleges, vocational schools and polytechnics, amongst others. According to the National Accreditation Board (2012) there are about 9 accredited public universities and over 50 accredited private universities in Ghana. Some public universities in Ghana include: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Ghana, University of Cape Coast, University of Mines and Technology amongst others. Private universities in Ghana include: Ashesi University College, Central University College, Valley View University, Wisconsin University, and so on.

Prospective students have a variety of universities to choose from and as a result of this, universities must focus on their branding strategies in order to attract the type of students they want in their universities. This is just like walking into a supermarket and having to pick a product from a variety of products displayed on a shelf. The customer is more likely to pick a well-known brand, which he/she can afford. Some factors prospective students consider when deciding which university to attend include: parental influence, location, popularity, affiliations with the institution, entry requirements, courses offered, student's word of mouth, general advertisement amongst others (Marrs, Gajos , & Pinar , 2011). Other factors include a historically established brand, internationally recognized faculty, attractive campus and good public perception. Students will be attracted to universities that have been well branded and deliver what they promise. A strong university brand ensures sustainability and a competitive advantage over its competitors. A brand will have a competitive advantage when it can deliberately choose a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value for the consumer (Porter & Kramer, 2002). A competitive advantage exists when an institution's strategy can attract loyal customers while defending itself against various competitive forces. A well branded university should be able to attract students, attract, recruit and retain quality staff and faculty, have excellent quality of education they are perceived to offer and have a good relationship with its local community.

Additionally students in Ghana have the option of choosing from either local or international universities that are performing well in the Higher Educational sector. Students will send applications to universities that easily come to mind during the application season. As a result of this, universities must position themselves in order to place themselves in the minds and hearts of prospective students. Universities on the other hand will aim at receiving applications from good students

worldwide. All universities, target students and thus should differentiate themselves in a unique manner by meeting the demands/needs of its students. As a result of this, universities must focus on how well their brands are performing and measures they can adopt to improve and sustain their brand. In Ghana for example, a lot of universities offer Business Administration causing majority of students to pursue the course. But the next question they are often asked after they graduate is "From which university did you graduate?" It is for this reason that every university should focus on its branding strategies and its ways to maintain a good reputation. A brand becomes successful when consumers perceive that the particular product/ service offered is not the same as another brand in the same category

Due to the importance in the value a brand needs to create for its customers, there has been an increase in emphasis placed on understanding how to build and measure brand equity (Keller , 2013). In efficiently managing a university brand, there should be a clear understanding of the university's brand equity. Brand equity is *"the added value of a product, expressed usually in monetary terms based on the sum of all distinguishing qualities, assets and attributes (i.e. perceived quality, strong brand associations, patents, trademarks, channel relationships etc.) of a brand, drawn from all relevant stakeholders, that results in personal commitment to and demand for the brand"* (Keller , 2013). A university will have a strong brand if it has positive sources of brand equity. According to Keller, strong brands understand what the brand means to costumers and excels at delivering what the consumers truly desire and understand what the brand means to its consumers while monitoring the sources of brand equity (Keller, 2008). To identify an institution's source of brand equity, a brand audit can be performed. A brand audit is an externally consumer focused valuation which involves various activities to determine the overall health of the brand, uncover sources of equity and

recommend ways to improve and leverage that equity (Keller, 2013). A brand audit is a 360 - degree view of a brand, which helps an institution understand the relevance of the brand today, tomorrow, and helps develop a strategy for your future.

A University`s brand equity should not be identified only from the institutions perspective but should be concerned about how its stakeholders (i.e. parents, students, faculty, staff and alumni) perceive the brand. Education is a service, thus experiential and intangible in nature so branding education has to be based on experience and perceptions (Harsha & Shah , 2011). A university`s brand can be classified as the university`s most valuable intangible asset and thus must be managed efficiently (Harsha & Shah, 2011). This research paper will assess how well the Ashesi University College brand is performing from its target`s group perspective.

1.3 Research Question

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

- ❖ How do Ashesi`s consumers (i.e. students, parents and alumni) perceive the Ashesi University College brand?
- ❖ What are the main sources of brand equity for Ashesi University College?
- ❖ What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for Ashesi University College brand?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This paper seeks to ascertain how well the Ashesi University College brand is performing from its consumer`s (i.e. parents, alumni and students) perspective.

1.4.1 Specific Objectives

- ❖ To ascertain how consumers perceive the Ashesi brand.
- ❖ To identify the sources of brand equity for the Ashesi brand.
- ❖ To identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Ashesi brand.

1.5 Significance / Justification

Majority of universities strive to be the best in the Higher Educational sector. Ashesi`s aim is to help solve the developmental problem in Africa through educating leaders who will make a difference in the world (Ashesi University College, 2013). To achieve this, Ashesi must focus on its branding strategies. The aim of this research is to help Ashesi assess the current health of the brand by identifying their main sources of equity from its targets` perspective. This research will help in identifying Ashesi`s sources of brand equity and recommend strategies the university can use to leverage on its sources of equity to aid in the quest of becoming a strong well-known brand. The brand audit determines whether or not there were any problems with Ashesi`s desired brand image and the perceived image. The research highlights the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats for the Ashesi brand. This will help the university know what it`s consumers perceive to be wrong with the brand and how they can improve.

This research will also add to existing literature, as little academic work has been done in the area of auditing higher educational brands especially in Ghana. The research will aid other universities in Ghana, understand what its target group wants from the brand as well as what they currently know about the brand in order create a profile of potential consumers and act in a strategically and informed manner in positioning the institution.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework adopted to guide this research was the Consumer Based Brand Equity pyramid by Kevin Keller Lane. The Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) framework is used to assess the health of a brand by identifying sources of equity and recommending ways by which a brand can improve (Keller, 2008). The Consumer Based Brand Equity framework helps to identify brand equity from the consumer's perspective. This concept is of the view that the power of a brand lies in what resides in the minds and hearts of customers. The CBBE model approaches brand equity from the perspective of the firm's consumer (Keller, 2013). The consumer in this case may be an individual, organization, and existing or prospective customer. It is in this view that this research seeks to focus on parents, students and alumni since they are the main consumers of the brand as they patronize the brand. The framework comprises of two main steps; the brand inventory (supply side) and the brand exploratory (demand side). The brand inventory is a profile of how the products and services of a company are branded and marketed. The brand exploratory provides information as to how consumers perceive the brand by identifying sources of customer based brand equity. This research will focus on the brand exploratory side of the brand audit due to time constraints and the extensive nature of the brand inventory side.

1.7 Reasons for Conducting a Brand Audit

The main reasons for conducting a brand audit include;

- ❖ To determine any discrepancies between the desired brand image and the real perceived image.
- ❖ To uncover potential opportunities to enhance the brand image as well as mitigate the harmful ones.

- ❖ To enhance marketing and communication strategy.
- ❖ Determine the ability to meet the needs of Ashesi`s target audience.

1.8 Outline of Dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter one of this study is the introduction which gives a general overview of this research. This chapter also provides the research questions, objectives and significance of study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chapter two comprises of the literature review, which discusses other researches done in the area of this study. This chapter focuses on areas such as

- ❖ Brands
- ❖ Brand Equity/ Consumer Based Brand Equity
- ❖ University Branding
- ❖ Brand Audit

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter three focuses on the research design and validity of the research instruments used. This includes the study design, target group, sampling technique analytical tools and data sources.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Chapter four presents the findings of the data gathered in relation to the objectives of this research mentioned in chapter 1. Graphs have been used to

explain the findings. The findings are also analysed in relation to existing literature in the area of study.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Limitation and Recommendation

Chapter five presents a summary of the findings, recommendations and conclusion of the entire study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter takes a look at works on the concept of branding, university branding, brand equity, the Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid and brand audit.

2.2. Branding

The concept of branding has been in existence for centuries to distinguish the products/services from one producer to another (Keller , 2013). The word “brand” is derived from the Old Norse word “brandr” which means to burn, as owners of livestock used to burn a part of their animals to identify them from those of their competitors (Keller, 2013). In the nineteenth century, branding became predominant when entrepreneurs realized they could charge more for a product or service if they could guarantee quality and consistence (Temple, 2006). Branding is still being practiced in recent times, but has undergone a few changes with regards to its true meaning. In the past, brandishing was all there was to branding, but currently, branding includes names, logos, symbols and so on which give value to the customer by meeting their needs.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as the “**name, term, sign, symbol** or **design** or a combination of them, intended to identify the **goods** and **services** of one seller or a group of sellers and to **differentiate** them from those of competition” (American Marketing Association, 2014). According to Keller (2013), “whenever a marketer creates a new name, logo, or symbol for a new product, he or she has created a brand”. Simon Anholt, one of the most important

practitioners in branding also defines a brand as “a product or service or organization, considered in combination with its **name**, its **identity** and its **reputation**” (Anholt, 1998). Van den Heever is also of the opinion that a brand is not just a name, logo, sign, symbol, advertisement or spokesperson. He believes a brand is everything that an organization wants its target market to feel and believe about its product and services (Tuominen , 1999). Dennis Hahn defines a brand as “the **recognition** and **personal connection** that forms in the hearts and minds of your customers and other **key audiences** through accumulated **experience** with your brand, at every point of contact” (Tuominen , 1999)

Temple on the other hand believes that branding is not just about creating a unique physical presence but it must meet consumer’s psychological needs through the value the brand embodies (Temple, 2006). Most definitions of “brand” focus on the identity of a product or service and the added value consumers/customers acquire from using or experiencing the brand. The feelings and perceptions created by the consumer while experiencing the brand, creates equity for the brand. Brands are the key source of differentiation that guides consumers purchase choice. As a result of this an organization must know how it will uniquely deliver value to the consumer, usually for a profit (VanAuken, 2003).

2.3. University Branding

A University is a high-level educational institution in which student’s study for degrees and academic research is done (Oxford Dictionaries , 2014). Bennett and Ali-Choudhury defines a university brand as “a manifestation of the institution`s features that distinguish it from others, reflect its capacity to satisfy student needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions” (Bennett & Ali-

Choundhury , 2009). Temple defines a university having a strong brand as one, which conjures up distinctive values and images in the minds of students (Temple, 2006).

Higher Educational Institutions are a nation's greatest asset and the backbone of every country's economy (Gyimah-Brempong, Paddison, & Mitiku , 2006). Kwabena Gyimah-Brempong et al, (2006) suggested that an increase in educational human capital has significant positive impacts on the growth rate of per capita income in African countries. Being one of a nation's greatest assets, there are a lot of benefits a nation can derive from university branding. For example the state and local governments enjoy increased tax revenues from college graduates as they will have to spend less on income support programs and providing a direct financial return on investments in postsecondary education (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). However, higher education branding especially amongst private and public universities is gradually becoming dominant (Varghese, 2004). Some researchers however think otherwise. Hemsley Brown & Goonawardana (2007) suggests that even though there is a growing importance of branding in general, branding higher educational institutions is still scarce.

Branding is a tool for marketing and this applies to the higher educational sector. Branding universities is an area that has received little academic attention (Chapleo, 2010). Some researches argue that the concept of branding in higher education is different from that of branding in the service sector whereas others think otherwise. Jevons (2006) raises questions about the branding concept and whether or not it can be applicable to the Higher Education sector. Jevons explains that branding is suitable for business sectors and not necessarily in the higher education industry (Jevons, 2006). Harsah & Shah, (2011) argues that education is

a service, which is intangible in nature, and thus branding it should be based on experience and employability. Research has also shown that campus life, career prospects of graduates, learning environment, cultural integration are a few but not all of a university's sources of brand awareness (Gray , Fan , & Llanes , 2003). To compete in today's competitive global market, higher educational institutions need to create and maintain a distinctive image (Parameswaran & Glowacka, 1995). A good brand image is important in higher educational institutions, as it causes students to apply to institutions perceived to be of good quality. Currently, most institutions focus on external branding which include advertisement, promotional materials, and so on but forget about other factors that constitutes having a good brand (Jevons, 2006). According to Chapleo (2006), a successful university brand is one, which has a clear vision, support from leadership, brand experience, internal support and a good location.

When a university brand is mentioned, associations, emotions, images and faces are evoked. It is for this reason that a university must know how to build and manage these factors (Harsha & Shah , 2011). To build, manage and measure these factors, the consumer based brand equity framework may be used (Keller, 2013).

2.4. Brand Equity

There has been no common viewpoint on how brand equity should be conceptualized or measured, since its inception in the 1980's (Keller , 2013). Although different definitions for brand equity have emerged, most are of the view that, brand equity is the added value a brand gains through its marketing strategy. Some researchers view brand equity from a financial perspective where as others view it from a consumer's cognitive perspective.

The Marketing Science Institute (MSI) defines brand equity as “an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant, unique added values which match their needs most closely” (Aaker, 1996). The Marketing Science Institute views brand equity as the way consumers behave towards a brand which can enable a brand earn greater market share leading to greater profit margins and causing them to have a strong and sustainable advantage (Aaker, 1996). Aaker also defines brand equity as “a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm/ or to that firms customers (Aaker, 1996). His definition throws light on the intangible assets a firm possesses, which creates value for consumers. Figure 1 below depicts how brand equity can create value for both the firm and customer according to Aaker`s.

Figure 1.1: How Brand Equity Generates Value

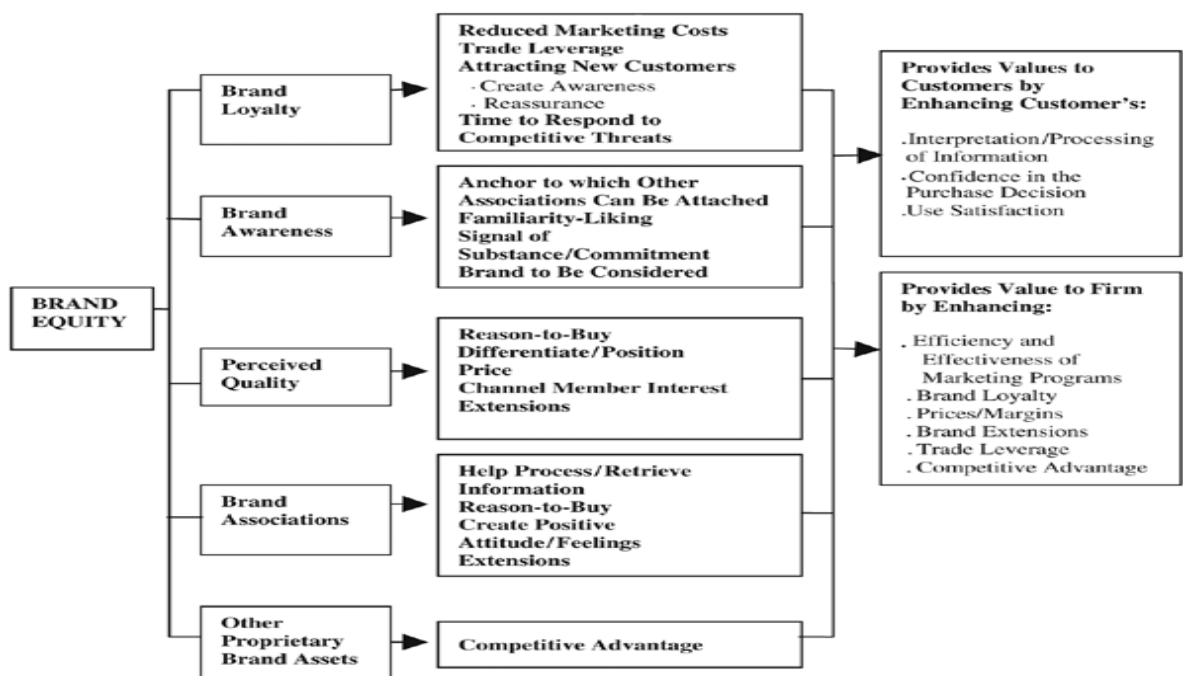


Figure 1.1: Brand Equity According to Aaker

Source: Adapted from Aaker, 1996, p. 9

Aaker identifies four sources of brand equity, which are brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality and brand associations (Aaker, 1996). All these sources of brand equity create value for the customer, which in turn creates value for the firm. Brand loyalty will increase profits to the firm, reduce cost for the customers and create trade leverage. Aaker describes brand awareness as the most important asset a brand has in the mind of its consumers. The awareness created is the degree to which customers can recall and recognize a brand during their purchase decision-making process. A high level of brand awareness will increase patronage and create value for both the consumer and the firm. Perceived quality aids in differentiating the goods and services of sellers to their competitors. For example prospective students will apply to universities that they perceive to be of good academic reputation. Brand association creates a positive attitude towards a brand. Brand associations may include: brand ambassadors, affiliations with other universities, and so on.

Keller also defines brand equity as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of the brand" (Keller, 1993). Justin Anderson views brand equity from a financial perspective. Anderson defines brand equity as "the financial value that a firm derives from customer response to the marketing of a brand" (Anderson, 2011). Anderson believes that brand equity is not only based on only the current value a firm has in terms of cognitive associations but also it is a net present value of future cash flows resulting from brand sales (Anderson, 2011). Some other economists also perceive brand equity as the ability of a brand to gain a larger market share and achieve a price premium (VanAuken, 2003).

2.5. Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE)

Many organizations seek to build a strong brand. A firm must have strong and positive sources of brand equity in order to build a strong brand (Chapleo, 2010). The Consumer Based Brand Equity model supports the fact that “the power behind a brand lies in what the consumers have learnt, felt and heard about the brand overtime” (Keller, 2001). The Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) is a model that can be used to measure a brands performance from the consumer’s perspective. The CBBE model throws more light on what brand equity is, how it should be built, measured and managed. The CBBE model assumes that the power of the brand resides in the hearts and mind of consumers (Keller, 2013). The CBBE model depicts how a company can build a strong brand. Figure 2.2 depicts Keller’s Consumer Based Brand Equity Pyramid.

Figure 2.2 (Consumer Based Brand Equity Pyramid)

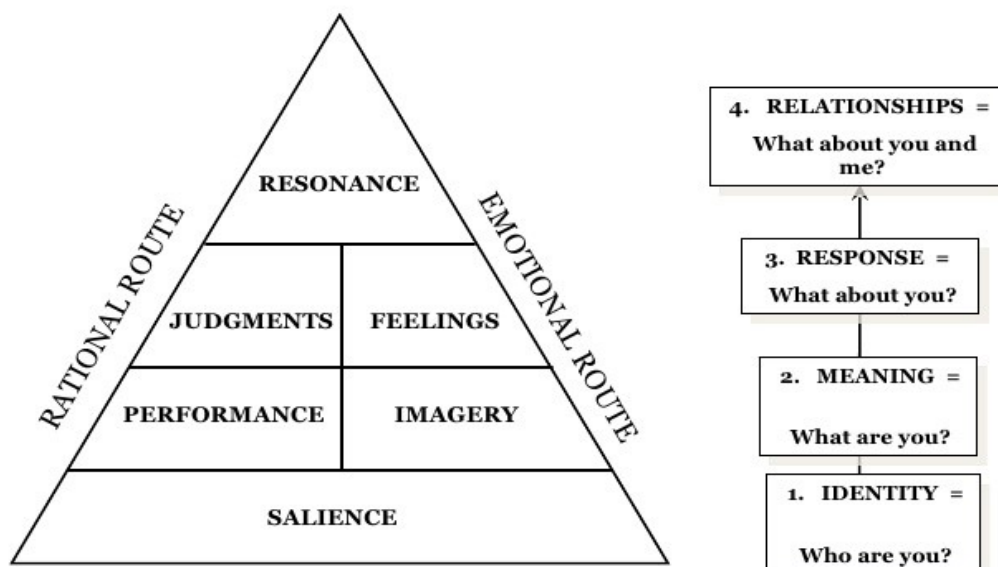


Figure 2.2: Keller's Consumer Based Brand Equity Pyramid

Source: Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity (2013)

i. Brand Identity (*Who are you?*)

The building block at this stage is *Brand Salience*. Brand Salience refers to consumer awareness of a brand (Keller, 1993). This step is to ensure that consumers know your brand and are able to identify it when the need arises. Brand salience forms the foundation of building and developing brand equity. Brand awareness is not just about remembering the brand when the need arises but also for consumers to have strong and positive perceptions about the brand (Keller, 1993). Brand salience determines whether or not a brand can be classified as a strong brand.

ii. Brand Meaning (*What are you?*)

At this stage questions such as "Who are you?", "What are you?", "How strongly is the brand identified with a brand association?" are asked. The two factors to building a strong brand are; performance and imagery (Keller, 2013). According to Keller, there are five important types of attributes and benefits that underlie a brand's performance (Keller, 1993). These include 1) primary characteristics and secondary features 2) product reliability, durability and serviceability, 3) service effectiveness, 4) efficiency and empathy, style and design and 5) price.

Brand performance is the way a brand can satisfy a consumer's utilitarian, aesthetic and economic needs and wants (Keller, 1993). A strong brand must be able to meet or exceed consumer's needs. Brand imagery is when the product is serving the psychological and social needs of its consumers (Keller 1993). Brand imagery is intangible and is about how people think about a brand rather than what the brand actually does for them.

iii. Brand Response

Brand Judgment is a consumer's personal opinions and evaluation of a brand (Keller, 2013). Consumers compare various brands that perform similar functions and based on various attributes, selects the one that best serves their needs. Consumers mainly focus on brand quality, credibility, consideration and superiority. These are the four main types of brand judgment in creating a strong brand. At this stage consumer will ask "What about you?"

Brand feelings are the emotional reactions and responses a consumer has towards a brand (Keller, 2013). This is how consumers feel when they use or experience a particular brand. The feeling developed towards a brand can be either positive negative, mild or strong. The six main types of brand feelings are; warmth, fun, excitement, security, social approval and self-respect (Keller, 2002).

iv. Brand Resonance

Brand resonance is the relationship a consumer has with the brand. This is how consumers feel they are attached to a brand. According to Keller, brand resonance can be broken into four main categories. These categories include behavioural loyalty, attitudinal attachment, sense of community and active engagement. At this stage consumers will ask, "what about you and me?"

2.6. Brand Audit

A brand audit is a comprehensive examination of a brand, involving activities to assess the health of a brand, uncover its sources of equity and suggest ways to improve and leverage that equity (Keller, 2013). A brand audit is a qualitative snapshot of the current position of a brand from the current perspective of the target audience (Staish, 2007). A brand audit may contain SWOT Analysis,

Consumer Based Brand Equity pyramid, Points of Parity and Points of Difference (Keller, 2013). Brand audits help various firms know what customers want from their product or service as well as what they are currently offering.

A brand audit consists of two steps: the brand inventory and the brand exploratory.

The Brand Inventory (Demand Side):

The brand inventory side provides a current profile of how all the products and services sold by a company are marketed and branded (Keller, 2013). The brand inventory side profiles each service or product offered. It includes the inherent product attributes or characteristics of the brand, distribution policy, communications, pricing and so on (Keller, 2013).

The Brand Exploratory (Supply-side):

The brand exploratory side provides detailed information on how consumers think and feel about a brand (Keller, 2013). The exploratory side gives data on how consumers perceive a brand and how that can add value to the brand. This research will focus on the exploratory side of the brand audit.

2.7. Gap in Literature

There has been a number of literary works that focused on branding higher education and brand equity. However there has been little done on auditing the brands of higher educational institutions especially in Ghana. A brand audit was conducted by Marrs et al, using Valparaiso University in Indiana as a case study (2011). The objective of the research was to show how a brand audit could help understand university branding issues and identify the sources of brand equity to

help in developing branding strategies for colleges and universities. The researchers conducted a CBBE, SWOT-f, and a gap analysis. From the research it was found that brand image is crucial in developing a strong university brand and brand equity. Findings showed a university with a strong and effective brand would cause students to apply for admission and remain competitive in a global market (Marrs et al, 2011). It was found that to create and implement a clear, focused and effective brand, a brand must be conducted utilizing the Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Pyramid.

Another brand audit was conducted on the Disney brand. Here the researcher focused on both brand exploratory and brand inventory and gave recommendations to the Disney brand (Pearson, 2008). Ingrid Staisch also conducted a brand audit on the L`Oreal Brand. The main objective was to find out how L`Oreal can improve their current brand image and position itself amongst its target group (Staisch, 2007). All these papers have been done in various parts of the world and various sectors. This research paper aims to add to existing literature by auditing the Ashesi University College brand, which can be used to assist in auditing other higher educational institutions especially in Ghana.

2.8. Summary

This chapter has provided information on branding, university branding, brand equity, consumer based brand equity and brand audit. There is limited information on auditing universities from consumer's perspective and higher education branding in Ghana. This research seeks to provide information as to how consumers perceive the Ashesi brand. The study will narrow its findings based on Keller's consumer based brand equity model.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the research methods and instruments used in gathering data to investigate how Ashesi`s stakeholders perceive the brand. It includes the research purpose and design, study area, sampling methods and data analysis tools that were used for the purpose of this research. There is an explanation of the procedures and rationale for every method applied. The limitations of this research have also been presented in this chapter.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of how Ashesi`s stakeholders (i.e. parents, alumni and students) perceive the Ashesi University College brand.

Specific research objectives included:

- ❖ To ascertain how Ashesi`s consumers perceive the Ashesi University College brand.
- ❖ Identifying the sources of brand equity for the Ashesi University College brand.
- ❖ Identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Ashesi Brand.

3.2. Research Purpose

The objective of every research informs the type of research that should be employed. The three basic types of research are: exploratory, descriptive and

explanatory. Based on the research objectives stated, the research purpose for this study is both exploratory and descriptive in nature.

Exploratory research is research done to find out what is happening; seek new insights to a question and assess phenomena in a new light and to provide a better understanding of a situation or a new phenomenon (Robson, 2002). Exploratory research is usually done by interviewing "experts" in the subject, conducting focus group interviews and through a search of the literature (Saunders et al, 2007). This research is an exploratory research as it seeks to explore to understand how Ashesi's main consumers perceive the Ashesi brand. This research will help Ashesi University College, understand how the perceptions of parents, alumni and students can add or subtract value to the brand.

Descriptive Research is research conducted "to portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations" (Robson, 2002). Descriptive research describes a phenomena accurately which can be done through a narrative description (Blanche , Durrheim , & Painter , 2006). Descriptive research is usually an extension of an exploratory research (Saunders et al, 2007). A questionnaire was designed based on the results obtained from the in-depth interview. Results from the questionnaire were used to identify and describe the perceptions towards the Ashesi brand, which makes this research descriptive in nature.

3.3. Research Method

This research was a mixed method research, as it employed the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. Qualitative research is used for any data collection technique (such as an interview) or data analysis procedure (such as categorizing data) that generates or uses non-numerical data. (Saunders et al, 2007). Quantitative research is also used for any data collection technique

(such as questionnaires) or data analysis procedure (such as graphs or statistics) that generates or uses numerical data (Saunders et al, 2007). Quantitative research method was employed due to the questionnaires that were administered in collecting data. Both qualitative and quantitative were chosen in order to gain a deeper understanding of how Ashesi`s consumers perceive the brand and to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

3.4. Research Strategy

The research strategy is the general plan of how a researcher will go about answering the research questions (Saunders et al, 2007). This research is exploratory and descriptive in nature and thus adopted the use of both in-depth interviews and online surveys.

The in-depth interviews had open-ended questions to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers truly perceive the brand. An Interviewing Guide with themes relevant to the research objectives and theoretical framework was used as a guide to interview and guide the discussions with the respondents. The questions were structured to suit the consumer based brand equity model. Appendix A, B and C contain the questions used during the interviews with parents, alumni and students respectively. The results obtained from the in-depth interview were used to design the questions for the online survey, which can be found in appendix D.

Ingrid Staisch conducted a similar study in 2007 on the way students perceive the L'Oreal brand and adopted the use of an online survey as an approach for collecting data (Staisch, 2007). Marrs et al also adopted the use of questionnaires in auditing Valparaiso University in Indiana (Marrs et al, 2011).

Close-ended questions were used for the online survey. This is because the close-ended questions produce standardized data, which can be analyzed statistically. The close-ended questions were likert type questions. Likert scales are ideal to use when measuring attitudes. Likert type questions include answers like agree, strongly agree, indifferent, disagree and strongly disagree. To avoid social desirability, the same question was asked in different ways. Appendix D contains the questions for the online survey for students.

3.5. Study Area and Data Source

This research employed the use of both primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from some internal stakeholders. Internal stakeholders for a university may include faculty, staff, students, alumni, parents, etc. (Harsha & Shah , 2011). This research focused on only parents, current Ashesi students and alumni since they interact more with the brand. Parents convince their wards to apply to specific institutions and pay for tuition. Students were chosen because they interact more with the brand and their performance after school has a great impact on the brand image. Internal stakeholders were selected for this research due to the theoretical framework guiding the research. The Consumer Based Brand Equity pyramid is of the view that, the power of a brand lies in what its customers have learned, felt, seen and heard about the brand as a result of their experiences over time. The students selected were current students from all year groups (i.e. 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017). Alumni were also chosen as they once experienced the brand and their performance in corporate Ghana will either affect the schools image positively or negatively.

Secondary data was information gathered from the schools website particularly about the university's profile.

3.6. Sampling Method

The sampling approach used in this research was convenience and purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure in which the judgment of the research is used to select the cases that make up the sample (Saunders et al, 2007). Purposive sampling was used because the research specifically needed some internal respondents who had experienced the Ashesi brand. Convenience sampling was used to interview four parents who currently have their wards in Ashesi. Four alumni were also interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of they currently perceive the brand. Two students from each year group was interviewed (i.e. 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017). The online survey was initially to target 40 students (i.e. 10 students from each year group) on campus but received 58 respondents.

3.7. Data Analysis Tools

The data analysis method used was content and narrative analysis. Content analysis is for gathering and analyzing the content of a text. Content analysis is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002). The content may include themes, messages, words, symbols, ideas, and so on. Narrative analysis is the collection and analysis of qualitative data that preserves the integrity the integrity and narrative value of the data collected, in order to avoid fragmentation (Saunders et al, 2007).

With the permission from respondents, the interviews were recorded. This was to ensure that the data obtained had been accurately replicated. This research employed the use of Microsoft Excel for data presentation. Microsoft Excel graphs

were used for a better representation of the responses collected from the online survey.

3.8. Summary

- ❖ This research was exploratory and descriptive in nature as it adopted the use of both quantitative and qualitative techniques of collecting data.
- ❖ Twelve respondents were interviewed and 58 students responded to the online survey, which was designed after the interviews.
- ❖ The interviews were recorded and content and narrative analysis was used to analyse the data that was gathered

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter entails an analysis of the data that was collected for this study in relation to the research objectives. The chapter has been divided into two parts. The first part contains the analysis of the in-depth interview (qualitative research phase) while the second part contains the presentations of the findings from the online survey (quantitative research phase). The findings of the survey have been presented in graphs. All findings presented are based on the research objectives and theoretical framework.

4.2 History of Ashesi University College

"If there is anything you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now". Dr. Patrick Awuah, founder of Ashesi University College pondered on these words by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as he took up an ambitious project of setting up the only Liberal Arts university in Ghana (Ashesi University College, 2013).

Ashesi University College is a private university located in Berekuso, a town near Aburi in the Eastern Region of Ghana. Ashesi's mission is *"to educate a new generation of ethical and entrepreneurial leaders in Africa; to cultivate within our students the critical thinking skills, the concern for others and the courage it will take to transform their continent"* (Ashesi University College, 2013).

Ashesi University College was founded in March 2002, a year and a half after it gained accreditation from the National Accreditation Board (NAB) in September

2001 (Ashesi University College, 2013). Ashesi is an independent, co-educational, public benefit education institute operating as a non-profit institution in Ghana. Ashesi University College is currently affiliated with Cape Coast University, a public university in Ghana. Ashesi started with 30 students in rented houses in Labone, Ghana, which served as lecture halls and administration blocks. Currently Ashesi has its own campus, where students from diverse backgrounds live together. The Ashesi University College brand was built on the Liberal Arts system, which incorporates Scholarship, Leadership and Citizenship (Ashesi University College, 2013).

Currently, Ashesi`s student population is 602 with 53% representing male students and 47% female. Ashesi has 17 full time faculty, 18 adjunct faculty, 15 faculty interns and 44 administrative staff (Ashesi University College, 2013). Ashesi offers three undergraduate degree programs, which are: Business Administration, Computer Science and Management Information Systems.

4.3 Qualitative Research Findings

(In-Depth Interview)

The main reason for conducting the in-depth interview was to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers perceive the Ashesi University College brand. Results from the interview were used to design an online survey to collect quantitative data. The interview questions were designed to gain information on the sources of brand equity for the Ashesi brand. A total number of 12 people were interviewed at the in depth exploratory stage (i.e. 4 parents, 4 alumni and 4 students).

4.4 Sources of Brand Equity

The results from the qualitative research phase proved that Ashesi University College derives its equity from four main sources: brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand association.

Brand Awareness

The research respondents indicated how they heard about Ashesi University College and gave reasons why they chose Ashesi University over other universities. Respondents said they heard about the brand through; alumni, television advertisements, parents, newspapers, Ashesi representatives during school visits, relatives, colleagues at work and friends.

An old student who was interviewed said *"I had heard about Ashesi from my friend who had applied here and secondly my younger brother had also applied to Ashesi and that's what made me look in that direction. I researched and realized that the kind of educational model they promoted was one of a kind."*

A second year student of Ashesi also said *"I heard about Ashesi at an orientation session back in my high school when Ashesi representatives came to talk to us about Ashesi."*

One parent explained *"I heard about Ashesi after a business dinner. A woman present was talking about her ward who had completed Ashesi University. She spoke with a lot of pride about the school. I decided to check the schools website and I must confess I was impressed"*.

The research revealed that students and alumni chose Ashesi University College over other universities mainly due to parental influence. One old student said, *"I got home one day and my father had bought the forms for me*

to fill. I initially wanted to go study in the United States of America but my dad disagreed. I had no other option than to come to Ashesi, which I do not regret”.

Other reasons mentioned included: small class size, liberal arts curriculum, Honour Code System, dream university, internship opportunities, active interaction with corporate Ghana and international exposure.

According to Keller brand awareness influences the information and strength of the associations that make up the brand image (Keller , 2013). From the research, Ashesi`s marketing team has been able to register the brand in the minds of most parents and thus easily revoked during the decision making process (i.e. when their wards are applying to universities). According to Keller (2013), Aaker (1996) and Kotler (2003) registering the brand in the minds of consumers is usually the first step in building strong brand equity.

Brand Loyalty

The research revealed that most respondents had a good attitude towards the brand. From the research, the consumers of the brand indicated their loyalty towards the brand.

One parent who was interviewed said, “I have four sons. My first son went to Ashesi University College. My second will finish this year and my third will finish in 2016. The last one will definitely come to Ashesi whether he likes it or not. I want the best for my children and I think Ashesi is the only university in Ghana that can offer them the best.”

Respondents were asked whether or not they would recommend the brand to their younger siblings or other people. Ten out of twelve respondents testified

to the fact that they will recommend the brand to others. An old student of Ashesi who completed in 2012 said, *"Yes! Definitely yes! I do recommend the brand to others and I will keep recommending it. I take every opportunity I get to recommend the university to people. Just last year, I helped two people apply and they both got in. And this year, I am helping one person to apply."*

To further probe and find out how loyal they are to the brand, alumni were asked if they were still in touch with the brand and whether or not they participate in Ashesi related activities especially after leaving Ashesi. Some of the alumni are currently participating in Ashesi related activities where as others choose not to participate.

An alumna who completed in 2011 said *"I am still very active in the sports sector of Ashesi. I help the clubs and give them feedback. I am helping the school build a research faculty this semester. So I help both faculty and students. I assisted in the Berekuso needs assessment to figure out what the people of Berekuso need and now impact study and now we are coming up with a Berekuso impact study to find out how Ashesi impacts the people of Berekuso."*

Another old student expressed his desire to partake in such activities but could not due to the nature of his job. Some also indicated that they haven't heard about any alumni meetings that have been organized.

One alumna said, *"I haven't been able to attend the alumni meetings because I do not hear about them. But I will, if I get updated about these meetings and activities more often"*.

Respondents were asked if they would want to pursue their master's degree program at Ashesi, if Ashesi should offer their desired program. One final year student said *"No I wouldn't want to. This is because Ashesi has thought me how to step out of my comfort zone to succeed. I have become familiar with the Ashesi brand and experienced it. I will want to experience another brand for a change. This is not to say Ashesi will not be a good place to pursue a master's degree program."* Another student also said *"Yes I will. This is because after spending 3 years in Ashesi, Ashesi has taught me a lot and I believe there is still more to be learnt".*

A parent expressed his willingness to pay for his ward to go back to Ashesi for his master's degree. He said, *"I wish Ashesi offered a master's degree program. I will not mind even pursuing my master's degree program there. I am willing to pay any amount for my ward to pursue a master's program at Ashesi."*

Perceived Quality

The research revealed that majority of the respondents perceived the Ashesi brand to be of high quality as compared to other universities in Ghana. According to Keller the perceived quality is customer's perception of the overall quality of the brand as compared to others (Keller , 2013).

Some respondents indicated that Ashesi is of high quality due to the lecturers they have. Respondents showed that Ashesi has excellent lecturers who are the backbone of the university and without them Ashesi may fail or become like any other university. An old student who completed in 2005 said, *"We had all these lecturers from other big universities come and teach us. Even if it was one semester, it was quiet an interesting experience. They came from a*

background where they will not just teach you, but have an interaction with you. This made our class discussion a proper exchange where they encourage your ideas and urge you on, which is something we do not have from a class experience in our education here in this part of the world."

Respondents perceive Ashesi to be a credible brand. An old student said, *"I think we have gained very high credibility for the quality of students we are bringing out. I still have conversations with my bosses here today and they say, "Oh we want people from Ashesi. We want people like you out of Ashesi". So I think we have established ourselves as a credible brand in turning out leaders and people that think differently and I think that is a great thing".*

All respondents, parents included, indicated that the practice of the Honor Code has proved that Ashesi can be a trusted brand. A final year student in Ashesi said *"In Ghana, you don't have a system where you leave your students to write exam without invigilators and expect them not to cheat. But Ashesi has an honor code system where a student can write an exam without cheating and that alone, I believe can prove that Ashesi is an incredible brand".*

Respondents also indicated how a lot of people want Ashesi doing well and this will always push Ashesi to strive. Most parents expressed that there is a lot of attention on Ashesi now and this will cause the students to strive to make a mark in society.

Brand Association

Brand associations are mental linkages to the brand. To find out what things can be associated with the Ashesi brand, respondents were asked what the first things that come into mind when they hear Ashesi. Majority of respondents mentioned the following; Honour Code system, liberal arts curriculum, Dr.

Patrick Awuah, world class education, revolutionary, young and hopeful, progressive, high quality, excellence, Africa`s future.

One old student said, "When you mention Ashesi University, I think the first thing that comes to mind is Patrick Awuah. Patrick has built a brand for himself and one that will help Africa at large."

From the research, most respondents wanted to be associated with the Ashesi brand. An alumna who now works with Ashesi had this to say, *"I wanted to be part of that revolution of new entrepreneurial thinkers that want to change the country. I wanted to be part of the people that in 10, 15 or 100 years from now they will say "oooo this was the Kofi/Ama that went to Ashesi."*

A parent said, *"Ashesi is associated with greatness! Most people believe that everyone who went to Ashesi will make a mark in society in the near future. Whenever I say my child is at Ashesi people tend to respect me and look at me in a positive different way".*

4.5 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

Strengths

1. The Ashesi Honour Code System

Majority of respondents perceived that Ashesi`s Honour Code was Ashesi`s greatest asset. Respondents especially students and alumni believed that Ashesi Honour Code added value to the Ashesi brand especially being the only university practicing it in Ghana. The Ashesi Honour Code system is a system intended to build a high-trust community, to put students in charge of their

ethical posture and the reputation of their alma mater. A parent had this to say *"The Honour Code system has made Ashesi different. When I first heard about it, I didn't believe it. But after interactions with my child I was amazed. This system has set Ashesi apart from its competitors"*.

2. Liberal Arts Curriculum

Most parents believed that, the Liberal Arts Curriculum is the root strength of Ashesi. One parent said, *"Ashesi teaches these young adults a bit of everything. Our children are going to come out of Ashesi and have knowledge in different fields unlike other universities where students major in only one subject"*. The liberal arts curriculum sets Ashesi University apart from its competitors. An alumnus said, *"The flexibility of having to go to school and not having to decide your major from day one is impeccable. This is because half of the people that go to university do not know what they want to do until they settle down a bit."*

A student also said *"I love the liberal arts curricular. It's exciting and very challenging. The school gave me a lot of exposure. They provided me with a lot of resources that will help your stay at Ashesi and also access to multinational companies. I got the opportunity to work with Goldman Sachs. Yes, it was also due to some of my abilities but the school was well positioned to bring in that exposure."*

3. Quality of faculty

From the research, Ashesi is perceived to have good lecturers. Parents expressed that the lecturers are coming from good backgrounds and thus are able to positively impact the students. A recent graduate had this to say, *"When I came to Ashesi my lecturers were "westerners". They had a lot of*

western exposure and this made me feel the international affiliation. I am not trying to say that western lecturers are better than local lecturers. They form a package Ashesi is offering so if I'm to going to pay \$3000 or \$3500 then I should feel that in a school that has a lot of international exposure."

4. The Course load

All alumni felt that the workload given to students at Ashesi adds value to the brand in the long run. One said *"the workload prepares us for the future and working world. When you finish with the degree program you would realize that the workload is good for you. This is because in the real world, the workload may be less than what you had in school so it's better than going out there and getting surprised."* Respondents also felt that, if the students excelled in their prospective workplaces, it will rub off the Ashesi brand and will be perceived by the public as a good brand. Students on the other hand expressed that the workload was too much and found it stressful. A second year student said, *"I can relate with the assignments but the workload is too much. Sometimes you do not have time for any other thing. Some of us wish we could work and come to school at the same time but that can hardly happen as a student in Ashesi"*. Parents also believed that students make up the brand and thus giving them a lot of work prepares them for the future.

5. Small class sizes

Respondents expressed that Ashesi University College has a competitive advantage over universities in Ghana due to the small class sizes. A final year student explained how she chose Ashesi University College over other universities due to the small class sizes. She explained how she visited her friend in a public university and realized that the lecture halls were over flowing

with students and wondered how a student standing outside will benefit. Ashesi has provided its students with spacious lecture halls, which make learning much easier for students.

6. Gender Balance

Respondents felt that Ashesi has been able to open its doors to both male and female without any discrimination. Currently Ashesi's population is 606 with 53% male and 47% female. This includes students from Ghana and different parts of Africa. An international student said *"I was so excited when I got admitted into Ashesi. In my country, girls find it difficult pursuing their tertiary education". But Ashesi has given me that opportunity and I am very grateful".*

7. Scholarship opportunities

From the research, Ashesi is one of the few universities that grant a lot of scholarship opportunities. This adds value to the brand's image. An international student said, *"Before coming into Ashesi, I had the perception that the school was for only students coming from rich families. I am from a family where 5 of us share a bucket of water to bath and can go for days without eating. I didn't think I belonged here until I got into the school. Now my tuition, accommodation and feeding are covered. I even get a monthly stipend."*

Weaknesses

1. Lack of marketing strategies

Majority of parents felt that Ashesi needed to enhance and expand their marketing strategies such as advertisement. One parent said *"We pay the fees*

and thus we are Ashesi`s main target. We mainly hear about Ashesi through other means like word of mouth and not exactly through the school". That being said, Ashesi must advertise more to reach parents. Another student said, "When I first entered Ashesi there were a lot of marketing drives and I think that has reduced. Yes we do have a lot of applicants still applying but we still have to maintain our heads above water and let other people know who we are. So I think we should pay more attention to our marketing efforts."

2. Succession Plan

From interviewing people, respondents felt that Ashesi currently lacked a succession plan. Respondents felt Ashesi needed to be built as a separate entity from Patrick Awuah. *An alumnus said, "Right now it's as though Ashesi University is associated with Patrick, which is true. But if he is not around then what happens to the brand? Ashesi should be able stand on its own and so should be built as a separate entity from Dr. Patrick Awuah."*

3. Alumni Engagement

Responses from the alumni showed that there was little or no engagement when it came to alumni relations. Some alumni said they wanted to get involved but could not since they have not been updated with activities happening on campus. They indicated that there was no proper means of receiving updates from the school.

4. Lack of variety with regards to Majors

Respondents expressed their inability to choose from a wide range of programs. Some students said they came to Ashesi wanting to pursue other programs but could not due to the limited number of majors available. They only applied due to parental influence. One business administration student

said, *"I wanted to pursue law but my parents wanted me to be here. I had no option than to study Business Administration".*

Opportunities

1. Post Graduate Programs

Respondents especially alumni, felt there was a high demand for postgraduate courses and thus should be considered by Ashesi. One alumnus said, *"There is a lot of demand for postgraduate programs. Ashesi is very young and has done remarkable well for the undergraduate programs. Ashesi should think of expanding soon to cover that segment of the market".*

2. Unemployment rate in Ghana

Unemployment rates in Ghana have been increasing over the past few years. A lot of the youth complete either secondary or tertiary education and find themselves unemployed. Respondents expressed their concerns with regards to unemployment in Ghana. A parent advised that Ashesi should see this as an opportunity to help the youth in Ghana. He advised that Ashesi should take measures to curb this problem as it trains its students to be good entrepreneurial leaders.

Threats

1. Students living on past glories

Respondents felt students may become complacent in future as they may live on past glories and not meet up to required standards. An old student said, *"We the alumni are doing well in our prospective workplaces. This has set a*

good track record for all Ashesi students. But we must ask ourselves this, "Will the next generation be able to continue with the good work done or will they fail the brand?"

Summary of Qualitative Research

- ❖ Most students and alumni heard about Ashesi University College through their parents. Some parents also heard about Ashesi via word of mouth. Other means by which respondents heard about the brand include: television, radio and newspaper adverts, alumni, friends, relatives and Ashesi website.
- ❖ In terms of loyalty, most respondents showed they were loyal to the brand. Most respondents talk about and recommend the brand to others. Some respondents will want to pursue a master's degree in Ashesi if only Ashesi offers their desired program.
- ❖ In terms of perceived quality, respondents believed Ashesi offers a world-class education and thus has the ability to expand into different regions in Africa.
- ❖ Respondents associated the Ashesi brand with the Honour code system, and words like high quality, excellence, revolutionary, young, hopeful, Africa's future.

Summary of S.W.O.T Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Honour code ❖ Small class sizes ❖ Gender balance ❖ Faculty ❖ Scholarship ❖ Active Interaction with Corporate Ghana ❖ Affordable World Class Education ❖ International Exposure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lack of marketing drives ❖ Succession Plan ❖ Lack of variety with regards to Majors offered ❖ Lack of alumni engagement
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Growing demand for post graduate courses ❖ High unemployment rates in Ghana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Students living on past glories

4.6 Findings from Quantitative Research (Online Survey)

The second phase of the research was an online survey, which was designed, based on the responses from the in-depth interview. The findings have been presented in tables and charts for easy interpretation. Figure 4.1 is a pie chart, which shows the number of students that responded to the survey.

Figure 4.1: Year Groups (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

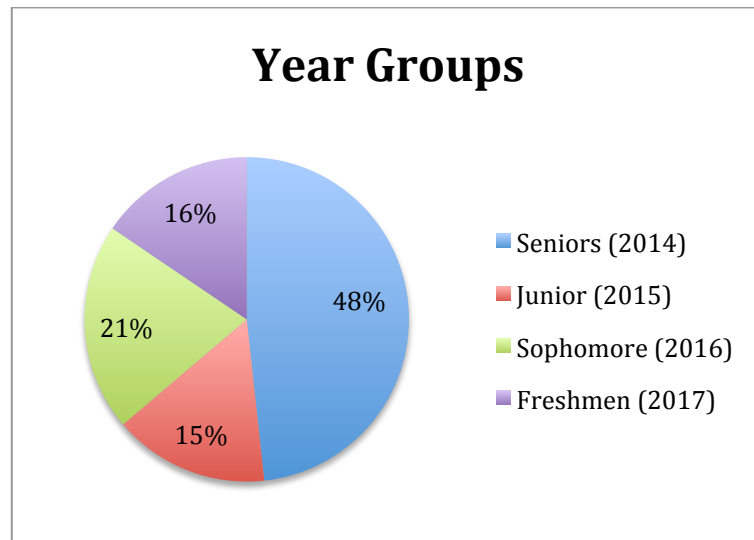


Figure 4.1: Students who responded with regards to their year groups

A total number of 58 students responded to the online survey. 28 students came from 2014, 9 from 2015, 12 from 2016 and 9 from 2017.

Figure 4.2: Majors (Business Administration, Computer Science, Management Information Systems)

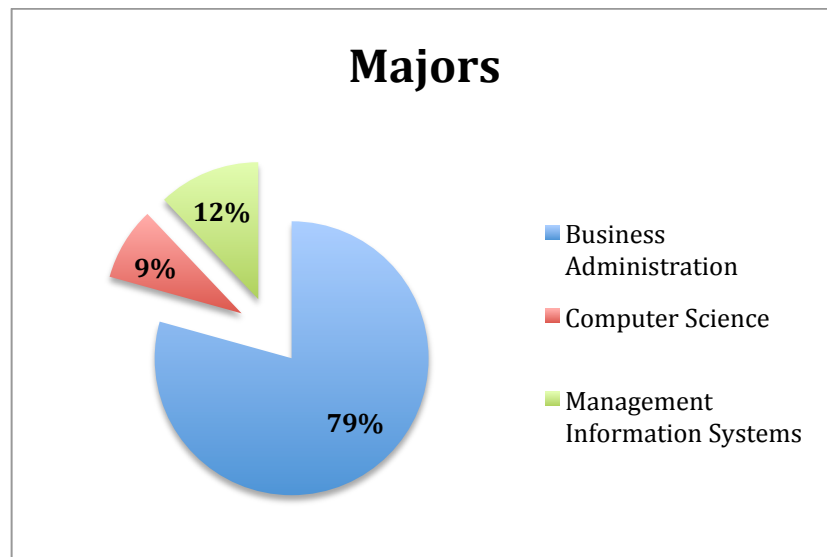


Figure 3.2: Student Majors

Out of the 58 respondents, 46 were Business Administration majors, 7 Management Information Systems majors and 5 Computer science majors.

Brand Awareness

To find out about how students heard about Ashesi, they were asked to tick from a list. From the responses, 27%, which was the highest number of respondents, indicated that they heard about Ashesi through their parents. 20% of the respondents indicated that they heard about it through Ashesi alumni and 15% through their friends in Ashesi. 10% also heard about the brand through Ashesi Representatives during school visits. Figure 4.3 gives a graphical representation of the various ways by which Ashesi students heard about Ashesi University College. This shows that most Ashesi students heard about the school from their parents followed by alumni and friends.

Figure 4.3: Ways Students heard about Ashesi University College

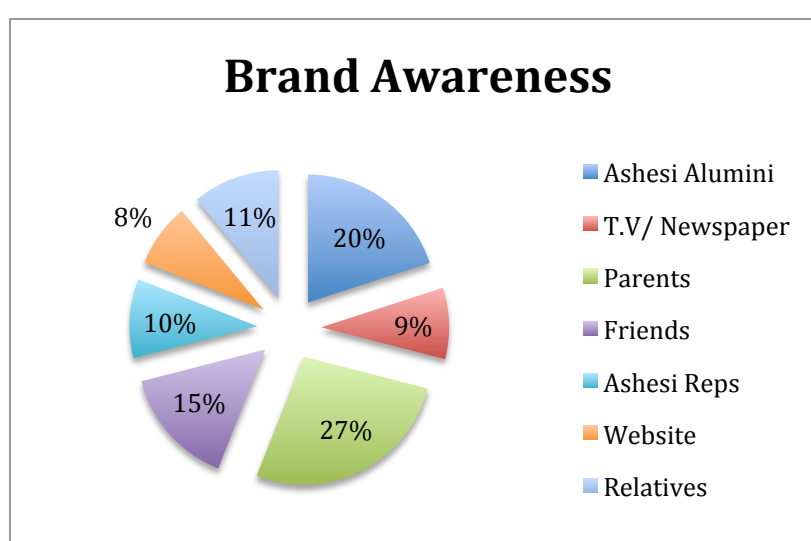


Figure 4.3: Ways students heard about Ashesi

To find out what influenced their decision, 47% of respondents indicated that they would have attended Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and 28% University of Ghana, Legon other than Ashesi University College. This could mean that Ashesi's major competitors in the Ghanaian higher educational industry may be University of Ghana, Legon and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. However most respondents chose Ashesi over other universities mainly due to parental influence and Ashesi's smaller class sizes. Figure 4.5 shows the various factors that influenced their decision to choose Ashesi over other universities.

Figure 4.5 (Factors that influenced their decision to choose Ashesi over other universities)

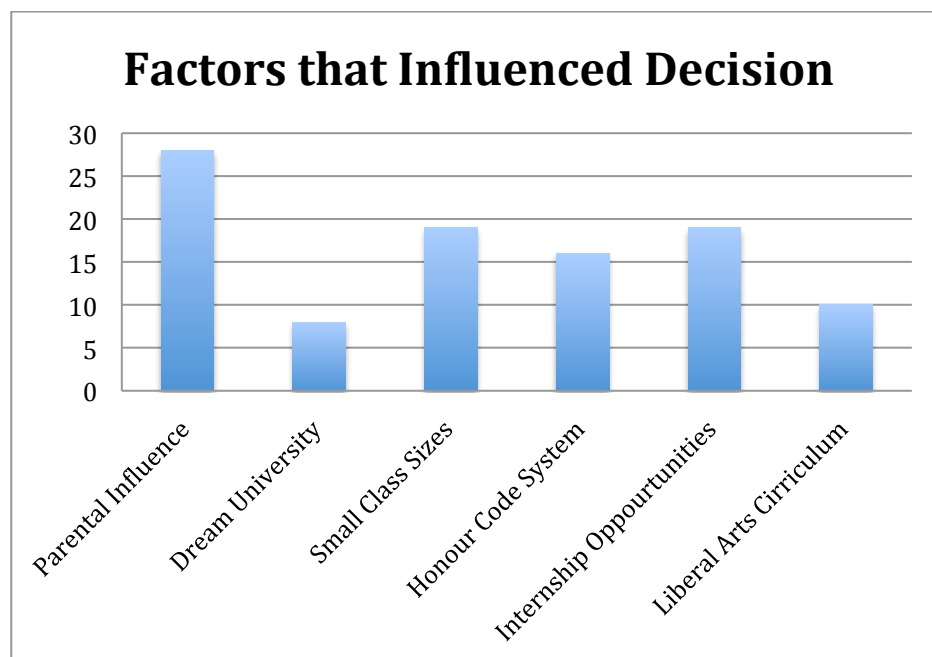


Figure 4.5: Factors that influenced student's decisions

This shows that majority of student's awareness before enrollment came from parents who also influenced them to apply and come to Ashesi. As a result of

this Ashesi should focus on parents and extend its marketing strategies to reach more parents.

Brand Loyalty

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceive to be loyal to the Ashesi brand. 35% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were loyal to the brand while 31% agreed to be loyal. Figure 4.6 represents the other responses.

Figure 4.6: Rate at which students consider themselves loyal to the brand

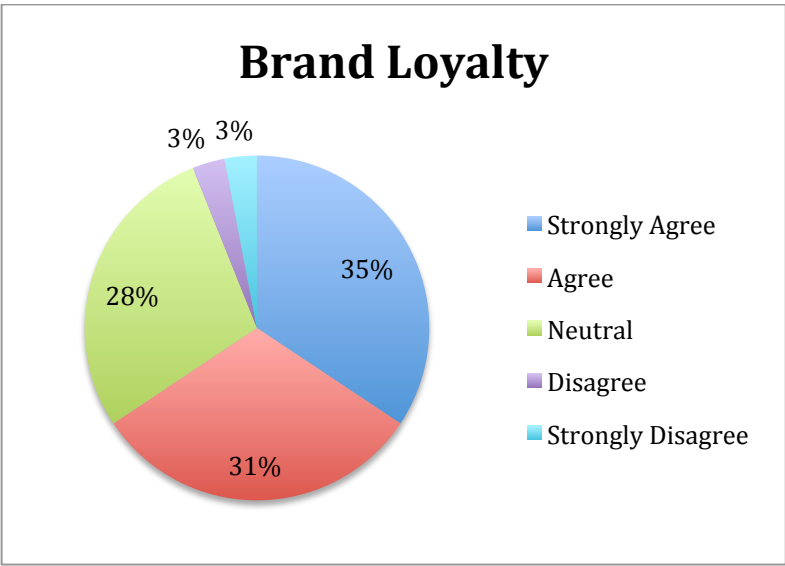


Figure 4.6: Student`s loyalty towards Ashesi

To probe and find out how true they were loyal to the brand, respondents were asked if they participated in Ashesi related activities. Findings from the survey proved that majority of students participated in Ashesi related activities not because they were required to but because they wanted to. Figure 4.7 represents the number of respondents who actively participated in Ashesi

Related activities. 88% of students said they actively partake in Ashesi related activities. This proves that a greater chunk of students have an interest in the brand and can be considered loyal to the brand.

Figure 4.7 (Actively partake in Ashesi related activities)

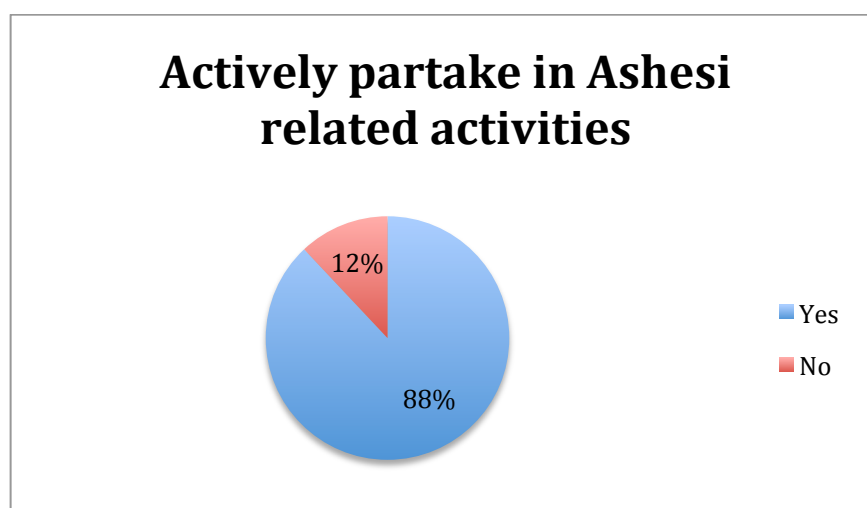


Figure 4.7: Students who actively partake in Ashesi related activities

To prove loyalty, students were asked whether or not they will pursue their master program here at Ashesi if the university offered their desired choice of program. As represented in figure 4.8, 64 % said they would where as 36% said otherwise. This indicates that majority of students will like to come back to their Alma Mata. According to Keller, brand loyalty shows how hesitant a consumer will switch to another brand especially when that brand makes a change in either price or product features (Keller, 2008). From the research a majority of the population will still pursue their master’s program at Ashesi if Ashesi offers their preferred course.

Figure 4.8 Pursue master's program if Ashesi offers desired course

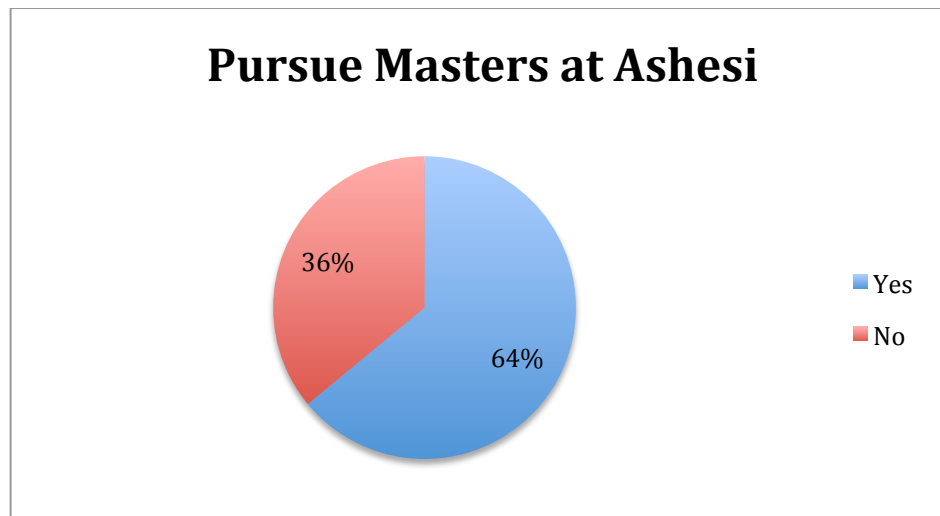


Figure 4.8: Students who will pursue a master's degree program at Ashesi

To further probe, students were asked whether or not they would recommend Ashesi to others. 95% of students testified to the fact that they will recommend Ashesi to other people. Brand loyalty represents a favorable attitude toward a brand resulting in consistent purchase over time (Tuominen , 1999) From the in-depth interview; one student said *"You must be crazy not to recommend this brand to people. Ashesi is the future and we must encourage others to join the train to success. Its moving fast and people shouldn't be left out"*. This shows that respondents are loyal to the brand as they keep recommending the brand to others. This show that there is a very high positive word-of-mouth. This goes a long way to generate value for Ashesi as it can help reduce marketing/advertising cost over a period of time.

Figure 4.9: Students recommending Ashesi to others

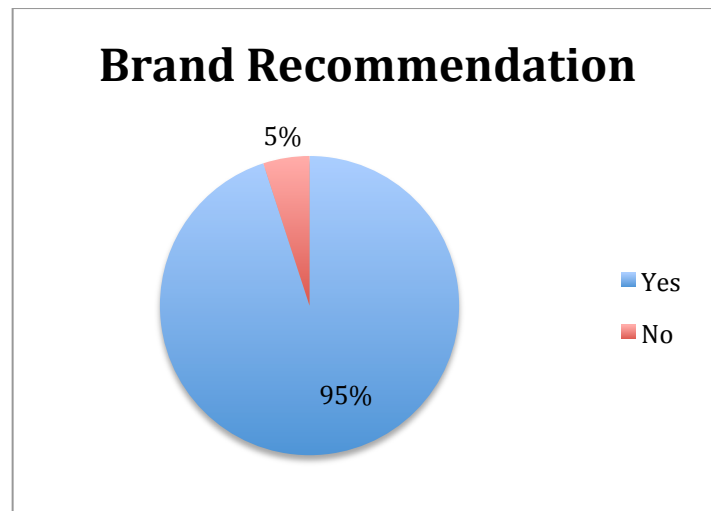


Figure 4.9: Students who recommend Ashesi

Brand Association

A brand association is any mental linkage to the brand (Tuominen , 1999). Findings from the research showed that students associated the brand with a number of things. Respondents were asked how they would describe Ashesi in one word. 19% of the students describe Ashesi as "Challenging" which was followed by 18% that described it as "High Standards". Figure 4.10 represents a chart showing the various words to describe Ashesi.

Figure 4.10: Brand Association

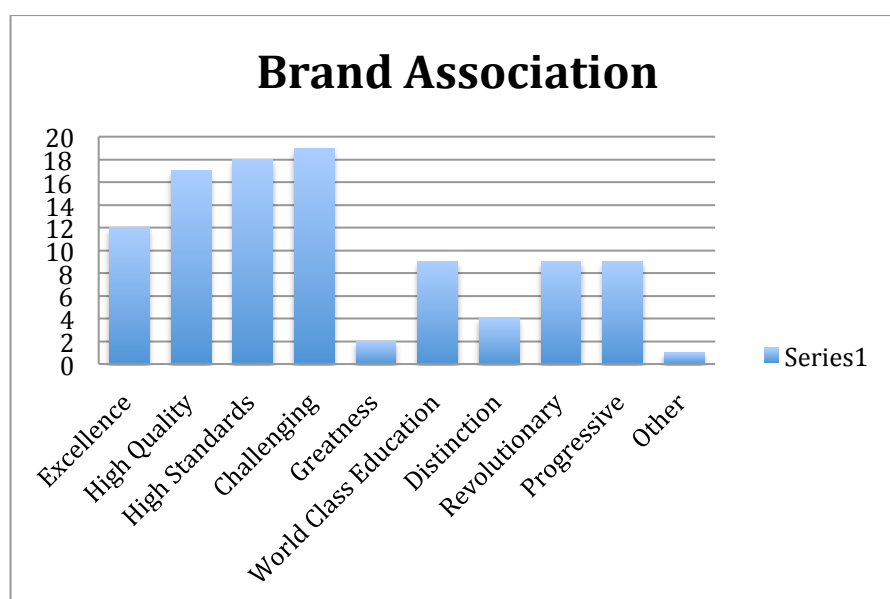


Figure 4.10: Ashesi in one word.

According to Keller, brand associations do not just exist but has a level of strength attached to the brand (Keller, 2008). From the in-depth interview, Ashesi was perceived to have some intangible assets that made the brand a strong brand. Some of which included the Honor Code system, liberal arts curriculum, gender balance, small class sizes, scholarship opportunities, lecturers and links with international community. According to Keller (2008), an association can provide a point of differentiation and provide a reason to buy and create a positive brand image. Figure 4.11 shows what students thought Ashesi's greatest asset was. 24% of the students perceived it to be the Honor Code. Ashesi is the only university in Ghana that practices the Honor Code system and as a result, sets the university apart from its competitors. This is a system intended to build a high-trust community, to put students in charge of their ethical posture and the reputation of their Alma mater (Ashesi University

College, 2013). 14% also felt it was the Liberal Arts Curriculum and 14% believed it was due to the smaller class sizes

Figure 4.11: Ashesi`s Greatest Asset

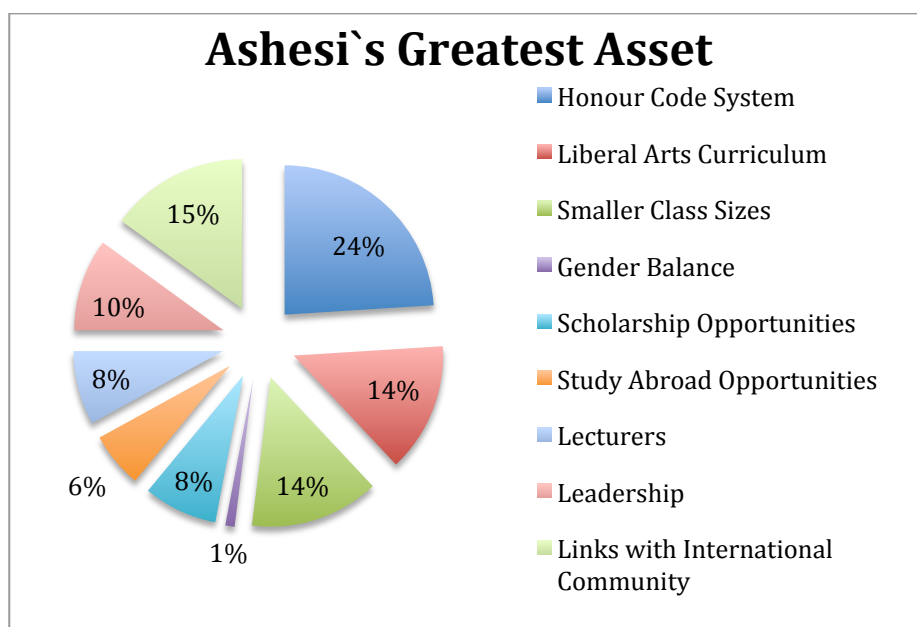


Figure 4.11: Ashesi`s greatest asset

Discussion

The research question stated in chapter one sought to identify the main sources of brand equity for the Ashesi University College brand. From the research it was found that Ashesi possess four main sources of brand equity namely brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations. According Aaker brand equity consists of a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm/ or to that firms customers (Aaker, 1996). Aaker is of the view that sources of brand equity create value for the consumer, which also creates value for the institution. From the research it was observed that

consumers perceive the Ashesi brand to be of high quality. According to Tuominen the most valuable asset that a brand possesses is the knowledge that has been created in consumers' minds from the firm's investment in previous marketing programs (Tuominen , 1999). From the research, majority of respondents (i.e. students and alumni) heard about the Ashesi brand through their parents. This means that Ashesi has been able to position themselves in the minds of parents the most.

In relation to the consumer based brand equity model, perceived quality gives customers a pivotal reason to buy. From the research, respondents perceived Ashesi to be of high quality and this will give them every reason to patronize the university. From the in depth interview conducted, one final year student said *"I know Ashesi is one of the best universities in Africa. Ashesi has proved its quality by providing us with world-class education right here in Ghana. Should Ashesi offer a master's degree program I will not think twice about enrolling. I will definitely do it here."* According to Tuominen (1999), Keller (2013) and Aaker (1999) perceived quality could be used efficiently by using the brand name to enter new product categories. In relation to the research, perceived quality will cause respondents patronize the brand when it expands by introducing a variety of programs.

According to Keller, brand equity creates value for both the customer and the firm. Keller believes that brand equity creates value to the firm by strengthening brand loyalty and achieving distinctiveness over competition. To the firm brand equity creates value to the customer by

reinforcing buying which, in the case of this research proved to be true, as most respondents would want to pursue their masters here at Ashesi.

From the similar research conducted by Marrs et al. (2008) it was revealed that there was little interaction and engagement with faculty, staff, students, alumni and other relevant stakeholders. This was similar to this research as alumni felt there was little interaction and engagement with them. From the research done by Marrs et al, (2008), stakeholders were not involved in the branding process as their opinions concerning the brand were not taken into consideration. The research recommended that there should be a training campaign to engage the stakeholders and the university and to deliver the brand message. From this research the stakeholder generally knew about the brand and the brand promise. This may be because they are currently interacting with the brand. The perceptions and opinions of some of the relevant stakeholders was identified in this research and presented to Ashesi University College.

CHAPTER 5

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5. 1 Introduction

This chapter provides recommendations of possible solutions to the identified problems based on the findings. The recommendations are ways by which the Ashesi University College brand can improve.

5. 2 Recommendations

Findings from the research showed that consumers of the Ashesi brand generally had a positive perception of the brand. There were some problems identified and below are a few recommendations for the brand.

1. Improve the Marketing Strategy:

Majority of respondents (i.e. parents, alumni and students) suggested that Ashesi should improve upon their marketing to reach a wider population. There should be more marketing drives to reach parents/guardians. This is because from the research, most students and alumni heard about Ashesi through their parents. There should be regular of television, radio and newspaper adverts to reach a wider population especially the parents. Adverts should run during periods where majority of parents are driving to work or driving back home from work. The TV adverts should also run during or after the evening news to reach a wide target. Ashesi should also make use of social media platforms to reach the youth especially prospective students. This is due to the large number of students on social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

2. Introduce Entrepreneurship courses in Freshman year

Ashesi should introduce entrepreneurship courses in the first year. Students who want to start businesses should be assigned a lecturer who will mentor and guide them throughout the inception of the idea to the implementation (i.e. from the first year to the final year). These classes will help students develop entrepreneurial skills and apply them in real life situations. This will aid in curbing the problem of unemployment in Africa as Ashesi students become job creators. Ashesi student will start companies that will employ people. This will go a long way to add value and credibility to the Ashesi brand as people will be convinced that Ashesi practices what they preach.

3. Expand into different regions in Africa

Ashesi should consider expanding into the northern, eastern and western parts of Africa. From the research, respondents perceived the brand to be of high quality and according to Tuominen (1999), Keller (2013) and Aaker (1996) perceived quality will enable its customers patronize the brand when it expands into new product categories or various locations. This will train more people become ethical leaders to help solve problems in various sectors of Africa. This will also enable the brand expand to reach a wider market and have a greater impact.

4. Introduce a wide range of courses

Currently, Ashesi offers only three undergraduate programs (i.e. Business Administration, Computer Science and Management Information Systems). From the research students and alumni want a variety of courses to choose from as the students picked courses Ashesi offered just to be a part of Ashesi University College or just because their parents influenced them to apply. Even

though Ashesi seeks to expand now into Engineering, some respondents suggested law and medicine.

5.3 Conclusion

The main objective was to assess the health of the Ashesi University College brand by understand the perceptions of its consumers towards the brand. The study successfully provided data on the perceptions of consumers towards the Ashesi brand. From the data obtained most respondents had a good perception of the brand but pointed out a few problems with the brand. The information gathered was used to identify the main sources of Ashesi University College`s brand equity. The sources of brand equity included brand awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand loyalty. A S.W.O.T analysis was also conducted based on the findings from both the in-depth interview and online survey. Some challenges and limitations that were faced during the research was time constraint and parents and alumni not having enough time for the interview due to their busy schedules.

5.4 Further Research

Further research may be conducted to investigate the brand inventory side. Further research may also include the perceptions of faculty and the general public towards the brand as they can be considered as internal and external stakeholders of the brand respectively. A research may be done to conduct a brand audit for a public university to determine the differences in the perceptions between private and public universities.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Interview Guide for Parents

These questions have been designed to solicit your view on how Ashesi University College is performing from its targets perspective. The reason for conducting this survey is to assess the health of the Ashesi University Brand and recommend ways by which the brand can improve. This is an academic project, and any information you provide will be used solely for this purpose.

Brand Salience

1. Which Universities are you aware of? (Mention the first five universities that come into mind).
2. Mention two Universities will you consider sending your ward to in Ghana and why?
3. When and how did you hear about Ashesi University?
4. What were some of the factors you considered before sending your ward to Ashesi?
5. When "Ashesi" is mentioned, what are the things that come into mind?

Brand Feelings and Judgments

1. How will you describe Ashesi in one word?
2. How well does Ashesi satisfy your ward's needs?
3. How do you feel when you think of Ashesi?
4. What does Ashesi offer that other higher educational brands cannot / do not offer?

Brand performance and imagery

1. How well do you think Ashesi is performing?
2. What is the most unique thing Ashesi has done that you are aware of?

Brand Resonance

1. Do you really talk about Ashesi University?
2. Do you have any younger children? If yes will you let them attend Ashesi University College? Why?

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Alumni

These questions have been designed to solicit your view on how Ashesi University College is performing from its targets perspective. The reason for conducting this survey is to assess the health of the Ashesi University Brand and recommend ways by which the brand can improve. This is an academic project, and any information you provide will be used solely for this purpose.

Brand Salience (Awareness)

1. Which Universities are you aware of? (Mention the first five universities that come into mind).
2. Which two University`s will you have considered attending in Ghana and why?
3. How did you hear about Ashesi University College?
4. When "Ashesi" is mentioned, what are the first associations that come into mind?

Brand Judgments and Feelings

1. How will you describe Ashesi in one word?
2. Is Ashesi worth a premium price?
3. What does Ashesi offer that other higher educational brands cannot / do not offer?

Brand Performance and Imagery

1. What is the most unique thing Ashesi has done that you are aware of?
2. What positive and negative impacts do you think Ashesi University had on you as a student?
3. Has coming from Ashesi ever hindered you at your workplace?

Brand Resonance

1. Are you currently involved in any project Ashesi is undertaking?
2. If you were a parent will Ashesi be an option for your ward?
3. Will you and do you recommend Ashesi to others?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Students

These questions have been designed to solicit your view on how Ashesi University College is performing from its targets perspective. The reason for conducting this survey is to assess the health of the Ashesi University Brand and recommend ways by which the brand can improve. This is an academic project, and any information you provide will be used solely for this purpose.

Brand Salience (Awareness)

1. Which Universities are you aware of? (Mention the first five universities that come into mind).
2. Which two University`s will you have considered attending in Ghana and why?
3. How did you hear about Ashesi University College?
4. When "Ashesi" is mentioned, what are the first associations that come into mind?

Brand Judgments and Feelings

1. How will you describe Ashesi in one word?
2. What feelings are generated by the Ashesi brand?
3. What does Ashesi offer that other higher educational brands cannot / do not offer?

Brand Performance and Imagery

1. What is the most unique thing Ashesi has done that you are aware of?
2. What positive or negative impacts do you think Ashesi University College has had on you as a student?

Brand Resonance

1. If you were a parent, will Ashesi be an option for your ward?
2. Do you partake in Ashesi related activities?
3. Will you and do you recommend Ashesi to others?

Appendix D: On line survey

1. Which year group are you in?

- ☐ 2014
- ☐ 2015
- ☐ 2016
- ☐ 2017

2. What is your major?

- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Computer Science
- ☐ Management Information Systems

3. Which other university in Ghana would you have considered attending apart from Ashesi University College?

- ☐ Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
- ☐ University of Ghana Legon
- ☐ University of Cape Coast
- ☐ Central University College
- ☐ Lancaster University
- ☐ Other:

4. How did you hear about Ashesi University College?

- ☐ Ashesi Alumni
- ☐ TV / Newspaper advertisement
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Friend
- ☐ Ashesi Representative
- ☐ Ashesi Website
- ☐ Relative

5. Why did you choose Ashesi University College?

- ☐ Parental Influence
- ☐ Dream University
- ☐ Location
- ☐ Liberal Arts Curriculum

- ☐ International Exposure
- ☐ Internship Opportunities
- ☐ Honor Code System
- ☐ Smaller Class Size
- ☐ Other:

6. Which word(s) best describes Ashesi University College?

- ☐ Excellence
- ☐ High Quality
- ☐ High Standards
- ☐ Challenging
- ☐ Greatness
- ☐ World Class Education
- ☐ Distinction
- ☐ Revolutionary
- ☐ Progressive
- ☐ Other:

7. Compared to other university brands, how best does Ashesi satisfy your needs as student? On a scale of 1-5

- ☐ 1
 ☐ 2
 ☐ 3
 ☐ 4
 ☐ 5

8. Are you an active member in any of the clubs on campus?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

9. Do you participate in Ashesi Student Council activities?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

10. What is Ashesi's greatest asset?

- ☐ Honor Code
- ☐ Liberal Arts Curriculum
- ☐ Smaller class sizes
- ☐ Gender Balance
- ☐ Scholarship opportunities
- ☐ Study abroad opportunities

- ☐ Links with international community
- ☐ Lecturers
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Other:

11. Please indicate your interest

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Ashesi is a credible brand					
Ashesi provides high quality world class education					
Ashesi has good lecturers					
Ashesi teaches me to be different					
Ashesi gives me a lot of exposure					

12. Please indicate your interest for the brand

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I really love Ashesi					
I really talk about Ashesi to others					
I consider myself loyal to Ashesi					
Ashesi satisfies my needs as a student					
I have a strong desire for the Ashesi brand					

13. Will you recommend Ashesi to other prospective students?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. If Ashesi is to offer a master's degree program will you pursue it?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No