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BRAND COMMUNICATION OF EU LEADING UNIVERSITIES: INSPIRATIONS FOR THE UKRAINIAN CONTEXT

ABSTRACT

The paradigm shift within the administrative framework of domestic higher education institutions (universities) towards marketing management necessitates the incorporation of innovative methodologies in relation to their positioning, branding, and brand communications. Consequently, there exists merit in scrutinizing and assimilating the progressive experiences of leading European universities within the realm of their brand communications.

The article presents the results of analysis of universities' branding activities in a qualitative case study of ten EU universities, which occupy leading positions in the Shanghai Academic International Ranking of Universities.

An examination of the preceding decade reveals discernible qualitative transformations in the modalities through which universities articulate their inherent values. In the initial years of the second decade of the 21st century, preeminent values encompassed excellence (or quality), social justice (or diversity), third mission (or outreach), academic orientation, community (or collaboration), internationalization, and performance measurement (or evaluation) (Mampaey, Huisman, and Seeber (2015)). These values were extensively disseminated by universities as part of their brand communications.

Emergent values observable in the contemporary brand communications of leading EU universities include: autonomy, academic freedom, innovative mindset, creation of an innovative ecosystem, marketization of research, ethics and academic integrity, sustainable and climate-friendly organization, make a difference approach, impact, openness, courageousness, effectiveness, solution-oriented thinking, life-long partnership, creation the environment, society confidence, brand development, creativity, cultural influence.

An evolution in brand communication strategies of EU universities has been discerned. While the early years of the second decade of the 21st century witnessed a notable convergence in these strategies among leading universities, accompanied by "mimic" strategies by less competitive institutions, the current trend reflects a divergence in these approaches. This differentiation is evidently driven by the distinctive characteristics inherent to each university, a strategic vision for future development, and a proactive inclination to establish a distinct and clearly differentiated position within the competitive landscape.

Keywords: university, marketing, brand communication, value, value cluster, management

JEL Classification: I25, M30

INTRODUCTION

In the 2021-2031 Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine, it was elucidated that a pivotal issue, impacting the nation's higher education framework, is the dearth of societal enthusiasm for higher education, which is posited as a fundamental institution and primary catalyst for the country's advancement (Strategy for the Development of Higher Education..., 2020). Concurrently, the resolution of several identi-

fied quandaries, such as (1) the meager intensity of collaboration between higher education institutions and business entities, local self-governance bodies, and communities as consumers of educational and scientific-technical services, (2) the extant disparity between the higher education system and the labor market, (3) the tepid level of interaction among educational and scientific institutions in the execution of educational, scientific, and innovative pursuits, (4) the inadequacy of societal readiness to engage in the development of occupational standards and training programs, (5) the diminution of higher education's prestige in society, and (6) the absence of feedback mechanisms among employers, students, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders (Strategy for the Development of Higher Education..., 2020), can be discerned both within the realm of the managerial dimension, encompassing the reengineering and augmentation of specific business processes, and within the sphere of communications linking higher education institutions and the broader society, which includes brand communication. In this particular context, brand communication ought to be construed as the «self-presentations of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in mission statements and other publicly accessible documents, as well as in visual elements and symbols» (Mampaey, 2018).

An additional challenge manifests in the redundancy of specialized training programs within a single discipline offered by domestic universities situated in close geographical proximity, necessitating either the streamlining of the university network, as advocated by Kremen, Lugovyi, Saukh, and Talanova (2022), or a deliberate orientation toward a specific marketing niche. Scholars posit that within this milieu, European universities are being transformed into «a more market-oriented steering approach» (Mampaey & Huisman, 2016) and thus «increasingly pressured to develop and communicate unique brands to compete in global and local markets» (Mampaey, 2018). The cultivation of distinctive university brands serves the overarching goal of fostering connections with consumers, primarily students, and other stakeholders, thereby rendering these relationships vibrant and enduring. Furthermore, the cultivation of unique brands is deemed imperative for mitigating competition through the targeted appeal to diverse market segments (Mampaey, 2018).

Hence, an examination of the distinctive characteristics inherent in the brand communications strategies employed by prominent European universities proves to be a fruitful endeavour in the context of adopting essential approaches for branding of domestic HEIs (further - universities). The incorporation of exemplary methodologies stands to enhance the marketing representation of universities, elucidate fundamental values, and play a pivotal role in ameliorating systemic challenges associated with engagements with diverse stakeholders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Universities grapple with conflicting demands, having to fulfil the traditional roles of being centres for learning and research while also adopting managerial and corporate structures (S. Oertel & M. Söll, 2017). That is why branding and brand communications are relatively new in the management discourse of universities.

Limited research by international scholars, predominantly conducted between 2015 and 2019, has been dedicated to exploring the broader domain of university brand development and, more specifically, brand communication. These inquiries were prompted by heightened competition among universities, prompting a recognition of the imperative «to understand, manage, and leverage a strong brand position» (Hannan, 2021). The findings underscored that universities' effective endeavours in this realm can yield what is termed brand value, contributing to long-term sustainability. Possessing a robust brand endows universities with several advantages, encompassing (1) the reflection of the institution's capacity to meet student needs, (2) the establishment of trust and facilitation of the recruitment process, (3) a tool for enhancing retention rates, and (4) a means to promise quality products and services to consumers (Hannan, 2021).

Some research aimed to identify crucial factors in the development of a university branding strategy, and to investigate the impact of attributes such as awareness, acceptance, and quality on the brand image of universities. Results indicate that the university's image plays a pivotal role in the decision-making process for university selection. The study also revealed four key factors contributing to the university's image: quality, prestige, financial incentives, and acceptance. Quality emerged as the most influential factor, followed by prestige, acceptance, and incentives (Iqbal, 2016).

Current scholarly investigations also delve into diverse facets of constructing and advancing university brands and their brand communications. Researchers examining the distinctiveness of universities' positioning identified a trend wherein higher-status research universities possess more leeway to communicate clichéd self-presentations, such as “we are the best” (Mampaey, 2018). Conversely, lower-status teaching institutions exhibit a more nuanced brand communication that, according to Mampaey (2018), has the potential to perpetuate objective status hierarchies through a self-fulfilling prophecy mechanism.

A pivotal facet of scholarly inquiry revolves around the style in which brand communications are executed. Researchers have identified that highly reputed institutions utilize distinct communication styles compared to lower reputed ones, categorizing these styles into assertives, commissives, directives, and expressives (Mampaey & Huisman, 2016). Additionally, evidence supports the notion that assertives are theoretically the most potent speech acts, significantly influencing «the perceived legitimacy and attractiveness of the university» (Mampaey & Huisman, 2016).

A number of studies were devoted to the content of brand communications (in particular, the content of universities' mission statements). Some articles delve into the ongoing processes that lead to the transformation of German universities into organizational actors by exploring the creation and dissemination of mission statements (Kosmuetzky, 2016). Drawing on an analysis of higher education reform policy documents, case studies of mission statement development, and a content analysis of mission statement texts, the findings illuminate the ways in which mission statements propagate, gain popularity, and sometimes fall short of their intended objectives. Nevertheless, these mission statements reflect the transformation of universities from structured institutions into dynamic organizational actors (Kosmuetzky, 2016).

A notably significant outcome is that mission statements are increasingly integral to the overall strategic planning of universities. These statements not only articulate empirical and attainable goals but also contribute to both the internal organizational identity and the external image of the institution (Lieber, 2016).

In the context of universities' mission statements, scientists identified some regularities: amidst various expectations, universities opt for assertions that seem credible to external stakeholders and align with the principles upheld by internal members. Additionally, universities tend to embrace statements akin to those of institutions sharing the same organizational structure while distinguishing themselves from nearby universities to minimize competitive redundancy (Seeber et al., 2019). Besides it was proposed recommendations when crafting universities' mission statements: seeking legitimacy in the face of numerous and conflicting expectations involves finding a delicate equilibrium between aligning with other universities and maintaining a distinct identity (Seeber et al., 2019) because nowadays the presence of mission statements doesn't necessarily imply a deliberate effort to carve out distinct niches and present themselves as sharply differentiated competitors as institutional profiling often centers on the subject fields of teaching and research, a phenomenon named as soft profiling (T. Lieber (2016).

At the same time, it was found that, for example, imprinting does not play a role in initiating mission statements but instead influences their substance. The effect of imprinting is tempered by the influence of the universities' power and reputation (S. Oertel & M. Söll, 2017).

Some studies focus on how universities convey core value statements in their brand communications. The findings suggest that the adoption of core value statements is not uniform, reflecting different degrees of institutionalization. A trend has been observed where higher education institutions (HEIs) strive to be recognized for distinct, yet relatively generic and abstract values. These values primarily emphasize technical/professional and moral aspects, with variations influenced by factors such as the country of origin, international ranking, and the institution's classification (as a university, university college, or professional college) (Wæraas & Sataøen, 2018).

Several studies investigate the strategies universities use to develop their brand identities. The analysis classifies these strategies into three main visual types—guilded, national, and organizational—which are further divided into five subtypes: classic, science/technology, local, abstract, and just-text. The research indicates that the abstract organizational visual type is particularly prevalent in Western countries such as France, Germany, and the United States, while a more diverse range of visual types is observed in countries like Australia, Italy, and South Africa (Delmestri, Oberg, & Drori, 2015).

Scholars observe that «building and maintaining a brand in the HEI sector is very challenging» (Hannan, 2021). It was also stated that there is a kind of «communication gap between universities and their current Generation Z students», which arises as universities incorporate «strictly formal, distancing, and non-inclusive brand tone of voice» and a one-way communication style (Filipov, 2023).

Another problem is that national governments strategically shape their communication to portray the higher education sector as a unified entity, avoiding the prominence of individual universities as representatives. The inherent tension between promoting similarity and differentiation in public sector reputation-building is managed by emphasizing commonalities in the structure and format of presentations, while also highlighting distinctions in the content (Sataøen & Wæraas, 2016).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the article is to analyse the progressive experiences of leading European universities within the realm of their brand communications. The main objectives include (1) making a comprehensive analysis of universities' branding activities; (2) revealing qualitative transformations in the modalities through which universities articulate their inherent values; (3) analysing the evolution in brand communication strategies of EU universities during the last decade.

METHODS

In our study, we analyze universities' branding activities in a qualitative case study of ten EU universities (Table 1). Despite the significant stratification of the selected universities (by location, specialization, focus on research or teaching activities), all of them are world-class universities that consistently occupy leading positions in the Shanghai Ranking. Moreover, in recent years some of them have significantly improved these positions (in particular, ETH Zurich, ETH Zurich, Karolinska Institutet).

Table 1. Ranking of EU universities. (Source: Shanghai Ranking, 2023)

University	Ranking		
	2021	2022	2022
University of Cambridge	3	4	4
University of Oxford	7	7	7
Paris-Saclay University	13	16	15
University College London (UCL)	17	18	17
ETH Zurich	21	20	20
Imperial College London	25	23	23
University of Copenhagen	30	39	32
Karolinska Institutet	42	41	37
The University of Edinburgh	38	35	38
PSL University	38	40	41

Following Mampaey and Huisman (2016), we specifically selected welcome addresses as the primary unit of analysis, based on the premise that welcome addresses (1) are designed to reach a broad range of stakeholders, (2) are developed by or with the involvement of top university management, (3) articulate the university's vision and key values, and (4) are widely used as communication tools by various types of institutions regardless of their reputation (Mampaey & Huisman, 2016). Additionally, we analyzed organizational strategies (when stakeholders were involved in their development, as stated by the universities), and examined inaugural speeches delivered by university Chancellors, Vice Chancellors, and Provosts.

The research employs a specific methodology involving the collection of relevant information from the official websites of the universities under study. A deductive category approach is used for content analysis, which includes coding the data and subsequently analyzing the coded data. The software program QCAmap (Mayring, 2020) is used for data processing, allowing for the analysis of frequencies and occurrences of key categories. To ensure the validity of the results, inter-coder and intra-coder agreements were employed (Mayring, 2014).

Employing the deductive category formation approach, in the first stage of the research we used categories defined as value clusters by Mampaey, Huisman, and Seeber (2015): "excellence (or quality), social justice (or diversity), third mission (or outreach), academic orientation, community (or collaboration), internationalization, and performance measurement (or evaluation)". Additionally, we applied qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014) to interpret the institution-specific meanings of these key value clusters. The analysis uncovered several values and communication messages that did not fit within the proposed value clusters, prompting us to conduct an additional analysis using inductive category formation. This approach enabled us to identify additional value clusters which have been communicated during the last decade.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The outcomes of the content analysis indicate that the examined universities employ a notably diverse brand communication strategy. Each university strategically positions a distinct array of value clusters and effectively communicates them to stakeholders (Table 2).

Table 2. Peculiarities of brand communication of EU universities.

University	Value clusters						
	excellence (or quality)	social justice (or diversity)	third mission (or out-reach)	academic orientation	community (or collaboration)	internationalization	performance measurement (or evaluation)
University of Cambridge	+	+	-	+/-	-	+	+ (negative context)
University of Oxford	+	+/-	+/-	+	+	+	-
Paris-Saclay University	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
University College London (UCL)	+	-	+	+/-	+	-	-
ETH Zurich	+	+/-	+/-	-	+	+	+/-
Imperial College London	+	+/-	+	+/-	+	+	-
University of Copenhagen	+	+	+	+	+/-	+	-
Karolinska Institutet	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
The University of Edinburgh	+	+	+	+	+	+	-
PSL University	-	+	+	-	-	-	-

A shared element among all universities is the inclusion of the value of *excellence (or quality)* in their set of value clusters. A comprehensive content analysis shows the multifaceted interpretations of this principle across various institutions. For instance, the University of Oxford (2023) underscores the significance of cultivating a profound understanding of the self, the world, and the cosmos from diverse perspectives. This perspective emphasizes the imperative to intellectually challenge students, nurturing them into the next generation of thought leaders poised to address global complexities.

Similarly, Université Paris-Saclay (2023) delineates its commitment to fostering academic excellence through the symbiotic relationship between education and research, positioning itself as a vanguard in higher education and scholarly inquiry. Conversely, the University of Edinburgh (2022) articulates its pursuit of excellence through adherence to principled, considerate, and respectful conduct across all endeavours.

ETH Zurich (2020) underscores the cultivation of a quality-centric culture characterized by adaptive learning methodologies that respond to evolving societal, pedagogical, and organizational paradigms. Imperial College of London (2020) reiterates the enduring importance of its mission to advance excellence in research and education across diverse domains (in science, engineering, medicine and business) for societal improvement.

The University College London (UCL) (2021) community is described as an enclave teeming with individuals driven by a fervent pursuit of excellence and creativity. This sentiment is further reinforced by UCL's assertion regarding the quintessence of its strength lying in the excellence pervading its educational, research, and innovation endeavours. Likewise, the University of Copenhagen (2023) highlights its expansive disciplinary spectrum as a crucible for fostering specialization and conducting cutting-edge research at the highest level.

Furthermore, there is a highlighted emphasis on the imperative to provide support for academic staff members as an essential prerequisite for attaining excellence. Thus, the Karolinska Institute (2020) pledges to delve deeper into the conceptual contours of excellence and quality within its institutional framework, with a concerted effort to furnish researchers with optimal conditions conducive to pioneering breakthroughs. This assertion finds resonance in the pronouncement from the University of Oxford (2023), advocating for a reimagining of strategies to recognize and valorize the teaching endeavours of academic staff, alongside a call for institutional advocacy for teaching at all hierarchical levels.

Empirical investigations further reveal a correlation between an institution's positioning in academic rankings and the salience with which it communicates the principles of excellence or quality. Conversely, the absence of explicit articulation of these values is notable in the case of PSL University.

In the brand communications of the majority of the examined universities, the presence of the value cluster labelled *social justice (or diversity)* is notable. This phenomenon is notably conspicuous in the promotional materials of universities such as Cambridge University, Université Paris-Saclay, University of Copenhagen, Karolinska Institutet, University of Edinburgh, and PSL University. These institutions underscore their commitment to fostering an environment characterized by equity, inclusion, and diversity. Concurrently, the value of justice (or diversity) is not prominently emphasized in the brand communications of the University of Oxford, ETH Zurich, and Imperial College London.

For instance, Cambridge University (2022) asserts the university's stance against censorship and vehement attacks on individuals with differing viewpoints, positioning itself as a bastion of free expression and intellectual diversity. Similarly, Université Paris-Saclay (2023) delineates its proactive measures to cultivate a culture of inclusivity and combat discrimination across various axes of identity. Likewise, the University of Copenhagen (2023) articulates its vision of a vibrant academic community nurtured by creativity, curiosity, and active participation from all constituents, with an overarching commitment to prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion across all endeavours including research, education and innovation.

Karolinska Institutet (2020) emphasizes the imperative of broadening recruitment efforts, ensuring equal opportunities, and fostering a supportive environment conducive to equitable treatment. Moreover, the institute underscores the integration of gender, power, and equality education within its curricular framework, recognizing their foundational importance in promoting equity within healthcare. Similarly, the University of Edinburgh (2022) shows its dedication to fostering a diverse, inclusive, and accessible environment for all members of its community. This commitment extends across various facets of university life, including education, research, and institutional accessibility initiatives.

PSL University (2023) echoes these sentiments by affirming its mission to provide equal access to high-quality education irrespective of individual backgrounds, financial means, or geographic location. Central to its ethos is the facilitation of a diverse talent pool's advancement through comprehensive support mechanisms spanning the entirety of educational and research trajectories.

The concept of the *third mission (or outreach)* is evident to varying degrees in the brand communications of nearly all the examined universities. Notably, higher-ranked universities tend to convey this value to a lesser extent compared to their relatively lower-ranked counterparts. For example, in the inaugural speech delivered by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford, a robust endorsement of this principle is evident. The Vice-Chancellor expresses unwavering commitment to fortifying and enriching the interconnectedness between the university and its surrounding communities (University of Oxford, 2023). Similarly, Université Paris-Saclay underscores the imperative for universities to reevaluate their societal roles. The institution advocates for a renewed focus on the societal impact of academic pursuits, emphasizing the university's responsibility to serve as a locus for ongoing dialogue surrounding pressing societal issues. In this predisposition, Université Paris-Saclay posits universities as vital hubs for interdisciplinary exchange, wherein scholars, students, the public, and policymakers engage in equitable discourse (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Furthermore, PSL University prominently features this value in its brand communications, positioning it as one of the central tenets of its institutional ethos. PSL University echoes the sentiment espoused by Université Paris-Saclay, emphasizing the university's duty to foster continuous dialogue on significant societal challenges. This commitment underscores PSL University's dedication to facilitating collaborative exchanges among stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and perspectives (PSL University, 2023).

The University of Edinburgh underscores its dedication to community service, both locally and globally. It articulates a profound commitment to the well-being and interests of its immediate surroundings, while also engaging in endeavors of national and international significance. This commitment ensures the university's relevance and impact across diverse contexts (University of Edinburgh, 2022). Similarly, ETH Zurich positions its engagement in the third mission as fundamental to its institutional identity. It emphasizes the importance of active participation and involvement in decision-making processes, recognizing their formative influence on the institution's ethos and operations (ETH Zurich, 2020).

Imperial College London asserts its commitment to the values of the third mission and outreach, expressing a dedication to empowering society through substantive engagement and dialogue. Central to its mission is the endeavour to ensure that its research and initiatives are accessible, pertinent, and responsive to the needs of society (Imperial College London,

2020). Moreover, a strategic orientation towards the third mission is discernible in the communications of UCL. The university articulates plans to consolidate and augment its research and educational endeavours in alignment with significant societal challenges, thereby enhancing its capacity to address pressing issues (UCL, 2021).

Likewise, the University of Copenhagen envisions its exceptional research and student body as pivotal contributors to societal progress. It aspires to leverage its resources and expertise to tackle local and global challenges, thereby catalyzing socio-economic development and job creation (University of Copenhagen, 2023). Karolinska Institutet underscores the imperative for universities to assume responsibility for driving societal development. It emphasizes that active engagement in societal issues not only enhances institutional legitimacy but also underscores the university's broader mission to effect positive change (Karolinska Institutet, 2020).

The broadcasting of *academic orientation* as a core value is evident across all universities (with the exception of ETH Zurich and PSL University), although there are variations in the density and assertiveness of communication messages. For instance, the University of Oxford underscores the fundamental role of academic orientation within its institutional activities. It articulates a firm belief in the centrality of knowledge generation and dissemination to not only the university's mission but also to the vitality of contemporary society and global stability. Against the backdrop of modern challenges such as the proliferation of misinformation, geopolitical tensions, climate change, and emerging technological advancements, the university underscores the pivotal role of academic endeavours in navigating these complexities (University of Oxford, 2023).

Conversely, Université Paris-Saclay, while also acknowledging the significance of academic orientation, places a heightened emphasis on the ethical and responsible management of scientific outputs. It posits that universities bear a unique responsibility not only for the advancement of knowledge but also for ensuring that such knowledge is leveraged for the greater good of society in an ethical and conscientious manner. This perspective underscores the university's commitment to fostering a culture of responsible scholarship and societal engagement (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Karolinska Institutet's communications exhibit a distinct tone of assertiveness, articulating a clear attitude to the intrinsic importance of curiosity-driven research and its transformative potential. The institution emphasizes the indispensable role of such research in driving scientific breakthroughs and underscores its commitment to fostering a culture where high-quality, science-based education complements research endeavours. This steadfast dedication to the pursuit of scientific inquiry underscores Karolinska Institutet's ethos and its conviction in the power of knowledge to effect positive change (Karolinska Institutet, 2020). Similarly, the University of Copenhagen emphasizes its commitment to creating value through research and education conducted at the highest international standards. The university posits curiosity-driven research as the cornerstone of both fundamental and applied research endeavours, highlighting its belief in the foundational importance of academic freedom in driving innovation and advancing knowledge (University of Copenhagen, 2023).

Concurrently, UCL's communications implicitly convey a commitment to academic orientation through its emphasis on research power and impact. The university underscores its track record of producing impactful research outcomes while attracting talented students from diverse backgrounds. This narrative underscores UCL's position as a hub for academic excellence and its dedication to advancing knowledge across various disciplines (UCL, 2021). Likewise, Imperial College London's communications indirectly convey an emphasis on academic orientation by highlighting its commitment to maintaining world-class academic disciplines, particularly in science, engineering, medicine, and business. The institution underscores the importance of grounding all research and education endeavours in a deep understanding of foundational principles, thereby reaffirming its dedication to academic excellence (Imperial College of London, 2020).

The conducted content analysis substantiates the significance of *community (or collaboration)* values for nearly all the examined universities, with the exception of the University of Cambridge and PSL University. Nevertheless, the interpretation of this value varies. The University of Oxford positions the cultivation of a collaborative ecosystem as a cornerstone of its operational ethos, citing it as indispensable to its continued success (University of Oxford, 2023). This sentiment is echoed by Université Paris-Saclay, which views robust collaborative partnerships as essential in navigating the complexities of the contemporary world. The institution emphasizes the value of engaging with socio-economic stakeholders to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical solutions, thereby fostering innovation that addresses pressing societal and environmental challenges (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Similarly, the University of Edinburgh underscores the importance of nurturing a sense of community among its stakeholders, fostering an environment where staff, students, alumni, and supporters take pride in their affiliation with the institution (University of Edinburgh, 2022). ETH Zurich emphasizes the cultivation of a cohesive community characterized by mutual appreciation and collective learning, underlining its commitment to fostering a culture of togetherness (ETH Zurich, 2020). Likewise, Imperial College London articulates its commitment to enhancing its supportive, diverse, and inclusive staff

community, recognizing the pivotal role of collaboration in achieving its institutional goals (Imperial College of London, 2020).

UCL encapsulates the consensus on the value of community and collaboration, emphasizing the importance of creating a mutually respectful environment conducive to academic excellence and innovation. The university underscores its commitment to organizational changes aimed at fostering a dynamic and supportive community where staff and students can thrive (UCL, 2021). Similarly, Karolinska Institutet views collaboration as integral to achieving global competitiveness, highlighting the need to respond to intense global competition by fostering deeper collaborative ties with various stakeholders, including other universities and organizations within the healthcare sector (Karolinska Institutet, 2020).

The value of *internationalization* is conveyed in the brand communications of seven out of the ten universities under examination. Perceived as influential global actors, these universities adopt a nuanced understanding of internationalization that transcends traditional conceptions centred solely on student and academic mobility. They recognize it as a multifaceted responsibility encompassing active contributions to addressing pressing global challenges. In this context, universities such as Cambridge underscore the imperative for global collaboration in seeking solutions to complex issues like climate change and pandemics. They emphasize the necessity for unprecedented levels of joint mobilization to effectively tackle these challenges (Cambridge University, 2022). Similarly, institutions like Karolinska Institutet highlight the importance of broad international cooperation in addressing critical questions within specific sectors, such as the future of the healthcare sector (Karolinska Institutet, 2020).

Additionally, a novel perspective on internationalization emerges, framing it as a tool for enhancing visibility and disseminating academic achievements. For instance, the University of Oxford advocates for elevating the prominence of teaching excellence alongside research prowess to the global audience (University of Oxford, 2023). Furthermore, internationalization is recognized as a key driver of excellence in both teaching and research domains. Institutions like the University of Edinburgh celebrate their deep-rooted internationalism, attracting top-tier talent and fostering innovative global partnerships across research, teaching, and societal impact endeavours (University of Edinburgh, 2022). Similarly, institutions such as ETH Zurich and the University of Copenhagen emphasize the transformative role of international collaboration in generating new research questions, enriching teaching methodologies, and creating value for research and education (ETH Zurich, 2020; University of Copenhagen, 2023).

Moreover, future strategic priorities within the academic landscape are increasingly intertwined with internationalization efforts. Institutions acknowledge the relevance of global developments and anticipate their significant impact on future strategic directions. Consequently, internationalization emerges as a fundamental aspect of strategic planning, ensuring adaptability and competitiveness in the evolving international university landscape (ETH Zurich, 2020).

Among the prominent EU universities examined *performance measurement or evaluation* emerges as a value that receives relatively minimal emphasis in their brand communications. Notably, only two out of the ten universities analyzed incorporate relevant messages regarding performance management and effectiveness evaluation.

Karolinska Institutet stands out for its comprehensive communication on performance management, highlighting the establishment of a cohesive quality system aimed at ensuring standardized quality assurance practices. This system emphasizes the use of common tools and methods, with a focus on outcomes and deviations. The university's commitment to performance management is underscored by its adoption of cyclical processes and a culture conducive to continuous improvement through systematic approaches (Karolinska Institutet, 2020). Similarly, ETH Zurich underscores its tradition of measuring processes within the framework of international comparisons. Operating in a competitive environment, the university evaluates its performance in research and teaching against benchmarks set by leading global universities and research institutions (ETH Zurich, 2020).

Conversely, Cambridge University's brand communications exhibit a reluctance or unfavourable disposition towards performance measurement and evaluation procedures. The university expresses concern regarding the increasing pressure from the UK Government to quantify, evaluate, and regulate various aspects of university operations, including research, teaching, knowledge transfer, and student welfare. This sentiment is reflected in the observation that university staff are increasingly burdened with reporting and justifying activities rather than focusing on substantive work. Additionally, the university's leadership articulates a sense of being overwhelmed by external demands, likening the situation to "tap-dancing like crazy" without control over the music, which is not characterized as conducive to a positive atmosphere (Cambridge University, 2022).

Our analysis substantiates the assertion regarding communication excellence as the prevailing value cluster (Mampaey, Huisman, & Seeber, 2015). Simultaneously, we observe a discernible shift in the landscape of brand communications over the past decade. While the prior decade witnessed a convergence primarily in the dominant value cluster, specifically the

third mission, according to Mampaey, Huisman, & Seeber (2015), our current analysis reveals a significant divergence in the brand communications of the examined universities. This differentiation can be attributed to their distinct specificities and their vision for future strategic development. Contrary to the notion put forth by the authors that relatively lower-reputed universities imitate their more highly reputed counterparts concerning core values, our research does not support such a claim. When conducting a within-group analysis (comparing more highly reputed and relatively lower-reputed universities), we find no within-group differentiation, as identified by Mampaey, Huisman, & Seeber (2015) in their analysis of UK higher education. This observation suggests universities' inclination towards occupying a unique and clearly differentiated niche, aligning with a market-oriented steering approach.

Our analysis further reveals that contemporary university brand communications extend beyond the mere translation of value clusters as identified by Mampaey, Huisman, & Seeber (2015). The evolving realities, including increased geopolitical instability, substantial socio-economic shifts, profound environmental challenges, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have prompted a discernible shift in communication messages.

Indeed, contemporary university messaging extends beyond advocating for the redefinition of their roles in the modern context. While statements promoting the idea that a university education should equip students for careers and societal contributions are prevalent, there is a broader discourse encompassing diverse perspectives. For instance, there is an emphasis on the importance of students' active engagement with established knowledge and emerging ideas. Moreover, university education is portrayed as a transformative journey, offering opportunities for intellectual growth and exploration. It is framed as an experience that broadens horizons, exposes individuals to the complexities and beauties of the world, and challenges preconceived notions. Furthermore, there is a rejection of simplistic portrayals of universities as mere providers of content and students as passive recipients. Such reductionist views are critiqued for undervaluing the multifaceted nature of university education and diminishing the agency and experiential learning of students (Cambridge University, 2022).

Moreover, there is a notable emphasis on the role of universities in fostering understanding and peace, as articulated by statements from various institutions. For instance, the University of Oxford highlights the transformative power of education in facilitating profound societal changes, promoting social mobility, fostering greater empathy and awareness towards diverse perspectives, and ultimately contributing to a more peaceful world (University of Oxford, 2023). Similarly, universities are recognized for their significant influence on social dynamics and processes. This is underscored by statements such as the one from Université Paris-Saclay, which emphasizes the imperative for universities to engage in self-reflection, adaptation, and a reaffirmation of their dual commitments to both scientific advancement and societal progress. In doing so, universities strive to ensure that their roles remain «harmonious, constructive, and forward-thinking», thus contributing positively to broader social development (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Emergent values evident in contemporary EU university communications encompass *autonomy* as a central theme. For instance, Université Paris-Saclay emphasizes the importance of safeguarding university independence and integrity amidst growing interconnectedness with various stakeholders, especially in a context where scientific endeavours become increasingly resource-intensive (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023). Similarly, ETH Zurich underscores the significance of autonomy in ensuring efficiency and academic freedom. The university's structural framework, characterized by autonomous departments and independent research groups, facilitates the freedom to establish and execute strategic action plans in both research and teaching domains (ETH Zurich, 2020).

Another pivotal value widely communicated is *academic freedom*. The University of Copenhagen, for instance, underscores the significant responsibility entrusted to universities in upholding academic freedom. This entails creating optimal conditions for the generation and dissemination of new knowledge, as well as fostering continuous and critical discourse surrounding existing knowledge, norms, and practices. Notably, academic freedom extends to both research and teaching domains, requiring proactive leadership from the university's administration to promote responsible research conduct. Furthermore, the university emphasizes the importance of cultivating a democratic culture and fostering value creation through inclusive practices and active participation among stakeholders (University of Copenhagen, 2023).

The cultivation of an *innovative mindset and creativity* is an evident value communicated. For instance, Université Paris-Saclay emphasizes the importance of fostering a transformative mindset among its community members, encouraging students, alumni, researchers, and staff to perceive themselves as innovators in their respective domains (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Furthermore, there is a notable emphasis on the creation of innovative ecosystems within universities. The University of Copenhagen articulates its commitment to enhancing the culture and framework conditions conducive to innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaborative business endeavours. The university aims to invest in and facilitate the development of

a cohesive innovation ecosystem to support and nurture innovative initiatives (University of Copenhagen, 2023). Imperial College of London highlights the institution's commitment to fostering a culture of innovation, characterized by a willingness to experiment, provide support for bold initiatives, and facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration. This emphasis on innovation underscores the university's confidence in its ability to seize opportunities and drive meaningful progress (Imperial College of London, 2020). Karolinska Institutet highlights the significance of creativity in generating groundbreaking results. The institution emphasizes the importance of creative thinking, perseverance, collaboration, and the encouragement of originality in its pursuit of academic excellence and innovation (Karolinska Institutet, 2020).

Emergent values include the *marketization of research*. For instance, Université Paris-Saclay emphasizes the development of economic intelligence capabilities to empower researchers to identify potential application markets for their discoveries. This strategic approach aligns with regional, national, and European strategies, fostering coherence between research outcomes and market demands (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023). Similarly, universities such as Imperial College of London articulate their commitment to translating research ideas into impactful solutions through entrepreneurship and strategic partnerships with various stakeholders, including businesses, NGOs, and government entities. By providing services aimed at harnessing the value of their world-leading research, these universities actively engage in the marketization of research outcomes, thereby maximizing their societal and economic impact (Imperial College of London, 2020).

Contemporary EU university communications also reflect values centred around *ethics and academic integrity*. Université Paris-Saclay, for instance, underscores the necessity of creating mechanisms to facilitate explicit debates surrounding the ethical implications of its activities. This commitment reflects a broader recognition within academia of the importance of upholding ethical principles and maintaining academic integrity in all scholarly endeavours (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Emergent values apparent in contemporary EU university communications encompass *sustainability and climate-friendly organization*. Université Paris-Saclay articulates its commitment to sustainability by supporting the production of knowledge concerning environmental changes, associated risks, and methods for achieving sustainability. Additionally, the university prioritizes the training and awareness-raising of its community members, particularly students, to prepare them to engage with and contribute to societal transitions (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023).

Similarly, universities such as Imperial College of London and Karolinska Institutet emphasize their dedication to fostering climate-friendly organizations. Imperial College sets ambitious objectives addressing climate footprint, resource use, and biodiversity on campus. Leveraging research knowledge, the university actively promotes and supports the green transition while creating opportunities for students and staff to engage in environmentally sustainable practices (Imperial College of London, 2020). Likewise, Karolinska Institutet prioritizes environmental and social sustainability, advocating for travel-free meetings and equipping students and employees with the necessary knowledge and skills to contribute to sustainable development in their respective roles (Karolinska Institutet, 2020).

Contemporary EU university communications also reveal such values as the *aspiration to make a difference and to have an impact*. For example, the University of Edinburgh emphasizes the importance of its undergraduate curriculum in fostering breadth and choice, with the goal of preparing students, graduates, and alumni to make a positive difference in their endeavours, regardless of their field or location (University of Edinburgh, 2022). Similarly, the University of Edinburgh articulates its commitment to enhancing the impact of its research through partnerships, international collaborations, and investments in emerging disciplines. Improved digital outreach is envisioned to facilitate global engagement in education, while opportunities for co-creation and engagement with various stakeholders aim to amplify the university's impact (University of Edinburgh, 2020). Moreover, University College London (UCL) asserts its identity as a global university recognized for its radical and critical thinking, highlighting its widespread influence on a global scale. This emphasis underscores the university's commitment to making a significant impact through its research, education, and engagement with society (UCL, 2021). Karolinska Institutet underscores its commitment to specifically cultural influence through active engagement with society. The institute aims to promote fact-based knowledge and foster a scientific, critically inquisitive approach across various domains. By facilitating dialogue and interaction with broader societal contexts, Karolinska Institutet seeks to contribute to cultural enrichment and intellectual advancement (Karolinska Institutet, 2020).

Another value cluster includes *openness and courageousness*. For instance, ETH Zurich emphasizes its commitment to openness by welcoming new ideas, talent, and partnerships. This openness extends to both internal and external realms, with a dedication to transparency in all endeavours (ETH Zurich, 2020). Similarly, Imperial College of London acknowledges the importance of courage in the face of challenges, particularly exemplified by the COVID-19 crisis. The university underscores the value of a strong strategy, the willingness to take risks, and the imperative to act courageously during times of uncertainty. Furthermore, Imperial College commits to embracing courage and innovation in pursuing new opportunities, recognizing the necessity of taking both academic and financial risks «to sustain excellence in research and education» (Imperial College of London, 2020).

Contemporary EU university communications reflect a value of *effectiveness*. For example, University College London (UCL) emphasizes the importance of investing in administrative functions that significantly contribute to institutional success. This investment aims to bring about demonstrable improvements in the efficiency of administrative and transactional processes, thereby optimizing the time allocated for both staff and students. By reducing administrative burdens, UCL aims to create more opportunities for meaningful interactions between students and teachers within the curriculum, as well as enhance the support provided by student advisers and supportive staff to those in need (UCL, 2021).

Research findings show that universities underscore the importance of *solution-oriented thinking* as an emergent value. For example, Imperial College of London aims to support innovative teaching initiatives and practices that cultivate the ability to identify and address challenges effectively. By prioritizing solution-oriented thinking, Imperial College seeks to equip its graduates with the skills and mindset needed to navigate complex issues and contribute positively to society (Imperial College of London, 2020).

The value of *the lifelong partnership* is widely communicated by the studied universities. Imperial College of London, for instance, highlights its commitment to serving as a lifelong learning partner for individuals and society. The university aims to address the increasing demand for skills development by offering world-class, research-based education at various levels, including Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programs. Furthermore, Imperial College intends to provide opportunities for continuing and further education throughout individuals' careers, thereby fostering lifelong partnerships that extend beyond traditional academic boundaries (Imperial College of London, 2020).

Contemporary EU university communications highlight the emergent value of *creating conducive environments*. For instance, the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) aims to establish itself as a recognized institution offering an attractive study environment characterized by high levels of student well-being. The university emphasizes the importance of fostering communities where students are supported in their academic and social engagement throughout their education. Additionally, UCPH is committed to ensuring an appealing work environment that promotes personal and professional development, innovation, and quality in the daily activities of its employees (University of Copenhagen, 2020).

Similarly, Karolinska Institutet (KI) prioritizes the creation of optimal working conditions for both students and employees. KI endeavours to provide predictable career paths and cultivate environments that are physically, organizationally, and socially conducive to study and work. Moreover, KI is dedicated to maintaining environments that are «free from discrimination, offensive behaviour, and harassment» (Karolinska Institutet, 2020), thereby fostering inclusivity and support for all members of its community.

CONCLUSIONS

Recently, amidst the contemporary context of «heightened geopolitical uncertainty, significant socio-economic transformations, and profound environmental challenges» (Université Paris-Saclay, 2023), coupled with the outputs of the pandemic and the forced marketization of university activities, notable shifts have been discerned in the brand communications strategies of leading EU universities. These universities no longer confine themselves to conveying conventional value clusters such as “excellence (or quality), social justice (or diversity), third mission (or outreach), academic orientation, community (or collaboration), internationalization, and performance measurement (or evaluation)” as manifested by Mampaey, Huisman, and Seeber (2015).

Relatively new values that can be seen in modern brand communications of leading EU universities, are: autonomy, academic freedom, innovative mindset, creation of an innovative ecosystem, marketization of research, ethics and academic integrity, sustainable and climate-friendly organization, making a difference approach, impact, openness, courageousness, effectiveness, solution-oriented thinking, life-long partnership, creation the environment, creativity, cultural influence.

The application of content analysis and the grouping method made it possible to group the identified values into the following value clusters: creativity (or originality), solution-oriented thinking, autonomy (or academic freedom), innovativeness (or openness), marketization (or brand development), ethics (or academic integrity), sustainability (or effectiveness), impact (or cultural influence), courageousness (or solution-oriented thinking), creation the environment (or life-long partnership).

Significant differentiation in the brand communications of the studied universities is caused by their unique specificity, understanding of strengths, vision of their further strategic development, as well as the desire of the universities to occupy a unique and clearly differentiated niche in accordance with the market-oriented steering approach.

The avenue for future scholarly inquiry lies in the examination of contemporary brand communications attributes within Ukrainian universities. This encompasses an exploration of their communication strategies, the theoretical underpinnings, and the practical execution of the brand communication framework. Such an investigation is predicated on an in-depth analysis and incorporation of optimal foreign practices.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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БРЕНД-КОМУНІКАЦІЇ ПРОВІДНИХ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ УНІВЕРСИТЕТІВ: ПРОГРЕСИВНІ ІДЕЇ ДЛЯ ВІТЧИЗНЯНОГО КОНТЕКСТУ

Зрушення в системі управління вітчизняними закладами вищої освіти (університетами) в бік маркетингового управління передбачає запровадження нових підходів до їх позиціонування, брендингу та бренд-комунікацій. Саме тому продуктивним є вивчення та інкорпорування прогресивного досвіду провідних європейських університетів у контексті їхніх бренд-комунікацій.

У статті представлено результати якісного контент-аналізу елементів бренд-комунікацій провідних європейських університетів, які посідають позиції лідерів у Шанхайському міжнародному академічному рейтингу університетів.

Визначено, що протягом останнього десятиліття відбулися якісні зміни в комунікуванні університетами їхніх ціннісних орієнтирів. На початку другої декади ХХІ століття домінуючими цінностями були досконалість (або якість), соціальна справедливість (або різноманітність), третя місія (або охоплення), академічна орієнтованість, спільнота (або співпраця), інтернаціоналізація та вимірювання ефективності (або оцінювання), які широко комунікувались університетами.

Ідентифіковано цінності, які наразі комунікуються провідними європейськими університетами: автономія, академічна свобода, інноваційне мислення, створення інноваційної екосистеми, комерціалізація досліджень, етика та академічна доброчесність, стійкий та екологічно дружній університет, відкритість, сміливість і здатність іти на ризик, ефективність, орієнтоване на рішення мислення, довготривале партнерство, створення середовища, довіра суспільства, розвиток бренду, креативність, культурний вплив.

Ідентифіковане зрушення в стратегіях бренд-комунікацій європейських університетів. Якщо на початку другої декади XXI століття спостерігалася значна уніфікація таких стратегій університетів-лідерів і мімікрія менш конкурентних закладів, то наразі спостерігається диференціація цих стратегій. Очевидно, вона зумовлена унікальною специфікою університетів, розумінням їхніх сильних сторін, баченням свого подальшого стратегічного розвитку, а також прагненням зайняти унікальну та чітко диференційовану нішу відповідно до конкурентного середовища.

Ключові слова: університети, маркетинг, бренд-комунікація, цінності, ціннісні орієнтири, управління

JEL Класифікація: I25, M30