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Positioning in Market Space: The Evaluation of Swedish Universities' Online Brand Personalities

Robert A. Opoku
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ABSTRACT. The paper extends Aaker's previous empirical work on brand personality by exploring whether Swedish Universities communicate distinctive brand personalities in cyberspace. Employing a multistage methodology, data are drawn from the English Web sites of 17 Swedish universities and analyzed by using a combination of computerized content and correspondence analyses. Results indicate that some universities appear to have clear brand personalities, others take on a new face with regard to the obvious personality one would have initially associated them with, while others fail to communicate their brand personalities in any distinct manner. While illustrating a powerful but simple and relatively inexpensive way for institutions for higher education and brand researchers

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to study communicated brand personalities, this study also highlights the growing importance of brand positioning issues in internationalization and globalization of higher educational institutions.

KEYWORDS. Branding, brand personality, international education, university, Sweden

INTRODUCTION

As a result of increased national and international competition within higher education, universities (once hesitant to use modern marketing techniques) are now undertaking branded marketing campaigns. This renewed interest in branding and strategy has also triggered researchers to study universities as brands. For instance, Gatfield, Barker, and Graham (1999) have measured the communication impact for university advertising material in building brands. Chapleo (2002) explored the extent to which the concept of branding in UK higher education was evolved, accepted, and understood and whether any effort has been made to understand, measure, and influence existing university brands. Bulotaite (2003) examined how a university can use its heritage to promote and embellish its brand name. Gray, Fam, and Llanes (2003) conducted a survey on branding universities in the Asian markets and suggested that a standardized media mix could be used to promote universities. In their study, McAlexander, Koenig, and Schouten (2006) also demonstrated how the understanding and management of brand community can make to those interested in the advancement of higher education. Temple (2006) discussed the three elements of the successful brand—product, identity, and values—and considered them in the context of higher education. Judson, Aurand, and Grochels (2006) investigated the internal communication of the university brand. Haan and Cruicksham (2007) also made some recommendation on how institutions of higher education can attract more home-schooled students.

Parameswaran and Glowacka (1995) argued that the name of the institution is its brand and should represent the university's unique personality or image. Therefore the competition between the higher education institutions obliges them to present a clear brand personality. This suggests that more development of brand personality to especially prospective students is necessary. Studies have shown that emotional satisfaction is far more important than cognitive satisfaction (Clarke, 2005). This implies that

focusing on emotional satisfaction can be very beneficial, as a university's brand personality plays a key role in student's ability to form an initial emotional connection to it. Yet, it appears that none of the studies in this area has focused on the personality characteristics that influence students (both native and foreign) in selecting a university for higher education.

BRANDING SWEDISH UNIVERSITIES

In many Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states in Europe, a steeper demographic decline is imminent in the future (Mizikaci & Baumgartl, 2007). Reductions in the traditional 18–25 year-old student age group will affect educational institutions in terms of enrollments in a number of OECD countries (Mizikaci, 2007). Obviously, this will have an impact on higher education institutions in Europe, which will enroll fewer native. This decline is being offset by the flow of foreign students. It is therefore not a surprise to find that many European universities have recently been making real efforts to attract foreign students in order to fill in the gaps.

Some countries are further down the line than others in attracting international students, and in some cases are prepared to make very significant investments. Interestingly, this market has been dominated by Anglo-phone countries despite that these countries charge full cost fees, whereas countries such as Germany, France, and Sweden charge low or no fees to international students. Sweden, in particular, has all it takes to be successful in this enterprise because it has an educational policy that is based on recognition that a multicultural student body is a resource. With few exceptions, tuition fees for students are fully subsidized by the government, regardless of nationality. Moreover, most Swedes speak very good English. Sweden's profile in terms of its commitment to education clearly suggests that it should have been an increasingly attractive destination for students from all over the world, but in absolute terms, Sweden's share of the foreign student market is still tiny. According to the OECD report, *Education at a Glance* (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2006), of the 2.7 million students studying abroad around the world in 2004, Sweden hosted only 36,458 or 1 percent of the total. In its bill "New World—New University" (Swedish Government Offices, 2005), the Swedish government presented proposals aimed at making

higher education in Sweden more international and more attractive to natives. Subsequently, Swedish institutions of higher learning have presented more than 300 masters programs to be taught at 29 Swedish universities in English for the 2006–2007 academic year. However, as with any other marketed services, the commercial challenge is how to attract a large number of students (Larsen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2002). Perceptions need to be changed so that students begin to consider countries like Sweden a safe destination as well as a premium opportunity in all fields of education. This suggests that a study is needed to ascertain whether the universities are communicating clear and distinctive messages in their bid to attract both local and foreign students.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to explore whether universities communicate distinctive brand personalities in their efforts in attracting both local and foreign students. Thus, in a context, this study investigates the brand personality dimensions that Swedish universities use in order to attract and build relationships with students. This study will further help us gain a better understanding of the brand personality dimensions that influence students in selecting a university for higher education as well as enable a comparison of brand personalities of different universities.

Though this paper is limited to the analysis of Swedish universities, the results are expected to have implications for the positioning of more university brands in the local and promising international education market of today. Furthermore, we have chosen to investigate only the universities' online communication. The university's Web site is potentially a strong competitive weapon as it positions the school against competition and is part of the image it portrays to its stakeholders. Yet, universities are not differentiating themselves in the online environment (Adams & Eveland, 2007). Therefore, it is important for the university to have the right brand personality communicated via its Internet site. Moreover, our focal point will be the English-speaking sections of the Web sites, as it is from these that the great majority of potential foreign students will assess the universities.

In order to investigate this phenomenon, we proceed as follows: first we briefly describe the concept of brand personality and review some extant literature associated with this topic. Then we describe a study aimed at identifying and describing the brand personalities of a number of Swedish universities as communicated by them online. Finally, we conclude by identifying the limitations of the study and our approach, and bring to fore avenues for future research considerations as well as practical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept and Measurement of Brand Personality

Introduced by Olins (1978) from psychology, the concept of brand personality was later seized and integrated into a more comprehensive brand-management approach by Abratt (1989). There have been various attempts to measure brand personality. Relying on the “Big Five” human personality structures, Aaker’s (1997) Brand Personality Scale (BPS), developed in the United States, was found to have some international applicability in subsequent works (Aaker, Benet-Martinez, & Garolera, 2001; Chun & Davies, 2001; Okazaki & Rivas, 2002). In this study, we chose to rely on the BPS because Aaker’s (1997) rigorous effort enables experimental researchers to measure symbolic meanings of brands as if they were people. Aaker (1997) measured the perception of a brand by considering the extent to which the respondents believe it possesses the characteristics of five personality dimensions; “sincerity,” “excitement,” “competence,” “sophistication,” and “ruggedness.” However, in this study, as will be seen, we do not use customer or respondent perceptions as input for our determination of university brand personality. Rather, we use what is communicated on a university’s Web site as input. Stated somewhat differently, we will not measure a university’s brand personality by what others think it to be, but, rather, what the university says about itself. Again, our area of attention is how brand personality is determined through Web sites. In the literature, brand personality is often discussed with clear reference to either products, corporate brands, or countries, but not how this is communicated via a Web site. For our consideration, however, a research in this area is of paramount importance because of the complex, vicarious, and unpredictable process of branding universities online. In contextualizing this study and taken into consideration Aaker’s definition (see Aaker, 1997, p. 347), brand personality will be defined as the “the set of human characteristics associated with a particular university and how these are communicated through its official Web site.”

METHODOLOGY

Sample Selection and Data Collection

The sample space covered 39 institutions under the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education¹ as of May 2005. Out of this list, the focus

of the study was further narrowed down to the 17 institutions that are actively conducting research by eliminating 22 university colleges. The selected institutions are Stockholm University (SU), Karolinska Institutet (KI), Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), Umeå University (UMU), Jönköping University (JU), Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Linköping University (LIU), Luleå University of Technology (LTU), Stockholm School of Economics (SSE), Chalmers University of Technology (CUT), Lund University (LU), Växjö University (VU), Uppsala University (UU), Gothenburg University (GU), Örebro University (ÖU), Karlstad University (KU), and Mid Sweden University (MU). These institutions were purposely selected because of their relative uniformity in terms of status and governance on the Swedish higher education market.

The data sources were the official English Web sites of these selected universities. Initially, it was tempting to limit such a study to the homepage (initial screen) of the site (see Ha & James, 1998; Jo & Jung, 2005), but with the view to enriching our basis for analysis as opposed to solely investigating the Swedish universities' main English portals, we chose to define our unit of analysis as the textual information derived from the Web sites' main portals and four levels down in the hierarchy of information. That is to say, we repeatedly copied all textual information from the main English portal into a text document. Thereafter we clicked all the links on the main portal and copied all the text from these, and this process continued three levels further down the Web site hierarchies so that all available text from the main Web portal and four levels down had finally been obtained. This rigid and systematic procedure yielded a considerable amount of textual information from each university's Web site (see Appendix A).

Data Analysis Techniques

The method used to analyze the Web sites was content analysis. This is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of a text. The content may include words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated. Content analysis has also commonly been regarded as a useful method for social science studies especially in advertising and other marketing communication (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). While overcoming one of the methodological concerns of content analysis, namely that of developing an accurate and reliable coding process (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991), we opted for a

computerized content analysis program called WordStat. This software, as recommended among others by Krippendorff (2004), is a text analysis module specifically designed to study textual information such as responses to open-ended questions, interviews, titles, journal articles, public speeches, and electronic communications.

For our data collection instrument, we designed a comprehensive dictionary of terms by collecting and compiling synonyms of Aaker's (1997) five brand personality dimensions with the help of the online version of *Encyclopaedia Britannica's* thesaurus function² and the dictionary builder of the software package. In her article, Aaker (1997, p. 354) introduced a table with a set of 42 personality trait norms that she suggested should serve as an aid for comparing brand personalities across different categories. In this paper, our aim was primarily to find original synonyms for all of these traits, as well as synonyms for the five fundamental dimensions. The five dimensions and their respective traits are:

- Sincerity (domestic, honest, genuine, cheerful)
- Excitement (daring, spirited, imaginative, up to date)
- Competence (reliable, responsible, dependable, efficient)
- Sophistication (glamorous, presentation, charming, romantic)
- Ruggedness (tough, strong, outdoorsy, rugged)

To increase the reliability of the instrument, two parallel lists of synonyms were collected in the same manner by two different persons, one male and one female. These two lists were thereafter merged into one by selecting only the synonyms that had been identified by both persons. This procedure generated a final list of 1,625 words that were relatively evenly distributed across Aaker's original five dimensions of brand personality as demonstrated by the following percentages: "sincerity," 21 percent of all words listed; followed by "excitement," 17 percent; "competence," 20 percent; "sophistication," 21 percent; and "ruggedness," 21 percent.

Thereafter, this list of synonyms was converted to electronic format and categorized according to Aaker's brand personality dimensions through the WordStat software package. With the help of the software's exclusion function, words with little semantic value such as pronouns and conjunctions were excluded from the dictionary while the stemming function of the software reduced various word forms to a more limited set of words based on their roots. After a thorough pretesting of this newly created automatic categorization dictionary, the textual information from the

17 selected Swedish universities' English Web sites was converted into an analyzable format and imported into the program. A computerized content analysis was then performed on the Web sites in order to find out how the brand personality dimensions were distributed.

To identify and map the associations between the Web sites and the brand personality dimensions, we further performed a correspondence analysis with the WordStat content analysis software. This is a mapping technique based on cross-tabulation data that is converted into a joint space map by using the chi-square value for each cell (Bendixen, 1995). The perceptual map created through correspondence analysis is useful in uncovering structural relationships between different variables (Inman, Venkatesh, & Ferraro, 2004), and its graphic nature facilitates interpretation of data that would otherwise be difficult to comprehend (O'Brien, 1993). Moreover, Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) explain that correspondence analysis is best suited for exploratory data analysis; therefore, the choice of analysis method is appropriate for this study, which is exploratory in nature.

RESULTS

By aggregating the number of words identified by the analysis software, Table 1 provides a two-way contingency table of frequencies in relation to the five brand personality dimensions. The cell counts in this table portray the number of times a particular brand personality dimension was found to be associated with a particular university's Web site, while the row and column marginal subtotals designate the number of mentions received by a particular dimension and Web site respectively. In this table, it is apparent that the Linköping University Web site contained the most words associated with brand personality dimensions with its 2,749 terms, while Stockholm School of Economics was the least associated. In terms of individual brand personality dimensions, "competence" was portrayed most in all the universities' Web sites accounting for 43.0 percent (8,140/18,914) of the total words, while "sophistication," representing 3.6 percent, was the least portrayed. A chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 8\,732.29$; $df = 64$; $p < 0.0001$) reveals that the row (i.e., the brand personality dimensions) and the column (i.e., Web sites) variables are related.

Figure 1 is a correspondence analysis map that unveils the underlying structure and positioning of the investigated Web sites in relation to the brand personality dimensions. The data is purposefully presented in two

TABLE 1. Brand personality dimensions distribution over web sites

BPS Dimension/ University	Competence	Excitement	Ruggedness	Sincerity	Sophistication	Column Total
Chalmers Uni.Tec (CUT)	424	217	32	209	16	898
Gothenburg Univ. (GU)	382	217	46	343	42	1,030
Jönköping Univ. (JU)	358	78	12	162	16	626
Karolinska Inst. (KI)	151	83	18	257	9	518
Royal Inst. Tech. (KTH)	257	72	20	122	22	493
Karlstad Univ. (KU)	536	285	54	405	33	1,313
Linköping Univ. (LIU)	1,435	364	148	734	68	2,749
Luleå Tech. Univ. (LTU)	584	175	45	210	23	1,037
Lund Univ. (LU)	552	308	49	324	56	1,289
Mid Sweden Univ. (MU)	256	66	17	232	20	591
Swedish Agric. U (SLU)	824	410	473	610	80	2,397
Sthlm Sch. Econ. (SSE)	352	46	10	67	13	488
Stockholm Univ. (SU)	262	238	61	394	96	1,051
Umeå Univ. (UMU)	277	111	92	186	25	691
Uppsala Univ. (UU)	318	211	70	209	67	875
Växjö Univ. (VU)	785	424	61	494	60	1,824
Örebro Univ. (ÖU)	387	219	43	369	26	1,044
Row Total	8,140	3,524	1,251	5,327	672	18,914

 $\chi^2 = 8,732.29$, $Df = 64$, $P < 0.0001$.

FIGURE 1. Correspondence Analysis Map of 17 Swedish Universities' English Web Sites in Relation to the Five Brand Personality Dimensions.

dimensions since this provides a fairly reliable display of the full picture, with 82.5 percent of the total variance explained³ (eigenvalues and explained proportions of the first dimension are 0.051 and 50.956 and for the second dimension 0.031 and 31.586 respectively), at the same time as it facilitates data interpretation (see for instance Bendixen, 1995; Berthon et al., 1997; Greenacre, 1984; Hair et al., 1998). In other words, the graphical output brings to fore information about how the Web sites and dimensions are positioned between and against each other.

Regarding the relationship between the brand personality dimensions, an initial optical analysis reveals that the “sincerity,” “excitement,” and, to some extent, “sophistication” dimensions seem more closely related to one another than the “competence” and “ruggedness” dimensions. Due to the difficulty in getting a clear picture on relations between the university Web sites by examining them only optically, a dendogram analysis was performed to determine the agglomeration order. The analysis results in Figure 2 reveals that the university Web sites can be put into four principal clusters: one containing the English Web sites for SU and KI, another representing SLU and UMU, a third group with JU, KTH, LIU, LTU,

FIGURE 2. Dendrogram Displaying the Agglomeration Order Between the 17 Analyzed Web Sites.

SSE, and finally the fourth and most outspread cluster containing the university Web sites of CUT, LU, VU, UU, GU, ÖU, KU, and MU.

In interpreting a perceptual map such as Figure 1, one has to be very cautious in analyzing the distances between row and column variables due to how they are scaled independently (Hoffman & Franke, 1986). This implies that the proximity of a certain Web site to a brand personality does not necessarily mean that they are closely related. However, the angle between words and Web sites does provide some meaning in that an acute angle indicates that two characteristics are correlated whereas an obtuse angle indicates less correlation (see, for instance, Lebart, Salem, & Berry [1998] for more information about this). In this sense, Stockholm University's English Web site should be considered more closely related to "sophistication" than Karolinska Institutet's, although they optically appear to be equally close.

These limitations aside, the map still indicates that university Web sites are grouped near the brand personality dimension that they mostly communicate on their Web sites; for example, sophistication in the case of SU, and the reverse for SLU and SSE in relation to the same dimension. If a university's Web site is not close to any of the dimensions, it is not communicating a strong brand personality (as in the case of CUT or UMU). On the other hand, if a university falls in between or among the

dimensions (for instance GU to “sincerity” and “excitement”), the case could be that the university’s message is mainly split between these two dimensions, which leads to communication of a dual personality.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The correspondence analysis map shows that the official English university Web site of SU and, to some extent, KI communicates the brand personality of “sophistication,” while “competence” is represented by LIU, LTU, JU, KTH, and SSE. The “ruggedness” dimension has a weak connection with SLU and even weaker with UMU, whereas the remaining university Web sites are all, more or less, grouped together along with the “sincerity” and “excitement” dimensions. A cursory examination of the content of these English Web sites will portray this summary to be reasonable, accurate, and representative in some cases, and quite surprising in others.

That SU emphasizes sophistication is hardly surprising considering its location in the royal capital of Sweden. The university is positioned at the heart of Scandinavia’s thriving business capital, and is thus perfectly located for both career opportunities and all the diversity that this vibrant environment has to offer. Stockholm is also the one of the cities in the world that can pride itself as the seat of the Nobel prizes. That KI is clustered together with SU serves as a bit more of a surprise since much of the information on the Web site mentions the high quality of research and education, especially in the field of medicine. This would initially lead one to expect a closer connection to the “competence” dimension. SLU’s English Web site is the one most closely associated with the brand personality of “ruggedness.” This could be representative in the sense that, as one of the few agriculture universities in Sweden, it has a unique role to monitor and assess the state of the environment. With a clearly defined role in the Swedish society, this university’s responsibility stretches from the wide-ranging fields of agriculture, forestry, and food industry, to environmental questions. All these are concerned with environmental issues and may have therefore informed their somewhat rugged position. According to the correspondence analysis, UMU does not really show any strong personality at all, but it still shows up in the “ruggedness” quadrant together with SLU. A more thorough investigation of UMU’s Web site reveals information about Umeå’s fairly warm summers where the sun hardly sets and snowy winters ideal for skiing. This could

contribute to a somewhat rugged impression. However, as it was not very clearly communicated, one can say that Umeå University lacks a strong online brand personality.

The official English Web sites of LIU, LTU, JU, and KTH communicate the brand personality dimension of "competence." LIU's Web site, which appears to have the strongest connection, claims that the university is always exploring new academic ways and boasts of an entrepreneurial spirit of education that has characterized the university's history. The competence connection can be further understood when the LIU Web site explains that Linköping University was the creator of Sweden's first MSc program in industrial management and engineering and that it today can pride itself with many multidisciplinary departments. The Web site of JU emphasizes that the Jönköping University foundation offers a young and vital academic study environment at the same time resting on a one-hundred-year-old foundation. With its various focus areas on everything from the International Business School to the School of Engineering and the School of Health Sciences, this university displays a breadth online that in many cases can be interpreted as "competence" in brand personality terms. KTH and LTU also end up in this group. In KTH's case, it is easily understood as an investigation of the institute's English Web site reveals that it is Sweden's largest technical university claiming to be spearheading research areas such as IT (information technology) and biotechnology. Moreover the Web site explains that KTH produces students "with a modern and multidisciplinary outlook, well prepared for a rewarding professional life." LTU's positioning, close to the others, creates some confusion though; on one hand, Luleå University of Technology claims to deliver top-class research and education as well as original and innovative thinking, which would justify the competence personality, but on the other hand LTU's slogan is "The Northernmost University of Technology in Scandinavia," and most graphic elements on the site seem to emphasize snow and winter. From this perspective, one would have expected to see LTU, a university situated on the fringes of Europe far away from the old prestigious universities and cities with a long academic history, to have capitalized on this unique position by stressing its magnificent natural surroundings rather than competence and academic authority.

The Web sites of SSE and CUT are also to be found in the upper left quartile of the correspondence analysis map, but in SSE's case it has positioned itself far away from the others at the very corner of the map. The data on Table 1 reveals that SSE's judicious Web site strongly focuses on

words that emphasize competence (352 analyzed words out of a total of 488 were connected to the competence dimension) as opposed to the others that also seem to be communicating elements of other brand personalities. This, in a way, has led to the fact that the Web site of SSE seems to have the strongest position of all the analyzed sites. In the case of CUT the situation is a bit more diffuse. Although the Web site ends up in the top right quartile, the dendrogram analysis reveals that it is still more closely related to the group of sites located in the bottom right quartile on Figure 1 by communicating relatively more of the “excitement” and “sincerity” BPS dimensions. This implies a somewhat unclear position for CUT at the same time as it manages to differentiate itself a small piece from the other investigated technical universities (KTH and LTU).

Although grouped close to the “sincerity” and “excitement” dimensions together with most of the other universities in this study, UU’s official English Web site differs in the sense that it is still in the “sophistication” quadrant together with SU. Founded in 1477, this university can boast of being the oldest in the Nordic countries with excellent reputation in terms of education and research. The university that has produced eight Nobel laureates emphasizes ancient traditions, advanced knowledge, and extensive experience, and this sets it aside from the main group by displaying more of the sophistication personality. The main group consists of the Web sites of GU, ÖU, LU, KU, VU, and MU, where the Web site of GU is the one closest to the “sincerity” and “excitement” dimensions, and LU, VU, and MU are farthest away. The former is found more or less in between the dimensions in question, which imply that GU is communicating a dual personality. The GU Web site explains that the university is situated at the heart of Gothenburg and provides an attractive and exceptionally high-standard study environment, as most parts of the university are situated in the city center, this allegedly enriches city life as well as student life. The communicated dimensions can be explained by the fact that Gothenburg seem to have a lot to offer its students, it has a rich and varied cultural life with many theatres, concerts, and festivals. ÖU is almost identically positioned with GU, and the Web site stresses the fact that the university seems to be an active player in the development of the region in combination with a campus spirit of openness, exchange, and collaboration as well as an informal atmosphere between students and staff. However, for a relatively young university such as ÖU it might be a risk to position itself in the same way as a larger, more tradition-bound university such as GU, since there is a possibility that the two will be competing head-to-head for the same group of international students.

KU, LU, VU, and MU's English Web sites are somewhat close to "sincerity," but are a little farther from "excitement." Though close to "sincerity," this connotes that their Web sites are not really communicating a strong brand personality; the message is not all that clear and sharp. Against this backdrop, one would have expected that, for instance, LU would put on a clearer and more distinct brand personality, seeing its geographic location in the south of Sweden and its rich academic traditions. Concerning MU, KU, and VU, one could have expected VU, the second largest university in southern Sweden and the oldest among the three, to have more clearly communicated its personality than KU, and MU which was accredited university status as late as 1999 and 2005 respectively. The idea would be that, while these universities may have a lot to share with potential students, the message is not clear.

Some Swedish universities appear to create strong online brand personalities by clearly and distinctly positioning themselves. This is pursued by, consciously or unconsciously, communicating strong brand personality dimensions, such as ruggedness, competence, sophistication, or sincerity. There were also some surprises as to how some of them appear to take on a new face with regard to the obvious personality one would have initially associated them with. Others seem not to position themselves clearly on any particular brand personality dimension, or not to communicate any of the brand personality dimensions at all.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The student cannot fully experience the educational process prior to making a decision to attend the university; therefore, it is highly likely that he or she must rely on the university's brand name and corresponding image (reputation) as a promise of future satisfaction. Hence, this study is expected to promote the need to understand why brand personalities of universities should be given particular attention in such a time when universities globally are exploiting and capitalizing on marketing opportunities. As education has become a growing business, it has resulted in stiff competition, and universities need to soar up in order to become more competitive in the international education arena. To this end, university administrators might want to monitor the competition and devise a strategy to create a unique brand personality in this industry. Hence, this study might be an eye-opener.

Again, the Web site is a positioning opportunity by which universities worldwide can communicate their intended position in the market.

Therefore, we have provided all educational institutions with a technique that can be used to establish what their positioning is relative to the competition. If the positioning is not what they intended, they can make the necessary changes to their communication mix and Web site. The same approach can be used for most institutional brands in many countries and geographical areas.

In addition, the development and advancement of brand positioning management strategies by educational administrators might be enhanced through this research. To date, little appreciation of these dimensions by higher education managers may have been achieved, hence this study would tend to offer general guidelines for already existing and would-be university Web site developers when putting up a Web site and to communicate better. Those universities that do not communicate clear and distinct brand personalities online will learn from this, potential ones will take clues, and those that have worked on them will continue to improve by the results of this study. For instance, a university that wants to position itself stronger with the brand personality of “competence” might want to investigate the Web site that is the strongest associated with competence in this study (SSE), as there might be some important lessons to learn there. The same naturally applies to the other brand personalities. Moreover, the correspondence analysis map on Figure 1 also presents some potential online positions that any interested higher education institution could further utilize. For instance, the brand personality dimensions of “sophistication” and “ruggedness” are weakly represented on the Swedish market and a university (be it local or foreign) could create a unique position here by more strongly emphasizing its rich traditions and magnificent facilities (to create sophistication) or closeness to the wilderness and opportunity for sporting activities (to create ruggedness) in its online communication.

Finally, this study introduced and demonstrated the application of a combination of content analysis and correspondence analysis in assessing the brand personality of Web sites. The correspondence analysis, as illustrated here, empowers all types of brand managers as it allows them to visualize the brand personality of their organizations’ Web sites relative to their competitors’ as well as relative to their benchmarks, at a very low cost. In today’s fiercely competitive business environment, this combination of techniques affords any organization the ability assess how their brand is positioned through their official Web sites, and hence how they are reflecting themselves toward their customers. Our proposed method permits data collection at a very low cost and at a fraction of the time that

otherwise would be required by other methods. Moreover, for the layman, interpretation of correspondence maps is easier and more accurate compared to the displays that are generated by many other statistical tools and procedures; this can lead to a faster management decision making process.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It should be noted that the conclusions in this study are drawn from a computerized content analysis of the universities' English Web sites, which means that the intention is not to suggest how students or other stakeholders perceive these universities. In other words we are portraying only what they appear to communicate about themselves. The analysis is also limited to what specific words the universities have used to create a brand personality. This presupposes that an inclusion of the Web site's graphical elements might create a different overall personality as, sometimes, a picture might say more than a thousand words. Furthermore, one cannot overlook the critical issue of the dictionary construction when working with computerized content analysis. Although specific measures were taken to avoid possible bias, human nature and personal interpretation to the meaning of words and how they are selected to build up the dictionary could be affected by personal values, experiences, and knowledge. It is also well noted that though a study such as this and others relating to the Internet are written as forward looking ones, they will presumably be regarded as a historic documents within some few months and years. Again, as Web sites are updated from time to time, it may be possible, or even probable, that one may not get the same results if this study would be conducted at a later point in time.

Besides attending to these limitations, researchers interested in this area could include more universities in order to improve the generalization of the results. Spreading this study to cover a larger sample will further enrich this phenomenon. It would also have been interesting to look at this study in terms of regional blocks. This could help unearth the similarities and differences in terms of the brand personality dimensions that are associated with a given cluster. One might also consider investigating into the individual clusters (North, Mid, and South). This is because each cluster is unique in terms of competence, climate, and natural resource endowments. It would also have been worth comparing what these universities say in the Swedish Web sites and that of their English Web

sites. In addition, studies such as this rely on secondary data, and normally the people or objects being studied are not directly involved. Unlike the survey research, the researchers do not ask respondents direct questions to measure variables but rely on the information available in the text. With the use of the same Aaker's instrument, it would be worth conducting a survey of students' and other stakeholders' perceptions of university brands taken into consideration Swedish universities. This could also help us understand this phenomenon from the standpoint of the consumers.

NOTES

1. <http://english.hsv.se>
2. <http://www.britannica.com>
3. A commonly used threshold value for acceptable reliability is 70 percent (Hair et al., 1998). Although 90 percent is an absolute standard (See Chin, 1998), values below 70 percent have been deemed acceptable if the research is exploratory in nature.

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APPENDIX A. The investigated Swedish University Web sites

University	Short name	Homepage URL	Number of Words
Chalmers University of Technology	CUT	http://www.chalmers.se/en/	34,221
Gothenburg University	GU	http://www.gu.se/english/	64,379
Jönköping University	JU	http://www.hj.se/doc/229	20,162
Karolinska Institutet	KI	http://ki.se/ki/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=130&l=en	19,873
Karlstad University	KU	http://www.kau.se/eng/	64,057
Linköping University	LIU	http://www.liu.se/en/	115,374
Luleå University of Technology	LTU	http://www.ltu.se/?=en	48,103
Lund University	LU	http://www.lu.se/lund-university	74,234
Mid Sweden University	MU	http://www.miun.se/default_22057.aspx	33,246
Royal Institute of Technology	KTH	http://www.kth.se/?=en_uk	25,576
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences	SLU	http://www.slu.se/?id=580	124,001
Stockholm University	SU	http://www.su.se/English	79,757
Umeå University	UMU	http://www.umu.se/umu/index_eng.html	34,755
Uppsala University	UU	http://www.uu.se/en/	49,165

(Continued)

APPENDIX A. (Continued)

University	Short name	Homepage URL	Number of Words
Växjö University	VU	http://www.vxu.se/english/	86,437
Örebro University	ÖU	http://www.oru.se/templates/oruExtIntroPageLevel2.aspx?id=4965	56,277
Stockholm School of Economics	SSE	http://www.hhs.se/default.htm	17,385