KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,

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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF SERVICE BRAND DIMENSIONS ON

STUDENTS CHOICE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN GHANA

BY

OBENG ALEXANDER ANSONG

(BSC. NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT)

NOVEMBER, 2015

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FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE

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NOVEMBER, 2015

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the MBA and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person, nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the university, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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Signature   Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research work to God for his provisions during the period of the research and also to my Wife, Dr, Mrs Adwoa O. Obeng, and Son, Nohlan Nana Asare Obeng.
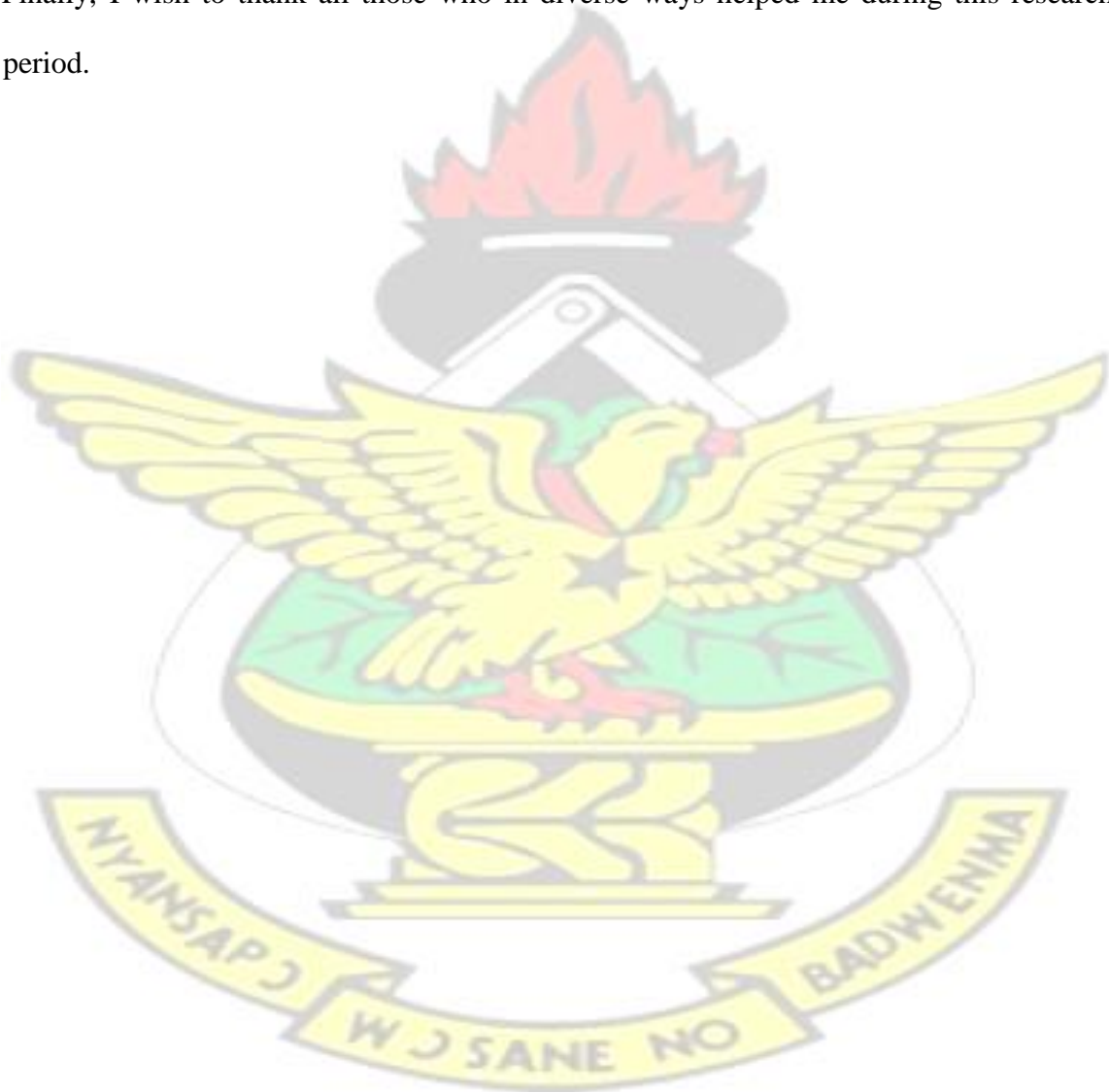
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

Service brands, even though brands in general have become an increasingly important part in companies" marketing strategy due to the fact that they are seen as valuable assets and a primary source of differentiation, has suffered low research into the area coupled with the fact that various theoretical models helping to understand the relationship between the consumers and their brands are basically done in terms of physical products. Out of the little research that has been done in the service industry so far, no research has been done in the education sector. It is in this light that this study sought to understand the relationship between service brand dimensions and students choice of private universities. Fifteen private universities were selected through simple random sampling and questionnaires distributed to 400 students using convenience sampling to harness information to help achieve the objective of the study. Service brand dimensions adopted from literature were used in designing the questions to solicit their effect on the students" choices. The results revealed that all the hypothesized service brand dimensions were of value to the students and all but controlled communications and Core service significantly contributed to users" pre-purchase decisions of a service brand which in turn, impacted their various choices of private universities. Recommendations were made to Management of the various private universities to critically look at the findings of this research to guide them in mapping well strategized policies and marketing campaigns to suit the needs of the different target groups to ensure increase in the number of student enrolments.

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CHAPTER ONE (1)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will take us through a background to the research, the problem that has necessitated the conduction of this research, what questions we hope to answer at the end of the research and the objectives that we have set to help us answer those questions, the significance of this research and who would benefit from the findings and limitations of the research.

1.1 BACKGROUND

In today's chaotic and competitive business environment, customers are overwhelmed with the issue of choice. We can imagine the confusion that would be at purchase points if producers had nothing unique to differentiate their products. Customers would have experienced the tedious task of determining what product to choose from the list of unbranded products. Okafor, (1995), confirmed this statement by suggesting that, when customers come across a familiar brand, they will end the rigorous pre-purchase analysis of alternatives and move on straight to make the purchase. He captured the main reason behind a brand when he stated that not only would it be arduous trying to decide on which product to buy, other product management decisions, based on market segmentation, promotion, product positioning, pricing etc, would have been practically impossible. Marketers have therefore come to a realization that, a brand as a marketing tool affects other product management decisions and that its effect on marketing activities and customers cannot be overstressed.

Customers are not able to visit all of the items on display in supermarkets, let alone to put weights on all the different options available to them; they always therefore decide on what to purchase like a flash in a pan. To help customers with this predicament, customers use elements as mental shortcuts and heuristics, to enable them make their choices with ease. Some clues present in the surroundings guide the customer"s attention in their decision making at purchase points. Most of the time, customers are unaware of the clues or they employ to arrive at their decision. And in my opinion, the brands are the most powerful clue or mental shortcut available to customers.

Branding provides customers with the mental shortcut needed and allows them to quickly and more efficiently select from the products and services available. In simple terms, branding pulls the customers" attention to different products and services; it registers those products in their memory allowing them to recognize products or services. It serves as a clue, as fore mentioned, to help retrieve hidden information from memory about different products or services.

Alluding to what we said so far about the significance of branding to businesses, producers and marketers equally have developed a surging interest in the use of this strategy as an effective and efficient way of differentiating their products to stay ahead of the competition. The service sector in Ghana is no exception to this growing adoption of branding as a strategy for positioning in the minds of customers especially the educational sector.

Throughout the last few years, branding has become a gradually significant part of companies" marketing strategies because it is perceived to a valuable tool as well as a key source of differentiation. With this background, many academicians have developed

theoretical models which give understanding to the relationship between consumers"
decision making and brands. Conversely, the models mainly conceptualize brands in terms
of physical products while researches in the field of service brands have almost been
neglected throughout the past years. With the pace at which the services industry is
growing compared to packaged goods, this neglect or minimal academic interest in service
branding is particularly inadequate for the fast growing service industry.

It was obvious that the intrinsic differences in the marketing principles of products
and services provide basis for us to question the relevance of the already existing branding
models" application within a service setting and this demanded further investigation.
Several researches have been done in this respect by some astute researchers, but a lot still
needs to be done to ascertain if branding is the major factor influencing consumer choice.

Private university education is more of a new concept to most Ghanaians even
though it has been in existence for over 30years. And just like any other service providing
institution in Ghana, It is has joined the growing adoption of branding as a strategy tool
for positioning in the minds of its target group in that sector. The various private university
institutions have struggled and some are even still struggling to position themselves in the
minds of Ghanaians giving them low student intake numbers. And the role of branding in
this issue cannot be underestimated.

This research seeks to investigate the effects of service brand dimensions, using
rigorous scientific techniques supported by an understanding of consumer behavior, on the
choice of a particular private university by students.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Mostly, when customers are asked to give the reasons, other than price, behind their choice for a particular brand over another, most customers spontaneously say "the Quality". But, this answer would be accepted with a level of uncertainty, given the fact that customers rarely have what it takes to make an objective quality differentiation among different product or service brands. The percentages of this category of customers are usually quite negligible and are mostly highly informed and enlightened.

Quality grades ascribed by customers to some product and service brands are not factual but normally a figment of their perception. It therefore follows that, marketers who know and understand how to best influence customer perception, can position their brands in the minds of the customers and will certainly come out winners in the competitive marketing environment.

The question then comes, "Is it that consumers, in making choices merely respond to the effects of their perception which is a combination of dimensions like brand name, employee service, physical evidence etc.?" The point here to understand is that most service providers now are certain that brands have a very high influence on customer"s choice (Ogbuji, 2008).

In Ghana, it can be anticipated that the issue of quality standards in our private university should not be of concern. This is against the background that the National Accreditation Board (NAB) has stipulated as well as regulated and is seriously enforcing standards for all private tertiary institutions thereby making every private university of equal quality standards in terms of the core service.

With the public universities inability to absorb the vast number of senior high school graduates, management of private universities are keen to understand how they can influence the choice of their students and ultimately increase their income through the student numbers. Thus this research can be said to be very timely.

Some private universities have been known to struggle with student numbers over the years and this has been mostly attributed to other reasons such as location, the fees etc. with branding sometimes mentioned. However, just like any another service, branding is an important tool that any service provider should consider greatly. In Ghana a lot still needs to be discovered as much as to be able to ascertain whether service brand dimensions are a major factor influencing the students choice of a particular private university, and given the fact that many elements constitute the brand dimensions, one is not certain to know if these dimensions equally influence choice or if some play a higher role than others. That is the root of the problem of this research.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this research is to investigate the effect of service brand dimensions on students" choice of private universities in Ghana. However, the specific objectives of the research are to:

- Ascertain who makes final decisions when choosing Private Universities.
- Determine which service brand dimensions are of value to students when choosing private universities.

- Identify the strength of the relationship between the brand dimensions and students" choice

- Determine the effect of the service brand dimensions on the choice of the students

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve its objectives the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- Who make the final decision when choosing the private universities?
- What dimension(s) of service brands is/are of value to students in their choice of private universities?
- What is the nature and strength of the relationship between these variables? What effect do these dimensions have on the choice of the students in private universities?

1.5 JUSTIFICATION/SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There have been little to no research in the area of branding in services as compared to products (Balaji et al, 2001) hence this research will primarily be an addition to the knowledge base in this area of marketing but more specifically, the findings and recommendations from this research will assist management of the various private universities to know how to channel their resources to improve their positioning in the minds of their customers and hence increase their student numbers.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive in nature since it is fact-finding and explanatory in the capacity of establishing the cause and effect of service brand dimensions on student choice. Quantitative technique was used in the form of administering questionnaires since the

information expected to be collected from the field involved factual components that would be presented using descriptive statistics methods.

The target population of this study will be students who have enrolled into the various private universities in Ghana. Simple random sampling techniques would be used to select the private universities for the survey. After which quotas will be assigned to the selected universities due to the difference in their population sizes. Finally convenience sampling technique will be used in getting the respondents to be interviewed.

The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (version 20.0) was used for the analysis of the data where Regression and Correlation analysis was ran to establish the strength of the relationship between the variables of the study and the effect of the individual brand elements on the student choices.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The research was carried out in Accra and Kumasi since most of the private universities are located in these cities and even those outside these two cities have opened satellite campuses in these areas.

The respondents for the research covered students who had enrolled in the various private universities.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For a study of this caliber it would have been prudent to cover all the private universities in the country but for reasons of lack of resources which are the money, men and time, only institutions in Accra and Kumasi were sampled. It could have also been in

the right direction to separate the general programmes institutions from the specialized ones where students choose solely because of the programmes they offer.

1.9 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter discusses briefly the background to the study, the problem statement, research objectives and the research questions, significance of the study, overview of the methodology, the scope of the study as well as limitations of the study.

The second chapter reviews many other existing literatures on the various academic studies and research on branding with a close look at service branding, its importance and effect on customer choices.

Chapter three outlines details of the methodology adopted for the study. It spells out the population, sample and sampling methods, research design and the instruments to be used for data collection.

The fourth chapter covers data analysis, presentation and discussion of the field data that was collected for the study

The fifth and final chapter constitutes the summary, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings arrived at.

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CHAPTER TWO(2)

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss the concept and value of branding by reviewing other peoples work in relation to the subject matter. More specifically, this section will look at the concept and importance of branding as well as brand models and dimensions.

2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT AND VALUE OF BRANDING

2.1.1 What is a brand?

More definitions for branding have been formed over the years by writers depending on their perception on what a brand is. But the one mostly mentioned is the definition by the American Marketing Association (AMA) in the 1960s as cited by De Pelsmacker, (2007), which states that a brand is a name, a term, a sign, a symbol, a design, or a combination of these with the objective of identifying the goods or services of a particular producer thus to differentiate them from those of their competitors.

While brands might have initially started their lives with just a couple of unique names, over time they have become acknowledged by consumers for their useful capabilities and have consequently developed into simple notations that are associated with

several distinctive values (de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). Now, brands, in the world of marketing, have become perhaps one of the most important concepts in consumers'' minds because of its capability to generate a perceptual image of supremacy (Levine, 2003). Customers view brands as purveyors of benefits with respect to economic and symbolic values (O''Cass & Grace, 2003). This indicates that, not only do brands serve as a good source of information; it also paints a picture of the quality of the product or service and hence saves consumers cost and risks on their purchases (Biswas,

1992; Janiszewski & van Osselaer, 2000). They also act as representations that give meaning to the consumer and as such gives a form of guarantee with respect to purchases in the future (Keller, 1998).

From a company''s stand point, brands are an important ingredient in the development of good marketing strategies, reason being that companies have gradually come to the understanding that branding is a cherished asset and a key source of competitive advantage (Grace & O''Cass , 2003)

Alluding to this fact, brands have been proven to be a mechanism that engages both producers and consumers in a long-term credulous relationship (Keller, 1993; Fournier, 1998). It is also an effective way of creating value to satisfy customers and eventually ensure a repurchase of the product (Aaker, 1991). However, as indicated by Arora & Stoner (1996), a strong brand sometimes even plays a more important part in a customer''s decision-making process than the perceived product or service product or service quality per se. Let''s further have a look at the value a brand adds to a product termed brand equity.

2.1.2 Brand Equity

Brand equity gives weight or value that is added to a product and/or service (Farquhar, 1990; Farquhar et al, 1991; Kamakura and Russell, 1993; Rangaswamy et al, 1993). In Aaker‟s (1991) conceptualization, brand equity creates value for both companies and customers. And it can be estimated by two different aspects – one is a financial, objective aspect, the other is a subjective aspect, which refers to the consumers‟ perception (Feldwick, 1996; Kapferer, 1997).

From the financial aspect, brand equity, like goodwill, is an intangible entry on the balance sheet and accounts for how much value a brand holds (Heding, Knudtzen et al., 2009). It increases the possibility of brand extension (Aaker and Keller, 1990; Rangaswamy, Burke et al., 1993; Barrett, Lye and Venkateswarlu, 1999) and reduces the cost of advertising products or service but produces higher level of purchases compared to unknown brands (Smith and Park, 1992). It also increases the probability of brand choice, more specifically, consumers willing to pay a premium price and less elastic to price increases (Barwise, 1993; Pitta and Katsanis, 1995). It is important to know how much value the brand holds, because not only does it have an effect on merger and acquisition decisions (Mahajan et al, 1994), but also stock markets (Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Lane and Jacobson, 1995).

From the consumer‟s point, on the other hand, brand equity is perceived as the value added to the functional capability of the product or service as a result of its association with a brand name (Aaker et al, 1993). In addition, brand equity increases the efficiency of marketing communication, have resilient effects against competitors‟ promotional pressures, and form barriers to the competitors‟ entry (Farquhar, 1990; Smith and Park, 1992; Keller, 1993; Simon and Sullivan, 1993; Yoo, Donthu and Lee, 2000; Keller, 2001).

In summary, brand equity provides a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Bharadwaj, Varadarajan and Fahy, 1993; Hoffman, 2000). And thus very important, from the fore mentioned benefits, to both the company and consumers alike.

2.2 SERVICE BRANDING & MARKETING

With the fore discussion centering on the concept and value of a brand to both producers and consumers alike, this section focuses on the services branding and marketing as it is the center of this study. With the current growth of today's service industry, this section will highlight the essential marketing approaches for services currently in the environment and will further discuss the pertinent issues of services branding including previously developed frameworks and explore the brand dimensions that play a role in the assessment of service brands.

2.2.1 Marketing Services

In the last few decades, various economies have seen the exploded development of the service sector, more especially the developed ones (Martin, 1999). Given this level of explosiveness, most of the Western communities have and are continually being subjugated by the service industries. This has resulted in customers having increased expenditure with respect to services than physical goods (Maughan et al, 2000). That notwithstanding, both academicians and strategic marketers have come to the realization that products and services are different to a large extent and this has resulted in a common argument that „„most of the customary knowledge in consumer goods

marketing simply does not „fit‟ the service situation‟‟‟ (Smith et al, 1993). As a result, the challenges being faced by service companies of today have become the focus of most of the studies being conducted (Martin, 1999).

2.2.2. Service Branding

Considering the speedy growth of the service industry, many researchers and writers have stressed on the little attention that has been given to the area of service brands. They have expressed concerns pertaining to the fact that most of the existing literature conceptualized brands only in the context of physical products (O‟Cass &

Grace, 2003, Moorthi, 2002; de Chernatony & Dall‟Olmo Riley, 1998; van Riel et al., 2001). This part looks at some conventional services branding principles.

Even though brand experts and consultants were found to agree that based on brand‟s overall role in connecting a company‟s advanced rational and specific values with the perceptions of customers, service branding might be different in its operations in terms of the emphasis to some specific dimensions (de Chernatony et al, 1999). In contrast, academicians mostly believe in a stronger impact of the distinctive characteristics of services and therefore establish that various concepts from traditional product branding needs to be considered in order to be effective in the services industry

(de Chernatony & Dall‟Olmo Riley, 1999; Turley & Moore, 1995 Stuart, 1997 in McDonald *et al.*, 2001;). As a result, a common understanding has developed within the academic community that extensive research in this domain of service brands is necessary (Grace & O‟Cass, 2005a).

2.2.3. The Importance of Service Brands.

Like product-oriented brands, services brands are the foundation for building consumer relationships where there is trust and because of that, it is often viewed as a consumer-directed informational mechanism which serves as some sort of guarantee for future service experience (Davis *et al.*, 2000; Berry, 2000). Yet, with the perceived risk often associated with services because of their intangible nature, a consumer''s perception of service brands is critical since their motivation and resulting attitude towards the brand emanates from there (Davis *et al.*, 2000).

One basic difference between principles of service and product branding is the fact that, company names becomes brand names for services because consumers see the company as the provider of the service experience (e.g. hotels) (Berry, 2000). This shows that, the tangible attributes of the company such as physical environment, quality of delivery and employee services determines the strength of a service brand (Berry, 2000). On the flip side, there might be some disparity in the experiences as a result of the inconsistence of the human factor in services when staff interact with customers at different touch points (i.e. heterogeneity), and this is a big challenge to service providers marketers (Bitner *et al*., 1994 in Berry, 2000).

In the same way, the intangibility of services emphasizes the crucial significance of service brands as opposed to physical product brands. As a result of the difficulties consumers face in evaluating services before consumption, its brand is believed to assist consumers to better visualize and do some assessment of these service products (Berry, 2000). McDonald *et al.*, (2001) added that even though physical differences form a larger part of a brand and the values it offers, their absence in the service sector emphasizes the

key role service brands play as a source of differentiation. With the background that service brands communicate the values and benefits of an offer by a company (Moss *et al.*, 2008), a strong brand is known to be a crucial component in a service company"s effort to differentiate itself in the competitive environment(Arora & Stoner, 1996).

2.2.4 Service Brand Models

Although the difference between service and products have been noticed early in the 1960"s (Rathmell, 1966) and a lot of works discussing the problems and strategies in service marketing have been done by many researchers (George and Berry, 1981; Zeitham, et al 1985; Berry, 1993; Lemmink et al., 2001), but there is a lack of specific attention to model the connections between customers and service brand dimensions except some models claimed to be relevant to both goods and services (Aaker, 1993; Keller, 2001).

Similar to the broad aspect of brands, it is better to model the link between customers and service brand dimensions so as to capitalize on service brand equity (Berry, 2000;

Grace and O'Cass, 2005a). The following part will start with a discussion of service brand dimensions and form a Service Brand Loyalty model and several research

hypotheses at last.

Taking the inherent different marketing principles for goods and services into account, Berry (2000) questioned the potential application of the previous models and proposed his famous Service-Branding Model. The model was based on 14 mature, highperformance service companies. From his point of view, brand equity is cultivated from brand awareness and brand meaning, and brand meaning have the primary impact.

Company's present brand and external brand communications have impact on both brand awareness and brand meaning, although some are primary and others are secondary.

While customer's experiences with company only have impact to brand meaning.

Berry's model provides a sound guideline for companies to cultivate brand equity, but it also have its limitation, since other validations did not capture customer's perspective.
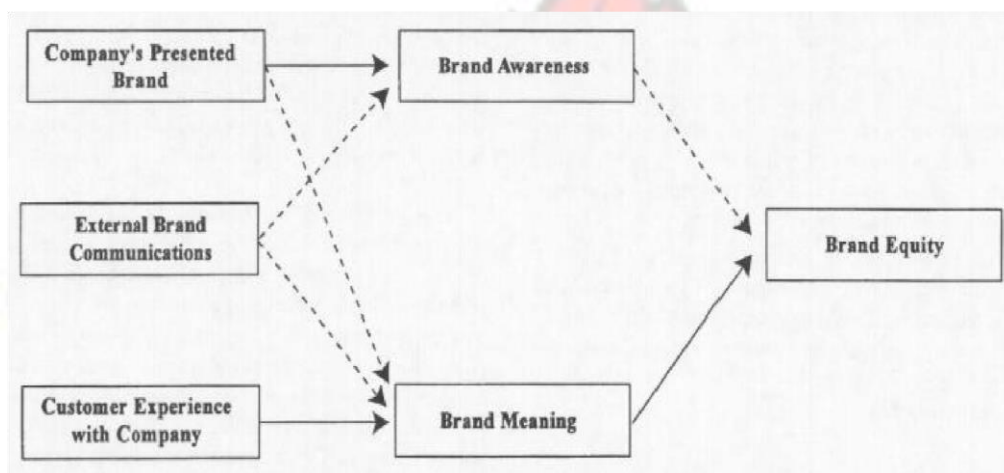
Figure 2.1: Berry's Service-Branding Model

(Source: Adapted from Berry, 2000)

Note: The bold arrows indicate primary impact and the dotted arrows secondary impact.

Based on the growth of service marketing and the lack of service brand models in academic, Grace and O'Cass (2005) proposed a service brand verdict (SBV) model (*Fig 2.2*). In order to develop the SBV model, they investigated the brand dimensions of service first (table 1). And then they modeled the relationship between the brand dimensions and the consumer response variables, for example, brand attitude, Based on the growth of service marketing and the lack of service brand models in academic, Grace and O'Cass (2005) proposed a service brand verdict (SBV) model (*Fig 2.2*). In order to develop the

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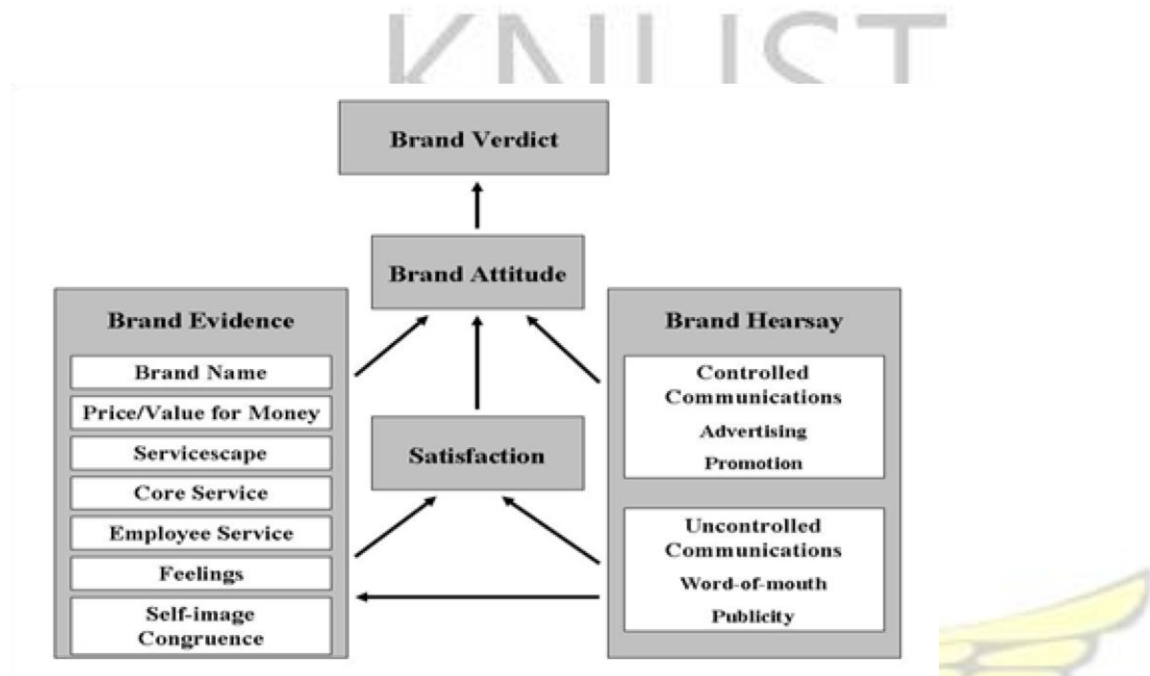
Figure 2.2: Grace and O'Cass's service brand verdict model

(Source: Adapted from Grace & O"Cass, 2005a)

In their Service Brand Verdict (SBV) model (Fig. 2.2), Grace and O"Cass conceptualized service brands as consisting of just two basic dimensions which are brand evidence and brand hearsay. These, in turn, break into several lower order elements of which customers are expected to formulate brand associations with. While the *brand evidence* construct refers to all those brand dimensions that service users experience during the period before purchase and during the consumption stage i.e. brand descriptors, *brand hearsay* comprises all the different modes of communication i.e. controlled and uncontrolled, that a customer solely receives before any purchase. This shows that brand

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evidence covers more than just the tangible dimensions of the brand i.e. brand name, price but rather intangible service brand dimensions which impact consumers" brand evaluations i.e. feelings, employee service.

Considering the other dimension, brand hearsay deals with the way in which the brand evidence is communicated to the customer. In order to incorporate service brand dimensions which actually hold meaning to the brand users as compared to marketers and consultants, Grace and O"Cass (2005a) mainly included the service brand attributes that had previously been validated through qualitative studies by other researchers

(O"Cass & Grace, 2002).

2.2.5. Service Brand Dimensions.

Researching service brand dimensions have become crucial for service providers. This is because of the understanding that brand dimensions slightly differ between services and goods (O"Cass & Grace, 2003). But, service brands have mostly been considered with their brand names and this is based on the simple analogy that characteristics of services have difficulties being communicated through any other means

(Moore et al, 1995). From a customer"s point of view, a the weight of brands are considered to exceed just the name but all the associations that the customer hold in terms of the various attributes whether non-product-related or product-related (Keller,

1993). Davis *et al.* (2000) stated in his research that the service brand"s image refers to the perceptions held by the consumers when they experience the service. And these are created by the brand dimensions, symbolic meanings and functional benefits that the consumer associates the service with. Subsequently, it can be said that the psychological representations of brands consist of the entirety of its associations in a consumer"s mind

(Aaker, 1991; 1996) and thus main the task for service providers and marketers has to do with understanding these associations.

Whiles service brands can be viewed as a combination of what the firm says the brand is, what others say, and how the firm delivers the service (Berry, 2000), when it comes to the formation of brand associations for the service related dimensions, it is done in the consumer''s mind. As a result, many researchers and academicians have pointed out the importance of customer-based information on the brand attributes that have meaning for service consumers (O''Cass & Grace,2003; 2004).

In their bid to have insight into how consumers form brand associations and the level to which they are different among numerous types of offerings, a research was done by Grace and O''Cass (2002) to determine the importance of brand dimensions for both physical products and services. This was done using unstructured interviews with consumers. Their research discovered that, viewing at it from a customer''s angle; the brand dimensions were different in terms of physical products and services and even though some were common to both there were others that were unique to one type of offering (Fig.2.3). Their findings thus opposed the earlier results of de Chernatony and

Dall''Olmo Riley (1999)
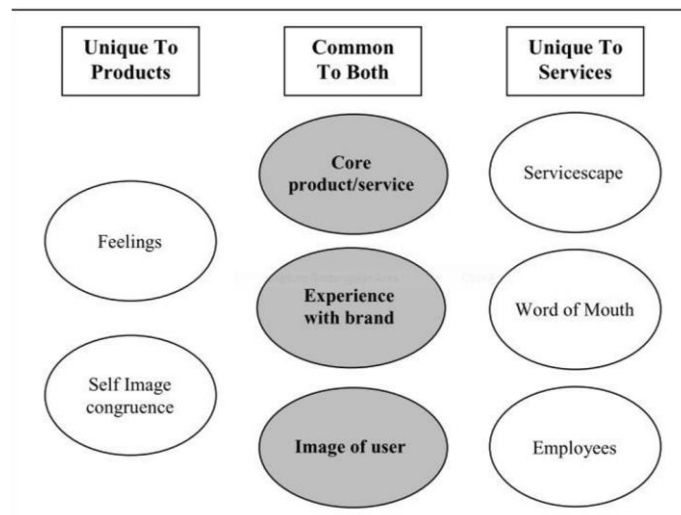
Figure 2.3: Brand Dimensions comparison between Products and Service

Source: Grace and O"Cass (2003)

Intrigued by their findings in their study, Grace & O"Cass (2003) this time presented the brand dimensions that were discovered in their earlier study in several structured interviews with consumers. Their aim was to determine the significance of service brand dimensions to the consumers when making decisions of choice. The respondents were asked questions pertaining to which dimensions were meaningful to them and to what extent each dimension was important for their perception formation. On the whole, the results vividly showed that all of the listed service brand dimensions were selected either directly or indirectly during the interviews. This indicates that every single brand dimension was at least, to some extent, significant to consumers when making service brand-related choices. Additionally, the interviews exposed the existence of some service brand dimensions such as feelings, servicescapes, word-of-mouth, user image, employees and brand experience. There were found to be of peculiar importance to the formation of brand attitudes and perceptions by the consumers (Column B) even though subsequent findings proved they vary among different types of services. While some of

the identified brand dimensions in O"Cass and Grace"s (2003) research had earlier been depicted in models by Keller"s (1993, 1998), brand knowledge

conceptualization (e.g. user image, price, brand name), others appear to be distinctive in a service setting and therefore show that consumers" associations differ between product and service brands as indicated in the table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Brand Dimensions of Services

Service Brand Dimensions	A*	B**
Servicescape	X	X
Feelings	X	X
Brand name, trademark, etc.	X	
Brand personality	X	
Brand and self-image	X	
Image of typical user	X	X
Price	X	
Experience with brand	X	X
Brand advertising	X	
WOM	X	X
Publicity	X	
Employees	X	X

Notes: Column A – dimensions mentioned as having some meaning, however small; Column B – dimensions that are very important when formulating brand images or attitudes

(Source: Adapted from Grace & O"Cass, 2005a)

Based on his theoretical conceptualization, Berry (2000) notes that most of brand dimensions are similar for goods and services and as such concludes that service branding is primarily supposed to differ in its degree, not kind, from conventional product branding. In this light, a service customer"s awareness of the brand is primarily influenced by the

company"s controlled communication. But customers may nevertheless become aware of and form perceptions about the brand through independent sources such as word-of-mouth or public relations. With regards to the pragmatic nature of services, service brand equity is in addition modeled to be unreasonably influenced by those beliefs and associations that are based on a consumer"s first-hand experience with the company. Even though a company"s advertising can create brand awareness and inspire customer trial, „„a presented band cannot rescue a weak service"" (Berry, 2000). Generally, customers" experiences are the main determinant of brand equity and image for both services and products but the basic difference lays in the fact that human performance rather than a robot is critical for branded services (Berry, 2000).

2.3 CUSTOMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Every consumer goes through some processes before arriving at the final decision to purchase a product of or service. This process the customer seeks to shorten hence the use of mental shortcuts as has been discussed above.

Lee (2005) conducted a study to ascertain the stages of consumer decision making process in the example of China. He focused on the factors that affected the consumer decision making process on purchasing imported health food products, and considered particular demographic effects such as gender, marital status, education, and income. He identified the stages as being five namely: problem/need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision made and post-purchase evaluation.

Blackwell et al (2006) gave one of the common models of consumer decision making process. As was postulated by him the five stages of consumer decision making process are followings: *problem/need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision made and post-purchase evaluation.* Now even though a other researches have been done with different tendencies towards the five stages as was given by Blackwell, all their views are convergent as they stages in similar ways.

Each stage has been defined by different researchers with varying little but leading to a common perception about what each stage involves. For example, according to Bruner (1993) the first stage, problem recognition occurs when the individual becomes aware of the difference between their current state and where there want or need to be. Neal and Questel (2006) supported this claim indicating that problem identification or need recognition occurs due to several reasons and circumstances which include personal, professional and lifestyle which in turn lead to formation of the idea to purchase.

According to Blackwell"s model which is supported by Schiffman and Kanuk (2007), the second stage is the state where the consumer searches information related to desired product or service. According to them, information search process can be internal and external. While internal search points to the situation where customers depend on their personal experiences and believes, the external search involves wide search of information including searching through the media and advertising or feedbacks from other people (Rose and Samouel, 2009).

The third stage as considered by Kotler and Keller (2005) is one of the important stages as the consumer considers all the types and alternatives taking into account all the dimensions

and associations of the different brands of products or services such as the price, quality etc. this happens after the relevant information about the product or service has been obtained.

With Kotler considering the third stage as one of the important stages, Backhaus et al (2007) suggested that purchase decision is another important stage as this stage refers to occurrence of transaction. In other words, once the consumer recognized the need, searched for relevant information and considered the alternatives he/she makes decision whether or not purchase the product or service.

Finally, post-purchase decision involves experience of the consumer about their purchase. Although the importance of this stage is not highlighted by many authors Neal et al (2006) argues that this is perhaps one of the most important stages in the consumer decision making process as it directly affects the consumers" purchases of the same product or service from the same supplier in the future.

2.4. EFFECT OF BRAND DIMENSIONS ON CUSTOMER DECISION MAKING

Grace and O"Cass (2005a) examined their Service Brand Verdict model based on the responses from customers of supermarket and banks and had all their hypotheses confirmed. On the whole, satisfaction had a strong effect on consumers" brand attitudes which, subsequently influences purchase intentions. Apart from the fact that such relationships had previously been recognized by numerous researches, Grace and O"Cass" discoveries revealed important effects from the service brand dimension constructs to both consumers" satisfaction and brand attitudes. Considering the specific sources of service brand information, it was shown that controlled communications such as advertising and promotions were affected consumers in a marginal way. Furthermore, Grace and O"Cass

(2005a) found that brand hearsay and evidence considerably influenced the consumers'' decision making thereby influencing their attitudes and loyalty. It was therefore established that a service company''s advertising and promotional efforts, their employee service, physical environment and brand name strongly affect the way in which consumers perceive and decide on a service brand. However, because of the high level of capriciousness within the service sector itself, it has been pointed out that these results might probably differ among some unique types of services.

The research also done by Lu (2011), which sort to confirm or oppose the findings of Grace & O''Cass by repeating the study using the airline industry, also came up with similar results as had been identified by Grace and O''Cass (2005). He found out that the hypothesized dimensions significantly impacted the consumers'' perceptions and decisions thereby affecting their choice and attitude towards a service brand. Even though there were some slight differences in the level of the individual effects, the baseline argument there was that, as stated, all the service brand dimensions had some effect on the perception and the pre-purchase decisions of consumers.

It is obvious from the various discussions above that the role service brands play are different in some aspects from the product brands and plays a very important role in positioning the service in the minds of customers and aids in their decision making in terms of choice. Even though not much research has been done in this area, the few done have gone on to prove this fact.

2.5 FACTORS AFFECTING UNIVERSITY CHOICE

Canale, Dunlap, Britt, and Donahue (1996) conducted a study to investigate the relative importance of some factors on the university selection process by high school seniors over a period of two years. The respondents were given a number of university characteristics and asked to rate according to level of importance. Results showed

"excellent teachers" as being very important to their college choice decision followed by the "area of study available" in other words program of study. In summary the quality of the teachers and the availability of a particular program of study are important to students when making a college choice (Canale, Dunlap, Britt, & Donahue, 1996).

Martin and Dixon (1991) sought to look at the factors that influenced students" college choice by soliciting responses from first year students at a southwestern university. They created an instrument to measure the factors that influence the college choice process. They used an instrument which they created for the study called, the College Choice Influence Scale (CCIS). This instrument assumed that the students were influenced to attend University for a variety of different reasons. Hence, it was composed of five subscales which included (a) perceptions of the university, (b) future aspirations, (c) influences others have on this decision, (d) independence social activities, and (e) family tradition of attending the institution. But all these sub-scales fell under the three major categories of the University choice process i.e. predisposition, information gathering and (Martin & Dixon, 1991). The results however indicated that respondents characterized by external locus of control were more influenced by others in their lives. However, education majors were more influenced by family tradition to attend a particular college than business majors or those who had not declared their major (Martin & Dixon, 1991). The cost of attending an institution is a consideration for students when choosing a particular

college. Jackson and Chapman (1984) studied high ability students who were in need of financial aid to attend college and the factors that influenced them to attend college. They noted that when deciding between a first choice institution and second choice institution students consider the availability of financial aid as being very influential to their college choice decision. This suggests that financial aid was a major consideration for students and those large amounts of financial aid can move a second choice institution to a first choice institution (Jackson & Chapman, 1984).

These researches were all done in the western countries but researches in this area are limited when it comes to Ghana and Africa as a whole but given the cultural and economic differences these factors would change when looked at in the African context.
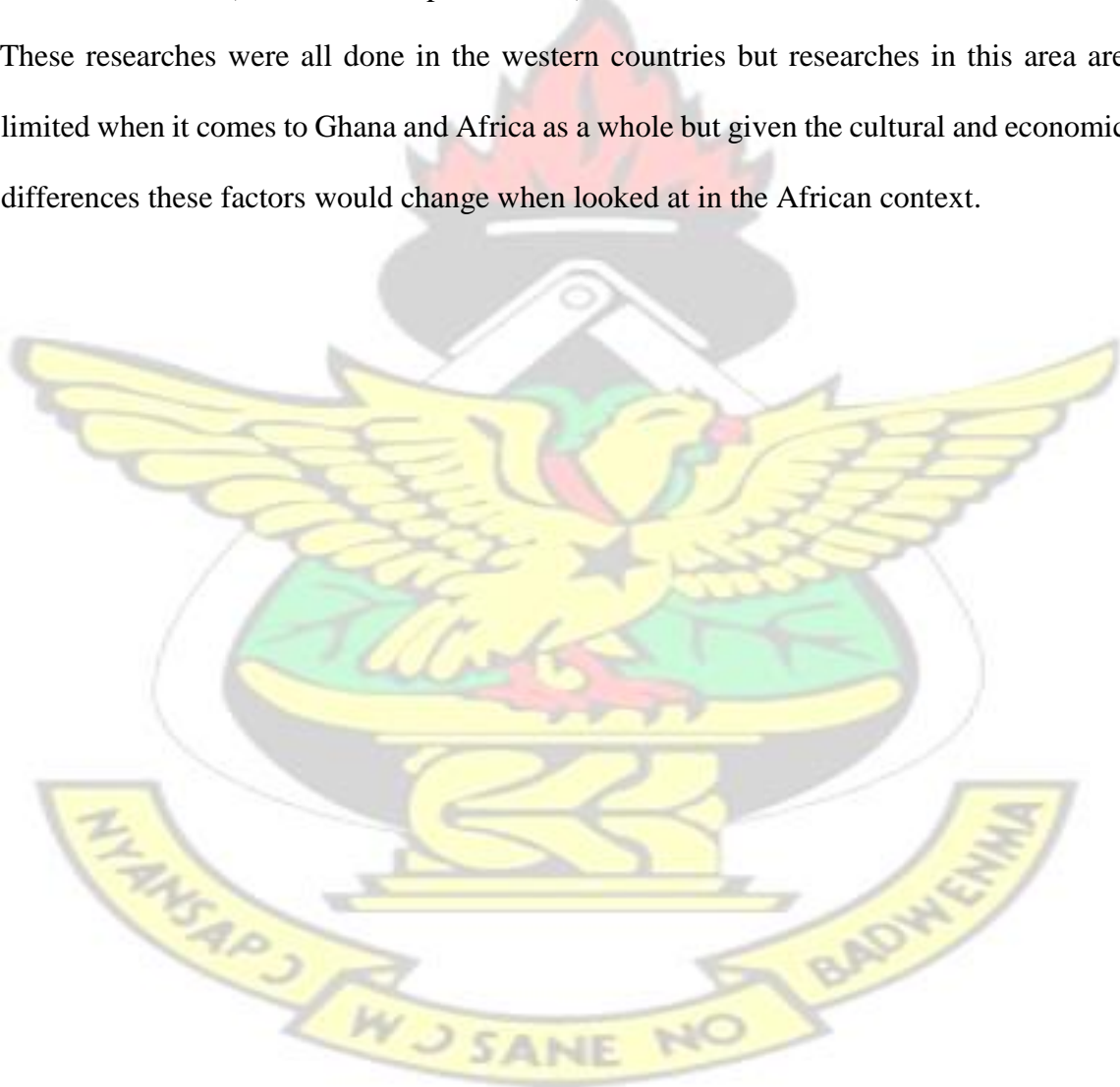
CHAPTER THREE (3)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Having discussed the theoretical bedrocks in the previous section, this chapter discusses the methodology that was adopted in the execution of the research/study. It addresses the most crucial areas such as research design, population, sample size and technique, method of the data collection and analysis pertaining to the survey.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is the strategy or the blue print for the collection, measurement and analysis of the collected data. Thus it is the outline of what the researcher would do from writing the hypothesis and its operational implications to the analysis of the data. Regarding this study, the research approach employed was quantitative and was based on the distribution of questionnaires to collect the data. This research strategy is one of the most frequently used methods within the area of consumer marketing. This is because it involves the collection of customer-based data and this can be used for statistical analysis and investigation of a-priori specified relationships among variables of interest to corresponding studies (Neuman, 2003).

3.2 POPULATION

The population for this study consisted of students of 15 private University Colleges in

Accra and Kumasi (African University College of Technology, Ghana Technology

University College, KAAF University College, Knutsford College, Methodist University

College – Ghana, Pentecost University College, Regent University College of Science and

Technology, Wisconsin International University College, Ghana , Mahatma Gandhi

University College, Islamic University College, Christian Service University College , Garden City University College Ghana Baptist University College, Kessben College St. Margaret College). The reason for the choice of these areas, as already explained in the chapter one of this report, is the current high concentration of private universities in these two cities. This is supplemented by the fact that even those located outside these areas also have satellite campuses in these locations as well. The total population size was estimated to be 31,000 students with the students being the respondents for this research. **Table 3.1 Estimated University populations from 4ica**

s/n	Institution	Estimated population from 4ica
1	Pentecost University College	3000
2	Islamic University College	2000
3	Mahatma Gandhi University College	2000
4	Regent University College of Science and Technology	3000
5	African University College of Technology	1000
6	Methodist University College – Ghana	2000
7	Ghana Technology University College	2000
8	KAAF University College	2000
9	Wisconsin International University College, Ghana	3000
10	Knutsford College	3000
11	Christian Service University College	3000
12	Garden City University College	3000
13	Ghana Baptist University College	1500
14	Kessben College	100
15	St. Margaret College	400
	Total	**31000**

3.3 SAMPLE SIZE AND TECHNIQUE

Sampling occurs when units are selected from the population of interest to the researcher. Trochim (2006) adds on to say that by studying the sample, we may fairly be able to generalize our results to cover the population from which it was chosen from.

Ideally the study should have encompassed all the students but as indicated by several researchers like Dwumfour (2006), it is fruitless to survey the entire population and time consuming as well.

The decision to choose a particular sample size was based on several factors as proposed by Sarantakos (2005). According to him, one factor that affects the decision of the sample size is the homogeneity of the population. The more homogenous the target population, the smaller the sample size. In this study, the target population, private universities in Accra and Kumasi are homogenous in that they offer very similar

services, and have very little differentiating features.

Although the sampling frame for this research was 31 institutions as per the information given on the website of the National Accreditation Board (NAB,2015), however for reasons of lack of resources (time, money and personnel), and given the homogenous nature of the institutions, ten (10) institutions were randomly selected from Accra and Five (5) institutions were also selected from Kumasi. The difference in number was due to the difference in level of concentration of private universities in these two cities. The Institutions selected were:

A sample size of 400 was chosen this was with the background as proposed by Saunders et al (2012) that when sampling a population of more than 10,000 the researcher can use a minimum sample size of 385. Hence the sample size for the research is justified

given the fact that the estimated student populations of the selected private universities was 31000 students

Quotas were however assigned to the different private universities based on their student numbers as indicated in the table below:

Table: 3.2 Sample quotas assigned to selected Universities

s/n	Institution	Sample quota
1	Pentecost University College	30
2	Islamic University College	25
3	Mahatma Gandhi University College	25
4	Regent University College of Science and Technology	30
5	African University College of Technology	25
6	Methodist University College – Ghana	30
7	Ghana Technology University College	30
8	KAAF University College	25
9	Wisconsin International University College, Ghana	30
10	Knutsford College	20
11	Christian Service University College	30
12	Garden City University College	30
13	Ghana Baptist University College	30
14	Kessben College	20
15	St. Margaret College	20
	Total	**400**

Convenience sampling technique, which involves selecting respondents because of the availability, ease of volunteering as well as access, was then used in the administration of the questionnaires to collect the data from the respondents.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION.

The instrument used in collecting the data was structured questionnaires. As was indicated by Twumasi (2001), questionnaires consist of well formulated questions designed to probe and obtain responses from respondents; it may be structured, semistructured or both. After the questionnaires designed, it was pre-tested on students on students of Presbyterian University College to assess suitability of the test items and whether the questionnaires would solicit the needed information without difficulty. As was stated by Yin (2004), the pre-test provides an opportunity for the necessary corrections to be made on questions that were ambiguous and confusing, and also to add items that were not initially captured.

Prior to the data collection, an introductory letter was obtained from the office of the Dean of School of Business, KNUST and sent to the selected institutions for the study. This was to formally introduce the researcher to the institutions to afford him the opportunity to meet up with the respondents.

Before the presentation of the questions to the respondents, the researcher introduced the topic and the main objective of the research and assured the respondents of the strict confidentiality of information they were about to give. They were also given instructions on how to answer and rate the items. As a form of confirmation of their statues as students and as such qualified for the survey, I.D cards were requested of the students before proceeding with answering the questionnaires. A total of 400

questionnaires were distributed to the various institutions based on the quotas as stated in 3.2 above and all the 400 were received. The response rate however was 100%. The response rate in this study was also very high because the questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher.

3.6 DIMENSION INDICATORS USED IN THE SURVEY

Table 3. 3: Dimension Indicators Used In the Survey

DIMENSIONS	INDICATOR/QUESTION	SOURCE
Brand Name	The name of this university means something to me	Grace & O''Cass (2005)
Price / Value for Money	The fees charged by the university influenced your choice	Sweeney & Soutar (2001)
Servicescapes	You liked the location of the school You were influenced by the physical facilities of the school.	Cronin Jr. & Taylor (1992)
Core Service	I chose the university for a specific programme	Grace & O''Cass (2005)
Employee Service	The university Employees are warm and welcoming people	Cronin Jr. & Taylor (1992)
Feelings /Self-image Congruence	I felt proud to be identified with the university	Jayanti (1995)
Publicity / Controlled Communications	I liked the advertisements and promotions of the University	Bansal & Voyer (2000) Holbrook & Batra (1987)
Word-of-Mouth	My friends/family influenced my evaluation of this company	Bansal & Voyer (2000)
Brand Choice	Overall I think my choice is very good	Yoo & Donthu (2001)

(Source: Adapted from Lu,2011)

3.7 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involves calculations of certain processes along with searching for patterns of relationships that exist among data groups (Kama, 1996), it was also indicated in a related study that, it is a number of closely related operations performed on group data with the purpose summarizing and organizing them in such a way that they address research questions. The data collected was first scrutinized, coded and tabulated before it was processed.

Statistical tools such as tables were use in the data presentation. In examining and analyzing the relationship between the variables, descriptive, correlation and regression analysis were done using the Statistical Package for Social Science version 20.

3.8 ETHICL ISSUES, VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

There are always key moral or ethical issues in carrying out such researches since the respondents are subjects and not objects of the research. Cohen et al (2007) in his research stated that research respondents experience different inconveniences, be it the time used for the completion of the research, the threat or sympathy of questions, or the possible attack of privacy and confidentiality.

In conducting this research there were no significant ethical challenges confronted during the course of the data collection. That notwithstanding, the consent of respondents was sought and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity given before the start of the data collection.

CHAPTER FOUR(4)

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology for this thesis, and to continue, this chapter presents as well as analyzes and discusses the results from the study in relation to the research questions stated in the earlier chapters. The findings were analyzed in direct relation to the theories and the results of previous research works that were discussed during the review of literature.

4.1 SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISITCS

Overall, the survey had 400 respondents from the selected private universities as was indicated in the earlier chapter. The sample was slightly dominated by female respondents (53.5 %) as compared to that of males (46.5%).

Majority of the respondents were within the ages 18-21 representing 38.3%, the next group fell within the ages of 22-25 forming 36.5%. those above these age ranges formed the minimum percentage given the fact that they form the mature students group and most of them are workers and have lectures on weekends. The information is shown below in table 4.2. . This just confirms the nature of the Ghanaian educational system where students of tertiary going age fall mainly between 18 and 25.

As has been the norm in Ghana for most private universities in Ghana to offer basically Business administration and ICT, these programmes had the highest number of

respondents with 28.5% and 21.3% respectively. 9% of the respondents offered other programs that were not listed in the survey instrument such as Bachelor of law and BSc. supply chain Management as shown in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 again indicates that most of the respondents for the survey were level 100 students with a percentage of 29.8%, with level 300,200 and 400 students following in that order with 25.8%, 22.3% and 21.8% respectively.

Table 4.1. Demographic characteristics of the Sample (N=400)

Characteristic	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
male	186	46.5
female	214	53.5
Subtotal	400	100
Ages		
18-21	153	38.5
22-25	146	36.8
26-29	72	18.1
30-33	24	6.0
other	2	.5
Subtotal	400	100
Academic Programme		
Business Administration	114	28.5
Information and Communication Technology	85	21.3
Communication Studies	48	12.0
Nursing	63	15.8
Physician/Medical Assistantship	53	13.3
Other	37	9.3
Subtotal	400	100
Academic Level in School		
100	119	29.8
200	89	22.3
300	103	25.8

400	87	21.8
Missing cases	2	.5
Subtotal	400	100

4.2 SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Every customer after need recognition proceeds to seek information this was confirmed as the respondents went to seek further information before applying for admissions. As shown in table 4.3 below, out of that percentage 44.5% got their information from the school websites followed by the various adverts conducted by the institutions which formed 25%. Events and brochures recorded the least with 16.9% and 10% respectively as indicated below with table 4.8. This high percentage for websites is as a result of the advancement of technology where students are able to access information from websites with the touch of a smartphone. Those who chose „other" gave instances of enquiries through phone calls to the various universities and direct visitation to the campuses for information.

Table 4. 2: Source of further information

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Advert	77	25	25	25
Event	52	16.9	16.9	41.9
Website	137	44.5	44.5	86.4
Flyer/Brochure	31	10	10	96.4
Other	11	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	308	100.0	100.0	

4.3. FINAL DECISION ON CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY

Table 4.3 who takes the final decision on choice of university

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	33	8.2	8.3	8.3
	Disagree	147	36.6	36.8	45.0
	Indifferent	27	6.7	6.8	51.8
	Agree	181	45.0	45.3	97.0
	Strongly Agree	12	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	400	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.5		
Total		402	100.0		

As illustrated in table 4.3, a total of 45.1% of the respondents disagreed to the fact that the final decision on the choice of the particular university was done by the students themselves whiles 48.3% of the respondents agreed that the final decision on the choice of the university was taken by other people other than they themselves.

4.4 SERVICE BRAND DIMENSIONS OF VALUE TO STUDENTS

4.4.1. Feelings / Self Image Congruence

Table 4.4: Felt proud to be identified with university

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Strongly Disagree	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0
	Disagree	32	8.0	8.0	8.0
	Indifferent				
	Agree	213	53.3	53.3	61.3
	Strongly Agree	155	38.8	38.8	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

Most of the students, representing 53.3% agreed that they felt proud to be identified with the school they chose. 38.8% also said they strongly agree and 8% were neither here nor there. None of the students seemed to disagree in any way that they were proud to be identified with the school hence the zero (0) as has been shown in table 4.8. In all 92.1% of the respondents chose their universities because they felt proud to be associated with its name. The feeling that comes with the association of a consumer with a brand name is very important to consumers in their pre-purchase decisions.

4.4.2 Brand Name

The number of students who agreed that the name of the university meant something to them was the highest; they represented 50.8%. Those who strongly agreed followed with a percentage of 17.0%. The students who were indifferent followed with a percentage of 15.3. 13.0% of the students disagreed that the name of the university meant something to them as was the 4 % who also strongly disagreed as shown in table 4.9 below.

Table 4. 5 Name of University means something to me

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Strongly Disagree	16	4.0	4.0	4.0
	Disagree	52	13.0	13.0	17.0
	Indifferent	61	15.3	15.3	32.3
	Agree	203	50.8	50.8	83.0
	Strongly Agree	68	17.0	17.0	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

4. 4.3 Location of Institution

38.3% of the respondents liked the location of the school, followed by those who were indifferent who make up 23.8%. A percentage of 23.0% strongly agreed that they liked the location of the school. The next group representing 8.3% disliked the location of the school, whiles 6.8% strongly disagreed to location of the school.

Table 4.6:   location of school

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	27	6.8	6.8	6.8
	Disagree	33	8.3	8.3	15.0
	Indifferent	95	23.8	23.8	38.8
	Agree	153	38.3	38.3	77.0
	Strongly Agree	92	23.0	23.0	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

4.4.4 Physical Environment

Table 4. 7: Influenced of the physical facilities of the University

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	13		3.2

Disagree	42	3.2	13.7
Indifferent	195	10.5	62.5
Agree	150	48.8	100.0
Strongly Agree	400	37.5	
Total		100.0	

Concerning how much the physical facilities of the school influenced the students; the greater portion representing 48.8% agreed that they were actually influenced. 37.5% strongly agreed making the total percentage of respondents who agreed to be 86.3%. They were followed by those who were indifferent comprising

16.0% and those who disagreed and strongly disagreed, 10.5% and 7.0% respectively.

4.4.5 Employee Service

36.3% of students agreed that they were influenced by the fact that the University's employees were warm and welcoming people. This was followed by 27.3% who were indifferent. Those who strongly agreed followed with a percentage of 15.3%. Those who said they disagreed that the employees are welcoming represents 11.5% and

9.5% strongly disagreed.

Table 4.8: University employees service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	.3	.3	.3
Strongly Disagree	38	9.5	9.5	9.8
Disagree	46	11.5	11.5	21.3
Indifferent	109	27.3	27.3	48.5
Agree	145	36.3	36.3	84.8
Strongly Agree	61	15.3	15.3	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

4.4.6 Publicity/ Controlled Communications

88.9 % agreed that they liked the advertisements of the university, this was followed by those who were indifferent about it and then those who disagreed comprising, 7.8% and 3.3% respectively. With the proliferation of advertising agencies, advertisements have taken a new look making them attractive. It is therefore not surprising that majority of the students liked the advertisements and promotions of their various universities.

Table 4.9 Advertisement and Promotions of the University

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	13	3.3	3.3
	Indifferent	31	7.8	11.0
	Agree	205	51.2	62.3
	Strongly Agree	151	37.7	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	

4.4.7 Price/ Fees

Table 4.10: Fees charged by University influenced choice

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Disagree	37	9.3	9.3	9.3
Disagree				
Indifferent	130	32.5	32.5	41.8
Agree	58	14.5	14.5	56.3
Strongly Agree				
Total	112	28.0	28.0	84.3

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
		63	15.8	15.8	100.0
		400	100.0	100.0	

In choosing the university, 32.5% disagreed that the fees charged by the school had an influence on them, whiles 28.0% of them agreed that the fees influenced their choice. Those who are strongly agreed followed with a percentage of 15.8. 14.5% of the students were indifferent and 9.3% strongly disagreed.

4.4.8 Word-of Mouth

Table 4.11 Family/Friends influenced my choice of the University

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
		0	0	0
	Strongly Disagree			
	Disagree	62	15.5	15.5
		26	6.5	22.0
	Indifferent			
	Agree	177	44.3	66.3
	Strongly Agree	135	33.7	100.0
Valid	Total	400	100.0	

78% of the respondents admitted that their choice of the private university was influenced by family and friends.15.5% disagreed with no one strongly disagreeing to the statement. Those who were indifferent were the least comprising of just 6.5%. This shows how

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important family and friends are in the choices of the students especially which schools they choose.

4.4.9 Core Service

Table 4. 12: Chose University for a specific programme

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	11	2.8	2.8	2.8
	Disagree	36	9.0	9.0	11.8
	Indifferent	40	10.0	10.0	21.8
	Agree	162	40.5	40.5	62.3
	Strongly Agree	151	37.8	37.8	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

40.5% of the students agreed that they chose the university because of a specific programme that the university offers. 37.8% strongly agreed. Those students who were indifferent represented 10.0%. This was followed by those who disagreed representing 9.0% and 2.8% strongly disagreed. The paradigm that was with business programs is currently shifting to the health sciences. Most students are now been pushed by their parents to pursue these health sciences programs under the impression of job security after the program. Students are now choosing programs and not the institutions per se.

4.4.10 Choice

Overall, 54.5% representing more than half of the respondents agreed that overall their choice was very good. 19.5% strongly agreed. Those who are indifferent constitute 10.8%. Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed represented 8.5% and 6.8%

respectively.

Table 4. 13; Respondents made a good choice

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	27	6.8	6.8	6.8
Disagree	34	8.5	8.5	15.3
Valid Indifferent	43	10.8	10.8	26.0
Agree	218	54.5	54.5	80.5
Strongly Agree	78	19.5	19.5	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

4.5 CORRELATION ANALYSIS

The table 4.14 below shows the results of the correlation analysis that was done to ascertain the type and strength of the relationship between the dependent variable i.e Choice, and the independent variables i.e. the service brand dimensions. The results showed a positive correlation for the service brand dimensions with „r" values of 0.156, 0.200, 0.099, 0.188, 0.034, 0.288, 0.118, 0.082 and 0.107 for Brand Name, Price / Value for Money, Services capes, Location, Core Service, Employee Service, Feeling/Selfimage congruence, Publicity / Controlled Communications, and Word- of- Mouth respectively. The results show that even though the service brand dimensions have a positive relationship to the final choice of the students, the relationship between them are weak as the values are all close to zero (0).

Table 4.14: Correlation co-efficient for Brand Dimensions

		Word-ofMouth	Controlled communications	Feelings/self-image Congruence	Brand Name	location	Services cape	Employees Service	Price/value for money	Core Service	Choice
Word-ofMouth	Pearson Correlation	1	.308**	.221**	.087	.128*	.092	.100*	.020	-.094	**.107***
	Sig. (2tailed)		.000	.000	.081	.010	.066	.045	.688	.059	.033
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Controlled communications	Pearson Correlation	.308**	1	.833**	.146**	.089	.058	-.140**	.168**	.065	**.082**
	Sig. (2tailed)	.000		.000	.003	.074	.247	.005	.001	.197	.104
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Feelings/self-image Congruence	Pearson Correlation	.221**	.833**	1	.200**	.175**	.069	-.116*	.196**	.016	**.118***
	Sig. (2tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.166	.021	.000	.745	.019
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Brand Name	Pearson Correlation	.087	.146**	.200**	1	.216**	.089	.024	.024	.256**	**.156***
	Sig. (2tailed)	.081	.003	.000		.000	.076	.626	.639	.000	.002
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Location	Pearson Correlation	.128*	.089	.175**	.216**	1	.035	.130**	.163**	.060	**.188***
	Sig. (2tailed)	.010	.074	.000	.000		.489	.009	.001	.229	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Services cape	Pearson Correlation	.092	.058	.069	.089	.035	1	.026	-.026	-.004	**.099 ***
	Sig. (2tailed)	.066	.247	.166	.076	.489		.599	.602	.938	.048
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Employees Service	Pearson Correlation	.100 *	-.140**	-.116*	.024	.130**	.026	1	.164**	.009	**.288***
	Sig. (2tailed)	.045	.005	.021	.626	.009	.599		.001	.865	.000
	N	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	399	396
Price/value for money	Pearson Correlation	.020	.168**	.196**	.024	.163**	-.026	.164**	1	.079	**.200***
	Sig. (2tailed)	.688	.001	.000	.639	.001	.602	.001		.116	.000
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397
Core Service	Pearson Correlation	-.094	.065	.016	.256 **	.060	-.004	.009	.079	1	**.034**
	Sig. (2tailed)	.059	.197	.745	.000	.229	.938	.865	.116		.495
	N	400	400	400	400	400	400	399	400	400	397

		.107*	.082	.118*	.156**	.188**	.099*	.288**	.200**	.034	1
Choice	Pearson Correlation										
	Sig. (2tailed)	.033	.104	.019	.002	.000	.048	.000	.000	.495	
	N	397	397	397	397	397	397	396	397	397	397

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.4 REGESSION ANALYSIS

Table 4.15: Regression co-efficient for Brand Dimensions

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.702	.532		1.321	.187
Feelings/self-image congruence	.144	.156	.081	.921	.357
Brand Name	.110	.054	.104	2.047	.041
Location	.086	.048	.089	1.783	.075
Servicescape	.109	.068	.076	1.611	.108
Core Service	-.006	.052	-.005	-.109	.914
employees Service	.239	.046	.255	5.181	.000
Price/ value for Money	.111	.042	.129	2.611	.009
Advertisement and promotions	-.014	.132	-.009	-.104	.918
Word –of- mouth	.040	.055	.037	.726	.468

a. Dependent Variable: Choice of private university

As shown in table 4.15 above, when the variables were regressed against the dependent (Choice of University) it was discovered that at 95% confidence level, Brand Name, Price/ value for Money and the Employee service were significant in the prepurchase decision making state of the students with significant value of 0.041, 0.009

and 0.000 respectively, whiles all the other dimensions were found not to be significant. This shows that brand hearsay even though is very crucial in the delivery of information to customers was not important when the customers are finally making their pre-purchase decisions. It is also evident that even among the ones that are significant, the Employee service is the most significant more significant that the rest, as shown in table 4.16.

4.5 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.5.1 Final decision on choice of University

Just like any group of consumers, the decision of final purchase rests on the buyer, the payer or the user. Even though each category contributes to the final decision, it mostly depends on the value that the consumer is seeking from the service. The current economic conditions existing in the country, usually pushes the consumer to seek for the value of price when it comes to the final purchase. Private university education is not cheap as most students pay fees ranging from 5000 Ghana cedis to over 8000 Ghana cedis a year. This reflected in the results of the research when about 45% of the students, who are the users in this case, acknowledged that the final decisions were not taken by them. The results also show that this is not totally the case as by a slight margin the about

48% of the students, even though their decisions were influenced by other members of the other categories e.g. payers, the final decision of which private university rested on them i.e. the users. They are those going to experience the product or service directly hence In situations where price is not an issue, the final decision usually lies with the user. This confirms the findings of Brosekhan et al (2000) and Kotler et al (2009) who stated that the decisions of purchase by consumers (payers, buyers or users) is dependent on a number of factors such as economic, situational, personality, perception and even cultural as well as what value is actually being sought from the product or service at that moment. The result shows that the Ghanaian society is changing as the traditional autocratic decision making by parents and guardians is gradually been diluted and young people who are affected by those decisions now given the chance to make them.

4.5.2 Service brand Dimensions of Value

As was the concern of the second research question of this thesis, that is to determine which service brand dimensions were actually of value to students when making the decisions of choice with regard to the private universities, the findings revealed that all of the tested service brand dimensions were of value to the students. The study however revealed that, Employee service (0.000), Location (0.000), Price/value for money (0.000), brand name (0.002), Self-image congruence /feelings (0.019) were significant, thus mattered to the students when they chose their respective universities. There have been researches in other areas of service e.g. Sports service, Supermarkets, Airlines, financial Services, hospitality etc by researchers like Lu,(2011), Grace and O"Cass,(2005), Pillossof,(2009) and Iacob, (2014) and they all found out that all the hypothesized Service brand dimensions are of value to the consumers and as such this finding only buttresses their earlier results.

4.5.3 Type and Strength of Relationship between variables

The study confirmed the findings of previous researches that sought to prove that there was a positive relationship between the hypothesized brand dimensions and choice (Lu, 2011 and Pillossof, 2009). This shows that as service providers continue to improve upon these dimensions so will there be an increased probability of the particular institution being chosen. The relationships were found out to be weak because no single service brand dimension can be isolated to influence choice on its own. That notwithstanding the various dimensions are collectively utilized by the consumer before arriving at the final decision. For example, when an institution has very good price (fees), a warm and welcoming employees, as well as very attractive physical facilities and environment etc., students will combine all these attributes before they can be inclined to choose that institution. This is

not surprising as consumers will base the guarantee of their satisfaction on a combination of these dimensions as they paint a certain picture of what the consumer should expect if he chooses that particular institution or company.

4.5.4 Effect of the Service brand dimensions

Brand name is very important in the choice of either a product or service as has been indicated by various researches (Grace and O‟Cass,2005, Pillossof, 2009). Pillossof (2009) stated that when consumers are not interested in core service, brand name is the next significant service dimension considered. This means that consumers who are not so interested in the service per se might rely on tangible cues to formulate specific quality levels already before the actual purchase. Consumers attribute some guarantee of satisfaction with well-known brand names as was identified in the Service Brand Loyalty

Model, brand name has a significant effect on satisfaction. This explains why even students would prefer to choose a brand name is popular and means something to them. For example: consumers have come to kw that the name Presbyterian is synonymous to Discipline in the country and as such would choose a Presbyterian university because of what the name „Presbyterian‟ means to them.

The strong sig. value gotten for the price indicates how the students as well as their parents or guardians mostly consider their choice of the service in terms of how much they are willing and able to pay for the service. This is so given the current economic hardships experienced by the citizens of the country. Some consumers attribute price to quality of service but students would choose institutions with lower fees all other things being equal. Being one of the 7P of services, price is never overestimated in assessing its effect on consumers in every service delivery.

The „people" part of every Service product is very crucial and as this research has confirmed, employee service, has very high level of significance in influencing the prepurchase stage decision making of consumers. This supports the findings of Lu (2011) and Pillossof (2009) as they found out that service is intangible thus employees who are directly related to the consumption of service are of high relevance to the consumers in their pre-purchase stage as well as when they evaluate service brands and in this case students. Even though someone might argue that from the findings quite a laudable percentage disagreed, it was found out to be one of the most important dimensions that affect the student choices.

In the research done by Grace and O"Cass (2003), trying to identify which dimensions from Keller"s model were unique to product and services they found "feelings and self-image congruence" to be peculiar to products. This is confirmed as it was found to be not significant in the students" pre-purchase decision.

From the outside looking in, even though the trend is changing, students attribute quality and class with the physical facilities and environment. As one of the Ps of services, even though it is of value to the students when considering which private university to attend it is not significant when making the final decision. The physical environment and the facilities play a crucial role in the pre-purchase stage, as it provides the most tangible evidence of the service brand to the consumer. It is one of the few ways consumers can assure themselves of the quality of the service they are about to receive, giving the intangible nature of services, thus it is not surprising that over 80% of the students agreed that it was of value to them in their overall choice of the universities.

This confirms findings of other researches in similar areas (Grace and O'Cass, 2005a, Lu, 2011).

In every business venture, location is of utmost importance and this was evident in the students" responses which indicated that location is of value to them when

weighing or evaluating alternatives in their choice of private universities. The researcher included location as a dimension given the singular importance of location in every business. With the migration issues in the country most people prefer to move into the big cities given the least chance and the choice of a university is in its whole a best chance to satisfy that thirst. There might be talks of serenity of some areas other than the cities but most students would choose a city for a location other than a town with serene learning conditions for the mere reason of city life.

With the abundance of marketing and advertising agencies, coupled with the homogenous nature of the information being carried across, the students are only given some information through the advertisements and promotions and as was found out in the research most of the students after being made aware of the existence of the university obtain more information to aid in their decision making from the websites.

This clearly indicates that unlike product advertisements that influence consumers to make purchase, service advertisement and promotions especially in the educational sector has no significance when it comes to the final point of decision making. This also confirms findings of similar research in other areas.

First time users normally, after being made aware of the service through the controlled communications, always would rely on testimonies or inputs from friends and families to arrive at their final decision, hence the value of word-of-mouth to the students in the decision making. WOM has the utmost potential, on any type of product, to influence pre-purchase decisions. This supports the finding of Grace and O"Cass (2005), Pillossof

and Nickel (2009) and Lu (2011) when they researched on similar topics in different areas e.g. supermarkets, and airline companies.

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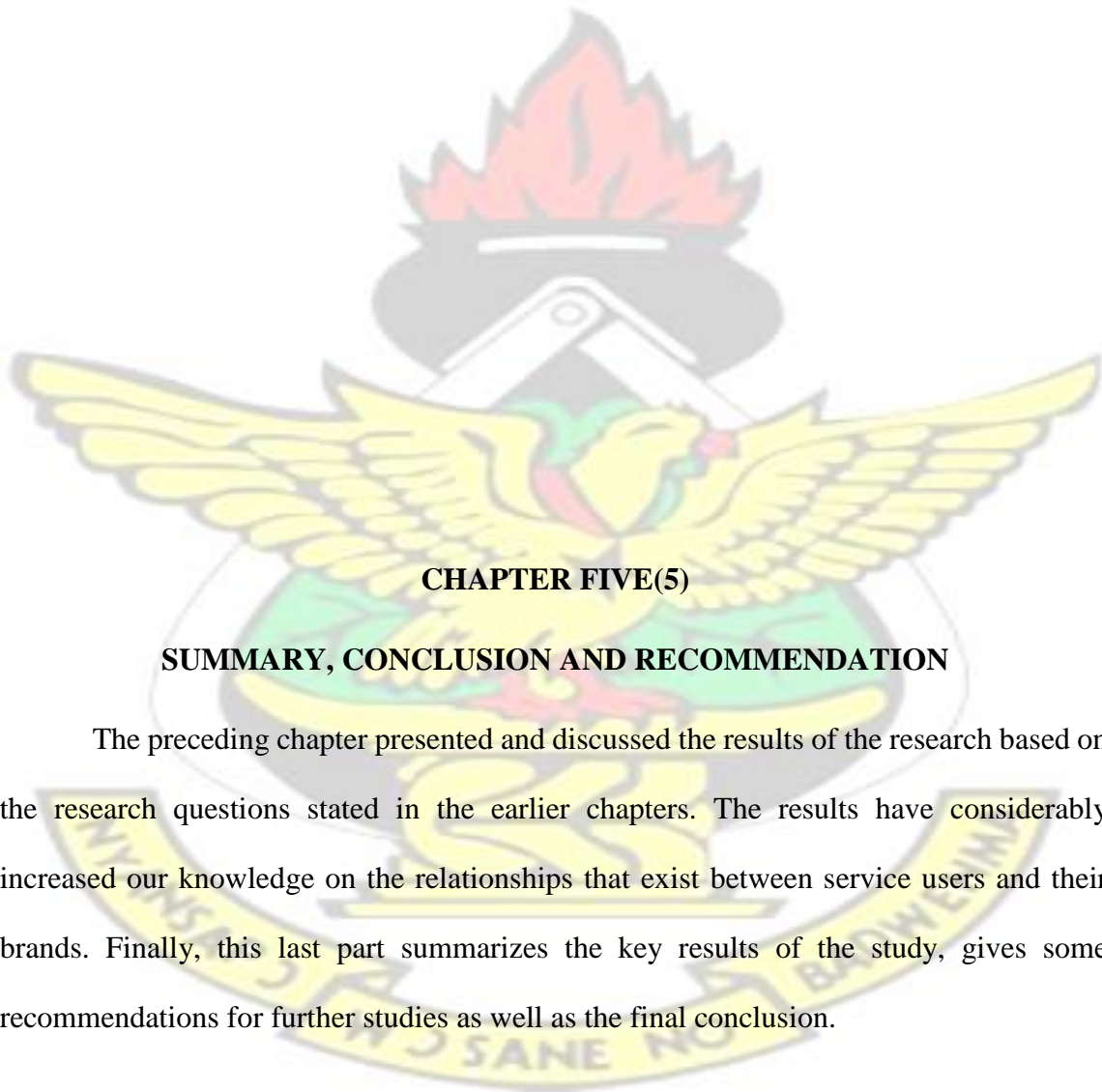
CHAPTER FIVE(5)

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The preceding chapter presented and discussed the results of the research based on the research questions stated in the earlier chapters. The results have considerably increased our knowledge on the relationships that exist between service users and their brands. Finally, this last part summarizes the key results of the study, gives some recommendations for further studies as well as the final conclusion.

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study sought to investigate the effect of service brand dimensions on students"
choices with respect to their choice of private universities. Knowing how important it is to
understand service branding from the customer"s point of view, the study investigated the
effect of these dimensions with consumer-based information gotten from a sample of
students from selected private universities in Accra and Kumasi in Ghana.

5.1.1 Final Decisions of Choice of Private Universities

As was the aim of the first research question, which sought to find out if the final
pre-purchase decision on choice of universities was make by the students who in this case
are the users of the service, the research revealed that the final decision on which university
to attend partly was made by the student themselves (48.3%) and partly by other categories
of consumers such as parents and guardians who are usually the financiers. The difference
was marginal showing how factors affect who takes the final decision on choice.

5.1.2 Service brand dimensions of value

Considering the second research question the study sought to answer, the results
revealed that Fees (Price), Brand name, Employee Service, Feelings/ self-image
congruence, Word-of-mouth, Location, physical facilities, core service and

Publicity/controlled communications of the hypothesized service brand dimensions by
Grace and O"Cass (2005a). The students in one way or the other valued these dimensions
of their chosen universities before they engaged in the decision making process.

5.1.3. Type and Strength of relationship between brand dimensions and the choice

The study showed that, as has been the case in all the researches done before this one, the

type of relationship between the service brand dimensions that influenced the decision making process of the students and their resulting choices was a positive relationship. For example, when an institution has very good price (fees), a warm and welcoming employees, as well as very attractive physical facilities and environment etc., students are inclined to choose that institution.

5.1.4 Effect of service brand dimensions on students' choice.

Even though all the hypothesized service brand dimensions were found out to be of some value to the students, the results indicated that some of the dimensions (Fees (Price), Brand name, and Employee Service) were significant in the pre-purchase decision making process thereby influencing their final choices whiles all others were not. More specifically, Employee Service was shown to be the most significant brand dimension in the pre-purchase decisions for consumers who in this case are the students.

Despite the above stated, the findings also revealed that the institutions" advertisements and promotions were important sources of information to the students, even though it was found not to be significant when it comes to the final decision on choice, and the students mostly get their information from the University websites.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are given at the end of the research:

- The findings cannot be consequently generalized as being universal in this sector of the service industry. In this respect, further research should be done to further confirm these results before some generalizations can be done.

- Management of the various private universities should critically look at the findings of this research to guide them in mapping well strategized marketing campaigns to suit the needs of the different target groups as was identified by the research.

- It is also recommended that, University management should ensure an updated and very rich website where the students can access all the information they need. •
Policies on employee training should be drawn and implemented to ensure optimum employee performance when they come into contact with the students.

- The private universities should also take make the most of every interaction they have with the external community and should ensure that they undertake more cooperate social responsibilities to propagate the name of the university thereby benefiting from some uncontrolled communications such as Word-of-Mouth.

5.3 CONCLUSION

On the whole, the research was successful as the results vividly support the findings of earlier studies in the field of service branding. It has thrown more light on the significance of service brand dimensions in pre-purchase decision making. It is a fact that the research has successfully validated previous studies in a different service setting. This significantly has added our knowledge on how service consumers make sense of service brand dimensions before making the final decision to purchase. Hence, the findings give key insights to both academicians and service marketers especially those in the educational

sector who appreciate the benefits and are ready to take advantage of the values of brands within their service setting. It is therefore recommended that the universities critically look at the findings of this research and be guided by it in their policies to ensure higher student enrollments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

The researcher is a Master of Business Administration student of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Business School, Kumasi who is undertaking a research "to investigate the effect Service brand dimensions on students" choice of private universities in Ghana". Please be assured that the research is purely for academic purposes and all information provided will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Please tick (√) the appropriate expression according to number

1. Gender a) male [   ] b) female [   ]

2. Age a) 18-21 [   ] b) 22-25 [   ] c) 26-29 [   ]

 d) 30-33 [   ] e) other (specify)…....

3. Academic level in school a) 100 [   ] b) 200 [   ]

 c) 300 [   ] d) 400 [   ]

4. Academic programme a) Business Administration [   ]

 b) Computer Science [   ]

 c) Communication Studies [   ]

 d) Nursing [   ]

 e) Physician/Medical Assistantship [   ]

 f) Other (specify) ………………………….

5. Did you get adequate information about the university before applying for admission?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

6. If your answer to question (5) is yes, where did you get the information from?

a) Advert [   ]   b) event [   ]   c) website [   ]   d) flyer/brochure   e)

other (specify)……………………………………..

For the following questions, please tick **(√)** the appropriate expression according to number.

(1- Strongly Agree; 2- Agree; 3- Indifferent; 4- Disagree; 5- Strongly Disagree;)

	1	2	3	4	5
7. Final decision on choice of university was made by me	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
8. The name of this University means something to me	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
9. You felt proud to be identified with the university.	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
10. You liked the location of the school	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
11. You were influenced by the physical facilities of the school	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

12. University''s employees are warm and

welcoming people   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ][ ]

13. The fees charged by the university

     influenced your choice   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ][ ]

14. You chose the university for a specific

     programme offered   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ][ ]

15. My friends/family influenced my

     evaluation of this university   [ ]   [ ]   [ ]   [ ][ ]

16. You liked the Advertisement and promotions of the University   [ ] [ ] [ ]

     [ ] [ ]

17. Overall I think my choice of this private university is very good.

        a) Strongly Agree [ ]   b) Agree [ ]   (c) Indifferent [ ]   e) Disagree [ ]

       d) Strongly Disagree [ ]

Thank you for your time.