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## Discursive Construction of Higher Education Institutional Academic Identities in Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

There is an increase in brand marketing on the websites of universities in a bid to present the kind of identities that will best promote them. This study examines the identities universities project to market their brands within the context of consumer culture of the contemporary higher educational setting. Data for the study were obtained from the websites of 24 public and private universities in Nigeria and were analysed based on Fairclough's (2015) dialectical relational theory and Roper and Parker's (2006) insights on branding. The findings reveal seven kinds of identity: professional, national, transnational, humanist, Afrocentric, ethnic and religious. These identities range from the ideal to narrow-interest ones. The study concludes that identity construction in any university should aim primarily at advancing knowledge and producing total graduates who would be able to adapt and survive in any part of the world and contribute meaningfully to societal development.

**Keywords:** identity, higher education, university, branding, marketization

## Diskurzivno oblikovanje visokošolskih institucionalnih akademskih identitet v Nigeriji

### IZVLEČEK

Na spletnih straneh univerz se povečuje oglaševanje le-teh kot blagovnih znamk, pri čemer se poskušajo predstaviti z identitetami, ki jih bodo najboljše promovirale. Predmet raziskave so identitete, ki jih univerze oblikujejo za potrebe samooglaševanja kot blagovnih znamk v kontekstu potrošniške kulture sodobnega visokošolskega okolja. Raziskava temelji na podatkih, pridobljenih na spletnih straneh štiriindvajsetih javnih in zasebnih univerz v Nigeriji in analiziranih na podlagi Faircloughove (2015) dialektične relacijske teorije ter razumevanja marketinga po Roperju in Parker (2006). Rezultati raziskave kažejo na sedem vrst identitet: poklicno, nacionalno, transnacionalno, humanistično, afrocentrično, etnično in versko. Končna ugotovitev je, da mora pri oblikovanju identitete vsaka univerza stremeti predvsem k visokemu nivoju znanja in produkciji odličnih diplomantov, ki se bodo znali prilagoditi in preživeti v kateremkoli delu sveta ter smiselno prispevati k razvoju družbe.

**Ključne besede:** identiteta, visoko šolstvo, univerza, blagovna znamka, oglaševanje

# 1 Introduction

This study investigates the construction of identities on the websites of universities in Nigeria, as these universities attempt to market themselves and present their brands to the public. In the last one and a half decades, the Nigerian government has embarked on policies and reforms leading to the liberalization of the economy with the goal of moving towards a market-driven economy. The liberalization policies have also affected higher education, leading to the massification of universities and other higher institutions in the country in line with the increase in demand for higher education. The National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institution Acts, which came into being in May, 1999 made the granting of licenses to private individuals and organizations to establish universities possible. The number of universities approved by the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) had grown to 219 as at the end of 2021, while several others are awaiting approval by the commission ([www.nuc.edu.ng](http://www.nuc.edu.ng)). This comprises 49 Federal universities, 59 state-owned ones and 111 private universities.

Due to the large number of universities in the country there is also a high level of competition, especially among the privately owned ones. Unlike the public ones, very few Nigerians can afford to pay the very high fees charged by private universities, therefore limiting their enrolments. It then becomes imperative for private universities to compete for the limited number of Nigerians who can afford them. The need to do brand marketing also becomes very important in order to attract students and other stakeholders. University websites are thus one of the most visible spaces for branding, presentation of universities' identities, and marketization. Public universities are also not left out in the process of marketization and identity formation, as they are conscious of operating in a very competitive market, where ranking in terms of performance indicators, such as teaching, research, citations, international outlook, and graduate employability play major roles in their recognition and patronage by the public. This study therefore examines how selected Nigerian universities brand themselves through identity formation on their websites, thereby leading to marketization of their institutions.

## 2 Literature Review

The increase in the number of universities in Nigeria has been motivated and necessitated by the tremendous growth in demand for university education in the country (Akpotu and Akpochafu 2009). This increase has naturally brought about strategic marketing efforts by these institutions through brand marketing (Mogaji, Maringe, and Hinson 2020), sloganeering (Ayinuola and Francis 2021; Farinloye, Adeola, and Mogaji 2020), the formulation of clear vision and mission statements (Ashiru and Oludare 2015; Efe and Ozer 2015) and strong institutional identities (Wayne, Farinloye, and Mogaji 2020), such as through “about us” texts on the related websites (Xiong and Li 2020), in order to compete favourably for patronage by stakeholders.

In spite of the challenge of affordability and in the face of the stiff competition among private universities with regard to the existing public universities, both kinds of institutions have developed strategies for attracting students and staff through brand marketing. While the

private universities capitalize on the deficiencies of the public ones to market themselves, emphasizing a stable academic calendar, good learning resources, conducive environment, ease of gaining admission, running courses that are in high demand, better research opportunities for faculties, and stronger lecturer-student relationships, among other factors, the public universities emphasize their experience and strength of faculty, among others.

Studies on the marketing, identity construction and branding of universities have identified specific contextual spaces for their display, such as the websites and hard copy publications of such institutions. Marketing elements are typically displayed in logos (Ead and Saleh 2021), vision and mission statements (Banda and Mafofo 2014; Ashiru and Oludare 2015), mottos and slogans (Shanaz and Qadir 2020), leaders' speeches (Teo and Ren 2019), and information about the university (about us) (Zhang 2017; Wu and Cheong 2020).

Studies on the marketization of universities include Fairclough (1993), Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015), Xu, Xie, and Lei (2021), and Ead and Saleh (2021), among others. For instance, Fairclough (1993) identifies an increasing tendency towards marketization and commodification of discursive practices in contemporary discourses that concern British universities, owing to their expectation to raise a proportion of their funding from private sources. He notes that major issues driving the marketization agenda of such universities include ranking, staff quality, citations per staff member as well as environment for learning. Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015, 3) focus on how universities have adopted academic marketing in their discursive practices by investigating "how two Australian universities represent themselves in response to social changes through the use of language on their institutional websites". The authors show that visual elements such as logos, images and videos play important roles in the representation of the universities.

Xu, Xie, and Lei (2021) also examine the marketization process of top-tier Chinese universities by scrutinising their self-promotional strategies over the past two decades. Their study focuses on the attitudinal markers in the "about us" texts of the selected universities with a view to identifying the major themes in the texts. The study identifies seven major themes that were positively appraised by the universities at both time points. Ead and Saleh (2021) is a critical discourse analysis of the shapes, images, symbols and colours used in logos of eight universities in Egypt. The authors observe that in marketing the various programmes the universities offer and project the relevance and images of the institutions. The logos project the cultural heritage, religious beliefs and past history of civilization.

There are also studies on the branding of universities, including Dogan (n.d.), Valitov (2014), Mampaey and Huisman (2016), Bhattacharya and Faisal (2020), among others. Dogan (n.d.) examines the corporate credibility of universities with three distinct naming strategies: strategies based on the name of a person, city or location and region of location. The study shows that the name of a famous person is preferred over the city of location, although the reverse is sometimes true. The study further shows that region of location-based names are the least preferred type of university name. Mampaey and Huisman (2016) examines the transformation to a more market-oriented steering approach in a European higher education context. The findings indicate that some similar tendencies are visible, although brand differentiation could also be identified between highly and lowly reputed institutions.

Bhattacharya and Faisal (2020) examine how the media were used for branding of higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors note that the emergence of COVID-19 altered the previous reliance on newspaper advertisements, radio jingles, career counselling workshops, education fairs, billboards, and so. However, the authors note that higher education started using social media in this time to get a competitive advantage.

There have also been a few studies on identity in academic discourse, such as Bucholtz and Hall (2005). The authors study identity and interaction from a socio-cultural linguistic approach, and assert that identity is a social and cultural phenomenon. In addition, they also observe that “identities encompass macro-level demographic categories, temporary and interactionally specific role and local ethnographically emergent cultural positions” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 592). Much more important to the current study is the view that identities may be “linguistically indexed through labels, implicatures, stances, styles and linguistic structures and system” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 594). As will soon be seen in the analysis presented below, institutional identities are often constructed by deploying different linguistic styles and discursive strategies to highlight prominent aspects of institutional identities.

Looking further into evaluative, affective and epistemic orientations in discourse, some scholars have studied authorial identities in an academic context, especially, students’ writing and journal articles (Flowerdew and Wang 2015, Karoly 2009 and Rahimivand and Kuhl 2014). Flowerdew and Wang (2015) examine identity in academic discourse and stress the nexus between voice and academic identity. They also assert and demonstrate how identities are often constructed based on the conventions of specific communities of disciplinary practices (see also Hyland, 2004; 2005).

Karoly (2009) investigates the expression of authorial identity in some research articles and Master’s theses written in English, and underscores the deployment of more author pronouns by less experienced writers rather than by expert writers. The author concludes that student writers need more training in English for Academic Purpose for them to be conversant with various aspects of style that take account of the students’ stereotypical cultural, linguistic, academic and educational backgrounds.

The present study rests on the assertions that identity is critical to any form of writing, that authorial voice is the way individuals represent or identify themselves in their discourse, and branding through marketization is essential for identity. In spite of the surfeit of studies on authorial identities in academic discourse, there is a lack of knowledge on academic identity construction for the branding of universities on institutional websites in Nigeria.

### **3 Methodology**

Data for the study comprise texts on the profiles of selected universities in Nigeria culled from the websites of the respective institutions. The data were obtained from four universities, two public and two private ones, in each of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, making a total of twenty-four data samples. The decision to obtain data from institutions from all the geopolitical zones was informed by the need to reflect the diversity of Nigeria and universities in the country, while data from each of the regions was purposively obtained focusing of the

length of the profiles of the institutions and their richness. The data samples were obtained over a period of six months (from July to December 2021) after the websites of the institutions were monitored for changes in their self-descriptions in order to ensure that the data used for the research represent the current vision statements of the institutions.

Specifically, different texts such as the “about us”, history, and vision and mission statements of the selected twenty-four universities constituted the data for the study. However, for data analysis we purposively selected different parts of the various texts from the different institutions that are relevant for the kind of analysis afforded by the precepts for analysis in Fairclough’s dialectical relational approach and Roper and Parker’s theory of branding.

After gathering the data, the researchers closely studied them and marked out the different identities that are constructed through different linguistic features, particularly lexical features and the issues raised in the profiles of the selected institutions. Through further close reading of the data, the researchers marked out various parts of the texts that yield to Roper and Parker’s (2006) ideas on branding and subsumed them under the various identities already established from the data. We thus show how the expressive resources for creating the various identities were further used for branding the institutions. In the presentation of excerpts for data analysis, we purposively selected the marked parts of the data that specifically projected various identities, while at the same time trying to reflect the diversity of the institutions whose profiles constitute the corpus for the study. Table 1 presents basic information about the institutions whose webpages were analysed for the purposes of the present study.

TABLE 1. Basic information about the institutions included in the analysis.

SN	Name of Institution	Brief Information on Institution
<b>South South</b>		
1.	University of Benin	A second-generation federal university in Benin City, the capital of Edo State.
2.	Rivers State University	One of the first set of state-owned universities in Nigeria. It is located in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State and owned by the Rivers State government.
3.	Benson Idahosa University	A private university owned by the Church of God Mission International. It is located in Benin City, Edo State.
4	Igbinedion University	One of the first set of private universities in Nigeria. It is located at Okada, Edo State. It is owned by Chief Gabriel Igbinedion, a business man.
<b>South East</b>		
5.	University of Nigeria, Nsukka	One of the first-generation universities in Nigeria owned by the federal government. It is located in Nsukka Enugu State.
6.	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka	A federal government-owned university located in Awka, the capital of Anambra State.
7.	Madonna University	A private university in Okija, Anambra State. It is owned by the Catholic Church.

8.	Renaissance University	This is a private university located in Enugu, owned by Chimaroke Nnamani, the former Governor of Enugu State.
<b>South West</b>		
9.	Obafemi Awolowo University	A first-generation university, owned by the federal government and located in Ile-Ife, Osun State.
10.	University of Lagos	A first-generation university owned by the federal government and located in Lagos, the commercial capital of Nigeria.
11.	Covenant University	A private university owned by the Living Faith Ministries and located in Ota, Ogun State.
12.	Redeemer's University	A private university owned by the Redeemed Christian Church of Christ and located in Ede, Osun State.
<b>North Central</b>		
13.	University of Abuja	A federal university located in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria and within the Federal Capital Territory.
14.	University of Ilorin	A federal government-owned university located in Ilorin, Kwara State.
15.	Veritas University	A private university owned by the Catholic Church. The university is located in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.
16.	Landmark University, Omuaran	A private university owned by the Living Faith Ministries. The university is located in Omu Aran in Kwara State.
<b>North East</b>		
17.	Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola	A federal government-owned university based in Yola, the capital of Adamawa State.
18.	Federal University, Wukari	A federal government-owned university based in Wukari, Taraba State.
19.	American University of Nigeria, Yola	A private university owned by Atiku Abubakar, former Vice President of Nigeria. It is located in Yola, the capital of Adamawa State.
20.	Kwararafa University, Wukari	This is a private community-owned university located in Wukari, Taraba State.
<b>North West</b>		
21.	Uthman Dan Fodio University	A federal government-owned university based in Sokoto, the headquarters of the Islamic religion in Nigeria.
22.	Federal University, Dutsinma	A federal government-owned university located in Dutsinma, Katsina State.
23.	Skyline University	A private university located in Kano, the foremost commercial city in the north-west of Nigeria.
24.	Al-Istiqama University	A private university located in Sumaila, Kano State.

## 4 Theoretical Framework

The study employs an eclectic theoretical framework for data analysis as it combines Fairclough's (2015) dialectical relational approach to critical discourse analysis with Roper and Parker's (2006) idea on branding. Fairclough's dialectical relational approach provides

for analysis of various discourse levels of analysis such as description, interpretation and explanation (Fairclough 2000). At the level of description, attention is paid to the formal features of a discourse such as vocabulary (lexis and metaphor), grammar, cohesion and text structure. For interpretation, attention is paid to how meanings of texts link the texts with their contexts. Finally, at the level of explanation, the analyst focuses on meanings relating to the broad ideological and topical issues underlying identity construction for universities in Nigeria. The choice of Fairclough's (2015) dialectical relational approach is based on its provisions for the explication of issues relating to social change and the analysis of expressive resources in discourses.

The other component of the theoretical framework, which is Roper and Parker's (2006) theory of branding, explicates branding as identification, differentiation, and personification, and the brand as asset. According to Roper and Parker (2006, 57), the original purpose of branding was for identification. Branding in this regard serves the purpose of ensuring that consumers recognize a product. At this level of analysis of a branded text, the analyst thus pays attention to the linguistic features that are used to identify the branded item, in the case of this study, the selected Nigerian universities. The second paradigm for analysis is the differentiation dynamic of branding. Here, according to Roper and Parker (2006, 57), due to the increased competition among companies and service providers, a brand needs to differentiate itself from other brands. In the context of this study, it will be interesting to analyse the linguistic features institutions use to create unique identities for themselves in the face of competition for students, staff and funding by the many universities in Nigeria.

Closely related to branding as differentiation is branding as personification. Here attention is paid to how the physical, aesthetic, rational and emotional elements of a brand are foregrounded to typify it. So, beyond differentiating themselves from other universities in Nigeria, this study will examine how the universities typically portray their inherent features and create identities for themselves. Finally, the analyst also examines a brand as an asset by focusing on the value of such a brand. Under this, it is possible to examine the value placed on the institutions by themselves regarding their leadership in provision of university education in Nigeria, internationality, stability, evolution of new trends, and perceived quality, among other factors.

## 5 Data Analysis

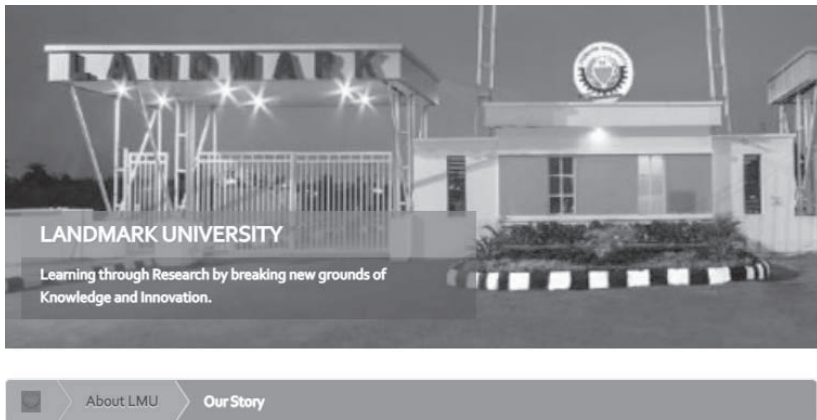
In the competitive educational context of Nigeria, Nigerian universities have been working hard to construct distinct identities which then form the basis for marketing themselves to potential stakeholders – students, parents, companies, funding agencies, etc. In earlier work, Shamaz and Qadir (2020) report that a corporate identity is the most prominent identity constructed by Pakistani universities. Kenway and Bullen (2001) find that students are constructed as educational commodities, while Ayaawan (2021) reports that educational institutions are constructed as businesses offering academic services in Ghana. Rogendorf (2008) shows that in New Zealand, corporate identity is often constructed, among other identities. In Nigeria, however, our data show that professional identity, national identity, transnational identity, ethnic identity, humanist identity, Afrocentric identity and religious

identity typify the marketization of universities. This section presents these kinds of identities projected in the data and a discussion on how they constitute marketization within the Nigerian education context.

## 5.1 Professional Identity

A very significant kind of identity that higher institutions construct in order to brand themselves is professional identity. For the purpose of this study, professional identity refers to the identity pertaining to career foci or job prospects which the programmes of the institutions sampled in this study focus on. This manifests in the attempts by higher institutions to portray themselves as focusing on certain fields or areas of research. Constructing a professional identity becomes necessary in a world where professionalism is gaining importance and students would prefer studying professional courses, which many universities offer. Moreover, the creation of specialized universities in Nigeria in response to specific national needs has brought about certain universities focusing on some specific subsectors of the economy, such as agriculture, technology, education, medicine, and petroleum, because of their importance for national development. For many of these specialized universities, their names are their first identities. It is, however, noteworthy that there are some universities in Nigeria that construct professional identities for themselves without necessarily reflecting such identities in their names. Let us consider an extract from what Landmark University, Omu Aran tagged “Our Story”, shown in example (1).

(1)



### Our Story

Landmark University is a private University established by the Living Faith Church World Wide, committed to raising leaders who shall be equipped with skills and character to lead the world in meeting the needs of humanity-FOOD.

In example (1) above, Landmark University creates a professional identity for itself by showing that their focus is on meeting one of the most basic human needs – food. This is graphologically expressed through the foregrounding of the lexical item “FOOD” in the text which is presented as the ultimate goal of the research focus of the institution. The vision of the university further constructs this professional identity as an agriculture-focused one. The



construction of a professional identity in the text reflects Fairclough’s dialectical relational approach principle that “[t]exts semiotically construe identities and simultaneously seek to make these construals persuasive” (Fairclough 2016, 101). A close look at the example also shows that, through the text, Roper and Parker’s (2006) idea of branding as identification is enacted. This manifests in the association of the institution with the Living Faith Church Worldwide as its owner, which conforms with Roper and Parker’s (2006) prescription on branding for the purpose of identification. Similarly, through the same text there is the enactment of branding as personification. Since de Chernatony and Dall’Omo Riley (1998, 418) state that “company, identity system, image, value system, personality, relationship and added value can be combined to form the personality of a brand”, the presentation of Landmark University as concerned with producing leaders who will ensure the production of food is an effort in branding the institution for personification. The example below also indexes professional identity:

- (2) *To be a leading world class university, by spearheading an agrarian revolution on the African continent through the exploration of hidden treasures in the mother-earth thereby restoring the dignity of the black race.* (Landmark University, Omu Aran, <https://lmu.edu.ng/about-lmu/vision-and-mission>)

The agricultural revolution has always been at the centre of most agro-economic policies of the Nigerian government, as it is a major way of diversifying the crude oil-based economy. Through these narratives, the university not only targets a set of students interested in agriculture-related courses, but also presents itself as committed to solving one of the problems in Nigerian society, which is the provision of food, that is metaphorically described as “hidden treasures in the mother-earth.” Thus, there is the continuation of the streak of branding for personification in the profile of Landmark University as the university is portrayed as largely interested in the “agrarian revolution” even though there is also the idea of branding as differentiation implicit in the text as the university is distinguished as one that focuses on agriculture. Another example elucidating professional identity follows:

- (3) *Brief History of the University*  
*Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola formally known Federal University of Technology, Yola, Adamawa state Nigeria was established in 1981 by the Federal Government of Nigeria to provide the much needed technologically skilled manpower for the nation. It is one of the Federal Universities recognized by National Universities Commission (NUC) to offer Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctorate degrees in different fields of Science and Technology.* (Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, <http://mautech.edu.ng/new/index.php/en/about-us/who-we-are/about-mautech>)

Moddibo Adama University of Technology also creates a professional identity through the contents of its website. Technologically skilled manpower is essentialized in the discourse as “much needed for the nation” as a way of marketing the institution. Through this, there is a branding of the institution for personification using Roper and Parker’s (2006) ideas as the institution is portrayed as basically typified by science and technology instruction and research. Since several other universities offer courses in science and technology, recognition

in the form of accreditation by relevant bodies (most especially the National Universities Commission, as is mentioned) plays a major role in shaping opinions of stakeholders. This text latched on to this widely held understanding to project the legitimacy and reputation of the university and market its degrees from bachelors to doctorates. However, different strategies are used in professional identity construction in relation to the accreditation of courses. These range from being general (*different fields of science and technology*), as seen in (3), to being specific, as seen in (4) below. However, in addition to branding by professional identity, there is also branding as identification. This manifests in the presentation of Modibbo Adama University of Technology as owned by the government. Below is another excerpt featuring professional identity in the discourse:

- (4) *All our programmes are accredited by the relevant regulatory and professional bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN), Pharmacists Council of Nigeria (PCN), Medical Laboratory Science Council of Nigeria (MLSCN), Council of Legal Education (CLE), Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN), Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), Computer Professionals Registration Council of Nigeria (CPN), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), etc.* (Igbinedion University, Okada, <https://iuokada.edu.ng/vice-chancellors-message/>)

For Igbinedion University, listing the relevant regulatory bodies and identifying specific professional bodies would go a long way to providing and promoting the necessary information. For many professionals, these professional bodies' recognition confers practical and ethical standards on their conduct. Providing such specific information is a strong marketing strategy for the professional subjects identified with those professional bodies (medicine, pharmacy, medical laboratory science, law, nursing and midwifery, engineering, computer science and accounting). This evidences Roper and Parker's (2006) concept of branding as an asset, as the institution is presented as having remarkable values which warrants its recognition by the numerous professional bodies.

Projecting professional values is an essential means of constructing professional identity. Such values include ethics, conduct and a professional appearance, including dress, which are an important part of conduct. For Benson Idahosa University, giving information to the public on the professional dress code is seen as part of professional identity projection.

- (5) *We are Nigeria's first university with a professional dress code for staff and students. We are Nigeria's first university to have a work study programme that allows students to study and put in some hours of their week into working to earn some money.* (Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, <https://www.biu.edu.ng/about-biu/why-study-at-biu/>)

The claim of being the first university to have a dress code for staff and students makes the information significant for professional identity projection and marketization of the university and its professional courses. This information being placed under "Why Study at BIU" is specifically drafted for marketing purposes, and is a way of branding the institution for differentiation. The use of the expression "first", which Fairclough (2015) accounts for

under the level of description bordering on lexis in data analysis, gives the institution the image of doing things differently. It also underscores the inculcation of professional ethics into students from the university and the support for such values among the university staff. However, the branding of the university in the text goes beyond differentiation as there is also branding for identification. This manifests in the assertion in the text that the university belongs to the wider Nigerian society through the expression “We are Nigeria’s first university...”

## 5.2 National Identity

National values and priorities may be important enough to constitute an identity for some universities, and the texts on the websites of Nigerian universities effectively project these in line with Fairclough’s (2015) claim on the centrality of identity construction to texts. Names are bearers of identities, therefore a university, such as the University of Nigeria, already projects the national identity through its very name. However, national identity has also been constructed in other texts about a university, as can be seen in one of the mandates of Rivers State University of Science and Technology (RSUST), Port Harcourt in example (6).

- (6) *RSUST was established to: [...] relate its activities to the social, cultural and economic needs of the people of Nigeria.* (Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, <https://www.rsu.edu.ng/index.php/about/who-we-are/about-rsust>)

The text above shows the deployment of branding as an asset for the construction of academic identity for RSUST. In the text, there is the essentializing of the goal of the institution by projecting it as one which aims at enhancing the social, cultural and economic conditions of Nigerians through its activities. This aligns with Roper and Parker’s (2006) claim that branding as an asset involves indicating the value of a brand. The implication of the projection of the value of RSUST is that the nation is the primary beneficiary of the products of the research of the university. In whatever form they come, the research activities would positively impact the social, cultural and economic life of the people of Nigeria. The strategic placement of this information under the heading “who we are”, which is a statement of identity itself, is significant for identity projection on the university’s website.

Another projection of national identity is seen in the welcome message of the Vice Chancellor to the University of Abuja, which is the first major narrative on the university’s website. The University of Abuja is located in the federal capital territory and also named after it. Abuja is obviously quite symbolic in Nigeria, being the capital. At the level of description in Fairclough (2000, 2015), one can see that in using lexis, the text producers give the university two appellations in the narrative: “the model university in Nigeria” and “a pride of Nigerians and humanity in the provision of higher education”. Going further in the linguistic analysis as described by Fairclough (2015) under description, one can see the centrality of two nominal lexical features “model” and “pride” used in the similar syntactic structure of MHQ-type nominal groups. These two appellations at the levels of interpretation and explanation as espoused by Fairclough (2015) are projections of how the university wants to be seen in relation to other universities, the nation, humanity and the provision of higher education in general.

- (7) *The University of Abuja is the model University in Nigeria, and has developed robust developmental strategies to meet and sustain that status and remain a pride of Nigerians and humanity in the provision of higher education. It is dedicated to quality teaching, learning, and research. It offers both staff and students a serene and conducive environment for living, working, teaching, learning, and research.* (University of Abuja, Abuja, <https://www.uniabuja.edu.ng>)

In the text above, in addition to the national identity that is constructed, the text producer also brands the University of Abuja using branding as differentiation, as it portrays the university as different through the lexical item “model”, which also ascribes a status which confers on it the “standard” which others have to follow. However, it is noteworthy that even though branding as differentiation is primary to the academic identity constructed in the text, there is also a subtle deployment of branding as asset, with the university being portrayed as giving the nation the value of being a source of pride to her, Nigerians and humanity in general. The ultimate goal of teaching, research and service is to address social problems. The beneficiaries of these activities are not usually clearly spelt out for most universities, since they are meant to assert universal values. Therefore, a deliberate essentialization of a nation and its citizens as the prime beneficiaries of any university’s products in its mission statement is a strong way of constructing national identity and branding the institution as an asset to the people of the nation. This can be seen in the vision statement of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in example (8).

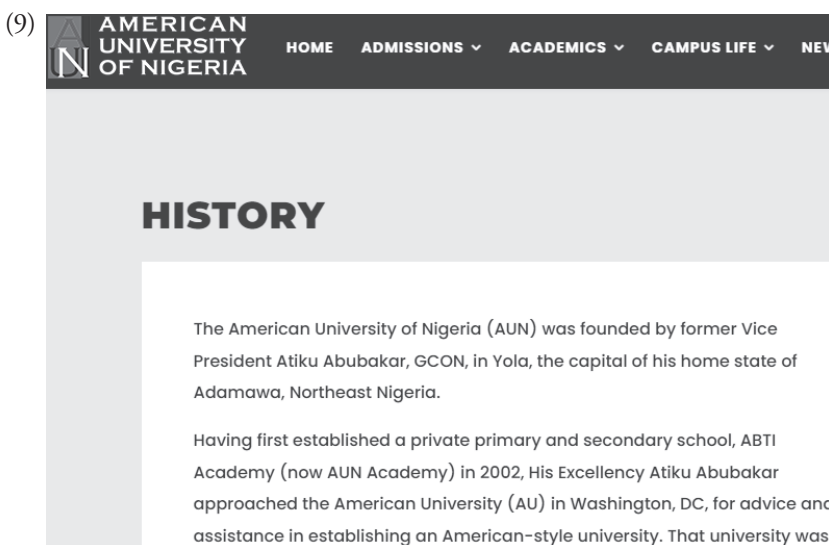
- (8) *The mission of the University is to use teaching, research, and public service to solve social problems. In the process of learning, students would be oriented to use their education in solving practical problems confronting them in the **Nigerian society** and beyond.* (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, <https://unizik.edu.ng/about/vision-and-mission/>)

While it is more common to see universities building capacities through the advancement of national values on their campuses or affiliates abroad, the strategy of projecting national values is not a very common one on the websites of Nigerian universities. This is a way of branding such institutions as assets for the circulation of national values in conformity with Roper and Parker’s (2006) idea on branding as asset. It must be pointed out that national identity projection abroad is more common at the lower levels of education – primary and secondary. In Nigeria there are some primary and secondary schools established by other nations, which project strong identities of these nations through their curricula, such as the Lebanese Community School, American International School, British International Schools, Netherlands International Schools, Italian International School, Enrico Mattei, and so forth. It is more common, especially for private universities to compete on projecting an identity that transcends their immediate locality or nation for marketing purposes rather than national identities. In the next section, this will be fully discussed.

### 5.3 Transnational Identity

By transnational identity, we mean an identity created to show that an entity or person is characterized by features that transcend national boundaries. For the universities, this

entails presenting themselves as not being localized, but having international appeal. In example (9) there is a text evidencing transnational identity in the profile of the American University of Nigeria.



(American University of Nigeria (AUN), Yola, <https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/about/overview/history>)

The projection of the identity of the founder, Atiku Abubakar in the text above is an instance of branding as identification. The strategy reveals a number of facts about him – his being the former Vice President of the country, the location of the university being the capital of his home state, and his vision of establishing an American-style university in Nigeria. Moreover, the text producers create a transnational identity for the American University of Nigeria. In the first instance, the name of the institution is indicative of the transnational identity constructed. In the name, there is reference to both America and Nigeria, because while the university is presented as American in nature and style, it is portrayed as belonging to Nigeria. This portrayal of the university as transnational is meant to show that it is a melting pot of Nigerian and American cultures, and a way of showing that students who are privileged to attend the institution will not only know about their society but also American culture and way of life. The American identity of the text further manifests in the expression “establishing an American style university”, showing that the university is patterned after the American University in Washington DC. The transnational identity constructed for the institution, using the branding theory of Roper and Parker (2006), is a way of branding the institution through differentiation it from other institutions in Nigeria. To further this differentiation, the university’s president has this as part of her message:

(10) *AUN is unlike any other university in this part of the world: we provide a university education based on the US model – just as if you were to go to university in the US.* (American University of Nigeria, Yola, <https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/about/leadership/president>)

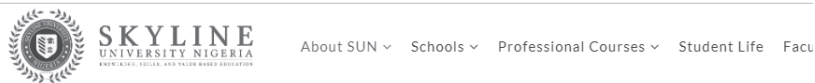
The differentiation claim that the university is “unlike any other in this part of the world” is based on the idea of bringing the American experience to Nigeria’s educational setting prompted by the idea of delocalization, and thus establishment of overseas campuses or affiliates to further internationalize the university.

It also brands itself as American through the transnational identity of the institution, given the fact that the American element in the naming and curriculum will arouse curiosity. Beyond this, it is a marketization strategy in the sense that there are many who would derive satisfaction from having a sense of attending a university that has some connection with America. Through the transnational identity of the institution, the university also prides itself as one that is internationalized, thus further marketing itself favourably to the public, internationalization being seen as one of the qualities of great higher institutions of learning. In an advertisement for admission on the university’s website, there is a slogan “school at home, study abroad”, which further strengthens the transnational identity. This slogan co-constructs the experiences of schooling and studying within the discourse of the transnational experience, thus bringing the American Dream (the dream of many young Nigerians) into the Nigerian national experience.

It is important to state that there is an emphasis on foreignness or Americanness in the construction of transnational identity in the profile of the American University of Nigeria. Drawing insights from Fairclough (2016, 101), this emphasis shows the peculiarity of the conception of the idea of internationalization by the university as opposed to what obtains elsewhere, especially in the Western world. The belief underlying such a perception is that internationalization refers to having foreign links or contacts, especially connections with one of the most powerful nations in the world, America, even though internationalization elsewhere would mean having an international outlook, especially regarding the composition of students and lecturers.

Similar to the AUN’s identity construction is that of the Skyline University of Nigeria, where a transnational identity is also expressed in the university profile:

(11)



The mission to establish Skyline University Nigeria took concrete form in 1990 when Skyline University College was established by the proprietor, at Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. The fame of this University College grew exponentially and students’ enrolment soon increased at an increasing rate with a large number of international students coming from Nigeria. Thus, in the 30 years of its involvement in the private university education business in the Middle East, *Skyline Investments Limited* has spread so widely. This is a testimony that the little spark of 1990 in the UAE, has blossomed into a full flame of excellent university educational opportunities for the young Nigerians in particular and the West African sub-region in general.

The major motivation to establish Skyline University Nigeria is to achieve the same mark of academic and all-around excellence that Skyline University College (SUC) has achieved within 3 decades of her existence in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by providing a total life-changing education at the tertiary level. The aim, therefore, is to complete the

(Skyline University Nigeria, Kano, <https://oas.sun.edu.ng/Apply/About>)

The transnational identity is expressed in the delocalization and internationalization of the university through the transfer of the United Arab Emirates' experience into Nigeria. The success of Skyline University College in the United Arab Emirates is being replicated in Nigeria with the establishment and transfer of the idea of the same university onto Nigerian soil and for Nigerian students, and the name is also intended to reflect this identity. The transnational identity of the institution also manifests its depiction as "the first international university..." It is interesting that, as stated earlier, the deployment of "first" for the branding of Skyline University is characteristic of Fairclough's analytical level of textual description where the adjectival lexical item goes to convey meanings bordering on differentiation in line with Roper and Parker's (2006) postulation at the levels of interpretation and explanation. The international appeal generated through the transnational identity of the institution is no doubt a marketization strategy as it has the propensity to attract many Nigerian students to have access to "the Dubai experience" or have the opportunity to further their education at the school in the United Arab Emirates. This international appeal and connection, which highlight the transnational identity of the institution, are similarly used to brand it as an asset in the sense that Nigerian students will benefit from the knowledge of the Arab world and culture which they will get acquainted with through their lecturers or books on the Arab world and culture. To further this transnational identity, another extract from the section "Why Skyline University, Nigeria" describes the university this way

(12) *Primarily, the goal of the university is to be recognized both locally and internationally as the citadel of academic excellence. The university boasts of quality staff and faculty members drawn from different parts of the world.* (Skyline University, Kano, <https://www.sun.edu.ng/sun-at-the-glance>)

Universities face the potentially conflicting task of responding to both local and global demands, and are expected to balance these dual engagements, and this is what Skyline University has responded to in example (12). A transnational identity is built into the university's goal, and one of the practical ways of demonstrating this identity is the attraction of faculty members from different countries, while remaining socially responsible and relevant within the Nigerian local context. The internationality of the faculty of the university is an index of its transnational identity and further serves the purpose of branding the institution as an asset that offers the best exposure to such an identity to its students.

## 5.4 Humanist Identity

The humanistic approach to education is one of the most advanced in contemporary education, because the whole concept of education is about human development through knowledge transfer and societal development. The focus in the projection of humanist identity is the enhancement of self-worth, self-image and self-actualization. Covenant University has developed a system that projects this kind of identity through its curriculum.

(13) *The Total Man Concept (TMC) is Covenant University's custom-built programme that constitutes the core concept of her academic programmes. This concept centres on 'developing the man that will develop his world'. The TMC Programme focuses on the three components of the human personality: the spirit, the mind and the body.* (Covenant University, Ota, <https://covenantuniversity.edu.ng/about-us/overview/about>)

Total human development is a concept that is central to the concern of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for which the organization has developed the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure each of the following three dimensions – a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. The human-centred focus of the Covenant University was developed to carve a niche for the institution and project its identity as humanistic. This aligns with Roper and Parker's (2006) idea of branding as personification as the total man concept is presented as the core of the academic operation of Covenant University. This is an uncommon marketization strategy, which is put forward in the general context of the promotion of the intellectualism and aesthetics, with little reference to the development of the total human personality.

This kind of identity is also projected by Redeemers University, Ede in its vision strategy. It emphasizes that the “total person” goes beyond intellectual success to latent aspects of the human individual, which will together with other, well-emphasized aspects produce the total person.

(14) *RUN is not only about academics. The serene atmosphere offers a conducive environment for your spiritual and secular development, making you a total person.* (Redeemers University, Ede, <https://run.edu.ng/vision-mission-strategy/>)

In addition to using the curriculum for achieving total human development, as done by Covenant University, Redeemer's University stresses the importance of the environment in one's total development. Here, neither universities misses out on the spiritual component of the human personality, being Christian mission institutions.

The University of Nigeria also projects the humanistic identity in its motto, which is: “To restore the dignity of man”. Through the expression/motto used to construct the humanistic identity at the textual level, as given by Fairclough (2015), there is the employment of branding as personification, and the restoration of the dignity of human beings is presented as an attribute of social and symbolic meaning to Redeemer's University. Education here is thus conceptualized as a tool for the restoration of human dignity, and making people realize their self-worth is an integral part of the humanistic-centred education. There is also the use of synonyms in the excerpt as the lexical items “serene” and “conducive” are both used to describe the environment at RUN for the purpose of marketizing it to the public. In the process of educating people, their minds are developed, as also expressed in the mission of the University of Benin:

(15) *To develop the human mind to be creative, innovative, competent in areas of specialization, knowledgeable in entrepreneurship and Dedicated Service.* (University of Benin, Benin City, <https://uniben.edu.ng/about/>)

Vital to human development is the development of the mind, which includes the cognitive skills and general intelligence necessary for adaptation and survival. These are spelled out in the mission of the university to create the awareness of those needs and the readiness to address them as part of its humanistic drive. Through the humanist identity created in the text, the producers also deploy branding as personification and branding as asset, based



on Roper and Parker's (2006) ideas. They promote the university as essentialized by the humanist orientation and list the values that can be obtained from the institution as innovation, professional competence, high entrepreneurial capacity and the ability to deliver exceptional service. Generally, the humanist identities created by these universities serve as a boost to promoting them as unique in their approaches to educational services.

## 5.5 Afrocentric Identity

Another form of identity seen in the branding of Nigerian universities is Afrocentrism, which is used to champion the African cause, values and identity. This resonates with an important idea in critical discourse analysis, which is resistance to foreign supremacist thinking and local inferiority/inequality to the foreign, which Fairclough (2016, 88) notes. What it means to be an African from an African perspective may be quite different from how the phenomenon is seen by others. With Africa's rich moral heritage of dignity, discipline, diligence, faith, honesty and integrity being eroded, these common ideals need re-emphasis in the context of the unmitigated acceptance of alien, Western doctrines. Some universities intentionally craft their profiles in such a way that they celebrate and project such Africanism and Afrocentric ideas in order to market their brand. The Afrocentric identity is foregrounded in the mission of Covenant University, thereby projecting the view of the restoration of human dignity, but focusing on the black race.

(16) *To create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black race via Human Development and Total Man Concept-driven curricula* (Covenant University, Ota, <https://covenantuniversity.edu.ng/about-us/overview/about/>)

Landmark University, an institution with the same owner as Covenant University, has a similar narration on the restoration of the dignity of the black race through the agrarian revolution, as noted in example in (2). It has always been said that the different forms of oppression the black race has gone through over the centuries, such as slavery and colonialism, have made it lose its dignity and real identity. But education can be deployed to restore this lost dignity. In the pursuit of this goal, Covenant University is one of the universities determined to bring Africa into the limelight through its human development programme, as expressed in the following example (17).

(17) *We run with a compelling vision of raising a new generation of leaders African continent.* (Covenant University, Ota, <https://covenantuniversity.edung>)

In this narrative on the activities of Covenant University, the ultimate goal of the human development programme is to "raise a new generation of leaders" specifically for Africa, the continent of the "black race". This is no doubt an instance of branding by personification as raising a new generation of leaders is presented as the major attribute of the institution, and is indeed a vital way of promoting the Afrocentric value. This value directly impacts on leadership, which is considered as a major challenge for many African countries. It is believed that with the kind of education that addresses leadership concerns, the dignity of the black race will be restored. The whole idea is articulated as a vision which is described as a "compelling" one. To further drive this leadership vision, Covenant University established the

African Leadership Development Centre (ALDC) to run innovative leadership trainings on leadership competencies. In the words of Dr David Oyedepo, the founder of the university:

- (18) *The greatest challenge of Africa in the 21st century is leadership. Therefore, the African Leadership Development Centre (ALDC) is poised to address issues of Leadership Development across diverse contexts.* (Covenant University, Ota, <https://covenantuniversity.edu.ng/about-us/operations/african-leadership-development-centre-aldc>)

This narrative further underscores the leadership challenge of Africa and the need to address it through an Afrocentric vision.

Apart from dignity and leadership, another concern projected in the Afrocentric identity is the African cultural values, which appear to be eroding with the popularization of Western values through colonialism. Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) emphasizes this aspect of the Afrocentric identity with the resolve to add value to African culture, apparently by projecting it at every opportunity that arises.

- (19) *To nurture a teaching and learning community; advance frontiers of knowledge; engender a sense of selfless public service; and add value to African culture.* (Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, <https://oauife.edu.ng/about-oau/vission-mission>)

Like many Nigerian universities, OAU has an institute that promotes African cultural values in order to drive its Afrocentric identity, and the African value of selflessness is enunciated in the profile of OAU excerpted above. All this has been presented in the profile for the purpose of branding OAU. In a similar manner as Covenant and Landmark Universities, in its “about us” text, AUN also addresses the issue of leadership, which is considered a very crucial challenge to the facilitation of the socio-economic development of Africa states

- (20) *The goal of AUN is to train the future leaders of Africa and to serve as both a stimulus and agent of economic development throughout the region [...] AUN is committed to providing the skills and the leadership essential to advancing the continent's pressing social and economic challenges.* (American University, Yola, <https://www.aun.edu.ng/index.php/about>)

The reference to Africa in all the extracts is captured through the use of the lexical items “Africa”, “region”, “continent” and “black.” It is however interesting that the foregrounding of Africa in all these narratives is positive, making the essence of the university the training of bright minds for the continent. It is generally believed that leadership is the bane of development in many African nations, and a close look at the excerpt shows that Roper and Parker’s (2006) branding as personification and branding as asset are evident in the text. This is because the text shows what typifies the university and at the same time what it has to offer. As can be seen in the text, to show their passion for African development, these universities present themselves as committed to training future leaders for the related countries.

Although Afrocentrism may focus on a number of values beyond what has been addressed, such as its being a historical/political movement, three key issues have been identified as the

basis for driving the Afrocentric identity projections on the websites investigated – *the dignity of the back race, leadership and African cultural values*. These issues are considered strong enough for emphasis in the higher educational approach to advancing the Afrocentric values and promoting the African identity. It should also be noted that through the Afrocentric posturing of the institutions, they also brand themselves as different, peculiar and unique and at the same time personalize themselves.

## 5.6 Ethnic Identity

The university is a universal concept of a citadel for promoting the knowledge industry through the dispassionate pursuance of scholarship in diverse disciplines. Such an idea is therefore not expected to promote ethnic concerns, given the assumption of the composition of a university in terms of people from diverse backgrounds. Universities are expected to be global in outlook and orientation, and thus free from ethnic biases, but this is not always case in practice. Ethnic identity refers to certain features that associate a particular person or entity with members of an ethnic group in contrast to members of other ethnic groups. From our findings, we discovered that certain universities present strong identification with their host communities in order to foster harmonious relationships and probably to advance the town-gown relationship with the local communities. This can be seen in the “Community Relations” section of the Federal University Dutsin Ma’s website.

- (21) *Dutsin-ma people and its leaders, particularly the district head of Dutsin-ma, have been very hospitable and supportive to University since its establishment. The pioneer and subsequent leaderships of the University have done an excellent work of establishing and sustaining a mutually beneficial relation with our host community. Therefore, we made sure we build upon that through the recruitment of more junior staff and security personnel on casual basis from Dutsin-ma and neighbouring towns, sharing our water source with our immediate neighbours and repairs of water and electricity equipment, donation of computers, classroom furniture etc to public and community schools, making our facilities available like venues for events, sport fields and vehicles.* (Federal University, Dutsin-Ma, <http://www.fudutsinma.edu.ng>)

In spite of the status of a public federal university, the narrative above shows the university’s strong identification with the host community, and to sustain this it is reflected in the institutions recruitment policy and some social programmes targeted at the community. This captures Roper and Parker’s (2006) idea on branding as identification. Even though the university is not presented as being owned by the community, it is presented as inseparable from it. The ethnic identity manifests through references to leadership and the people, giving the impression of the university enjoying goodwill and a harmonious relationship with the community.

The role ethnicity plays in shaping university identities in Nigeria is becoming more prominent. This, of course, cannot be divorced from the conceptions of “community” and “ethnicity” in Nigeria and perhaps Africa in general. The notion of community in Nigeria and Africa is rooted in the communal essence of the people, and Abakare and Okeke (2018, 67–68) state that “it is a system of social relations in which the claims of the individual is

generally put second, next to the claim of the community”. Closely tied to the idea of the community is the conceptualization of ethnicity in Nigeria, which defines many if not most Nigerians. This of course cannot be separated from the reality that most Nigerians define themselves in terms of their ethnicity first before perceiving themselves as Nigerians, since the nation is made up of many diverse and distinct ethnic groups.

Ethnic affiliations play prominent roles in the appointments of key officers in public institutions, and ordinarily this should be seen as antithetical to the spirit of intellectualism, in which competence is rated above any other considerations. But the reality in the contemporary Nigerian educational system is that the universities are gradually being “ethnicized”, and this process is being legitimized. Quite significant is the motivation to stress ethnic issues on the university’s website to make the wider world understand the university’s concerns for its host community in order to complement the usual research and teaching duties. This kind of information may also become relevant in the light of unhealthy relationships that sometimes develop between institutions and their host communities in contemporary Nigeria, sometimes leading to attacks and even killings.

A few communities are strong, cohesive, determined and financially strong enough to establish their own universities. Such universities are few, but for them the construction of an ethnic identity would not be out of place. Such is the case of Kwararafa University in Wukari, North Eastern, Nigeria.

(22) *Kwararafa University Wukari was licensed as Wukari jubilee by the National Universities Commission in 2005. It took off in March, 2006 with 61 students as the first community promoted University in Nigeria, the first university in Taraba State and the second private university in the North East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Located at Wukari an ancient city that was for a while the headquarters of the historically famous Kwararafa Confederacy, the university changed its name from Wukari Jubilee to Kwararafa in February 2012 to reflect the historical roots of the confederacy which at the zenith of its powers extended to modern Niger, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa and Benue States...In the logo, the spear head “Atoshi” is the traditional weapon of the Jukun people (host community of the University).* (Kwararafa University, Wukari, <https://www.kuw.edu.ng/history.php>)

The text above manifests the deployment of branding as differentiation for the purpose of creating a remarkable academic identity for the university. The statement “the first community promoted university in Nigeria” bears this differentiation in the text.

Just as it was indicated earlier that even the names of the institutions are used to construct professional identities, for specialized institutions (see above) in particular there is also the construction of ethnic identity through the name of the university “Kwararafa University.” “Kwararafa” is identified with a multi-ethnic confederacy around the River Benue valley of Central Nigeria. Wukari, which later became the rallying point for the Jukun people, who are a very strong part of the confederacy. Therefore, through the name, the university identifies itself with the Jukun, Wukari and the historical and defunct Kwararafa confederacy. The practice of deploying historical names for constructing ethnic identities for institutions is not peculiar to

this university, as there is also a university in Southwestern Nigeria named Oduduwa University in order to construct the Yoruba ethnic identity. Oduduwa is seen in Yoruba history as the first Yoruba person to have ever lived. Therefore, it can be said that apart from promoting harmonious existence with the people of the immediate locality, reference to historical values by institutions may have been the goal of promoting ethnicism by some universities.

It should also be noted that in order to foster ethnic identities, many public universities are named after persons considered to be prominent in the history of the ethnic groups that are based where such universities are sited after their deaths. While such persons are mostly politicians, the goal is primarily to promote an ethnic identity. Some examples include: Obafemi Awolowo University (named after the former Premier of the Western Region), Ahmadu Bello University (named after the former Premier of the Northern Region), Nnamdi Azikiwe University (named after the former President of Nigeria), Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (named after the first Prime Minister of the country in the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic), and Ambrose Ali University (named after the former Governor of the then Bendel State), among many others. Ethnic identity was the motivation for the (re)naming of these institutions and this resonates well with the different ethnic groups, since they legitimize the action.

## 5.7 Religious Identity

Since the liberalization of higher education and the granting of licenses to religious bodies to establish universities, many religious organizations have established universities in the country and the projection of religious identities is quite visible on the websites of these universities. In spite of the pressure on religious institutions to secularize, religious identity is becoming a prominent feature in the profiles of such institutions in Nigeria. By religious identity, we mean the use of language and visual element to show affiliations with certain religions or promote them. It may not be particularly surprising that religious identity keeps manifesting in the profiles of the higher institutions, given the fact that in the Nigerian nation, there is generally a wide reference to religion. Below are some examples that illustrate the promotion of religious identity in the narratives on the websites of some universities in Nigeria.

(23) *The mission of Veritas University is to provide its students with an integral and holistic formation that combines academic and professional training with physical, moral, spiritual, social and cultural formation together formation of Christian religious principles and the social teachings of the Catholic Church... Based on Christian inspiration and Christ's sacrificial witness, the University shall promote authentic human and cultural development modeled on the person of Christ.* (Veritas University Abuja, <https://www.veritas.edu.ng/about/mission.php>)

In example (23), which is extracted from the self-description of Veritas University, one can see the explicit construction of a Christian identity for the university by the text producers. This construction of Christian identity by the university resonates with Roper and Parker's (2006) principle of identification in their branding theory – the university wishes to be recognized as a Christian institution. Looking at the data through the prism of Fairclough's (2015) analytical layer of textual description, one realizes that the strategic lexical items used in the text for the creation of Christian identity for the higher institution are “spiritual”, “Christian

religious principles”, “Christian”, “Catholic”, “church” and “Christ”. Once one sees the above-mentioned lexical items in the self-portrait of the institution, one immediately discerns that it is a Christian school and indeed an institution established by a specific Christian denomination: the Catholic Church.

It is interesting to note that through the religious identity constructed in the text, the university intentionally tries to appeal to a certain segment of Nigerians, Christians, in order to market their institution. Furthermore, while a broad Christian identity is constructed in the text, it is also discernible that the religious identity is further deepened by identifying the institution as a Catholic one through reference to Catholicism as a subset of the Christian religious identity. Apart from the explicit mention of the Catholic Church in the text, other parts of the profile foreground Catholicism through reference to “the Second Vatican Council” and other expressions such as “Catholic identity of the University”, “Catholic principles and attitudes” and “Catholic universities”. This particular Catholic identity constructed for the university above its Christian identity indexes Roper and Parker’s idea of differentiation in their branding theory, which borders on how a brand differentiates itself from other brands. A similar religious identity construction is found on the webpage of Madonna University, another university owned by the Catholic Church.

(24) *Being the first private/Catholic university in Nigeria and a member of the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU), we pride ourselves to be **upholders of the great Catholic education tradition** that birthed modern civilization.* (Madonna University, Okija, <https://www.madonnauniversity.edu.ng/page/24/>)

The strong Catholic identity constructed in the narrative is seen in the expression “upholders of the great Catholic education tradition”. The Catholic Church has been involved in education in Nigeria since the pre-colonial days, and over the years they have been known for their educational tradition, which cuts across schools at all levels – primary and secondary and now university. There is the deployment of branding as differentiation for the purpose of creating an academic identity for the institution. Differentiation here is not limited to denominationalism, but is also reflected in the prominence of terms such as the exclusive claim of “firstness”, which boosts and markets the brand. Differentiation in religious identity is also seen in the following extract from Covenant University’s “about us” text.

(25) *Covenant University is a private Pentecostal Christian University, which has been operating with official status since 2002 in Ota, Nigeria. Covenant University is one of the leading universities in Africa founded on Christian Mission Ethos. It has the vision to raise a new generation of leaders and reinstate the black race’s dignity. The University is committed to remaining at the cutting-edge of learning based on enlightening the Total Man.* (Covenant University, Ota, <https://covenantuniversity.edu.ng/about-us/overview/about>)

Pentecostalism is projected as opposed to other forms of Christian religious practices, and the university is described as being founded on “Christian Mission Ethos”. This means the university has a distinguishing character, moral nature and guiding beliefs which differentiate it from others of similar Christian background. Beyond the projection of a Pentecostal

identity, this differentiation is also seen in the expression of the university's mission focus.

Religious identity as a branding technique also manifests in (26), which is part of the profile of Usmanu Danfodiyo University.

(26) *The University statute established the Centre for Islamic Studies in 1982. Its aim, among others, is to promote the study of and research in Islam, its instructions and related disciplines and its culture with special reference to the northern states of Nigeria. The Centre runs a Diploma programme in Islamic Studies, which started in 1983, to assist in the manpower development of the locality and the country at large. The Centre also runs certificate courses in Arabic and Islamic Studies.* (Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, <http://www.udusok.edu.ng>)

It is interesting that in this particular construction of religious identity, the university intentionally foregrounded on its website a centre of Islamic studies in cognizance of the popularity of the Islamic religion in Sokoto, where it is located. Using Roper and Parker's (2006) idea on branding, the presentation of the Centre for Islamic Studies as a very important feature of the university can be considered as asset branding. The centre is an immediately recognizable phenomenon that embodies and promotes Islam. Therefore, Usmanu Danfodiyo University brands itself as a university in the heart of Sokoto, the seat of the leadership of Islam in Nigeria. This promotion of Islamic religious identity is particularly significant because the institution is a public university owned by the federal government of Nigeria. The university authorities however deem it proper to project the popular religious faith in its locale and promote a religious identity on the related website. The religious identity further shows that even public universities can be sensitive to the religious peculiarities of their locations.

## 6 Conclusion

This study has examined the discursive construction of identity on Nigerian university websites and discussed how these constructions further project marketization of their brands to stakeholders. Sourcing data from selected public and private university websites in different parts of Nigeria, the study critically engaged the websites' narratives and identified the major identity types that are constructed, which are: professional, national, transnational, humanist, Afrocentric, ethnic and religious identities. The study argues that while many Nigerian universities project professional, national and transnational/international values, which could be very positive, some others promote humanist and Afrocentric identities in order to underscore pragmatic social values. Moreover, others project issues of narrow interest, which may not necessarily impact scholarship and intellectualism, such as religion and ethnicity. For such institutions, religion and ethnicity are essentialized to drive the sentiments of their organizations and locales. The significance of this study lies in its understanding of the discursive strategies that underly the projection of identities in Nigerian universities' websites. It also offers these perspectives in order to close the apparent gaps in global studies on marketization discourses, especially in the area of identity construction.

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