

THE INFLUENCE OF PRODUCT POSITIONING ON STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD CHOOSING A UNIVERSITY IN GHANA: MODERATING ROLE OF CORPORATE IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

In Ghana's increasingly competitive higher education sector, universities, particularly private institutions, are challenged to differentiate themselves to attract students. Even though product positioning is strategically important in shaping consumer choices, little is known about how it influences students' attitudes towards choosing a university, particularly when the corporate identity of the institution acts as a moderator. This study examines, using corporate identity as a moderating factor, how product positioning affects students' attitudes towards selecting a Ghanaian university. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 500 tertiary students from different universities as part of an explanatory and descriptive research design and structural equation modelling was used to analyse the data. The results show that university attributes such as lecturer quality, lecture halls, tuition fees, library facilities, and institutional reputation are key elements of positioning strategy. Product positioning was found to significantly and positively influence students' attitudes, while corporate identity strengthened this relationship. The results indicate that universities can enhance their appeal by ensuring potential students have a clear understanding of academic offerings and by aligning corporate identity with institutional image. To increase student attraction and retention, Ghanaian higher education institutions should adopt consistent and distinctive positioning strategies supported by a cohesive corporate identity.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector in Ghana has become increasingly competitive, with public and private institutions competing for a limited pool of prospective students.¹ This intensified competition has led universities to adopt marketing strategies typically associated with the corporate sector. Product positioning is one such strategy, involving the intentional presentation of a university as distinct and attractive to potential students. As a key element of the segmentation–targeting–positioning (STP) framework, product positioning enables organizations to differentiate their offerings and communicate specific value propositions (Muhammad et al., 2024). Within higher education, this approach often involves emphasizing unique attributes such as academic quality, campus facilities, tuition costs, or international partnerships to shape prospective students' perceptions and enrolment decisions.

Although product positioning is extensively studied in the marketing of consumer goods and services, its effects on higher education in sub-Saharan Africa, and specifically in Ghana, remain underexplored. Most existing research address business and retail environments, resulting in limited empirical evidence regarding the influence of positioning strategies on students' university selection in emerging economies. Additionally, the extent to which institutional corporate identity, encompassing values, organizational culture, and visual branding, shapes student decision-making processes is not well documented.

Due to the lack of evidence, policymakers may not have data-driven guidance for institutional branding policies, and universities may be investing in positioning strategies without fully comprehending their impact.

To close this gap, the current study investigates how corporate identity moderates the relationship between product positioning and students' attitudes towards selecting a Ghanaian university. The study's integration of these two ideas not only makes clear the direct effects of positioning but also identifies the circumstances in which these effects are amplified or reduced. This study theoretically applies the Positioning Theory (Ries & Trout, 1981) and Corporate Identity Theory (Balmer, 2001) to the context of higher education in developing nations. It shows that, similar to commercial brands, universities can hold a specific mental "position" in the minds of consumers, and that corporate identity serves as a tactical facilitator of positioning effectiveness. Additionally, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is used to explain how beliefs about the institutional attributes influence attitudes and enrolment intentions.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers insightful information to policymakers, marketers, and university administrators. The findings will enable organizations to develop and communicate positioning strategies that reflect the values and objectives of prospective students. Regulatory bodies may apply these insights to formulate policies that promote transparency, authenticity, and differentiation within the educational sector. By addressing a significant knowledge gap and providing actionable recommendations, this study contributes to marketing theory and the strategic management of higher education in Ghana's changing academic landscape.

2.0 THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The research is based on three interlinked conceptual frameworks: Corporate Identity Theory (Balmer, 2001), Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and Positioning Theory (Ries & Trout, 1981). Taken together, the three theories explain how universities can utilize positioning strategies to shape potential students' attitudes strategically, and under what circumstances such effects can be supported or contradicted by corporate identity. Three synergetic conceptual frameworks underlie this research: Corporate Identity Theory (Balmer, 2001), Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), and Positioning Theory (Ries & Trout, 1981).

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2.1 Positioning Theory

In accordance with the theory of positioning created by Ries and Trout (1981), companies compete on a unique and favourable "position" within the customer's mind. A well-articulated value proposition, consistency (reiterating the same message across touchpoints), and differentiation (highlighting special advantages that are difficult for rivals to imitate) are all necessary for effective positioning. Although the theory has been widely used in commercial marketing, it is becoming more and more applicable in higher education, where institutions serve as service brands (Sharif & Lemine, 2021).

In a university setting, positioning can emphasize both intangible (such as reputation, prestige, and values) and tangible (such as the calibre of instructors, facilities, and tuition costs). Good positioning lowers perceived risk in the selection process by communicating to potential students how the school fulfils their academic, social, and career goals (Solikhah, 2024). Positioning Theory is used in this study to assess how these strategic cues affect Ghanaian students' attitudes towards choosing a university, an area for which there is currently a dearth of empirical data.

2.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour by Ajzen (1991) offers a behavioural framework for comprehending how positioning tactics result in real-world decision-making. TPB asserts that attitudes, whether positive or negative, subjective norms, perceived social pressure, and perceived behavioural control, perceptions of how easy or difficult a behaviour is to execute, are what drive behaviour.

According to the study, students' perceptions of a university's positioned qualities, such as cost, academic calibre, and campus amenities, influence their attitudes towards the school. While negative assessments discourage enrolment, positive assessments encourage it. According to the theory, even in a competitive education market, positioning messages can directly affect attitudes and indirectly shape behavioural intentions if they are credible and consistent with students' values.

2.3 Corporate Identity Theory

Corporate identity, according to Corporate Identity Theory (Balmer, 2001), is the distinctive fusion of an organization's values, behaviour, culture, and visual identity. It includes an organization's values, identity, and methods of communicating these to stakeholders. Strong corporate identities strengthen the organization's positioning strategy, promote emotional connections, and increase trust.

In higher education, corporate identity encompasses not only visual components like logos and colour schemes (Wu & Cheong, 2021), but also organizational conduct (e.g., student support, ethics, and inclusivity) and corporate communication (e.g., transparency, message consistency). According to this research, corporate identity acts as a moderator, enhancing the correlation between students' attitudes and product positioning when identity cues are consistent, genuine, and consistent with institutional values.

2.4 Integrated theoretical perspective

A comprehensive grasp of the research problem is provided by the integration of these theories. Corporate Identity Theory explains when and why positioning strategies are more successful, TPB explains how students interpret and respond to these messages, and Positioning Theory explains what universities say to set themselves apart.

2.5 CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE REVIEW

2.5.1 Product Positioning

Product positioning is a well-known strategic marketing tactic used to influence how customers view a product or service in comparison to rivals. While O'Sullivan et al. (2024) emphasized that positioning necessitates aligning both tangible characteristics (e.g., quality, functionality) and intangible perceptions (e.g., prestige, symbolic value) to create differentiation in competitive markets, DeMaris (1992) characterized it as an attempt to control the consumer's mind.

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Businesses can gain substantial competitive advantages from intentional product positioning, such as increased customer loyalty, better sales results, and long-term differentiation (Kalafatis et al., 2024; Rollins & Ojumude, 2023). By using positioning, businesses can affect how customers visualize their products, increasing awareness and influencing preference patterns.

Due to the intangible, variable, and frequently high-risk nature of services, positioning takes on a greater significance in this industry. Services are divided into high- and low-involvement categories by Eldegwy et al. (2023), who point out that positioning is especially important for high-involvement services like higher education. By making a university's identity and value proposition clear, good positioning not only conveys what it has to offer but also lowers the perceived risk of enrollment decisions (Solikhah, 2024).

Positioning is essential to university branding and student choice, according to recent studies. While Hart and Rodgers (2023) and Zuhroh and Rini (2024) emphasize its role in influencing student attitudes in competitive higher education markets, Wu and Cheong (2021) contend that strong positioning promotes institutional distinctiveness. Universities that successfully set themselves apart, whether through creative curricula, distinctive cultural experiences, or solid industry alliances, acquire respect and attract particular student demographics (Basyah, 2023; Chiguvi, 2023).

Positioning also works by bringing institutional offerings and potential students' goals into alignment. Garikaparthi (2024), for instance, acknowledges that universities are able to recruit creativity- and profession-focused students by positioning themselves as world leaders in research. However, when students are presented with consistent and authentic institutional messages, they are more likely to choose universities that align with their personal values, aspirations, and sense of identity (Kethüda, 2021; O'Sullivan et al., 2024).

2.5.2 Consumer attitude

Of utmost importance in marketing and behavioural sciences is the consumer attitude, a construct representing people's long-lasting beliefs, feelings, and intentions to act toward an activity, a product, or a brand. The three disparate components that constitute this intricate construct are the conative (behavioural intentions), affective (feelings and emotions), and cognitive (beliefs and knowledge) (Bagozzi, 2024; Niosi & Chung, 2024). These elements together determine the way individuals process information, conclude, and form opinions.

As regards marketing, attitudes are probably the strongest force in driving consumer action. They decide whether consumers form positive links that produce brand loyalty or negative assessments that discourage participation (Akdim et al., 2021; Grigaliūnaitė et al., 2023). It is, based on more recent research, not only the key products but also other factors of the wider consumption context, including competitors, influencers, and categories (Mosikyan et al., 2024). This connection emphasizes the necessity for a long-term brand position to drive attitudes across various touchpoints.

Attitudes of higher education students function exactly the same as customer attitudes in other markets. Prospective students take into account tangible and intangible factors, including lecturer quality, price, and campus facilities, and reputation, prestige, and cultural alignment, when thinking about universities. The students' choices whether to apply, enrol, or suggest an institution to someone else immediately depend upon these evaluations and are thus important.

2.5.3 Students' attitudes towards universities

Students' opinions about universities reflect their assessments, whether positive or negative, of different facets of the learning environment, such as instructors, facilities, reputation, and the overall experience of the institution. They are formed through a mixture of social interactions, life experiences, and education and play an essential role in influencing student behaviour and engagement (Karunanayake et al., 2020; Yuliani et al., 2023). University attitudes are multifaceted and include affective reactions (such as satisfaction, a sense of belonging, or pride in affiliation) as well as cognitive evaluations (such as views of academic quality, program relevance, and institutional

reputation). These kinds of attitudes affect students' long-term loyalty, willingness to recommend the school, and involvement in alumni networks in addition to their immediate academic engagement (Altıntaş & Nur, 2024).

Students' attitudes are significantly shaped by certain factors in developing contexts like Ghana. Given that many students see education as a means of gaining access to opportunities around the world, reputation and international recognition continue to be important motivators (Gyamera & Asare, 2023). Accessibility also has a big impact on attitudes and choices, especially when it comes to the affordability of tuition and the availability of scholarships (Adoui, 2023; Laqua, 2023). For instance, Ghanaian students now have more options thanks to the growth of scholarship opportunities from both domestic and foreign sources (such as China and Canada), which has changed their perceptions of and assessments of local versus international universities.

Another important factor is the actual academic setting. Student satisfaction and positive attitudes are consistently shaped by faculty expertise, learning support services, and infrastructure resources (Ikram & Husaina, 2023; Pandita & Kiran, 2023; Sheng et al., 2024). Apart from enhancing the academic quality, socially and culturally acknowledged universities also help to build in students a sense of belongingness, enhancing their attitude and overall performance (Singh et al., 2024).

2.5.4 Corporate identity

The term "corporate identity" is used to describe the distinctive mix of traits, values, and behaviour that constitute an organization's stakeholder and public image. Organizational behaviour, communication policy, and visual presentation all must reflect the mission and values of the establishment at all times (Arora, 2023; Aksoy & Misci Kip, 2025). Healthy corporate identities not only separate an organization from rivals, but also create trustworthiness, credibility, and lasting stakeholder interaction. Corporate identity is particularly crucial at the level of universities since universities compete not only on academic products but also on cultural and symbolic value that universities are able to offer to students, parents, and society in general.

Corporate communications, organizational behaviour, and visual identity are therefore the three elements which are connected to each other in order to create an effective corporate identity. All three have a vital role in influencing attitudes and reinforcing positioning strategies and students' perceptions of a university.

2.5.5 Visual identity

Visual identity is the outward expression of a brand as design, typography, colour scheme, and logos. Visual identity in higher education communicates institutional culture, reputation, and credibility as well as being aesthetically pleasing (Bault & Rusconi, 2020; Dwitasari et al., 2025). Successful, beautiful branding builds awareness and recall rates as well as forming lasting emotional associations with prospective students (Wu & Cheong, 2021; Tian & Song, 2024).

Those universities with a visual identity that conveys institutional values, e.g., innovation, inclusivity, or tradition, are likely to resonate with their respective target markets, as asserted by Ghorbanzadeh and Sharbatian (2022). The digital media age witness's interactive visual elements of branding such as digital logos, virtual visits, and multimedia campaigns engage younger, technologically oriented audiences (Yu et al., 2024). Additionally, neuromarketing studies show that aesthetically pleasing designs elicit favourable emotional reactions in customers, impacting their assessments and choices (Frontiers, 2023). Because of this, a key component of corporate identity that influences how students view universities is visual identity.

2.5.6 Organizational behaviour

An organizational behaviour, in turn, is seen in an organization's internal culture, values, and practices. It will, in turn, influence the way in which that institution is viewed externally (Smith, 2024). Organizational behaviour, in higher education, refers to how institutions interact with their community,

treat employees, and care for their students. Universities are most likely to achieve positive images and better reputations if they prioritize the welfare of their students, embrace inclusive environments, and uphold high standards of ethics (Nogueira et al., 2023; Smith, 2024).

Based on studies, students are sensitive to how responsive, equal, and open the organization is (Patton, 2023). These include initiatives like individualized interaction, caring education policy, and socially responsible efforts that foster loyalty and commitment (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2021).

Yet practical concerns such as cost, location, and quality remain potent behaviour cues that impact dispositions among students (Mullens & Hoffman, 2023; Munir et al., 2023). By demonstrating community values of respect and fairness, institutions can become more competitive and ensure that their institutional culture is aligned with their external image.

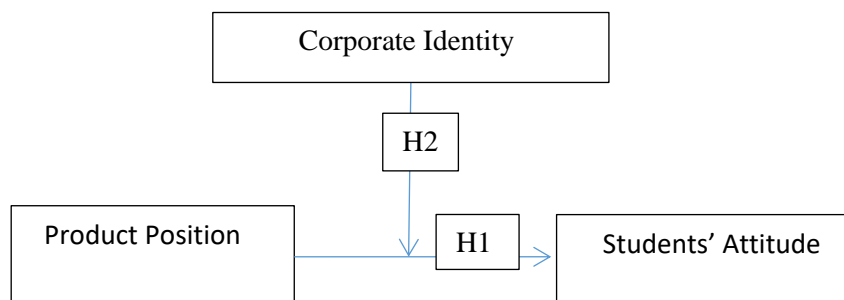
2.5.7 Corporate communications

Corporate communications are how organizations communicate their identity to stakeholders via strategic messaging and channels. As well as being able to inform students about programs, fees, and facilities, effective communication in higher education involves values like academic excellence, diversity, and career opportunity being voiced (Cornelissen, 2023; Jain, 2024). Two of the most important determinants influencing student choice are credibility and trust established by honest and transparent communication (Dai & Reich, 2022).

Examples of communication extending beyond conventional mediums in the digital era include social media, official websites, and interactive platforms. These help facilitate universities to communicate with potential students and respond to their queries with real-time replies by facilitating two-way communication (Aithal & Maiya, 2024).

2.6 Conceptual framework

The study conceptualizes the framework below.



Source: (Author's construct 2025)

2.5.1 Study hypothesis

Based on the conceptual framework, this hypothesis was developed.

H1: Product positioning has a positive impact on students' attitudes towards choosing a university in Ghana.

H2: Corporate identity moderates the relationship between product positioning and student attitude.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This research applied a quantitative explanatory research design to examine causal linkages among complex variables like corporate identity, product positioning, and student attitudes towards universities. Explanatory designs work best in theory testing and determining independent and moderating variables' impact on dependent outcomes (Saunders et al., 2019). The research was able to examine the overall trends and correlations of Ghanaian higher education using a cross-sectional survey to supply information from a large tertiary education student sample.

3.2 Population and sampling framework

The population targeted for the study was Ghana's university students. Because of their direct impact on university choice decisions and first-hand experience with the influence of product positioning strategies on customers' attitudes, the population was selected. In addition, because of their heterogeneity in terms of socioeconomic, cultural, and geographical circumstances, Ghana's tertiary students are the best population for understanding consumers' decision-making at the tertiary level (Gyamera & Asare, 2023).

For selecting participants, the research utilized a multi-stage sampling structure. First, universities were divided into public and private ones to reflect different types of institutions. Second, purposive sampling was applied in the selection of students in these universities since they are most directly affected by the topic under study (Hazari, 2023).

By ensuring only the members that were directly engaged in university selection are sampled, the purposive sampling strategy increases the validity of the outcomes (Campbell et al., 2020).

3.3 Sample size determination

Taking into account both statistical and practical factors, a sample size of 500 was selected.

Statistically, the sufficiency of the sample size was determined through Cohen's (1988) power analysis. Based on it, the detection of medium effect sizes with adequate statistical power for multivariate analysis implies that large samples need to be employed. Aside from that, with respect to model estimation with soundness, structural equation modelling (SEM) is generally recommended to use between 200–400 cases, or at least 10 respondents for every parameter estimated (Kline, 2023). The sample size of 500 thus exceeds these limitations, with guarantee of reliability and generalizability within the Ghanaian context. Practically, the number is a compromise between the requirement of wide coverage across various universities and ease of data collection.

3.4 Data collection

Data were collected with a structured questionnaire containing questions on major aspects of consumer attitude, product positioning, and corporate identity. Pretested instruments from previous research were utilized to transform the questionnaire to fit the Ghanaian higher education context. Cognitive and affective aspects of student judgments were assessed using a five-point Likert scale of items (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

3.5 Analytical technique and model specification

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS/SmartPLS was employed to test the data. SEM was employed as it is able to estimate multiple relations simultaneously and hence is best suited to examine complex constructs and direct, as well as moderating, effects (Yuan et al., 2021; Putu, 2024).

1. The direct impact of product positioning on the attitudes of students was examined by the estimated model in this research.

2. How corporate identity, visual identity, organizational behaviour, and communication affect or strengthen such relationship. Given that SEM controls for measurement error, allows latent constructs, and produces good tests of mediation and moderation, this modelling strategy is theory-based. The analysis thereby throws more light on how positioning strategy affects consumer attitude in Ghanaian tertiary education.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Measurement model

The constructs of the study were modelled as latent variables measured by observed indicators.

- **Product Positioning (PP):** Measured by attributes such as lecturer quality, facilities, tuition fees, reputation, and academic programmes.
- **Corporate Identity (CI):** A higher-order construct captured through three dimensions—visual identity, organizational behaviour, and corporate communications.
- **Students' Attitudes (SA):** Captured through cognitive (beliefs about the university), affective (feelings of satisfaction and belonging), and conative (enrolment/recommendation intention) dimensions.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess construct validity and reliability. Factor loadings for all indicators exceeded the 0.60 threshold, while Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were above 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, with each construct's AVE exceeding the squared inter-construct correlations.

4.2 Measurement model evaluation

The measurement model was assessed for reliability, validity, and factor loadings of constructs.

- **Reliability:** Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.7, indicating internal consistency.
- **Convergent Validity:** Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.5, confirming that each construct explained more than 50% of the variance in its indicators.
- **Discriminant Validity:** The square root of AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity.

4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) results

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using the minres method with varimax rotation. Three factors were extracted based on the data. Below is a summary of the results:

4.4 Factor loadings and communalities

The standardized loadings for each item on the three factors (MR1, MR2, and MR3), as well as communalities (h^2), uniqueness (u^2), and complexity, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor Loadings and Communalities

Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	Communality (h^2)	Uniqueness (u^2)	Complexity
Facilities	0.20	0.65	0.10	0.47	0.53	1.2
Lecturer Quality	0.16	0.69	0.13	0.52	0.48	1.2
Fees	0.17	0.62	0.16	0.44	0.56	1.3
Reputation	0.12	0.52	0.30	0.38	0.62	1.7
Belief	0.14	0.17	0.82	0.72	0.28	1.2
Feelings	0.26	0.21	0.67	0.56	0.44	1.5

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Item	MR1	MR2	MR3	Communality (h^2)	Uniqueness (u^2)	Complexity
Peer Influence	0.32	0.19	0.49	0.38	0.62	2.0
Media Influence	0.72	0.22	0.19	0.60	0.40	1.3
Identity	0.72	0.20	0.22	0.61	0.39	1.4
Ethics	0.73	0.19	0.21	0.61	0.39	1.3

Commentary

- Factor loadings above 0.5 were considered significant. Items such as *Belief*, *Feelings*, and *Media Influence* demonstrated strong factor loadings.
- The communalities (h^2) indicate that most items explained a reasonable proportion of their variance, with values ranging from 0.38 to 0.72.

4.5 Variance explained by factors

The variance explained by each factor is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Variance Explained by Factors

Factor	SS Loadings	Proportion Variance	of Cumulative Variance	Proportion Explained	Cumulative Proportion
Factor 1 (MR1)	1.88	0.19	0.19	0.35	0.35
Factor 2 (MR2)	1.78	0.18	0.37	0.34	0.69
Factor 3 (MR3)	1.63	0.16	0.53	0.31	1.00

Commentary

The three factors together accounted for 53% of the total variance in the data. Factor 1 explained the highest proportion of variance (19%), followed by Factors 2 (18%) and 3 (16%).

4.6 Model fit statistics

The fit indices for the EFA model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Model Fit Statistics

Fit Statistic	Observed Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
Root Mean Square Residuals (RMSR)	0.04	< 0.08	Good Fit
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	0.824	> 0.90	Adequate Fit
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.118	< 0.08	Marginal Fit
Likelihood Chi-Square (p-value)	<0.001	> 0.05	Significant Fit

Commentary

The model's RMSR value of 0.04 indicates a good fit. However, the RMSEA value (0.118) suggests a marginal fit, implying slight room for model improvement.

4.7 Factor score adequacy

The adequacy of the factor scores was evaluated, with results summarized in Table 4.

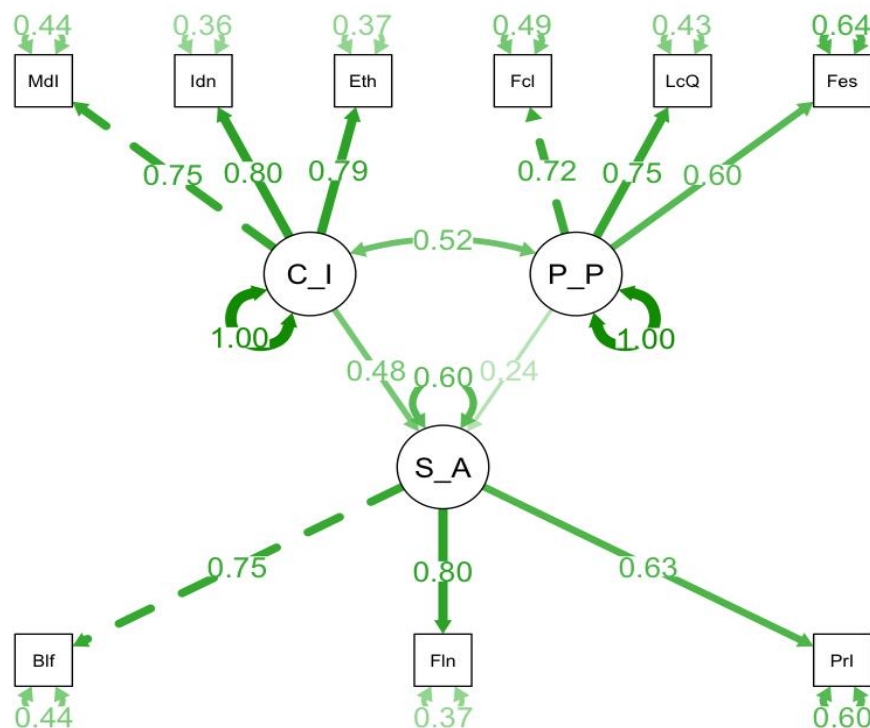
Table 4: Factor Score Adequacy

Metric	MR1	MR2	MR3
Correlation of Scores with Factors	0.87	0.84	0.87
Multiple R Square of Scores with Factors	0.76	0.70	0.75
Minimum Correlation of Possible Scores	0.51	0.40	0.50

Commentary:

- The factor scores demonstrated strong correlations with the respective factors, indicating reliable measurement.

4.8 Structural model results



The structural model was analysed to test the hypotheses. The results are summarized as follows:

4.8.1 Hypothesis 1 (H1): Product positioning influences students' attitudes

- Path Coefficient: **0.48**
- t-value: **7.56** ($p < 0.001$)
- Interpretation: Product Positioning significantly and positively influences Students' Attitudes. This confirms H1, indicating that effective product positioning enhances students' beliefs and emotional attitudes.

4.8.2 Hypothesis 2 (H2): Corporate identity moderates the relationship between product positioning and students' attitudes

- Interaction Path Coefficient: **0.24**
- t-value: **3.89** ($p < 0.01$)

- Interpretation: The moderating effect of Corporate Identity on the relationship between Product Positioning and Students' Attitudes is significant. This means Corporate Identity strengthens the influence of Product Positioning on Students' Attitudes. Organizations with strong corporate identity amplify the effectiveness of their product positioning strategies.

5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

H1: Product positioning influences students' attitudes:

The results validate the main tenet of positioning theory, which holds that students' perceptions of universities are greatly influenced by product positioning (Ries & Trout, 1991). Universities can establish a mental "position" in students' minds that affects their thoughts, emotions, and behavioral intentions by successfully conveying qualities like lecturer quality, tuition affordability, institutional reputation, and campus amenities. This illustrates the notion that, similar to commercial brands, universities need to set themselves apart by focusing on distinctive and credible USPs.

The findings support the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) by demonstrating that positive attitudes are shaped by belief-based assessments of both tangible (such as facilities and fees) and intangible (such as reputation and prestige) attributes. These favourable attitudes then support behavioral intentions like enrollment or recommendation. In this way, successful positioning tactics highlight the psychological processes by which marketing communications affect college students' decision-making and act as precursors to favorable student intentions.

The results are empirically consistent with earlier studies that emphasise positioning as a factor in determining consumer perception and brand image (Arora et al., 2022; Najafizadeh et al., 2012). Universities in Ghana show that unique value propositions—whether through creative programs, state-of-the-art facilities, or a reputation for academic excellence—cultivate more positive attitudes among students, much like in consumer markets where differentiation is essential for competitive advantage. This supports data from recent studies in higher education that demonstrate the importance of differentiation tactics in drawing in and keeping students in cutthroat educational markets (Taecharunroj, 2022).

The results theoretically support the relevance of commercial branding theories in higher education. The study demonstrates the strength of positioning theory in the context of university choice, where perceptions are equally influenced by differentiation and clarity of value offering, despite the fact that it has historically been applied to consumer products. Furthermore, by demonstrating that student attitudes are not only responses to functional characteristics but also to the institution's symbolic positioning, such as prestige and social identity, the findings further the field of higher education marketing research.

H2: Corporate identity moderates the relationship between product positioning and students' attitudes:

The findings highlight the significance of institutional identity as a strategic enabler of marketing effectiveness and offer compelling evidence that corporate identity significantly moderates the relationship between product positioning and students' attitudes. This research bolsters Balmer's long-standing contention that, depending on its strength and consistency, corporate identity not only directly affects perceptions but also increases or decreases the efficacy of positioning strategies. In other words, the credibility, coherence, and reliability of the institution's identity determine how much of an impact universities have on student attitudes, even when they implement effective positioning strategies.

Theoretically, this emphasizes the fact that a firm's identity is a benchmark upon which customers make judgments regarding companies. Students can try out positioning statements in a positive interpretative stance when there exists a strong identity exemplified through open communication, ethical organizational behavior, and stable visual imagery. Inconsistent or weak identity will, however, weaken positioning activities and lower their effectiveness. Previous studies have confirmed that visual identity, company culture, and brand reputation all significantly affect how

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consumers build and internalize positioning strategies (Ab Hamid et al., 2022; Wardana et al., 2023; Mandagi et al., 2024).

The attitudinal effect of positioning is compounded by corporate identity, as it establishes affective identification, trust, and confidence that brand communications align with consumer values based on empirical studies in consumer markets and higher education (Choudhary & Sahu, 2023). Students will consequently be likely to react positively to university assertions regarding academic quality, facilities, or reputation if such assertions are aligned with the institution's wider identity and culture.

By showing corporate identity to be an interactive, and not parallel, building block of brand, this research enhances theory and illustrates the significance it has in making other marketing campaigns more persuasive. This contributes to the current literature by proposing corporate identity as a strategic moderator, rather than a direct antecedent of attitudes.

The research shows Ghanaian universities and the like need to embrace an integrated branding approach whose product positioning is inextricably linked with organizational culture, visual identity, and communication strategy. Rather than using position messages alone, institutions need to make sure that they are truly integrated in the identity of theirs.

Universities run the risk of undermining their own positioning if they convey affordability, prestige, or academic excellence but lack credibility in identity signals (e.g., inconsistent messaging, poor organizational behavior).

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Theoretical implications

The study theoretically advances the literature on marketing and higher education by applying the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) and positioning theory (Ries & Trout, 1991) to the setting of higher education in an emerging economy. Referring to corporate identity as a boundary condition that enhances or suppresses the power of positioning strategies gives a more detailed picture of how attitudes towards universities are formed by students.

6.2 Practical implications

Pragmatically, the research highlights the importance for Ghanaian universities to embrace a holistic brand strategy whereby their position statements are professionally crafted as well as in favor of their overall brand identity. A clear, unique, and genuine value proposition that complements an institution's reputation, culture, and long-term goals must be communicated. In a more competitive higher education market, this alignment will improve enrollment decisions, cultivate positive attitudes, and increase student trust.

6.3 Policy recommendations for educational institutions

Findings could inform policies aimed at promoting transparency and standardization in how universities communicate their value propositions. For instance, regulatory bodies could encourage universities to disclose key metrics such as graduate employment rates and program accreditation status.

6.4 Limitations and directions for future research

The study is limited despite these contributions. Generalizability is limited by the study's concentration on Ghanaian university students; however, future studies may broaden to include other demographic groups or cross-national comparisons. Furthermore, longitudinal designs might offer more profound understandings of how identity and positioning affect attitudes over time.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Using corporate identity as a moderating factor, this study examined how students' perceptions of Ghanaian universities were impacted by product positioning. The findings suggest that successful positioning strategies based on academic excellence, infrastructure, reasonableness of fees, and reputation have firm influence on students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral tendencies. Besides, the findings support the postulated theory that the intensity of such relationship is contingent upon consistency of a university's corporate identity, which includes its visual identity, organizational culture, and communication style. The study's conclusion confirms that a university's competitive strength is derived from both its self-positioning and how well it is supported by a reputable corporate identity. To maintain long-term institutional success and mold positive student attitudes, these components must be in alignment.

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