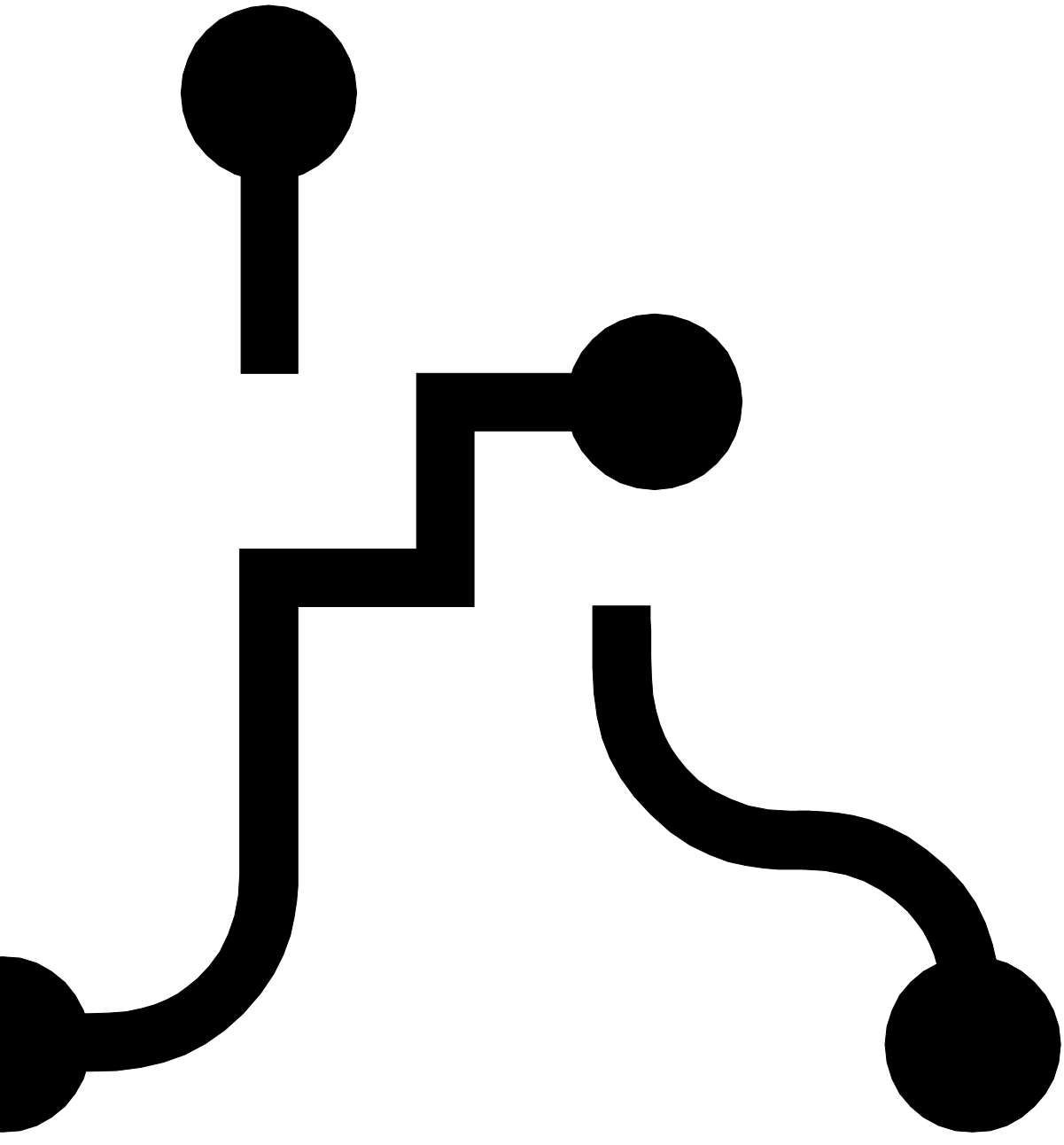
International Journal of Marketing Semiotics & Discourse Studies

2021

Vol. 9
ISSN: 2195-2280
www.ijmarketingsemiotics.com

Online first

Alimsiwen Elijah Ayaawan (2021). The colonising effect: Marketisation and the discursive enactment of institutional identity in Ghanaian universities' websites. *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics & Discourse Studies* Vol. IX, pp.1-21.



The colonising effect: Marketisation and the discursive enactment of institutional identity on Ghanaian universities' websites

Alimsiwen Elijah Ayaawan*, University of Ghana, Language Centre, Ghana (aayaawan@ug.edu.gh)

Abstract

The relationship between discourses of marketisation and the institutional discourses of higher education has been widely explored. The focus has been on discerning the ways whereby discourses of marketisation have come to colonise institutional discourses, and shape the identities, as well as the purposes of higher education institutions. A major research trend on the relationship between marketisation and higher education has been the reliance on promotional discourse genres. The literature on how marketisation has come to shape online institutional discourses in Ghana is scant. This study explores how the discourses of marketisation have shaped the types of identities that are enacted through the international students' section on the websites of two leading institutions. The study draws on the dialectical relational approach to CDA (Fairclough, 2013), as the principal methodological and analytical framework. The findings show that the discourses of marketisation have colonised institutional discourses, thus greatly affecting institutions' construal of instrumental, entrepreneurial and globalised identities. In addition, the paper explores how the verbal and visual modes were used in complementarity, in the performance of institutional discourses. The study concludes by arguing that higher education institutions in Ghana will have to construe identities that are more academically oriented.

Keywords: higher education, marketisation, Ghana, identities, CDA.

Alimsiwen Elijah Ayaawan is Assistant Lecturer at the Language Centre and a PhD candidate at the Department of English, University of Ghana. His research interests include CDA, academic literacies, and the construction of identities.

0. Introduction

A study that examines the construal of the identities of higher education institutions within the context of Ghana should primarily be situated in a broader context regarding the global changing landscape of higher education. Since there is an inextricable relationship between purpose and identity (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009), it is prudent that we begin by acknowledging the ongoing debate about the purpose(s) of higher education. Sullivan (2003) has indicated that the issue of the purpose of higher education "is as often a source of division as a rallying point" (p. 3). The need to participate in this debate is in fact one of the most important reasons why this study is necessary in the first place. Furthermore, participating in this debate is partially informed by Molesworth et al.'s (2009) argument that "a market ideology is silencing the debate around the purposes of higher education…" (p. 278). This observation about the implications of market ideology for the purposes of higher education, and by extension the identities of institutions of higher learning, is echoed in the widely accepted position that both the discourses and practices of higher education have come to be colonised by discourses and practices of marketisation (Abowitz, 2008; Brown, 2015; Fairclough, 1993; Lynch, 2006; Tang, 2011; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013).

Before offering a comprehensive account of the relationship between discourses of marketisation and higher education, it is vital that we provide a historical overview of higher education, especially as it pertains to purpose and how that idea of purpose has shaped the socially situated identities of higher education institutions that are performed through various media and genres such as brochures (Fairclough, 1993; Symes, 1996), college view books (Klassen, 2001), mission and vision statements (Edu-Buandoh, 2010; Morrish & Sauntson, 2013), and university websites (Chapleo, Durán, & Díaz, 2011; Hite & Railsback, 2010; Lažetić, 2018; Ramasubramanian, Gyure, & Mursi, 2008; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013), among others.

It may be argued that the original and perhaps idealistic purpose of the university is tied up with the so-called classical model (Bolsmann & Uys, 2001). The classical model is synonymous with the Humboldtian university which was envisioned by Wilhelm von Humboldt (Krull, 2005). This vision is premised on four pillars: a) the integration of teaching and research; b) the freedom to teach and to study; c) the demand for solitude and freedom in the pursuit of truth; and d) the seminar system as a backbone of a community of teachers and students. These four pillars are also expressed to some extent in Zhang and O'Halloran's (2013, p. 468) argument that notions of the university are defined by "traditions of knowledge, free thinking, the discipline of study, intellectual challenges and mentoring of scholars". We extrapolate from this characterisation of the university that its purpose is aligned with the pursuit and the dissemination of knowledge. Within this traditional view of

higher learning institutions, the knowledge that is being pursued and disseminated is for the public good, and as such it reflects the institutions' public mission (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). From this vantage point of higher learning institutions, the university is seen as a public services provider, and purely as an academic enterprise (Lažetić, 2018).

The mission that higher education institutions are supposed to fulfil, as above outlined, provides the broad framework within which the identity(ies) of higher education institutions are enacted. The purpose of higher education institutions as serving the public good is underpinned by the ideological discursive formation of liberalism. This is to say that the conceptualisation of the university as an institution with a public mission is a consequence of the dominance of the ideology of liberalism and of liberal democracy that stipulates the need for the individual to be equipped in ways that allow them to serve the public good. From the perspective of Abowitz (2008), equipping the individual for a public mission essentially means that higher education is used to promote the "inclusion of different kinds of families and students into common, universal education and ultimately in shared political life" (p. 359). The preparation of the individual citizen for the performance of their civic duty is, therefore, the function of the university that has informed the traditional and classical identities of higher education in general. It is, however, important that we begin to admit at this stage that the traditional and classical identity of higher education underpinned by liberalism is not unchallenged and that, in fact, the dominance of this identity has been challenged. This traditional identity has been largely abandoned in favour of what has been described by Sullivan (2003) as instrumental individualism. According to the identity of instrumental individualism, higher education has come to function as an instrument of research, leading to the dissemination of knowledge and skills for economic development (Sullivan, 2003).

1. Neoliberalism, marketisation and higher education

The observation made towards the end of the previous section concerning the supplanting of the traditional identity of higher education can be attributed to the rising dominance of the ideological discursive formation of neoliberalism, not just within discourses of higher education, but also in a broader social context. Neoliberalism, as Lynch (2006) points out, is "premised on the assumption that the market can replace the democratic state as the primary producer of cultural logic and value" (p. 3). At the heart of the advocacy of this premise is a "keen distaste for all things public and a [preference for] the speed, efficiency, and individualization of the market for guiding state policies, economic or educational" (Abowitz, 2008, p. 357). Given the centrality of the concept of the market to the ideological discursive formation of neoliberalism, where a market is defined by the presumed free forces of demand and supply, we can discern how neoliberalism, through the market, may entirely

redefine and reconstitute the purpose which higher education is supposed to serve, and by extension redefine and re-conceptualise the identity of higher education.

The reason why the concept of the market is integral to the ideology of neoliberalism is that, as Clarke (cited in Morrish & Sauntson, 2013, p. 64) puts it, "a theory of political economic practice that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by private property rights, free markets, and free trade". The first and direct implication of this theory of political economic practice for higher education is that it is forced to assume an instrumentalist function. This is to say that higher education, from this perspective, is defined by its ability to help in liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills. Secondly, it is apparent that this theory of political economic practice focuses on the individual. The implication of this premise is that it will have to draw its relevance from its ability, or not, to serve the interests of the individual. In this way, neoliberalism undermines the civic and public function of education (Campbell, 2008) by foregrounding the need to meet individual needs as against pursuing the interests of the larger public. There is, therefore, a de-emphasis of public mission and purposes (Saicheie & Morphew, 2016).

The overall implication of marketisation as a function of neoliberalism for the identity of higher education is what Sullivan (2003, p. 4), as already elaborated in the first paragraph of this section, describes as higher education coming to "operate on a sort of default program [sic] of instrumental individualism". This instrumental individualism is the same concept that defines the corporate world of the free market economics of neoliberalism. The institution of higher learning will, therefore, just like any other corporate enterprise, have to justify existence in "economic terms, not intellectual ones" (Morrish & Sauntson, 2013, p. 61).

Defining existence in economic terms entails that higher education institutions will come to adopt business practices such as advertising, marketing and the use of outside consulting firms (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). This has, indeed, become the case, as increasing number of studies have demonstrated how the ideology of marketisation has come to permeate the discourse practices and discourse genres of higher education (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). A prominent feature of the influence of marketisation on the institutional discourse of higher education consists in the ways individual institutions are discursively constructed as competing businesses in the context of globalisation (Chapleo et al., 2011; Lynch, 2006; Tang, 2011). Higher education is positioned as a global industry (Tang, 2011) that is supposed to directly meet the needs of its consumers, primarily students (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017; Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015; Klassen, 2001; Lažetić, 2018).

2. Marketing higher education through websites

The discussion of the literature so far has indicated that the influence of neoliberalism on higher education through marketisation has meant "the adoption of commercial enterprises' practices" (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015, p. 4) by higher education institutions and that such influence is pronounced to the extent that the discourse practices and genres of higher education have been colonised by the discourse of marketisation (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). Until recently, research that examines the relationship between marketisation and higher education has focused on advertising vehicles such as brochures, prospectuses, view-books, among others. For instance, a study by Klassen (2001) on college view-books points out that view-books of colleges in the USA are in danger of overselling institutions because they offer a "perspective of college life [that is] practically devoid of commitment and loyalty to anything beyond having a good time while waiting to graduate" (p. 21). In the context of the discussion on the colonisation of the discourse of higher education by discourses of marketisation, this finding is not at all surprising due to the consumerist culture imposed on higher education through this colonising effect.

The focus on the relationship between the institutional discourses of higher education and the discourses of marketisation have, however, moved beyond the traditional promotional vehicles of higher education towards web-based genres such as the institutional website. Zhang and O'Halloran (2013), in a study looking into the evolution of the website of the National University of Singapore, have noted that university websites first became common towards the end of the 1990s. Such websites, Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015) observe, are used as primary outlets for the introduction of the university as 'product'. It would appear, therefore, that right from the point of adoption of the website as a site for institutional discursive practice, the need for self-promotion was a primary concern.

The discursive construction of promotional identity via institutional websites is partly the result of what is known about prospective students' information seeking behaviour. Saichaie and Morphew (2014) report that in the US, more than 84% of prospective students are using institutional websites to gather information. This figure represents a substantial growth from the 58% reported in 1999 (cited in Ramasubramanian et al., 2008). Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015) report the same figure of 84% for website usage among prospective students in Australia. Although there are currently no statistics on the use of institutional websites among prospective students seeking to enrol in higher education institutions in Ghana, there is sufficient evidence pointing to a situation not too different from what has been observed in the US and Australia. An internet usage report by Kemp (2020) indicates that as of January 2020, there are 14.76 million internet users in Ghana. This number reveals that about 50%

of the population are consumers seeking online information. This figure indicates that the likelihood of university website usage among prospective students will be high, especially given the high incidence of internet usage among young people. These statistics do support the conclusion drawn by Saichaie and Morphew (2014) that the messages on institutional websites are important since they provide prospective students with their "first and only institutional impression" (p. 500).

Given the importance of the institutional website as a site for the enactment of discursive practices, the question arises as to the respective state of the literature on institutional websites. But before exploring the literature to answer this question, it is important to admit by agreeing with Saicheie and Morphew (2016, p. 500) that "very little is known about how colleges and universities portray themselves on institutional websites". This is attributed to the limited amount of research that has been conducted so far on the discourse of marketisation on university websites (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015), and because the academic literature has largely neglected online communication as part of corporate identity (Chapleo et al., 2011). This is the major research gap the current study intends to fill.

To return to the question of the state of literature on institutional websites, these have been studied from an evolutionary point of view (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013), the kind of semiotic resources used in the construction of institutional websites and how those resources influence attitudes towards institutions (Tang, 2011), the featured brand promise messages (Chapleo et al., 2011) as to how universities position themselves (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana, 2015) and the students (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017; Lažetić, 2018) who are using the available discursive resources. The studies by Tang (2011), and Zhang and O'Halloran (2013) show that in terms of semiotic resources, the trend has been from a logocentric to a multimodal form where the visual mode has come to dominate.

The studies that have looked at how universities position themselves, as well as students in the institutional discourses performed on websites require a more extensive exposition. In a study that examines the positioning of students, as well as corporate branding through university websites in Denmark, England, Germany, Ireland, Spain and Poland, Lažetić (2018, p. 995) reveals that there is no "common construction of student applicants as only consumers". In spite of this admission, the study does concede that potential students are uniformly positioned as holding considerable power in the websites' discourses. In terms of the corporate identities performed on the websites of the universities studied, Lažetić's (2018) study, unlike that of Hoang and Rojas-Lizana (2015) which concludes that universities' identities are highly isomorphic, argues that differences in self-construal arise

from a variety of factors such as national or institutional cultures, differences in website design styles, and internal governance regimes.

On the issue of how students and/or potential students are positioned in the institutional discourses of university websites, Gottschall and Saltmarsh (2017, p. 772) conclude that "websites commodify student subjectivities and lifestyles that, at their core, are conservative, privileged and exclusionary". This commodification of students' lifestyles results in their acquisition of what Molesworth et al. (2009, p. 283) describe as "'sovereign consumer status". This status culminates in a situation where learning is treated as "a coincidental by-product of the university experience" (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017, p. 772). The implication of this positioning of students on university websites is that not only are the institutions made to assume the subject position of service provider, but that the provided service does not stem from the traditional values of higher education, but from the discursive and ideological formation of marketisation.

2.1 The local context question

To what extent has the colonisation of the institutional discourse of higher education by the discourse of in the context of Ghana been explored in academic research? The short answer is that this global phenomenon is underexplored within the higher education landscape of Ghana. A study that is worth mentioning here is that by Edu-Buandoh (2010) which used CDA to examine how the discourse of publicly funded university administration has evolved from an academic discourse to one "steeped in business" (p. 60). The data used in that study stem from the corporate strategic plans of four Ghanaian public universities. Another study by Ayam (2017) also notes that reforms in higher education resulted in increased competition among universities, especially those in the private sector. What these two studies do indicate is that there is some evidence that the global phenomenon of the colonisation of institutional discourse by the discourse of marketisation has also taken root in Ghana.

A third study stems from Tetteh and Afful (2020). This study concludes that institutions portray themselves as academic by highlighting the type of human resources. Also, by using a hypermodal framework, Tetteh and Afful (2020) come to the conclusion that there is a low discoverability of information on the institutions' homepages. A point of convergence between the study by Tetteh and Afful (2020) and the present research is the interest in marketisation and university homepages. However, unlike their study, this study's focus is not on the institutional homepage as a whole, but rather on a section of the homepage, the

international students' section. Furthermore, an as yet unaddressed question concerns the types of studies on institutional discourse and how the identities mediated through institutional websites have been shaped by the discourse of marketisation. This niche is what this study examines.

3. Objectives of the study

Two specific issues constitute the core objectives of this study. The first one is an examination of the institutional identities that are being negotiated through the websites of the two universities on which this study focuses. Central to this examination is the extent to which the institutions are enacting identities that allow them to market themselves as products to prospective clients. The second issue concerns the ways in which different modes have been used in the negotiation of these institutional identities. In terms of the role of different modes in the performance of identities, it is important that we examine the aspects of reality that are represented and constructed through the websites. It is also crucial that we establish what aspects of reality are represented or constructed through different modes.

4. Methodology

The focus of this section is on the research methodology that was used in this study, the type of data, the data collection process, and the methods of analysis.

4.1. Research design

Jupp (2006) observes that research design allows a researcher to set out the research strategy and to justify the logic driving that strategy. The study employs a qualitative research design. Creswell (2014) points out that the qualitative approach is useful for exploring in-depth the meanings that individuals, as well as social groups ascribe to social phenomena. Given that the data for this study – screenshots of institutional websites – are a form of social phenomena, the qualitative approach is pertinent. Furthermore, Dawson (2007), as well as Lune and Berg (2017) point out that a qualitative research design is interpretive and focuses on uncovering the different nuances of meaning that are embedded in social phenomena. It is this affordance of qualitative designs that has informed the choice of CDA as the main analytical approach.

4.2. Data collection

The data for this study stem from two Ghanaian public universities' websites, the University of Ghana (UG) and the University of Cape Coast (UCC). These institutions are the leading public universities in Ghana and have shaped the country's higher education landscape. The study does not examine the entire websites, but rather focuses on the international students section. The rationale for this selection is based on research suggesting that due to the additional funding that accrues from international students (Ayam, 2017), universities are more likely to adopt a discourse of marketisation in the syllabus that is designed for international students. The international students' sections of these websites were, therefore, targeted so as to determine the extent to which the free market economy is shaping how the institutions position themselves, as well as potential students in this discourse. In total, sixteen screenshots (11 from UG and 5 from UCC) of the international students section of the websites were captured for the analysis. The difference in the number of shots for each institution is a reflection of the content available on their websites.

4.3. Framework of analysis

The adopted framework of analysis is the dialectical relational approach (Fairclough, 2013) to CDA that rests on a three dimensional conceptualisation of discourse (Fairclough, 1992). According to this perspective, discourse is a combination of text, discursive and social practices. Although the textual dimension of discourse was used to refer to the language used, it has come to mean the full range of semiotic resources that are employed in a discursive event. To this extent, this conceptualisation is relevant and useful in analysing multimodal discourse. The discursive practice dimension refers to the processes of production, interpretation and consumption of texts. It also refers to the wider discourses within which the text is situated and produced (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006). The level of social practice focuses on how the immediate, as well as wider social context shapes, and to a certain extent determines the textual and discursive practice dimensions of discourse (Fairclough, 1992, 1993, 2013).

A key discourse analytic task, from this three-dimensional perspective, is to analyse the relations that exist between these three dimensions. Within this framework, analysing the internal relations that exist between textual, discursive and social practice dimensions require a process of description, interpretation and explanation. In analysing discourse based on these three dimensions, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) suggest a triple orientation. The first aspect concerns intertextuality which is defined as the dependence of one text on another. The second one, interdiscursivity, concerns the different orders of discourse, but

also genres and styles that inform the former. The third concept, recontextualisation, is where textual or stylistic elements associated with particular speech events are seen to be 'relocated' in, or to 'colonise' new contexts. Of these three concepts, interdiscursivity and recontextualisation are especially important within the context of this study, as they relate directly to how institutional discourses have been colonised by the discourse of marketisation. In this study, the focus is on analysing the dialectical relationship between discourse and identity, as well as their dependence on ideology.

5. Analysis of findings and discussion

5.1. Relationships between modes: the UG case

Given that two modes – the verbal and the visual – constitute the means for the discursive construction of identities on the websites of the selected institutions, it is important that the analysis attends to the ways in which these two semiotic resources are combined to construct the identities of the institutions being studied in this paper. We, therefore, begin this examination by looking at the relationship between the two modes, as seen in University of Ghana's website. In this context, the verbal and visual modes have been used in ways that position the verbal mode as the organising frame for the entire discourse. This is to say that the verbal mode is the semiotic resource of relative salience. This point will be illustrated by recourse to Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Aerial shot of University of Ghana's campus.

Figure 2. Advertising for admissions at the University of Ghana.

In Figure 1, the primary visual dimensions of the text involve the aerial photograph of the University of Ghana's main campus and the icons arranged horizontally across the top half of the shot. These icons consist in button-sized circular flags of certain nations. The primary verbal component of the text includes a phrase placed in a heading position in the shot and another phrase placed across the aerial photograph of the University. Of particular importance in exploring inter-modal relationships is the spatial location of each mode. In this figure, we notice that in the aerial photograph which occupies the greatest proportion of the textual space, the visual mode has been used as a background to the verbal. The phrase "AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN SETTING!" is foregrounded in the shot. Secondly, this verbal aspect of the text is also placed linearly across the image so that it superimposes itself on it. Furthermore, the use of upper-case fonts draws attention to itself and, as a result, it enhances its salience within the text. An additional element of the verbal dimension that supports the argument about its relative salience is the banner-heading position of the phrase above the button-sized icons, also mentioned in this paragraph. The salience of the verbal, here, is also suggested by the position that it occupies. Its superordinate placement means that it acquires prominence in relation to the icons beneath it. The spatial positions assumed by the two modes in this shot, therefore, allow the visual to function as a complement to the verbal. This complementary relationship will be elaborated shortly.

In Figure 2, we also encounter the superimposition of the verbal on the visual. As may be observed in the shot that features a photograph, two human faces are blurred, whilst a third human face which is focalised on the right side of the shot, has been used as background. The verbal component of this discursive event is more aligned to the left of the shot. This spatial location of the verbal dimension is significant. The written text in English is processed linearly from the left to the right. The placement of the verbal mode to the left of the image

ensures that it becomes the starting point in the processing of the shot. The blurring of the visual allows the verbal to be brought into focus. The location of the two modes is not only salient in spatial terms, but also temporally. The left spatial location of the verbal element construes an episode in a sequence that continues with the visual elements that are placed towards the right-end of the shot. In other words, the verbal element, as a result of temporalisation, assumes precedence since it constitutes the starting episode within the shot. The temporal sequencing of the elements within this shot, therefore, suggests a limited causality in which what exists in a later temporal location is construed as dependent on what exists in an earlier temporal location. The cumulative effect of this use of the two modes is that the verbal comes to acquire relative prominence, emerging from its superimposition on the visual, as well as its spatial location and temporal sequencing within the shot.

As above indicated, there is a need for elaborating on the complementary relationship between the two modes. What is meant by complementarity here is the particular discursive role that each of the two semiotic resources is playing in the construal of the institutional discourse and in the performance of institutional identities. In this regard, the defining characteristic of the relationship between the two modes on the UG website is that the verbal mode is used as a claim expression. The visual mode is then used as a claim justification. What is meant by claim expression is a proposition that is expressed through the verbal mode which makes a claim about the institution. The claim expression in the case of UG is conveyed by means of catchy and memorable phrases such as “AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN SETTING!”, “EDUCATION THAT INSPIRES” (Figures 1 and 2) and “STUDY ABROAD!”. These phrases are used to construct a reality that excludes even the possibility of the existence of any other alternative reality as pertains to the university.

A question that ought to be answered about the claim expression conveyed by means of the verbal mode in these instances is how the constructed reality positions the institution within this discourse. Part of the answer to this question lies in the interdiscursivity of what has been realised by means of the verbal mode. The catchy phrases that have already been cited in the paragraph above are recurrent stylistic forms in promotional discourses. Their presence in this institutional discourse, therefore, hints at the colonising effect of promotional discourse on institutional discourse. Although the style of the phrases is an important indicator of the colonising effect of promotional discourse on institutional discourse and does have implications for the subject position that the institution is made to assume, it is in the propositional content of these phrases that we can see more clearly the kinds of identities that are being constructed for the institution.

The colonising effect of promotional discourse on the institutional discourse gives rise to two subject positions for the institution. The first of these two subject positions is that of the university as a product. Phrases such as “AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN SETTING!” and “83 University Partnerships in 27 Countries” are instances of the claim expression being used to construct this identity for the institution. In the first of the two phrases, the spatial location of the university is being presented as a defining feature. Another important feature of the noun phrase that has been used to convey the claim expression in this instance consists of the two adjectives that perform a pre-modification function within the noun phrase. Both “authentic” and “African” have been employed here to indicate the qualities of the university as a product. These adjectives, in fact, are the semiotic choices within this noun phrase that construct the institution as a desirable product.

In the second of the two noun phrases cited above which have been used to convey the claim expression, the focus appears to be on the enhancement of the university’s credibility as a product through positive association. The partnerships with other institutions in other countries allow the university to create a relationship of parity. The institution is seen as being on a par with other institutions. This positive association, therefore, enhances the credibility of the university as a product. Again, it is of vital importance that the choices made within this second noun phrase be examined. In this regard, what stands out in this noun phrase is the unconventional way in which numerical values have been utilised. The numerical values (83 and 27) have been used in Figures 1 and 2 respectively, instead of words. The portrayal of these values in numerals is an indication of the influence of promotional discourse on institutional discourse. What this demonstrates, is how the interdiscursive dimension of the claim expression has been used to construct a promotional identity for the institution. The construction of this identity is evidence of the extent to which market-based principles are shaping higher education institutions (Askehave, 2007; Klassen, 2001; Lynch, 2006; Qiping & White, 1994).

The second subject position that this discourse furnishes to the institution is that of a service provider. In this case, the claim expression is used to discursively construct the university as the provider of a service which, just like the construction of the university as a product, is intended for consumption. “Education that inspires” and “study abroad” are the two examples of claim expression being used to construct the institution as a service provider. In the first of these two instances, the identity of the university is being thought of as the provision of a specific kind of education, whilst in the second, it is being positioned as facilitating a potential student’s travel abroad as part of his or her study. The provision of services, such as travelling abroad, fits into what Gottschall and Saltmarsh (2017) describe as the commodification of student subjectivities and lifestyles. This discursive positioning of the

university as a service provider is a reflection of what Askehave (2007) describes as the instrumental ethos which has come to define higher education institutions around the world. Within this instrumentalist ethos, commercial as well as industrial needs which arise from the social situation within which the university exists have come to influence how the university defines itself. Both the product and service subject positions made available for the university within the institutional discourse are, therefore, a response to the realities of this social situation.

Although both modes are largely used in claim expression and claim justification respectively, there are instances where there is a concurrence of claim expression and claim justification. This happens in instances where both modes are constituted into a verbo-visual mode through intermodal semiosis. A case in point is the expression AN AUTHENTIC AFRICAN SETTING! in Figure 1. The argument has, of course, already been made that this text is verbal and is used in claim expression. However, what we must also pay attention to is the use of colour in the text and the implication of that colour for the verbal status of the text. We notice that this particular text is rendered in colour white. The white colour reinforces the notion of authenticity because it is a colour that, in the Ghanaian cultural context, expresses purity. The text is, therefore, verbo-visual, which allows it to function as claim expression and claim justification concurrently.

5.2. Centring the visual: the case of UCC

If it is the case that the verbal mode constitutes the organising frame of the discourse in the case of the UG's website, the reverse is true for UCC. In the case of this institutional discourse, constructed on the website of UCC, we see clearly that the visual mode is the central semiotic resource used in the discursive construction of the institution's identity. The visual mode is used to realise both claim expression and claim justification. Figure 3 will be used to explicate this position.

Figure 3. Photograph of international students on an excursion.

The most striking feature of Figure 3 is the minimal use of the verbal mode. The verbal mode has been used in what can be considered the peripheral parts of the shot. We notice from the figure that the sparse verbal dimension of the shot is spatially located in the upper third of the screen. This spatial location is responsible for assigning a peripheral status to the verbal mode. The second reason for the reduced relative salience of the verbal mode arises from the type, as well as the quantity of information it constructs. The verbal dimension in the Figure can be grouped into two. On the top left corner of the shot two phrases are featured. The first one is “Centre for International Education”, whilst the second one is “University of Cape Coast”. These phrases delimit the scope of the discourse by defining its aboutness.

The second part of the verbal dimension consists of the words arranged horizontally across the top third of the shot. These lexical items are indices in the sense that they provide pathways to information that is embedded in the website, albeit not on the landing page. To access it, therefore, one would have to click on each of these indices. The spatial location of the verbal dimension and its information load, therefore, buttress the argument that the verbal mode is peripheral.

Despite its peripheral status, the verbal mode is related to claim justification. Figure 4 is used to explain this discursive feature.

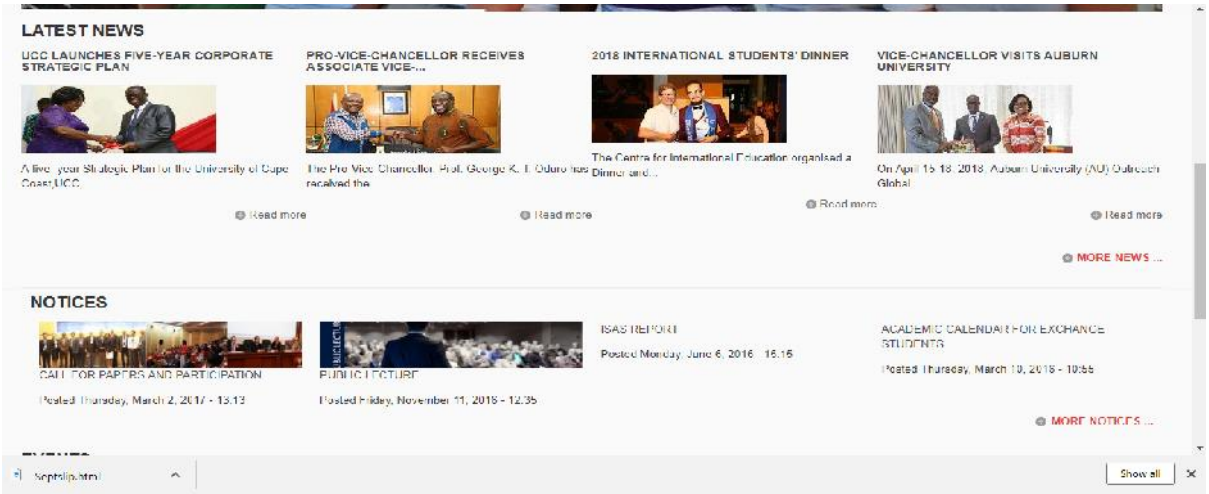


Figure 4. News section of UCC’s website.

Figure 4 is a screen shot of the bottom half of the website. Within this shot there are news items that are made up of a headline rendered in verbal mode, and then rectangular shaped photographs just beneath the headline. Underneath each of the photographs there is text, consisting of an incomplete sentence with three dots indicating an ellipsis. Based on the headlines, the institution is the subject of each news item.. This elaboration of the institution is conveyed by means of the verbal mode, since each of these stories is made up of written

text. However, because the stories cannot be accessed in full on the landing page, they have been displaced in the discursive event. This displacement of the elaborate claim justification, as well as the verbal mode in which it is rendered, is significant in two respects. First, it provides an indication that there is a preference for the visual mode as regards the construction of institutional discourse for this university. Secondly, it indicates that there is a preference for minimal institutional presence on the landing page.

We have so far demonstrated that the verbal mode is the peripheral semiotic resource in the case of the institutional discourse constructed on UCC's website. However, the objective, as indicated in the opening paragraph of this section, is to demonstrate that the visual mode is the organising frame of this discursive event. In this regard, we will have to interrogate the propositional content of the claim expression and claim justification, and examine how the institution is positioned in this discourse. The main visual resource in Figure 3 is a photograph. This photograph portrays six individuals, four of which are females, whilst the remaining two are males. Again, four of the individuals in the photograph are Caucasian or of Caucasian origin, whereas the other two are black or of African origin. All of the individuals are wearing t-shirts, two of them sunglasses, and one of them a cap. The background of the photograph portrays a beach front. A historical monument (probably a colonial fort or castle) figures prominently in this background, on top of a hill, close to the shore. It is worth noting that both the background and the foreground of the shot are visual.

Two distinct propositions are conveyed through the claim expression of the verbal mode in Figure 3. The first one is that the institution is an entity that embraces multiracialism. This claim and its justification are expressed via the racial diversity of the individuals that are featured in the photograph. This diversity allows for positioning the university as a place that is welcoming of people from diverse racial backgrounds. The subject position that is constructed for the institution is consistent with its identity as a place of learning for all.

In spite of the admission that this identity is consistent with traditional institutional discourse, this proposition and the mode by which it is conveyed are suggestive of the influence of two other discourses on the institutional discourse, as constructed on the university's website. These are the discourses of marketisation and globalisation. The discourse of marketisation of higher education is embedded in a broader Ghanaian socio-economic context that is shaped by capitalism wherein institutions are expected to raise money through their own means. Subsequently, institutions must discursively construct themselves in ways that allow them to attract "clients" as their main revenue source. From this perspective, the identity of the institution as an entity that celebrates racial diversity is interwoven with the objective of

offering its services to an international market and attracting as many foreign students as possible.

What requires further elucidation is how the discourse of marketisation manifests itself at a textual level. The broad smiles on the faces of the individuals in Figure 3 are indicative of satisfied customers, as used in product marketing campaigns. The casual apparel (t-shirts, backpacks, cap and sunglasses) is part of a marketing strategy that aims at sourcing tourists from allover the world. The beach front from which the photograph was taken, as well as the historical site which is a key feature of the shot's background, are visual resources that do not belong to an institutional discourse. These resources have been embedded in this discursive event via interdiscursivity and recontextualisation (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006), thus allowing the discourse of marketisation to colonise the institutional discourse. The students or prospective students are not positioned as someone who will have to confront challenging academic tasks that are consistent with pursuing a programme at a university level, but as a tourist. Once the student has been positioned as a tourist, the institution, by implication, is positioned as a tourist destination. The positioning of the institution as a tourist destination is further reinforced by the fact that the University has no explicit visual presence in all three photographs on display on the website. Figure 3, as already pointed out, is made up of individuals, with a beach as background. The second photograph portrays Kakum National Park, a well-known tourist destination frequented by both foreign and domestic tourists. The third photograph is made of up of nine individuals, three males and six females. The background to this photograph is a lawn with some buildings visible in the picture. Although this background resembles a university campus (the well-kept lawn and multi-storey building), it might as well be office premises. In a nutshell, the spatial signs that help construct the University as a tourist destination are foregrounded, whereas those that have the potential of positioning the University as an academic institution have, at best, a negligible presence in the discourse. The positioning of both the University and students/prospects is consistent with Klassen's (2001, p. 21) conclusion that "the perspective of college life is practically devoid of commitment and loyalty to anything beyond having a good time while waiting to graduate".

The discourse of globalisation also informs the institutional discourse that is construed on the university's website. Globalisation in higher education entails that institutions should be able to attract both faculty and students from allover the world. From the point of view of this discourse, the institution must transcend the local social and historical context where it is situated. Rather, it must construct for itself an international image that allows it to attract students and faculty from other countries. This discursive practice is afforded textually via photographs featuring people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The racial variation in

Figure 3 is suggestive of cultural diversity. The western type, represented by the Caucasian individual, and the African type, represented by the black individual, indicate a coalescence of global cultures. The institution, therefore, uses these discursive resources to construct a global identity for itself. This global image is underpinned by the free market ideology which requires institutions in higher education to position themselves as globally competitive (Chapleo et al., 2011; Morrish & Sauntson, 2013; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013; Zollo, 2016).

6. Conclusion

The objectives of this study were to examine the identities that are construed by higher education institutions in Ghana through the international students webpages of their websites, and to explore how these identities have been shaped by the discourses of marketisation and globalisation of higher education. The analysis of the multimodal resources that comprise these websites suggested that the discourse of marketisation has been firmly rooted in academic institutions' promotional discourse. Given that the identities performed on the websites of the concerned universities position them as instrumental and entrepreneurial institutions (Fairclough, 1993; Morrish & Sauntson, 2013; Sullivan, 2003), rather than academic ones in the image of the Humboldtian university (Krull, 2005), the implications for the purpose of higher education within the Ghanaian context will have to be critically examined. An instrumental and entrepreneurial university is a business that offers an academic service. What universities in the context of Ghana should be targeting, in terms of constructing a brand image for themselves through their websites, is the identity of a traditional academic university that offers various adjacent services, rather than a business that offers academic services.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the BANGA-AFRICA project and the Language Centre which provided support through a writing workshop and a retreat, respectively, where major parts of this article were composed.

References

Abowitz, K. K. (2008). On the public and civic purposes of education. *Educational Theory*, *58*(3), 357–376. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2008.00293.x

Askehave, I. (2007). The impact of marketization on higher education genre: The international student prospectus as a case in point. *Discourse Studies*, *9*(6), 723–742.

Ayam, J. R. A. (2017). Market Forces in Ghanaian Higher Education Institutions : A Conceptual Review of the Market Models and Competition in Private Universities. *International Journal of Business Studies and Management*, *4*(8), 1–5. Retrieved from www.ijrbsm.org

Benwell, B., & Stokoe, E. (2006). *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Bolsmann, C., & Uys, T. (2001). Pre-empting the challenges of transformation and marketisation of higher education: A case study of the Rand Afrikaans University. *Society in Transition*, *32*(2), 173–185. https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2001.10419041

Brown, R. (2015). The Marketisation of Higher Education: Issues and ironies. *New Vistas*, *1*(1), 4–9. https://doi.org/doi:10.4324/9780203842829

Campbell, D. E. (2008). The civic side of school choice: An empirical analysis of civic education in public and private schools. *Brigham Young University Law Review*, *0*(2), 487–523. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

Chapleo, C., Durán, M. V. C., & Díaz, A. C. (2011). Do UK universities communicate their brands effectively through their websites? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *21*(1), 25–46. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2011.569589

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). London: Sage Publications Inc.

Dawson, C. (2007). *A practical guide to research methods*. Oxford: How To Books Ltd.

Edu-Buandoh, D. F. (2010). Discourse in institutional administration of public universities in Ghana: A shift towards a market paradigm ? *Nebula*, *7*(3), 59–77.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: the universities. *Discourse & Society*, *4*(2), 133–168.

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London and New York: Routledge.

Gottschall, K., & Saltmarsh, S. (2017). 'You're not just learning it, you're living it!' Constructing the 'good life' in Australian university online promotional videos. *Discourse*, *38*(5), 768–781. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2016.1158155

Hite, N. G., & Railsback, B. (2010). Analysis of the content and characteristics of university

websites with implications for web designers and educators. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, *51*(1), 107–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/08874417.2010.11645455

Hoang, T. V. Y., & Rojas-Lizana, I. (2015). Promotional discourse in the websites of two Australian universities: A discourse analytic approach. *Cogent Education*, *2*(1), 1-19 https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2015.1011488

Jupp, V. (2006). The Sage dictionary of social research methods. London: Sage. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004

Kemp, S. (2020). Digital 2020: Global digital overview. *Datareportal.com*. Retrieved January 30th, 2020, from https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-ghana

Klassen, M. L. (2001). Lots of Fun, Not Much Work, and No Hassles: Marketing Images of Higher Education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *10*(2), 11–26. https://doi.org/10.1300/J050v10n02

Krull, W. (2005). Review：Reporting the Humboltian university. *Minerva*, *43*(1), 99–102.

Lažetić, P. (2018). Students and university websites—consumers of corporate brands or novices in the academic community? *Higher Education*, *77*(6), 995–1013. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0315-5

Lune, H., & Berg, B. L. (2017). *Qualitative methods for social science research*. London: Pearson.

Lynch, K. (2006). Neo-Liberalism and Marketisation: The Implications for Higher Education. *European Educational Research Journal*, *5*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2006.5.1.1

Molesworth, M., Nixon, E., & Scullion, R. (2009). Having, being and higher education: The marketisation of the university and the transformation of the student into consumer. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *14*(3), 277–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510902898841

Morrish, L., & Sauntson, H. (2013). 'Business-facing motors for economic development': An appraisal analysis of visions and values in the marketised UK university. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *10*(1), 61–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2012.736698

Qiping, Y., & White, G. (1994). The 'Marketisation' of Chinese Higher Education: A critical assessment. *Comparative Education*, *30*(3), 217–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305006940300305

Ramasubramanian, S., Gyure, J. F., & Mursi, N. (2008). Impact of Internet images: Impression-formation effects of university website images. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *12*(2), 49–68. https://doi.org/10.1300/J050v12n02

Saicheie, K., & Morphew, C. C. (2016). What college and university websites reveal about the purposes of Higher Education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *85*(1), 499–530. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2014.11777338

Sullivan, W. M. (2003). The university as citizen: Institutional identity and social responsibility. A special report. *The Civic Arts Review*, *16*(1), 1–14.

Symes, C. (1996). Selling futures: A new image for Australian universities. *Studies in Higher Education*, *21*(2), 133–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079612331381318

Tang, T. (2011). Marketing higher education across borders: A cross-cultural analysis of university websites in the US and China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, *4*(4), 417–429. https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2011.616288

Tetteh, G., & Afful, J. B. A. (2020). Marketisation of Ghanaian higher academic institutions: A hypermodal analysis of universities' homepages. *International Journal of Marketing Semiotics & Discourse Studies*, *8*, 1–24.

Zhang, Y., & O'Halloran, K. L. (2013). 'Toward a global knowledge enterprise': University websites as portals to the ongoing marketization of higher education. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *10*(4), 468–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2013.813777

Zollo, S. A. (2016). Internationalization and globalization . A multimodal analysis of Italian universities' websites. *Journal of Multimodal Communication Studies*, *3* (2), 1-17.