

## **Student Social Identity Development and the University Image: A Case of Selected Universities in Kenya**

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**Abstract:** The concept of organizational image has been emphasized in the field of marketing and business perspective. However, there has been little research in the area of organizational image in universities. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of students' social identity development on the university image. The participants were drawn from four universities; two public universities and two private universities in Kenya. The target population for the study included all the fourth year students in the selected universities. Data were collected by use of interviews. The findings indicated that students' identification with the university could be linked to student satisfaction with the university. Students who were satisfied with their degree programmes and university were found to engage in various behaviors that benefited them and the university, such as engaging in co-curricular activities as well as positively interacting with the institution. In addition, the quality of relationships between students and their lecturers is largely determined by the class size. Student-to-student relationship on the other hand is determined by the students' level of interaction with the university environment. The administration and governance of the universities shape the students' social identity. The conforming or non-conforming to the rules by the students dictates how they view their university. The study concludes that a students' social identity development plays a significant role in shaping the university image. The study further recommends that institutions of higher education should come up with impressive and high status activities and facilities to enhance development of students' social identity and in turn enhance the university image.

**Keywords:** university image; students' social identity; engagement; Kenya.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Competition in higher education sector is growing tremendously. Universities are competing for students, academic staff, and new sources of funding for the various developmental projects. Organizational image is a major concern to the management of the universities both public and private [1]. This therefore means that universities that have a strong distinctive positive image are in a better position to face the competition successfully and as a result enroll more students.

University image is the perception that people have about a given university. Individuals can have positive, negative and indifferent images of an organization, the organization's product and the organization's reputation and so on. One institution that absolutely depends on its image in order to prosper and even survive is the university. Institutional image is the instantaneous mental representation that people have of an organization [2]. Most institutions have distinguishable images. Organizational image has considerable influence on consumer behavior. At the university level, the students are the key consumers of the offered services. The students' perception about the

university does not develop at once but grows over time. Students' stay at the university creates a sense of belonging to the university. They develop a social identity within the university community. A positive social identity can be translated to positive university image and the contrary is true. Universities invest a lot of money in marketing and branding to gain more students and retain the already enrolled students. A positive university image would attract many students and satisfy the current groups [3].

Institutions of higher learning have experienced students' unrest, strikes and riots. Causes of unrest in institutions of higher learning has been attributed to students lack of patriotism, unsatisfying services, sour relationship between the students and the management of the institutions, lack of certain social amenities, political concerns among other causes [4]. These cases have led to students destroying institutions properties such as burning buildings, as well as loss of life. Such cases always disrupt the smooth learning process in the institutions of higher education. They also communicate a negative image of the institution to the public. On the other hand, some students would prefer some universities as compared to others based on

the university's image. The universities where strikes are common close for long duration affecting studies. Students take a long time to graduate and parents prefer universities with minimum disruption.

This study addressed the concept of students' social identity and the role it plays on the university image from a perspective of social learning theories [5,6].

This study adds to the growing body of literature that focuses on the concepts of university image. It also contributes to the evidence in support of the factors contributing to the development of the university image in Kenyan context. The study will also help the institutions of higher learning to improve on the strategies in developing students' identity, which significantly affects the university image. Universities will therefore be able to retain the current students and attract more students by developing a positive student identity, which translates to building a positive university image.

Organizational image refers to people's universal imprints of an organization. It is the people's loose constructions of understanding, beliefs and opinions about an organization. Organizational image represents the total perceptive reactions and relations of clients, investors, workers, and applicants to an organization's name. Organizational image aids as a basis to classify, store, and recall organization-related information [7]. Image represents how an organization is observed from its environment. On the same basis, university image can be viewed as the beliefs and the opinions about a university. It indicates the total understanding reactions that students and other stakeholders have about the university. According to Azoury *et al.* [8], university image is a result of how signals or messages emitted by the university are interpreted over time by stakeholders.

Every institution has an organizational image whether the organization does anything about it or not. University image develops over time due to the contribution of the stakeholders, who include the students, staff and parents among others [9]. The interaction of the various components of the university plays a key role in the building of the university image and reputation. Students play a key role in development of the university image. If we take the university to be the organization with the students as the consumers, then it can be concluded that the students play a great role in the shaping of the university image

Various researchers have studied organization image in education settings. Different researchers have investigated on the factors that affect the university image. According to Aghaz *et al.* [1], the international

reputation, university members (staff and students), academic planning and university environment, influences the university image. The study also adds that the university has a significant impact on the students trust in their university. According to Maric, Pavlin & Ferjan [10], the quality of professors and their lectures together with the learning content affect the university image. Interpersonal relationships play a key role in the development of the university image. The feedback that students receive as they relate with members of the public and other students contributes to the shaping of the university image [11]. In their study Khalifa & Mahmoud [12], found out that the word of mouth and faculty-individualized attention to the students were the precursors of the university image. Students' satisfaction positively affects what they say about their university.

The relationship between the quality of service, student satisfaction and the university image has been studied. The level of satisfaction among the employees tends to affect the service offered, which has a direct link with the customer satisfaction [9]. In a university set up the students are the consumers. According to Jiewanto, Laurens & Nelloh, [13], the quality of the services offered by a university to the students has a great significant effect on the students' satisfaction. Usman & Mokhtar [14] supports the study carried out by Jiewanto *et al.* [13] that service quality and students satisfaction are the strongest predictors of students loyalty to a university, which translates to the university image. The quality of academic staff affects directly and indirectly to the students' satisfaction [15].

Studies show that institutions differ in their organizational image. This is because university image has various components and attributes which include affective and cognitive domains. Both affective and cognitive components influence the formation of the overall image of the university. The affective and the overall image significantly affect the overall satisfaction of the students with their university [3, 8, 16].

Students and prospective clients evaluate the university image based on information and opinions gained through personal relationships and the media communication of the universities. Students evaluate universities using available information of the university on its heritage and prestige [17].

Students' learning is entangled with social identity development. This is because learning involves experiences in the acquisition of skills and knowledge that bring about change in a person and what they can do [6]. Social identity evolves when an individual demonstrates common behavior with other individuals of the same group. First year students joining university come in with their own perception of their academic

competence. For example, students who join universities with high grade point averages from their high school education will have a confident academic self-construct, which is associated with high goal setting, academic engagement, and academic accomplishment [18]. According to Bornholt [19], high school students' purposes to continue learning are based on their social identity rather than actual academic performance.

Identity develops in reference to a certain social group. It offers people with means through which they answer the question: 'Who am I?' This makes identity personal. Sharing an identity means that the students have some active interactions with a given group of other students [20]. Personal identity is the perception one develops about oneself that evolves over time. This may include aspects of one's life that one has no control over, such as where one grew up or the color of their skin, as well as choices they make in life, such as how to spend their time and what to believe [21]. The individual sense of belonging develops through interactions over a given period. Through the interactions, students engage with fellow students and the university environment and this leads to development of social identity.

Institutions of higher learning are fundamental arenas not only for the acquisition of knowledge but also for the development of a sense of belonging. According to Wenger [6], learning enables involvement in communities and involvement in communities enable learning. This therefore means that students in institutions of higher learning acquire social identity as they pursue formal education. Social identity acts as a basis for the growth of other identities as well as learning.

There are various identities in educational research. These identities include gender, ethnic, national, learner identities among others. Most of these identities have been researched on in educational setup [22]. Social identity is a vital identity in learning since other student identities are constructed through the individuals identifying themselves as learners first, then as members of the community.

Researchers have studied social identity and related constructs in education settings. According to Martin [23], students' positive social identities improve the development of other identities that facilitate learning. Students with a positive social identity are more confident, and have an increased level of engagement with their studies.

Students develop their identity based on the subject or the course they undertake in school. This is the perception students have based on being learners in

a given area of specialization [24]. Institutions of higher learning can support and maintain students' identities through engagement, imagination and alignment.

Students who learn and attend international schools identify themselves as a certain group of people within the school. According to Jabal [25], students identify themselves with co-curricular activities, which involve commitment and engagement with the school. Students prefer a curriculum that is integrated with local reference point, which allows teacher-student relationship. Students identify themselves with other students with common compatible attributes, which may include the year of study, subject, sporting or artistic interests, and similar personalities. This expounds the saying; birds of a feather flock together. Students identify with others from other regions but retain their own personal identity.

The construction of social identity can be influenced by various factors. Media can influence social identity construction and formation. Media includes the audio, visual as well as print media. Today social media is playing a great role in socializing the youth. Majority of the students in institutions of higher learning are in possession of a smart phone, which exposes them to internet and internet materials. The media representations in terms of stories, myths and reports attribute to certain characteristics of a given group or individuals. With time, those characteristics may help in defining or creating certain individuals or collective identities [26].

The literature has not obviously identified a clear relationship between students' social identity and the university image. It also indicates that little research has been done on the Kenyan universities in the area of social identity. The role of students' social identity development has not been studied on students' creation of the university image. This study therefore, sought to investigate the role of the students' social identity development on the university image, among the university students in selected universities in Kenya.

The study involved universities in Kenya both private and public. There are many universities in Kenya, and studying all of them would require a lot of time and resources. As a result, the study was delimited to four universities: two private and two public universities. Data were collected from undergraduate students in their fourth year of study both full time and part time. The researcher focused on fourth year students since they have already familiarized with the university community and have acquired membership in the community. The students consists both government-sponsored students and private sponsored students.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative design was preferred for the study since the researcher studied behavior in natural settings without manipulating the variables. The study used interview as research method. An interview guide was used for the interview during data collection. Semi-structured interviews were administered. According to Cohen & Crabtree [27], semi-structured interviews allow the respondents the freedom to express their views in their own terms. The study was carried out in four universities in Kenya with the focus on university students in fourth year in Kenyan universities: two public universities and two private universities in Nairobi and Mount Kenya region in Kenya. Purposive sampling was used at different stages: According to Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao [28], purposive sampling seeks out participants with specific features according to the requirements of the developing investigation and evolving idea [29]. The researcher purposively selected four universities in Kenya. The selection of the private universities was based on one university that is faith-based university while the other one is purely an enterprise university. The public university selection was based on the age of the university: one university that has been into existence in more than a decade, while the other one is a recently chartered university. Purposive sampling was used to identify fourth year students in various disciplines at the universities. The researcher required specific information; hence, at least two students per discipline were purposively sampled for the study. The disciplines in this study were categorized in the following four categories: arts, social sciences, pure sciences and technology.

The research generated qualitative data that was classified and categorized for proper interpretation. The participants' responses were coded. The codes were used to establish patterns and themes from which conclusions were drawn. The data were analyzed in a systematic manner enabling the researcher to search for common dominant themes that appear in the data thereby coming to some useful conclusions and recommendations. Since the research was conducted in Kenya and its findings intended to contribute to the study of human behavior, the researcher got a formal letter from the University of Embu. The researcher also obtained a permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in the Ministry of Education Science and Technology. Then, the researcher booked appointments with the administration and interviewed the respondents. The researcher sought consent with the respondents and the names and identity of the respondents was concealed to safeguard confidentiality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the research findings, analysis and interpretation of the research data.

### Interpersonal relationships

The respondents were required to explain how they relate with the staff members and the other students within the university community. The interpersonal relationships were therefore, divided into two: student-student relationships and student-staff relationships.

### Student-student relationships

The researcher was interested in establishing how students relate with other students. This included how students view themselves in relation to the university community. This is because students will communicate the same to others about their university.

The researcher found out that there are students who only interact with their class mates and do not relate with other students. Students who engaged in more than one activity at school, and held leadership positions felt that they were well known by other students. They were able to socialize with the community and were participants in the university community and not spectators.

Some students felt that it was not meaningful for them to interact with others. They were only in school for academics and hence they would only attend classes and leave the university compound. Student 23 was asked on his view on how other students think about him. He said:

*They see me as a very quiet person who does not like many things. I am that kind of a person, who is not here and there, I am only concerned with what is mine. Am mainly here for academics only, which is my main business. Therefore, when I have no classes I do not have business on this side of the university.*

Such a student is only at the university for academic purposes only. They only align themselves towards academic requirements. The student identifies with the university as a place to learn and achieve academic goals and that is all.

The students' perception of what others think about them also emerged. A student behaves according to how others see and classify them. They are identified first as individual students and second as students of a certain university. Others interpret the image of student as the image of the university. When asked what other students think of him student 7 said:

*They have known me as a man who stands for what he says. I am a man of my words. I am a*

*teacher and they labelled me principal meaning they see the leadership in me. You see when they label you; you know where you can fit. Therefore, I think they see me as a leader.*

Student 25 added:

*Some even call me professor. Therefore, I think I have a challenge of maintaining the students' expectations. This helps me to be on my toes to meet the expectations of my fellow students especially so in academics. I have no option to fail.*

A student who is labelled as a principal will be required to dress like a principal and even all his behaviors will be influenced so that he matches the expectations of the fellow students. According to Wenger [6], this is the second face of identity. He called it the imagination face. These are the images students have about themselves in relation to the broader involvement of life. The Bachelor of Education student is able to view himself as a teacher and a principal. This affects the students' social identity and largely the students' academic achievement and commitment. Students' interaction is another avenue where they share ideas, socialize as well as to solve conflicts amongst themselves. Student 24 was asked about the importance of the co-curricular activities and he expressed the following.

*Games and clubs help reduce stress and give a chance to engage with students from other departments. There is that student rapport that we establish as we create friends. We have one sense of belonging when we engage in games with students from other departments.*

*I think it would be better if students were more open minded to be able to accommodate each other. This is because universities house people from different backgrounds, local and international students. The students' sense of ownership of their university promotes healthier interaction among the students' as well as creates better networking in the future. It also creates better understanding and a positive perception of the university in general.*

From the data, it is evident that a students' sense of ownership of their university influences students' interactions. Students who are comfortable and satisfied of the university are motivated to interact with each other both in class and outside the class activities. This translates into creation of the university image.

### **Student-staff relationships**

To determine the role of the staff members in students' development of social identity, the researcher interviewed the students on how they relate with the staff members. The staff members comprised the teaching and the non-teaching staff. From the collected data the researcher can deduce that there is minimal or no interaction between the students and the non-teaching members of staff. On the other hand, the non-teaching staffs play a great role in socializing students. As indicated by the respondents, non-teaching staff are role models to the students. Students look upon them in terms of character and morals. They are part of the university community and constitute part of the students' life while in campus. Asked about his role model, student 26 said:

*There is one, who is a casual staff. He does cleaning and carrying of luggage here. He is a good person. He does his work perfectly regardless of his position he does it with all his heart and with a lot of passion. The other day I was interacting with him and I came to realize it does not matter what you do but how you do it. He was telling me by April he will not be a casual staff, he will be employed as a permanent staff because of the good work he does. He is a good friend of mine and I feel he is my role model.*

This is a clear indication that the non-teaching staff members are part of the students' socialization. They play a great role in the students' life. Students emulate their behaviors and character as they interact with the university community. If the staff member is of good morals then the students will emulate the good conduct and vice versa. The non-teaching staffs are part of the university community and are hence involved in socializing the students while at the university. The image of the university created by the non-teaching staff is most likely to be emulated by the students.

The data shows that interactions between the students and the teaching staff is more visible. Students majorly interact with the lecturers during classes. The level of interaction however, depended on the class size. The larger the class size the lesser the level of interaction and vice versa. From the data, the public universities indicated high number of students and hence large classes. This reduced the level of interaction between the student and the lecturer. The students do not have a one-on-one interaction with the lecturer. The science related classes also registered fewer numbers of students and this translated to one-on-one interaction with the students. Small size classes also mean that the lecturer has a lot of time to spend with the student as compared to the large classes. Student 26 from a private university observed:

*The good thing about my university is that the lecturers student ratio is not so big especially so with the medical school. It is like about 30-50 students per lecturer. The lecturer is most like to develop a relationship with each of the student. The lecturer has that personal care for each student than in any other university; let us say a public university where classes comprise like 300 students. I feel like the relationship here is more intimate we relate more with our lecturers than in other universities. I can approach them whenever I want. They are available to the students.*

The above anecdote from the student indicates that there are more student-lecturer interactions in private universities than there is in public universities. The student also felt that in small size classes the lecturers paid attention to every student. The students' feeling that the lecturer is paying attention to them brings about satisfaction and motivation to the student.

Students identify themselves with the lecturers as they teach. They emulate the lecturers as their role models. They look up to them for guidance and for future occupations. The images portrayed to them by the lecturers are the same that the students carry along with them. Satisfied with the lecturers, student 13 was asked whether he had role models within the school and he said:

*Yes, one lecturer in our department is very concerned with the students. For example, if you miss a class you may find him calling asking you why you missed the class. He takes care of us very much. He is very concerned about the students. For the non-teaching staff there is none.*

Students will engage more with the lecturers who show concern to them. By the fact that the lecturer calls the student when they have missed a class, the student translates that to mean that the lecturer cares for him.

Among the teaching staff, some of the lecturers are part time lecturers. The respondents indicated that, some of the lecturers are ever busy in the universities where they are employed as full time lecturers. This means that they attend few classes, they are not available after classes and hence there is minimal interaction with the students. Sometimes the syllabus is not covered and students feel that they are not getting the quality of education as expected. Student 25 felt disappointed and indicated the following:

*Honestly, I can say our lecturers from the department of Pure and Applied Sciences are doing their best as far as Mathematics is concerned. However, in the school of Information Communication and Technology*

*they have majority of the part time lecturers. Sometimes they do not do their work. They always claim to be so busy. The part time lecturers can attend just four lectures in a semester. Therefore, the major problem is that they do not have enough staff and they rely on part time lecturers who are busy in their universities. The computer part of my course is the main challenge. We are not getting what we are supposed to get.*

Students felt that teaching staff should devote more time with them. This meant that interaction in class only is not enough. For engagement to occur the part time lecturers, need to create consultation with the students outside the classroom.

The students' feelings of dissatisfaction on the quality of education offered in their university translated to the image they create about their university.

Interpersonal relationships in the university are an integral factor in the students' life at the university. The relationships develop through the interactions that a student engages with the university community. According to Wenger [6], our social identity develops when we engage directly with the world and with others. Students who participated in games and clubs were able to participate actively in the university interactions. It is through this interactions and engagement that students are able to realize their talents and other prowess in co-curricular activities. This helps in creation of the university image. Universities popularity based on certain activities for example, best in basketball, best comedians is all about the students' active participation in the university community. Students' participation brings about the image of the university to the students and the public and the university is henceforth known for that particular icon.

Studies that explored the concept of social identification in higher education have found that levels of social interaction are clearly associated with an individual's self-esteem and satisfaction with life in general [18]. A students' non-participation in the university activities can therefore be interpreted that the student is not satisfied with part(s) of the university environment and thus their non-participation. Such students are only in school to achieve academic goals. The university curriculum is both the written and the unwritten curriculum where the co-curricular activities are incorporated. Non-participation in the activities is an indication that the students may not be well adjusted to the communities of practice.

During engagement and interactions, students classify themselves and are classified by others based

on character and their way of life. According to Dean and Jolly [30], individuals self-classify themselves and are classified by others into any number of social groups or categories. This classification could include labels such as principals, professors among others [31]. Classification assists the students to command the social environment in the university as well as to discover themselves in it [32]. This discovery helps the students to get individual recognition both in school and outside the school. A student who is labelled the principal is compelled to behave, act and look like a principal while within or without the university.

The students' ability to visualize themselves in future affects the development of their social identity. Wenger [6] called this face of identity imagination face. Students are able to visualize and imagine what they will become in future. This helps in creating images on what the student endeavor to achieve and hence they work towards achieving the vision. The student will paint the image of the university based on the way they view themselves and their level of satisfaction about the university. They communicate this to other students as well as the public. That is why the other students are able to label and classify them. This therefore means that classification of the students by others plays a great role in creation of the university image.

Students draw their role models from the teaching and non-teaching staff. Students are able to do so through the levels of engagement with the university community. It is evident that few students choose their role models from the non-teaching staff. This can be attributed to the fact that there is minimal interaction between students and non-teaching staff. Interactions between the students and the teaching staff were largely determined by the class sizes. The larger the classes the lower the levels of interactions. This was also interpreted to students not having any role models. The student-lecturer relationship is not personalized. The students felt they were invisible in large classes and could hence miss to attend classes without the knowledge of the lecturers unlike in the small classes where the lecturers know the students.

Lecturer's personal attention to the individual students gave the students a sense of satisfaction; they felt that they lecturers were concerned about them. The sense of satisfaction was found to motivate the students to engage in activities that were beneficial to them and to the university. They felt that they could not do anything contrary to the lecturers because the lecturers knew them. They felt that anything wrong would disappoint the lecturer. This can be interpreted that the students will only engage in the accepted norms of the university community. This goes a great deal in protecting the university image. If the norms are followed then the university will not have instances of

unrests and riots. Strikes disrupt the university calendar as well as paint a negative image of the university. On the other hand, there are the part time lecturers. The lecturers are engaged elsewhere and hence they only attend their classes and leave the university. They do not have extra time for the students. Students felt that there was no personal attention by the part time lecturers. Sometimes the students felt that the part time lecturers were delivering the expected content. This leads to dissatisfaction of the students. This may lead to students' dissatisfaction with the specific unit, the course and finally the university. According to Maric *et al.* [10], the quality of professors and their lectures affects the university image.

This therefore means that student relationship with the staff members is key in development of their social identity. Development of a positive social identity brings about a positive university image.

#### **Student identification with the university**

The researcher wanted to establish how students identify with their university and the level of satisfaction they experience being students of a certain university. According to the participants, various factors contribute to students' satisfaction about their university. Students identify themselves with a university and feel proud of their university based on various factors:

The name of the university is an important aspect in students' social identity. Students want to identify themselves with a known university. When asked whether given an opportunity they would change the names, some of the students indicated they would change the name of the university. Those who were proud of their universities were comfortable with the names. The fact that the students want to change the name indicates that they may not be proud of that name. Student 23 was not proud of the name of her university and she said:

*I am not comfortable with the name. You see when the university was chartered, I expected a very nice name but I only realized it was this. You see the problem is when you go out there and you tell people that you study here; they ask you what that is, where is that university. You also find out even around people know us as the technical college it used to be. Some people even ask whether it is a private university or a public university.*

On the other hand, some students had different views. For example, student 13 said:

*I am very proud of our name of the university. The name is good, it is an international name and it fits the university because it's a university founded by the church.*

The fact that the university has a name that is perceived to be international by the student is a motivation enough for the students to be proud of their university. The sense of pride and belonging contributes to the development of the students' social identity.

The public universities that were established past a decade were more popular as compared to the newly chartered universities. Students felt that they had facilities; there was quality in terms of the programmes offered among others. Some students even indicated that they introduce themselves as studying in other universities that they felt were more popular. Student 19 was placed in a newly chartered university and mentioned the following:

*First of all the name is not known at all. People are shocked, where is this university. Even where I come from back at home, it is not known at all. This makes it hard to introduce myself as coming from this university. Therefore, I just say I come from another university where I feel more comfortable.*

*I feel so inferior, because I have to answer other questions. Students from those big universities will tell you what they have and what they do; after you make a comparison with what we have here, you find that there is a very big difference. It is as if we are getting a raw deal.*

Students in the newly chartered universities felt inferior among other students from the universities established earlier. They felt comfortable belonging to the big universities. This would lead to a negative social identity development.

The students from the private universities were comfortable with the name of their respective universities in majority of the cases. This may be attributed to the fact that the students ended up in the University of their Choice. For example, student 13 above indicated his sense of pride for his university. He goes ahead to mention that the name is an international name. This shows the value he attaches to the university and the sense of pride and belonging.

The ranking of the universities played a great role in students' identification with the university and the social identity in general. Data indicates that students felt proud of the universities that were ranked highly, and they had the desire to join the universities way back in high school. For example, student 5 was in a university that was not ranked highly and he said:

*You see every student would like to be in a known university. University of Nairobi is ranked high in Kenya among all the*

*universities and even internationally. Given another chance, I would go to UoN.*

Respondents indicated that they identify themselves with the physical facilities within the university. The physical facilities range from buildings, buses, lecture halls, lakes among others. According to the students' response it is about how big the facility is, how unique the facility is and the meaning the students attach to it. If it is the only one among other universities then it is worth identifying with however small or big. Student 3 felt that he was in a university with unique features. She said:

*The campanile. I think we are the only university in Kenya with a bell, our structures are good and maybe that is why the former president of US came to our university during his visit in Kenya. At the top of the campanile, there is a bell. It is tall enough, a watchtower of the university a central point. It is also an archive where the university history can be found. The bell plays a very important aspect in our life here in terms of time saving. It rings after every one hour as a reminder.*

The students derive pride from the unique facilities. They want to be identified with the only university with a certain unique feature, the unique feature being a bell. A bell is such a small icon mainly used in primary and secondary levels of learning to communicate time. However, it is rarely used at the tertiary levels of education. Student 3 felt that having a bell in her university made the university to stand out among other universities. It made the university unique and that felt good enough to identify with.

To the student, what matters are the size and the recognition attached to the physical facility, what can be observed from outside and what is in the writings. For example, when asked about what physical facility stands out in his university, student 1 said, "I can say the library; our library is the biggest in East and Central Africa. It may not be well stocked with books, but for me it stands out".

Another student 11 added the following:

*I can say the environment here stands out. You see where we are seated you can see the villas they just make you feel like you just want to read. You do not expect someone to start dozing off here while reading because the environment is conducive. In other universities, they do not have villas they only have libraries, which are usually congested.*

However, some of the respondents were also feeling that there are no physical facilities to be proud of in their university. As a result, they question the



quality of academic programmes offered. The students registered their dissatisfaction with the university during the interviews. About the dissatisfaction student 23 observed:

*I do not think there is any facility here: the ones available are not up to the standards of a university. Sometimes you look for a room to attend a make-up class and you find there is no room. The facilities are not adequate.*

Students perceive the lack of the facility at the point of need as lack of adequate facilities. This is a source of dissatisfaction. They translate it to mean that the university does not have adequate facilities. Lack of adequate facilities means that the quality of education is compromised. Students will carry with them the image of a university with low standards and may not be proud of their university.

The choice of university and programme is a contributing factor to students' identification with the university. It was found that either student was in a university by choice, or they were placed by the Kenya University and Colleges Placement Services (KUCCPS) or they followed the parent's choice of university and programme. Students who went to the universities of their choice taking a programme of their choice were more proud of their university and were satisfied with their programmes while the converse was also true. Student 19 registered his sentiments as follows:

*I found myself here. The placement board placed me here. It was by accident. When I came, I felt bad seeing how the university looked like. I was not happy. However, I had to accept, there was nothing I could do about it.*

Students who were not proud of the university because they did not choose the university, and did not have a choice ended up adjusting and fitting in the university. Wenger [6] referred to this as alignment. They conform to the set environment because they do not have a choice and they realize they have to study. They align themselves by meeting all the requirements of their programmes just to complete the stipulated period of the course.

One respondent, student 11 who managed to be placed at the university of her choice said:

*I chose this university because I loved it. I saw it in the internet. I googled their pictures, their adverts and that is how I came to like the university. I chose it. In fact, my parents wanted me to go to multimedia university or cooperative university but I chose this place.*

Student 26 added:

*The interaction of the students both within and outside university plays a key role in academic excellence. The interactions here make us see things from a different perspective.*

*Our university is the best university. If am given an opportunity to go to another university I will still come back. After this course in September, I want to register for another course here, Bachelor of Science on Food and Beverages. I am comfortable here. I can recommend other students to come to this university, what we experience here you will never experience it anywhere else. Life is very smooth and very cheap. It is strategically located with cool environment for studies.*

Student 26 is satisfied with the university as well as the programme. The level of satisfaction and motivation is indicated by the fact that the student is willing to take another course in the same university. This also indicates a great sense of belonging. The student feels proud of the university.

University's direct support of needy students is a factor to motivate students. It motivates the students and is a show that the institution cares for the less fortunate. Students have the need to be cared for by the university as an organization. When asked about what motivated him student 8 said:

*The University offers some scholarships to the students who are not able to fund their studies. I am not one of them but it feels good to know that the university is trying. The university also tries to absorb the students who clear their studies. Mainly they absorb the best performers, but again it is for those who are interested.*

The realization that the university is ready to pay fees to the needy students is a motivation to the students even though they do not benefit from the scholarships.

University's participation in a students' life after school emerged from the respondents. It is the institution's mandate to equip students with the required knowhow and the skills for the students to fit in the job market. If the university goes an extra mile to secure students future, then this acts as a motivation to the students. A Bachelor of Commerce (Procurement) student 8 registered her excitement:

*In the School of Business, they have a small foundation whereby they fund students who already have existing businesses. Like me am liaising with them because I have an existing business so that after I graduate I can get support from them and also get some training so that I can boost my business. In terms of finance, I think they give 1.5 million to every student. However, it is done like a loan such that you boost your business and after sometime you take someone else from the*

*department and boost their business. So it is a chain, you are helped then you help. It is motivating.*

This shows that students will not only identify with a university that delivers its core mandate of teaching but also the one that goes ahead and secures the students life after campus. This therefore means that, students would be encouraged to open businesses while still in school with the hope that they will be funded after they are through with their undergraduate programmes. It also means that they have to perform well, follow the rules and regulations of the university to avoid indiscipline cases that might bring about conflicts with the administration.

According to the students' responses, their security is also important while studying. By security, the students meant that the university is a registered university and that the programmes are accredited. A student needs to be reassured now and again about the same. For example, student 9 was asked how the university is meeting his career inspirations and he responded:

*The university holds meetings with us, and sometimes they invite people who are in the same field as us to come talk to us. There is a time there was the board inspection to assure us that we have all the required equipments to take the course and that the labs are meeting the standards. That's gives us assurance that we are getting quality education here and that we are well prepared for the job market. To me that create a sense of security that we are good even in the outside world as well as within Kenya. We are assured of even going for masters abroad. So the course am taking is a recognized course from a recognized university. The security is very important. You see like in Nairobi Aviation College, you can imagine spending like three years only to realize it is all waste of time. So being sure you are taking a recognized course gives us the peace and the security. While you are studying as a student, you know that if you go out you have a recognized certificate.*

Students' reassurance that the university is offering accredited programmes is linked to the students' satisfaction and motivation to continue with their studies. The fact that a student is taking an accredited and recognized programme affects how the students feel about their university. They are proud of the university if their programmes are recognized both within the country and globally. They feel safe and motivated to proceed with their postgraduate studies.

A study carried out by Di Battista, Pivetti & Berti [33], found that student identification with a university moderated the relationship between sense of integrity and extra-role behaviors. Hence, it is clear that social identification has an impact on student satisfaction and the engagement of students with their university. The interpretation is that satisfied students are motivated to participate in activities that benefit them and are of benefit to the university.

Students who were proud of the university's name felt proud about their university. They were proud being associated with the university as opposed to those students who were not proud of the name. Students are a key aspect in building university image. If students will associate with another university to feel safe, it therefore means that their university will remain unknown.

Students were proud of a university that had been in existence for a longer duration as compared to the recently chartered universities. Students felt that the older universities were well known, they had enough facilities and hence it was prestigious schooling in the universities [11, 38]. This translates to whether the students feel a strong sense of belonging to their university.

The cases of dissatisfaction with the university were mainly with the government sponsored students in the public universities. Their counterparts in private university were all well. This was attributed to the fact that the students in private universities have a chance to choose the University their Choice as well as the programme to undertake. This therefore means that the students' choice of university and programme plays a great role in development of students' social identity. A student satisfaction with the university and the programme will engage in other beneficial activities. They will represent the university positively both within and outside university.

Universities that go out of their way to help students while at school and after school cultivate the students' sense of belonging. A university that provides funding to the students' ready businesses after they complete the students acts as a motivation. Students can already imagine themselves as prominent businesspersons. Wenger [6] called this imagination face in social identity development. This therefore means that the student will continue the relationship with the university even after the completion of their studies. They will talk positively of the university even after they are through with the studies. This would attract more students since they would recommend others to the university. It would also encourage the students to start their own businesses before they complete their studies. This means that when a

university goes an extra mile to support students in their after school life, students are motivated and satisfied with the university.

### Student academic commitment

Students' academic commitment is determined by various factors within the university community. The researcher was interested in establishing what contributes to the students' commitment to their academics. The data indicate that students cheat in examinations just for the purposes of passing the examinations. The students are not serious and do not commit to preparing for the exams. They prepare to cheat in examinations especially so in programmes or units where the class sizes are large. Student 6 had this to say:

*I would say when it comes to the exams there is the thing that is called mwakenya. It makes the students not read for exams. Therefore, students just cheat in the exams and they pass. If only the lecturers would change the setting of the exams to applications then the students will be forced to read for them to apply the learnt knowledge. Again, the type of questions should vary every semester such that the students cannot predict the exam questions.*

The fact that students can predict what is to be tested in an exam makes them prepare to cheat and not revise for the examinations. The examinations that are set in a format that do not require students synthesis and application also encourage cheating. Students are therefore in school to pass exams only.

The continuous assessment tests are given to students in terms of sit-in exams and assignments or term papers. Some students will opt to copy from their peers just to meet the deadline. Student 3 shared his experience concerning the Continuous Assessment Tests:

*I am above average; I do take Continuous Assessment Tests and assignments seriously. Sometimes I copy my friends' assignments just to meet the deadlines. Like practicals I copy from my friends, we take short cuts. After all, the lectures do not mark the assignments.*

On the other hand, there are students who will ensure they take their assignments seriously. For example, student 7 mentioned that he hates being pushed around because he knows learning is his core business in school. As a result, any time he is given the assignment he takes them seriously and meets the deadlines.

Students' commitment to their studies is also indicated by their commitment to class attendance. Class attendance to some students is mandatory and

optional to others. This depends on what students perceive to be important in their academics as well as the unit lecturer.

When asked about class attendance, student 23 said:

*For me it is not necessary to attend all the classes because sometimes the lecturer who is teaching you is as good as not teaching. Some of them just lecture so it does not make any difference even if you miss the classes. Therefore, there are classes I will just let go.*

Student 18 had similar opinion and she said:

*I am committed, but you see in your last year you also have to think about other things. Like your life after campus. I have a business am planning, so sometimes I miss classes. I have a business deal to close then I will miss that class.*

It is evident that students consider various factors before they attend classes. If they consider that, the lecturer just lectures then they will prefer to miss the class and copy notes from their fellow students. Students who already have established businesses preferred attending to their businesses especially so now that they were in their final year. They were already preparing for their life after school. Imagination of their life after campus made them to start concentrating with their businesses instead of attending classes.

Students who were very committed to their studies would show efforts on their studies. They would go an extra mile to purchase books in their area of interest and specialization. They also enrich themselves through reading books from other fields. For example, student 6 said:

*I invest a lot in books; I buy one motivational book every semester. I read to add more knowledge because I know I cannot give what I do not have and good leaders are good readers.*

The fact that the student is willing to purchase books out of their pockets shows their commitment and motivation as students. They are willing to add into their knowledge. They go an extra mile to read books out of their own specializations. This shows that the students are also satisfied.

The relationship between students and the teaching staff affects students' commitment and motivation towards their academics. Lecturers who show concern for the students motivate them to attend classes. When students know that the lecturer is following, on their where about they will not engage in indiscipline behaviors while in school. While asked what she would like changed in the university a student 13 registered the following:

*If the lecturers are more concerned with the students by trying to know where they are and what their problems are, then the students would always want to attend the classes and feel free to share their problems. The students would work hard because they do not want to disappoint the lecturer, they would take their studies seriously because they know that the lecturer knows them.*

*If the students-lecturer relationship is improved then this would translate to good grade, better relationship with the administration and hence we will not be having strikes in the university. This will improve the students' academic achievement.*

Students will commit to attend classes when they feel that the lecturer will notice they are absent. They also would feel bad disappointing a lecturer who is concerned about their performance. This therefore means that good relationship between the lecturer and the students would enhance students' commitment to their academics.

Students interact with the various components of the university in an attempt to achieve their academic goals. Students who achieve their academic aims and objectives are more likely to be contented with their programme and institution [34]. Hence, student commitment, accomplishment and fulfilment are generally intertwined.

Students' satisfaction and identification with the organization leads to students' commitments to their academics as well as other co-curricular activities [35].

### **Co-curricular activities**

University curriculum involves the written curriculum and the co-curricular activities. Ideally, the two are expected to go hand in hand. Co-curricular activities are therefore not compulsory and students participate out of their own volition. The researcher wanted to establish what students engage with apart from the class work. Do the co-curricular activities have any impact on the students' development of social identity?

The researcher also wanted to find out what motivated the students to join the various games, sports, clubs, and leadership positions. From the data, it is evident that students who participated in a certain activity in their secondary school joined the same activities at the university. Students were asked about their participation in co-curricular activities, student 16 explains:

*Yes, it is only one though. I am active in the MUoN club here. It is a United Nations club, so we prepare ourselves throughout the year*

*so that we can attend a conference at the UN where they simulate the actual practices of the UN.*

*I have done it previously in high school. Therefore, when I joined the university I figured it out that I wanted to join. I started the club here. In fact, I am a leader there. I am the secretary to the general assembly.*

Students joined some activities because they were futuristic. This means that they would still participate in the activities even after the campus life. For example, student 11 joined a club that she felt it would continue even after campus, she said:

*Am in the brass band am very good at playing instruments almost all the brass instrument. Then am also good at vocals. I like singing. I think I had to go for the music classes for more skills. I am already in one of the best choirs in Kenya, the girls' choir in Kenya. It is not a university thing it is outside the university. This means even after school I will still be there.*

Student 10 added that:

*You know when you are seeking for employment; the employer also looks for other co-curricular qualifications apart from the academic qualifications.*

*Secondly I also had a passion, am a footballer naturally and I think that I have that talent. Therefore, it has also pushed me to join in these activities.*

Students joined clubs and other co-curricular activities because of their expected outcome. They expect that the activities will be of benefit to them after they have completed their studies. Students' imagination of their future life after campus affects the development of social identity. Students' view of how the co-curricular activities fit into the broader life causes the students to view the co-curricular activities as necessary.

Students who possessed certain talents were motivated to join in a certain activities to exploit their talents. Students viewed the university as a forum to show case their special gifts in various fields. Universities are known to produce gifted graduates that help in creation of the university name. Student 16 who is a Master of Ceremony (MC) said that, he is the official MC of the university. He added that he leads in events at the university. to him it is a source of money as well as a source of fun. He enjoyed doing it. This is an indication that the university is facilitating the students' development of social identity and the student is participating in creation of the university image.

Some students were not in any of the co-curricular activities because they felt that they were at the University for Academics only. The student develops an identity as one who is not interested in the co-curricular activities. Student 23 was questioned on the co-curricular activities that she participated in, and she said:

*They see me as a very quiet person who does not like many things. I am that kind of a person, who is not here and there, I am only concerned with what is mine. Am mainly here for academics only, which is my main business. Therefore, if I have no classes I do not have business on this side of the university.*

Students in leadership of the various groups, games and sports felt that they needed to be at the top in academics because they had to act as role models to the rest of the students. They also felt that they had to maintain their class performance at the top to lead from the front. Student 10 who was a leader reported the following:

*Being in a leadership position requires you to be an all-round student. On the other hand, as a teacher, you are a leader and you must be a good example to the students. This means that I cannot tell the students to participate in activities when am not involved. Therefore, being a leader comes automatic and it goes hand in hand with the academic performance. I cannot expect students to perform better if am not performing well. I should lead by example. The leadership positions keep me on toes. I have to be good in academics.*

The students view leadership as a motivating factor for the students' commitment to their studies. A leader is a role model and hence they are required to be at their best in all the activities in the school. This can also be interpreted that students' sense of leadership will yield to good behaviors and adherence. Students who participate in leadership positions will develop a social identity of being not only participant in the university but also participants with responsibilities. Taking responsibilities by the students is a show of their feeling about their university.

According to Liu, Loi & Lam [36], employees who identify with their organization may be more committed to remaining with the organization, they are more likely to perform their work beyond the call of duty and more likely to work effectively in teams and demonstrate positive organizational citizenship behaviors. If the university in this case is the organization then it can be interpreted that, student who participates actively at the university identify themselves with the university. They are able to achieve their core mandate that is academics and are able to go an extra mile to participate in co-curricular activities. They are therefore likely to portray a positive image of

the university, the image that the university is actively assisting them to achieve their goals. The university acts as a grooming ground for talents, leadership roles as well as creativity.

### **Administration and governance**

Universities are governed by the rules and regulations. These are set norms that all the students are expected to follow while they interact within the university community. The rules are communicated by the administration of the institution. Most of the time students will only realize that certain rules exist when they are caught up in the wrong. The researcher wanted to establish how students feel about the rules and regulations of their institution. When asked the question student 8 said:

*Our rules are ok but when it comes to the fees payment there is a problem. They bar students from entering into the university. However, you cannot do exams without clearing school fees. Therefore, they should allow students to attend classes and bar them from sitting for the exams.*

The student felt that the university should allow students to attend classes and bar them from sitting for exams. The students' view of such a rule is that its rigid, the management is not in a position reason together with the students. The student views himself as a student against the university. This can be a source of dissatisfaction to the student. The student can view the university as only interested with the fees and not with the student. They therefore create an image of uncaring and inconsiderate institution.

Students also felt that rules should be applied equally to all the students without use of double standards. Student 12 observed instances of double standards and reported the following:

*I think the university should be straighter on the deadline of the fees because you find some students are allowed to be around the school and they have not cleared the fees. Yet some are denied the chance. The rules should apply to all. We are all students and some are not superior to others.*

The administration passes rules and ensures that the rules are followed. The relationship between the administration and the students determines how the students receive and perceive the rules. Student 23 was asked about the relationship between the students and the administration, and responded as follows:

*I do not know whether it happens in other universities but you find that here, there is a lot of bureaucracy. Even the student leaders who have been charged with the responsibility fear to execute their duties. So you find that it*

*has an impact because for us students we have a class representative and you want something done, but when she goes, there she is threatened and even in some instance she is suspended and accused of may be inciting the other students. In addition, this has a negative impact on the academic achievement of all the students. Students do not have the freedom to air their grievances. In fact, we do not have any freedom. So what we do here we just come for the classes and go to our other business. We are not motivated at all. Students are very dissatisfied. The management just implements its own things and hence students will never own them but they expect the students to implement them. For example the E learning. The lecturers were expected to upload the notes on the website, which they did. Nevertheless, students are not interested if anything, they do not have the access to the website and there are issues with our emails. When you say that to them they just do not do anything.*

Students' ownership of a university depended on their feeling about their inclusion in passing of rules and making of decisions especially so those that concerned them. Student 18 felt that she was not included in the decisions of the universities and she reported:

*Again, the university should involve the students in decision-making. The students should be informed of changes to avoid confusion among them and misunderstandings. Like in the school rules, if the students are involved they will accept the rules because they will be their rules. They will own them. Therefore, if the interactions were improved here we would not have gone on strike last semester. Our leaders were not able to solve our issues with the administration. The administration is too rigid to listen to the students.*

Students will always see the administration in terms of the implementation of the rules and the regulations. The breaking of such rules is always followed by consequences. Students interact with the university rules in their daily life at the university. The rules may be humane enough for the students to co-exist peacefully with the students. However, sometimes the rules may be too rigid. The flexibility or the rigidity of the rules affects the students' development of social identity. According to Haslam [37], identification can also be enriched with a procedure where student groups, along with other sub-groups within the school, feel they have a voice and their views are valued and respected. This therefore, can be translated that if the students' views are not valued and respected then the students

will not identify themselves positively with the institution. The students will portray levels of dissatisfaction, which will translate to painting of a certain image for the university.

Students' unrests and strikes are mainly caused by misunderstandings between students and the administration. Strikes in the universities portray a negative image of the university. Students will avoid universities that are known for rioting. This is because during strikes, precious class time is wasted and the programmes are disrupted hence taking longer than intended. Therefore, the governance of the university requires putting into consideration students' voice and participation in making and implementing decisions that affect the students' life. This will improve on the students' perception on their university and hence improve on the university image.

The students create university image as they interact with the various university milieu. Students are likely to communicate their feelings about their university to the public. The students' social identity development therefore plays a great role in the creation of a university image. They can portray a positive or a negative image of the university.

## CONCLUSION

The study sought to establish how university students develop their social identity and the role the social identity plays in shaping the university image. The study found out that the students' social identity develops as they participate in the communities of practice. Through the participations, students develop relationships with fellow student as well as with the members of staff. Students related with other students during co-curriculum activities. It was evident that those students who did not participate in co-curricular activities had poor relations with fellow students. Students labelling and classification helped students to identify with the university community. Students who were in leadership positions were famous among other students and this indicated that they were actively participating in the university community.

From the findings, it is evident that there is minimal interaction between students and non-teaching staff. However, the non-teaching staffs are still part of the community and students look up to them for role models. They emulate their characters and behaviors, which might be positive or negative. This therefore means that non-teaching members of staff are an important aspect in socializing the students.

The study found out that the relationship between the students and the teaching staff was largely

determined by the class size as well as whether the lecturer was employed on full time or part time basis.

From the findings, the study observed that the physical environment contributed to students' identification with the university [9]. The respondents indicated that, prestigious and unique physical facilities were a source of pride to the students. Students identified themselves with the facilities that they felt would make them unique from other universities. Some of the unique facilities include library, campanile, and study villas among others.

Students were comfortable with the universities that they chose as well as the programme of their choice. The study found out that students in private university were comfortable with their university as well as the programme they were taking. This was attributed to the fact that the students choose the university and programme of their choice.

The web metric ranking was found as a factor in determining the students' identity with their university. Students preferred joining those universities that were ranked highly were perceived to be prestigious [38].

The period of existence of a university was a factor that students considered while choosing the university. Students were more comfortable with the universities that were chartered more than a decade ago as compared to the recently chartered universities.

The study found out that students would identify with their university positively or negatively depending on the already developed social identity. The students' satisfaction at the university translates to a positive university image and vice versa. Students develop the university image through their interactions, participation in co-curricular activities, and their presentation of the university to others through word of mouth among others. The quality of the services received by the students' influences what the students pass to other prospective clients [12, 38]. This greatly influences the reputation of the university to both the continuing students and the public.

From the analysis of this study, there is strong evidence that proposes that students' social identity develops as students interact within the communities of practice. The students may participate fully or be non-participants in the university community. The level of participation influences the development of the social identity.

From the findings, the researcher can deduce that the university environment affects the development of the students' social identity. This supports the study

carried out by Adeniji, *et al.*, [9]. Students' identification with the university, infrastructure, and curriculum and student governance affects development of student social identity. The social identity on the other hand influences the university's reputation and image.

The study concludes that students social identity development have a significant role to play in branding and university image. The students social identity develops as students pursue their education from the first year at the university. The university management should pay attention to communicating what students consider important as they interact with the university community. Institutions of higher learning would benefit from articulating and communicating their identities clearly, coherently and in a persuasive way. They should emphasize those features of the university's identity that students will perceive as unique prestigious and similar to their own identities. The university management should focus on executing communication approaches that emphasize and heighten the institution's reputation and image to the students [17, 39]. University image is a marketing tool that can help universities to attract more students, satisfy the current students and reduce students' arrests and strikes.

This study adds to the growing body of literature that focuses on the concepts of university image. It also contributes to the evidence in support for the factors contributing to the development of the university image in Kenyan context. The study will also help the institutions of higher learning to improve on the strategies in developing students' identity which significantly affects the university image. Universities will therefore be able to retain the current students and attract more students by developing a positive student identity which translates to building a positive university image

It should however be noted that this research relied on the self-reported data of students and it was beyond the scope of this study to assess the extent to which the students' perceptions replicate reality. Cultures and social norms differ in different parts of the country, which influences an individual's approaches and behaviors, so it is likely that student perceptions will vary according to local contexts. In addition, this study only factored in the development of students social identity as the main factor contributing to the university image. There might be other factors that contribute in creation of the university image.

From the findings, limitations and delimitations of this study, the researcher suggests further research on the influence of students' social identity after completion of studies and the job market.

The study also recommends research on other factors that influence the creation of university image apart from social identity.

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