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CORPORATE REBRANDING: AN INTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

Abraham Josepha, Suraksha Guptaa*, Yichuan Wangb, Klaus Schoefera

a Newcastle University Business School, United Kingdom

b Sheffield University Management School, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Corporate rebranding that modifies logos, tagline and the corporate brand name is common among practitioners. Available literature reports the success of corporate rebranding by the response and perception of external stakeholders but there is little reflection of the internal perspective. Employees however represent the brand values and fulfil the corporate brand promise. To fill this gap a multiple case study approach was adopted, and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted followed by thematic analysis of the data. Findings of the study emphasized upon the role of rebranding communication by leadership in facilitating changes to the corporate brand, resulting in employee buy-in. This important contribution to the literature will also help managers achieve employee buy-in to strategic changes in the organisation especially post Brexit. Further re- search is recommended to measure existing levels of employee engagement and corporate brand identification that will support post rebranding employee buy-in.

1. Introduction

Corporate rebranding is a common practice as organisations in various industries constantly adapt to the rapid pace of changes to the macro and micro business environment (Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2014; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Consequently, corporate rebranding has started to gain interest among academics that, thus far, have only a relatively small body of knowledge to drawn upon. Corporate rebranding exercises are generally expensive and require extensive resources for their implementation with no guarantees of successful outcomes (Shetty, 2011). A few notable and researched failures in this regards are of Shell's rebranding of 300 of its retail forecourts in the early 90's (Boyle, 2002; Miller et al., 2014), Royal Mail's rebranding to Consignia (Verdin, 2002) and British Airways' modification of its corporate logo to exclude the union jack colours to appear more in-tune with its international image (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). On the other hand, when Burberry in 2002 implemented a corporate rebranding strategy to reposition itself as a luxury brand to a younger audience in addition to its existing customer base, sales increased by 46% in a year's time (Moore & Birtwistle, 2004).

There is a growing interest among universities to focus on their branding to enhance the perception of their value and competitive advantage (Chapleo, 2010, 2015). Business schools are increasingly striving to build strong corporate brands that can make them stand out in the competition for national and international students, faculty and resources (Syed Alwi & Kitchen, 2014) in an environment where ranking and league tables determine admissions, placement and funding prospects (Argenti, 2000; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The ongoing Brexit issue in the UK has also affected the EU student intake numbers and is expected to affect research funding (Universities Uk, 2019) as a climate of uncertainty looms around the political and economic spheres. For these reasons' various traditional universities and business schools want to secure their position and are undertaking rebranding activities to position themselves better in a competitive marketplace. A few UK universities such as Portsmouth University recently rebranded aspects of their visual identity in a move to better communicate their corporate brand identity to their target audience (Port, 2017). A recent rebranding exercise by Harvard Business school where the name of its online learning initiative changed from an acronym to "Harvard Business school online" saw enrolment to its digital courses increase by 70% in the first quarter (Byrne, 2019). However, public sector organisations such as universities and colleges are complex in that each university has a unique student profile, culture, development stage, availability of resources among different

faculties and institutions within them (Asaad et al., 2013). Schools also are keen to keep up a good reputation and image among stakeholders as that helps with access to funding and support from parents and the community. Visual identity symbols of the school such as the uniform colour schemes, logo and name can send important messages to stakeholders that can help with identification and a sense of pride in the school (J. W. Lee & Gregg, 2017).

Corporate rebranding needs to consider all forms of corporate communication that includes external as well as internal stakeholders especially employees as they are instrumental in communicating the corporate brand promise to customers (Balmer, 2001). For most organisations internal branding activities are the primary medium of communicating the brand values and the promise of the corporate brand to their employees (Mitchell, 2002; Thomson & Hecker, 2001). Internal branding activities through internal corporate communication and training are therefore considered an enabler in the corporate rebranding process and are also critical to its success (Miller et al., 2014). Previous studies such as those by Punjaisri and colleagues (Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Punjaisri et.al., 2009) have shown that internal branding activities can impact the brand building behaviour and performance of employees. Similarly, the positive effects of internal branding on employees' behaviour and performance were also documented in exploratory studies on corporate rebranding (Bergstrom et al., 2002; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006).

However simply communicating the changes to the corporate brand doesn't necessarily mean employees will respond with brand supportive behaviour. For the employees' in an organisation that undergo corporate rebranding to enact the brand promise they need to embrace the changes made to the corporate brand, when it is internally communicated. An employee that is engaged within their role and to the organisation and the corporate brand is considered an asset in an organisation. But not all employees represent the corporate brand well or enact the brand promise. For example, all FedEx employees are expected to show their commitment to the corporate brand tagline that says, "We live to deliver", however, a secretly recorded footage of FedEx employee's at work which went viral showed their intentional mishandling of packages at various times (Kelly, 2011). A Gallup survey of employees worldwide (142 countries) in 2011-12 showed only 13% of employees were engaged and motivated to contribute to the organisations goals and performance (Crabtree, 2013). It could therefore be argued that although engaged employees maybe a minority, the

level of an employee's engagement to the corporate brand and the organisation could affect the outcome of a rebranding exercise internally.

When rebranding the corporate brand's visual identity of France Telecom, the employees perception of the organisation was affected positively (Peyrach and Levin, 2001) because they were informed of the change. However, Melewar et.al (2005) reports that this was shortly after the rebrand. This raises a couple of concerns one being that this cannot ascertain that the positive perception will stay or that employees bought-in to the modified logo and the colour schemes. Recently, rebranding the visual identity was reported to improve the employee's perception of the modernity of an organisation but when measured in a span of up to 4 years (Bolhuis et.al, 2015). That means the employees positive perception of the organisation post rebranding could stay longer but it still doesn't address their buy-in to the new identity. This study isn't examining if employees feel positive about the company post rebranding, but the buy-in to the modifications made to the corporate brand's attributes such as the name, graphical elements, or to the vision and values. Also, identification with the new brand attribute and the related vision and values is critical to their attitudes and perceptions (Stuart and Muzellec, 2004; Stuart, 2012). It's because employees relate their self-identity to their perception of the central, distinctive and enduring attributes that define the organisation and by extension the corporate brand (Dutton et al., 1994). It can be argued that if this identification is strong then it helps them to better act out the new brand promise but when its weaker it could also introduce resistance to the rebranding process (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008).

The rebranding process can be successful when stakeholders buy-in to the rebranded identity, vision and values of the corporate brand (Daly & Moloney, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Mitchell, 2002; Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006) and is hence considered a principle of success in corporate rebranding theory (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Buy-in from employees can be at an intellectual and an emotional level according to Thomson et al. (1999). Corporate brands that undergo corporate rebranding need employees to comprehend the changes to the brand attributes and its vision, its goals and be committed to its success. But if they don't it can reduce employee support and a positive attitude and behaviour towards the organisation. Organisations desire employees to enact the corporate brand promise and values towards its customers but a lack of support for the changes can affect this behaviour. A similar finding was reported in an empirical case study of a large telecommunications organisation by Gotsi et al. (2008) where they found that the culture of the organisation after a corporate rebranding

exercise did not align with the revised brand values affecting the employees' support and buy-in to the changes. This implies that managing the responses and reactions of employees during the corporate rebranding process and achieving buy-in to the new corporate brand (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Stuart, 2012) is paramount to its success and to begin to "live" the brand (Ind, 2003).

Gotsi et al. (2008) evaluated influence of brand value on stakeholders after rebranding and found that resistance of employees to change prevented the alignment of their attitude and behaviour with new brand values. A recent study by Lee and Bourne (2017) explored corporate rebranding process of NGOs (Non-government organisations) to recognize the impact of conflicting identities of individuals as brand managers and employees on the rebranding strategies. Although, available literature reflects on importance of employees in the rebranding process, (Table 1), it fails to explain the role of employee engagement, brand identification and employee buy-in in the overall management of corporate rebranding process. The limited successes of corporate rebranding exercises in the marketplace and a larger focus on the effects of corporate rebranding on customers in previous studies (Table 1) points to the need of an empirical understanding of the employee's responses and the process of achieving their buy-in. This constitutes an important gap in the literature. Secondly, from an employee's perspective it is important for organisations to understand what are the factors that contribute to employees' supporting the corporate rebranding process and buying-in intellectually and emotionally to the changes to the corporate brand. Most of the research on organisational identification is in the context of mergers and acquisitions (Buono et.al, 1985), corporate spin-off's (Corley and Gioia, 2004) or creation of a new division (Brown and Gioia, 2002), but not in the context of corporate rebranding. A third gap in the literature relates to understanding if an employee's identification and engagement as psychological factors can contribute to achieving buy-in from employees post rebranding. This study aims to address these identified gaps, by understanding how do employees respond to corporate rebranding? Three research objectives were formulated. Firstly, the study will evaluate how internal branding activities that communicate about the rebranding affects employees. Secondly the role that employee's brand identification with the corporate brand has on the buy-in of employees post rebranding will be explored. Lastly the study will examine if the engagement levels of employees affects the buy-in post-rebranding of a corporate brand.

2. Literature Review

Corporate rebranding is defined as a change of a corporate brand's attributes such as its name, logo, colour and values singularly or in combination (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006:805; Merrilees & Miller, 2008:538; Bolhuis et.al, 2018). This can affect the equity of the corporate brand and the perceptions of an organisation's stakeholders (Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Further, it disturbs the alignment between the corporate brand's vision, its culture and image, which are necessary for its success (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Corporate brand names are unique with enduring attributes and associations to an organisation's character and identity (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Brown et al., 2006). Organisations still pursue these expensive corporate strategies as is evident in trade and academic literature (Finney & Scherrebeck-Hansen, 2010; Gotsi et al., 2008; Kalaignanam & Bahadir, 2013; Melewar et al., 2005; Miller & Merrilees, 2013; Miller et al., 2014; Mitchell, 2002). For the purpose of this study its important to differentiate the types of rebranding. One research classified the types as revolutionary and evolutionary based on the extent of changes made to the corporate brand attributes (Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006). Evolutionary was more periodic to refresh the brand or rejuvenate it and included minor changes to the graphical elements such as logos. However, revolutionary was a major change because it included a complete change of name along with other elements of the visual identity which repositioned the organisation in the marketplace with a new identity. Major changes occurred when a merger or acquisition happened, or the organisation wanted to revive its lost reputation. In addition, for this study the author has identified a subset within revolutionary rebranding which is minor in nature and termed it minor-revolutionary rebranding. Its defined as the changing of the name or other brand attributes by retaining a part of the old in the new. For example, when a well known and reputable organisation with an existing brand retains the historical name and adds a modifier to it. Eg; Dell EMC was the new name of EMC after its acquisition by Dell in 2016.

2.1 Internal Branding

Internal branding is helpful in the creation of powerful corporate brands (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) and is an important part of establishing internal stakeholder buy-in (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Internal branding is defined as the "activities undertaken by an organisation to ensure that the brand promise reflecting the espoused brand values that sets customers' expectations is enacted and delivered by employees" (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Corporate brand management theory and practice in the past has focused on external stakeholders but

there has been recent interest in producing coordinated external and internal branding programmes (Schultz & Hatch, 2001).

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The concept has been widely researched in the services marketing literature and has an important bearing on the delivery and fulfilment of the brand promise by the employees (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2014). Internal branding is shown to increase the quality of service delivery (de Chernatony & Cottam, 2006) and contribute to the cognitive and emotional attachment of employees to the brand (Foster et al., 2010). Internal branding activities helps to emphasise the need for employee behaviour to be aligned with the corporate brand identity and brand values so that the customers would experience the corporate brand in the way that senior managers desire (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). This behaviour can also be influenced by senior managers and other organisational leaders such as CEO's by effectively communicating about the corporate brand, its values and attributes to their employees so they have brand knowledge which in turn affects the degree to which the corporate brand is correctly presented to their customers (Baker et al., 2014)

Two main corporate branding activities are internal corporate communication and training. Internal communication through corporate staff meetings or newsletters are used to engage employees at a cognitive level while training to develop skills and use techniques to perform the job well is an effective tool to affect behaviour (Lee et al., 2014). Internal communication aligns employees understanding of their roles in relation to the corporate brand affecting their attitude and behaviour towards customers (King & Grace, 2005). It also enables employees to buy into the corporate brand values at the emotional levels (Lee et al., 2014; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) and contribute to their commitment to the corporate brand (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Internal communication and training also influences the employees' knowledge, attitude and behaviour towards corporate brand (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) while producing commitment, shared understanding of the vision, satisfaction and loyalty to the organisation (Asif & Sargeant, 2000; Papasolomou & Vrontis, 2006). Having said that, consistency of corporate communication and coherency of the brand messages to what is communicated externally is extremely important in maintaining the quality of service encounters with customers (Punjaisri et al., 2009). A study by Punjaisri & Wilson (2011) identified that the three outcomes of internal branding; brand commitment, corporate brand identification and brand loyalty were positively influenced by internal communication and

training activities. In the present study the impact on corporate brand identification and commitment in the form of buy-in to the corporate rebrand will be examined in the context of corporate rebranding. Enactment of the brand values and the delivery of the brand promise by employees to customers is the aim of internal branding (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). But, brand knowledge is important for employees to transform brand promises into reality (Miles & Mangold, 2004). A study by King & Grace (2008) showed that employee satisfaction and their ability to carry out their roles and responsibilities was affected because of a lack of sufficient corporate brand knowledge and information. Organisations, especially a service-oriented one, have little control over the perceptions formed by their customers because of the inherent variability of employee-customer encounters. Therefore, it is vital that employees have a good understanding of the corporate brand promise, so they can deliver it consistently (Baker et al., 2014). Based on previous non-rebranding studies that have examined internal branding activities such as internal communication and by its definition, it's clear that its purpose is for employees to know and deliver the brand promise by adhering to its brand values. However, in this study internal communication will be focused on communicating the rebranding of the corporate brand's visual identity. The acquisition of corporate brand knowledge is also affected by the level of buy-in or support that employees have for the corporate rebranding process (Hankinson et al., 2007). Therefore, it's important to determine if this type of communication also results in buy-in of employees.

Managing employees' experiences with the corporate brand requires organisations to have an internal orientation to the needs and wants of their employees to implement appropriate responses (Lings, 2004). This is an extension of the external market orientation concept (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993) and is very helpful in developing corporate brand knowledge for employees that attracts, retains and motivates them to deliver the corporate brand promise (King & Grace, 2008).

When employees comprehend what the corporate brand represents; values and promise to its customers, it helps them exhibit greater cognitive and emotional attachment and commitment to the corporate brand (Thomson et.al, 1999; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Punjaisri et al., 2008). Furthermore, the view that the alignment of employees' values with that of the corporate brand can influence the desire to remain loyal to it is postulated by organisational identification and commitment theories (Dutton et al., 1994; van Dick, 2001). Corporate brand identification is thus equally important and according to Burman and Zeplin (2005) is a predecessor to corporate brand loyalty and commitment.

2.2 Corporate Brand Identification

Social identity theory posits that people tend to belong to various social groups and can be closely identified with a group's attributes and its members attributes (Ashforth et al., 2008). One such social group which employees can identify themselves with is the organisation which produces a sense of belongingness and attachment (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). Organisational identification is defined as a form of belongingness that individuals or members of the organisation develop to the organisation when they utilise the attributes that define the organisation to define themselves (Dutton et al., 1994). It also represents an employees' perception of oneness to an organisation (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). And as corporate brands uniquely represents an organisation or an attribute (Balmer & Gray, 2003), employees can identify themselves with the corporate brand identity. Employees who also identify with the organisation can therefore exhibit an interest in the success or failure of the brand (Riketta, 2005; Punjaisri et al., 2009). This interest and their identification can be instrumental during and after the implementation of the corporate rebranding strategy by the organisation. Its clear then that there is the organisational identification and the corporate brand identification.

The degree of an employee's brand identification can be affected by changes to the corporate brand as that affects the perceived organisational and brand identity (Dutton et al, 1994). When an organisation goes through a change, employees that have a higher degree of identification with the organisation are more receptive to information pertaining to the change process than in the outcomes of the change whilst its vice-versa for those with a lower degree of identification (Van Knippenberg et.al., 2006). On that basis one could argue that the employees that take a keen interest and participate in any rebranding activity (eg; brand ambassadors training) are those that have a higher degree of identification with the organisation and the corporate brand. Research conducted by Gilstrap and Smith (2016) on an NGO's name change rebranding initiative highlighted that managers experienced tensions in their identification with the organisation based on how the rebranding process was carried out by the leadership. Inclusivity in the rebranding process was emphasised for the managers to have a higher degree of identification (Gilstrap and Smith, 2016). This study however only addresses organisational identification and not the employee's identification with the new corporate brand name. And it's possible that the new corporate brand identity may not be as attractive, as employees find that their existing self-identity is incongruent with what the new brand name, vision and brand values represent. This could cause the employees to leave the

organisation or be not as effective in enacting the corporate brand promise (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). Therefore, two things are essential here, corporate brand identification and employee buy-in to the new identity. A few studies have shown that an employees' identification also affects their attitudes towards organisational changes and their psychological state post implementation of the change (Buono et.al, 1985; Van Knippenberg et.al, 2002). Explain?

Changes to the corporate brand will also need to be communicated with the help of internal branding activities.

A weaker degree of corporate brand identification can affect an employee' attitude towards the corporate brand and the organisation (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014). Further it is argued that when the employees attain a higher degree of corporate brand identification, it would have an impact on their buy-in that is achieved post rebranding through internal branding activities. This perspective of internal stakeholder buy-in could be more effective to the corporate brand and the organisation when undergoing corporate rebranding. This study aims to examine how identification levels can impact the intellectual and emotional buy-in of employees post implementation of the rebranding It is also argued that as corporate rebranding may require structural and culture changes to the organisation, the benefits to the organisation internally and therefore to its customers will only be fully realised when the buy-in is sustained over a longer period through effective internal branding efforts.

2.3 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has been widely researched mainly in the human resources and organisational behaviour literature as managers seek those employees that are productive, efficient and have a positive attitude and behaviour. Employee engagement from a marketing perspective is defined as a "multi-dimensional construct that comprises of all the different facets of the attitudes and behaviours of employees towards the organisation" (Kumar & Pansari, 2014, p.9). These different attitudes and behaviours are expressed in an employee's satisfaction, identification, loyalty and performance (Kumar & Pansari, 2014). In a later study by Kumar & Pansari (2016, p.500) employee engagement was also defined as the "level of connectedness of the employees with the customers and their attitude and behaviour towards the organisation". This study adopts a similar perspective and views employee engagement as the attitude and behaviour that employees have towards the corporate brand and its influence

in their relationship with the customers. Highly engaged employees will have a more positive attitude and behaviour towards the corporate brand and be closely connected to customers.

Research has also been conducted to relate employee engagement to organisational outcomes. Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes (2002) examined the relationship between employee satisfaction and engagement and business unit level outcomes of customer satisfaction, employee retention, safety, productivity and profitability. Their meta-analytic study collected data from 7939 business units in 36 different organisations with the help of the Gallup organisation and found that employee engagement was positively related to all the outcomes in the study (Harter et al., 2002). Other positive outcomes pointed out in the literature are commitment, positive reviews of the work place, innovative behaviour, job performance, job satisfaction and going the extra mile (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Lee et al., 2014; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). When an organisation undertakes corporate rebranding, an employee's engagement with the corporate brand may be affected thereby affecting organisational outcomes.

Employees that are engaged are likely to have a greater level of attachment to the organisation and the brand and are less likely to leave the organisation when changes occur to the brand (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Further, both the employer and the employee are also quite likely to develop trust, loyalty and commitment between themselves when they abide by the exchange rules according to social exchange theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Internal branding activities that exchanges brand messages for feedback from employees are thus significant for employee engagement to be maintained (Y. K. Lee et al., 2014). This can prolong the continuity of engagement from the employees and consequently the trust and relationship between them and the organisation can reflect in the positive attitudes and intentions towards the organisation and the brand (Saks, 2006). This contributes to the possibility that engaged employees after the corporate rebranding process can remain engaged and maintain a positive attitude and act in the best interests of the organisation and the corporate brand minimising any impact of the corporate rebranding on themselves.

2.4 Post Rebranding Employee Buy-in

For an organisation gaining the support of employees can be a critical success factor (Hankinson, Lomax, & Hand, 2007). In one of the earlier studies on employee buy-in, Thomson et.al, (1999) from a survey of 350 employees that included managers of large British organisations found a correlation between employee buy-in and business or brand

performance. They also explained that internal corporate communication was a key vehicle to create intellectual and emotional buy-in from employees (Thomson et al., 1999). Intellectual or cognitive buy-in of employees occurs when there is an awareness of and an intellectual alignment to the brand, its values, goals and strategies and an understanding of how they can contribute to its success within their role in the organisation (Thomson et al., 1999). This cognitive depiction of the corporate brand's values, goals and vision in the mind of the employee is also referred to as brand understanding (Piehler et al., 2016).

Emotional buy-in to the brand occurs when employees are committed to achieving the goals because of their emotional attachment and association to the brand (Thomson et al., 1999). Employee commitment is also found to be linked with employee identity, concern for the future of the organisation, loyalty and trust to the organisation (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). The two types of buy-in discussed here from the context of post rebranding of a corporate brand should thus be linked together for an employee to produce any results for the organisation and the brand. Brand knowledge disseminated through internal branding creates understanding of the brand vision, goals and strategy whilst the emotional attachment or commitment brings the performance the organisation seeks.

The effective internal branding activities of an organisation helps employees develop a shared understanding of the corporate brand and produces brand commitment from employees (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Internal corporate brand communication can help members of staff to remain informed of the brand's values and its strategy, so they can enact the brand promise to customers. Internal corporate communication plays an important role in maintaining a brand's performance and their employees' job satisfaction. Schweiger & Denisi (1991) showed how the overall brand performance, job satisfaction and commitment of employees decreased during a merger when internal corporate communication wasn't emphasised whilst it remained the same when it was salient. A similar result was found by Worrall and Cooper (1997) cited in (Thomson et al., 1999) where some managers didn't comprehend the benefits of a merger. Internal corporate brand communication builds brand understanding and employees are thus better equipped to determine their contribution based on their roles to the success of the brand's strategy (King & Grace, 2005; Thomson et al., 1999). The role of internal corporate branding and corporate communication is therefore significant in creating buy-in among employees post rebranding.

3. Research Methodology

The research design for this study was based on qualitative methods, which was found suitable to understand the corporate rebranding phenomena in-depth from an employee's perspective. An inductive reasoning to theory development was employed. It started with an extensive literature review of the corporate rebranding phenomena which was then used to interpret the data and form a theoretical conceptual framework (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). A case study research design was used so that the rebranding phenomena could be studied in the work environment from an employee's perspective (Yin, 2014). However, as a single case study of an organisation that showed extremities in their corporate rebranding practice based on extant literature was not identified (Yin, 2014), a multiple case study design was adopted. Multiple case studies can produce compelling evidences making the study more robust (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). Another factor in considering multiple case studies in studying corporate rebranding is the possibility of literal replication in the findings from each case (Yin, 2014). This study has adopted the use of a case study protocol (Eisenhardt, 1989) to increase the reliability of the research as suggested by other scholars (Phelan, 2011; Rowley, 2002), so that a robust research design is developed that guides the data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings from the case study.

A comprehensive review of the literature was undertaken to identify gaps and key themes with an aim to develop a conceptual framework based on qualitative findings. There appeared to be a lack of enough empirical research to address the corporate rebranding phenomena from the perspective of employees particularly in schools and in the education sector. Thus, two institutions from the education sector were chosen as the cases. The predominant methodology used in the literature on corporate rebranding is case study (Gotsi et al., 2008; Merrilees & Miller, 2008; Miller et al., 2014) which helped in an in-depth exploration and understanding of the phenomenon from an employee's perspective. Two cases within the education sector that included 1 school and 1 university were selected to conduct the study. In both these cases the institution had undergone a form of rebranding in the recent past. Further although in the same sector each institution had a slightly different approach to the rebranding process due to the availability of resources and their structure. Therefore, studying these organisations would help to recognise if theoretical replication is possible (Yin, 2014) as expected or if it would allow for comparison.

3.1 Case Description

CASE 1: CV Primary School

CV Primary School is a primary school based in the south of London, UK. It's a larger than average school with a capacity for over 600 children of the ages 2-11. After a successful OFSTED inspection in 2013, CV Primary School was formed into an Academy Trust by the request of the local government authorities. The Trust was formed in 2014. As more schools joined the Trust, the CV Academy Trust decided to rebrand themselves as P Academy Trust (PAT) in 2016 by separating themselves into another organisation and the school reverted to being called CV Primary School. The rebranding was therefore in two parts. In the first part the word 'school' was replaced by 'Academy' and in the second phase the word 'school' was added back, and a new entity was formed called P Academy Trust. However, the senior management of the school was also part of the trust. Hence both entities were important for the study from an employee's perspective. It's also worth noting that the first two words of the school was linked to the local area and was a strong identifier in the community. Those words were retained in the rebranding process. This meant the school as it is, went through a rebranding exercise from being a school to an academy trust with the additional responsibility of overseeing a failing school and then back to being called a school placed under the oversight of PAT. The trust comprises of 4-5 employees and is headed by an executive Head participant who can also be referred to as the CEO. Currently there are 5 schools that the Trust manages. Every employee in the school is employed by the trust. Each school has its own organisational structure but the head of the school (Head participant) reports to the executive head. The budgets allocated to the school by the government are sent to the school via the trust a part of which is used to fund the trust. Secondly, each school's vision, values and strategic direction is based on the core values and vision of the Trust. This makes the role of the Trust unique. The staff including the leadership of CV Primary School had to adapt their roles and responsibilities to this change. The responsibilities haven't changed since it was renamed to be a school again. The study focuses on the time period when the school was changed into an academy trust with a different strategic direction and mission. The newly formed academy trust was tasked to provide support and oversight to a 'failing' school. This meant new responsibilities for the participants in the school where they had to work with peers at the 'failing' school to improve the latter school's performance. Interviews were conducted with participants who were present during the transition from being a school to an academy trust. The current head participant was interviewed for a broader overview of the changes. The executive head of the trust was also interviewed due to the unique relationship of the Trust with the school and as he was the previous head participant of CV Primary before the current person took charge.

CASE 2: UK University Business School, London

The Business school is a division of the University College in London and is a world leader in science and technology. A few of their MSc and MBA programmes such as in Finance and Management are among the top 10 in the UK and has a reputable spot in Europe and the rest of the world according to their 2017 annual report. The business school was given faculty status in 2003 to be recognised alongside the other faculties of medicine, engineering, natural science. It was also given a sub-brand license to compete with the other top business school brands in the world in attracting students. Although the business school's programmes are highly ranked in the UK, the school embarked on a corporate rebranding and re-positioning strategy in 2013 to enhance its brand position among students and stakeholders. The corporate brand name along with other elements of the visual identity underwent changes. The new name was closely linked with the existing name and as such only a slight modifier that clarified it as a business school was added. With the help of a London based branding and graphic design agency the business school received a new corporate brand identity that included a change in logo, tagline and colour schemes of the brand name. The visual identity was integral in design of the interiors of the business school. The new visual identity had a two-letter acronym as logo and a separate tagline that appeals to its target market. The new visual identity was launched in 2015 and symbolised a dynamic, bold, innovative, analytical and rigorous brand. The modified name still remained connected to its parent name as it exemplified the strong historic roots, values and vision of a member of the royal family in the late 1800's and its reputation in one of the disciplines of medicine, engineering and natural sciences. At its core the brand was all about the fusion of business and technology.

3.2 Case Analysis

For exploration based analysis, data was collected from institutions, using convenience sampling technique (Yin, 2014). An interview guide was designed that solicited responses from participants on the key constructs identified in literature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and one to one basis. The participants were from a convenient sample and were identified based on their length of service, which meant they were present before and after the rebranding. Details of characteristics of participants have been provided in Table 2.

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The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality so that they could respond with honesty. This was done avoid any potential common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Care was taken to avoid interviewer bias by avoiding leading questions or comments and in-appropriate non-verbal behaviour (Saunders et al., 2016). As the questions asked revolve around processes in use by the organisation, perceptions of them and other non-sensitive information there will be no response bias expected in the answers provided. As the responses are anonymous and will not include feedback on other staff or management, responses will not be manufactured to appear positive (Saunders et al., 2016). Participation bias was avoided by agreeing on interview time periods and schedules that are not challenging for employees to fulfill (Saunders et al., 2016). Interviewing more than one person in an organisation has been considered valuable in previous studies as it enables greater insight into the phenomena being studied (Goffin et al., 2006; Krause, 1999).

A total of 6 interviews were conducted from the school, university and the Trust of which 3 were from the school, 2 from the university and 1 from the Trust. This was supplemented with documents available to view, website and a walk around of the premises. Each interview was an average of 32 minutes with the longest being 1 hr. All the interviews were conducted in the respective premises and they were digitally recorded, and field notes were made. The recordings were then transcribed soon after for analysis purposes. The interviews were conducted with the themes that emerged from the literature review on corporate rebranding. The interview questions were framed separately for the leadership and for other staff members. This was done to identify the process of implementing the rebranding internally in addition to the other questions. The open-ended questions were based on four major themes; internal branding, employees' corporate brand engagement, corporate brand identification and post-rebranding buy-in. The themes also reflected the gaps in the extant studies on corporate rebranding especially with respect to the education sector.

Each interview conducted resulted in data that contributed to a rich insight on the concepts and themes on corporate rebranding. After the interview, the researcher was allowed to scan the environment (premises) to view displays of the corporate brand identity in the form of interior design of the building using colour schemes of the corporate brand, information communicated internally and the vision and values of the corporate brand. This also included viewing literature such as brochures and other marketing material used to communicate externally. A few photographs of banners used in the premises were taken. In addition, the researcher visited the websites of the university and the school to look at strategy documents

such as the annual strategic plan of the school to examine the significance of the vision and values in what was communicated. This activity has helped the researcher in triangulating the empirical data collected from the interviews and is a practice encouraged in research when the environment of study allows it (Irani, 2002)

4. Analysis, Findings and Discussion

The data analysis consisted of a few iterative steps. The semi-structured interviews conducted were recorded and then transcribed. The raw field notes collected in the process were converted into summary notes that highlighted the key information from the interviewees. The transcribed text and the summary notes were used for data analysis and interpretation. Based on an extensive literature review this study identified four key themes that needed to be examined in corporate rebranding from an internal stakeholders' perspective. Prior to the commencement of the coding process by the researcher, the data collected was reviewed with other academics and experts to avoid any bias in the interpretation of data and maintain internal validity (Linclon & Guba, 1985). In the coding process, a provisional list of codes were developed based on the themes identified during the literature review (Ridder, 2016). Each transcript was read multiple times and then analysed line by line for what the participants said about the four major themes. A search of the text was done to find words and phrases related to the major themes and then a word tree was created for visualisation as displayed in figure 1. This helped in the further discovery of recurring phrases using words of interest that helped in the understanding of major themes and identifying directions of research. The text pertaining to each of the themes were then collated to develop a narrative that connected each of the themes to the responses. Once the themes were collated the text was carefully parsed for any links between the themes e.g.; employee engagement and corporate brand identification. This led to the development of theoretical propositions discussed after the findings.

<< Insert Fig 1 about here>>

4.1 Thematic Discussion

A thematic analysis of the transcripts from the interviews generated the following findings for the major themes identified by the literature review.

4.1.1 Rebranding Effects

The rebranding of the school affected the internal stakeholders especially the leadership and the teaching staff. There were at least two types of effects that were prominent among the participants. One of the effects was on the roles and responsibilities of the teaching staff and the leadership. They now had to work collaboratively with their peers at the 'failing' school to bring improvements and share best practices. This meant participants from each school would share resources, plan sessions together and travel to the failing school for support or even be asked to teach at the failing school if needed. The other effect was in the form of a sense of uncertainty with respect to job security and pay as a result of the rebranding as is noted in the excerpt below.

RM: "I think that was the main concern for participants. Um, you know, your hours going to change the or, um, you know, list of job requirements going to change, your money going to change"

"I think a lot of staff TA's, and participants were quite worried about job security. What does the academy mean? Does it mean they can replace us?"

The leadership on the other hand had to work with the leadership of the other failing schools to discuss issues and challenges in fulfilling the vision and values and share practices that worked in achieving what each school set out to achieve.

4.1.2 Institution as a Brand

This finding was unique to the responses from the school. Although it was difficult for participants and academic staff to perceive their institution as a brand, most of the participants thought that the name of the school was important and represented the core values of the school. The school name was also closely linked to its reputation according to all the participants and is supported by literature (Lee & Gregg, 2017). It can therefore be said that the school name is perceived as a brand that represented the vision and values of the school and its corporate brand reputation. This perception was very important as the school had only one site and its reputation in the community and locally was quite important as illustrated by the following excerpts.

MR (Head Participant): "I think CV is a Brand as a primary school I think it's largely because of reputation of being a good and outstanding School so therefore there is a lot of competition to get into all places with the school

RM (Participant): "Yeah, because it has that reputation with the Ofsted. I think that was one of the biggest things that happened here, and it has got a very good reputation"

"if we have to go to a course or we have to go training or we meet as a cluster of schools, CV Primary school has a quite high or very high reputation amongst the participants as well".

One of the participants said that the degree of reputation was higher among the participants from various schools while lesser with the wider external stakeholder such as parents because of its provenance associated to the name of the school and the locality.

4.1.3 Rebranding Communication

According to literature internal corporate communication is an important aspect of the corporate rebranding process as it encourages employees buy-in to the revised corporate brand goals and values (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). The key thing here is about communicating the changes to the corporate brand and the brand promise through internal activities. According to all the participants the leadership in the school played a crucial role in communicating the changes to the participants and other employees as explained in the comment below by one of the participants.

RM: "And obviously MR had discussions with parents and governors and participants as well about it just to kind of make sure we were all happy in those sorts of things and then the ball started rolling with it."

The vision and the values of the school were communicated during important meetings such as inset days at the beginning of the school year with all employees. The annual strategic plan developed from the vision and values of the school is used in the formulation of individual performance objectives for teaching staff. This again acknowledges the use of a different medium to communicate the brand values as shown by the excerpt below.

MR: "Nothing specific other than usual things such as beginning of school year where we revisit the vision.

"What they (performance objectives) are linked to in most cases for all teaching staff is linked closely to school development plan (annual series of plan and objectives for the year). Which is linked closely to the Vision and aims of the school."

The interesting fact here is that there were no official internal branding activities that regularly took place other than the consistent corporate communication from the leadership about the changes. It is therefore possible to suggest that corporate communication from leadership should be considered important especially in influencing the buy-in of employees they manage in the rebranding process. This concurs with literature that emphasises the need

for leaders to facilitate the internal branding activities for it to be effective (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster & de Chernatony, 2006).

4.1.4 Employee Engagement

Employee engagement in this study is viewed as a multidimensional construct that comprises of employee satisfaction, loyalty, identification, commitment and performance (Kumar & Pansari, 2014). There was commitment to the goals and tasks evident in the responses from the participants. For example, one participant noted;

PG: "every year you have a school improvement plan, so you'll have like five objectives across, whether it's improving the subject, improving a certain area of the school. And I was tasked with PE last year, so we sat down and put an action plan together of how we're going to improve PE across the school and that kind of things. So yes, it's, I've enjoyed it. It's been good."

The rebranding of the school into an academy hadn't significantly affected the interviewed participants engagement with their jobs and the school. There was evidence of ongoing support in performing the additional tasks that was expected of them in addition to their existing tasks as shown in the excerpt above. This could be explained by the fact that they were already highly engaged in their roles prior to the changes or that the strong leadership skills shown by the leaders in communicating the changes internally helped increase engagement. There is more evidence in the data to signal the role of leadership in communicating the changes to be the main factor. The role of leadership in corporate communication abilities in driving the engagement of employees has been evidenced in literature (Wiley et al, 2010). Research also shows that senior management needs to be able to clearly communicate how an employee's role fits in with the vision of the organisation (MacLeod & Clarke, 2010). As this agrees with the findings, the leadership's role in communicating the changes can be therefore considered as a driving force for engagement during corporate rebranding.

4.1.5 Corporate Brand Identification

Employees who internalise the brand values have a higher degree of identification with the corporate brand and will consider its success and failure as their own (Riketta, 2005). Employees who thus identifies with an organisational brand are usually proud to work for the organisation (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; Christ et al., 2003). All the participants discussed

their pride in working for the school when talking about their identification with the school's values.

PG: "I'm proud to work here. I think that, you can look at, say teaching as two ways. You can either just want to be a participant who teaches children and doesn't want to go into that bigger school making decisions that affect the school or you can look at somebody who does want to maybe work their way up the hierarchy, which I do.

There was a stronger identification from the head participant (leadership) to where his values and self-concept was linked to the school's but also vice versa showing the significance of the core values to his own.

MR: "Well I'm the lead professional here so my values should shape the values of the organisation. It may not necessarily always be exactly the same. But they would certainly be influenced and shape the organisation. A part of my makeup if you like is to have pride in the brand. So I'm very proud of what we offer here whilst recognising that in all groups or organisations all schools there are things that we could do even better."

The loyalty of the participants to the school was related to their identification with the school (Punjaisri et al., 2009) and its values. There was also the evidence of a positive attitude and behaviour towards the school and its children even going the extra mile as a result of their identification with what the school and its values. The excerpt below evidences this;

PG: "And, and if you don't identify yourself with a brand or a school, you're going to look elsewhere. You're going to not stay here for this length of time. So I suppose the answer is yes, I do. Otherwise you don't go that extra mile to help out schools and staff and everything else and so on and say, yeah, I mean if, if you don't see the potential then you jump ship somewhere else"

4.1.6 Post Rebranding Employee Buy-In

The organisation's success was important, and the participants were conscious of how their actions contributed to the school's success. There was clear cognitive buy-in from the participants about the school's goals and changes due to the rebranding. This was mentioned to be as a result of internal corporate communication by the leadership in line with findings of Thomson et al, (1999). There was a sense of alignment to the school's vision and values i.e. the brand values and a commitment to achieve them which is a sign of cognitive and

emotional buy-in post rebranding of a corporate brand. The following statement was made by one of the participants;

RM: "I think making sure the children are, you know, wanting to come to school, they're happy, they feel safe, they're all able to learn with their individual needs. Planning for those, having their children in mind and making sure all children can access the learning. I think that will probably be the main theme coming across. I think, you know, knowing that in this school we do everything we can to make sure we're giving these children the best start."

The participants were not just emotionally attached but were equally committed to doing the work and achieving the goals, which again establishes buy-in to the brand's vision, values, and goals. Below is a statement from a Year 6 participant;

PG: "I love sport. And last year when we did the sport on this action plan, it was like, all right, we're going to really invest and do something for it. And the state, it was then to, what we do now is I'm, they'd been challenges, but it's in a better state than what it was. And it's, yeah. It's what you sort of put into it that the school gains"

5. Theoretical Propositions

Based on the findings from the interviews on the major themes a second level of analysis revealed co-dependent associations between some of the themes. In all the responses there were strong links between employee brand engagement, corporate brand identification and employee buy-in post rebranding of a corporate brand. These relationships are detailed in the form of theoretical propositions.

5.1 Rebranding Communication and Employee Engagement

Most organisations internally communicate its activities, goals and strategies that represent the corporate brand as part of its internal branding program. However, it's important that the information provided through internal branding activities should also provide clarity to an employee's role within the organisation (King, 2010). In a study of the employees in the hotel industry it was found that internal branding is an important factor in determining the level of the employee's engagement with their work (Lee et al., 2014). The organisations internal branding activities communicate such information through various means such as newsletters, staff meetings and training related to the corporate brand. The corporate brand knowledge in terms of the brand vision and values gained through this process will help employees understand how their roles can impact the brand and the behaviour that enacts the corporate brand promise (King, 2010; Buil et.al, 2016). According to Karatepe (2013),

internal marketing activities and employee engagement are related as employees 'reward' the organisation by engaging more with their roles when they perceive that the organisation invests in their welfare and their efforts are appreciated. This can be salient in corporate rebranding as the engagement level of employees can be affected and internal branding can help revive it. In this study the participant responses showed how the rebranding communication they received from the leadership helped them understand what the changes were as part of the re-positioning of the school. However, contrary to literature the engagement levels of the highly engaged employees were not significantly affected by the rebranding. Instead, the rebranding communication helped sustain their engagement levels to the job and the corporate brand. Hence it is proposed that;

P1: An increase in the Rebranding Communication activities will increase the level of employee engagement

5.2 Rebranding Communications and Corporate Brand Identification

An empirical study of 276 business-to-business front line employees in the hospitality industry by (Baker et al., 2014) showed that internal corporate brand communications led to an increase in, the identification of front line service employees with the brand through their perception of brand authenticity and the internalisation of brand values. The results of the empirical analysis of employees in a German bank provide strong evidence for an employee's identification as a motivational force that influences employee's brand-congruent behaviours turning them into brand champions (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014; Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak, 2009). The employee's perceptions of the outcomes of internal branding activities such as their brand knowledge also influenced their identification (Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014, Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). The internal communication about the corporate brand thus also has an influence on the corporate brand-identification (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). There wasn't any loss of identification in the responses by the participants that were interviewed. As changes to the existing corporate brand identity can affect an employee's identification the effects of it was likely minimised by the Rebranding Communication by the leadership. It is thus proposed that internal branding activities for the revised brand influences brand-identification when corporate rebranding has taken place.

P2): An increase in the Rebranding Communication activities will increase the level of employees Corporate Brand Identification

5.3 Corporate Brand Identification and Post Rebranding Employee buy-in

Scholars have evidenced that the identification of employees with the organisation and the corporate brand has an impact on brand building behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour (Riketta, 2005; Baker *et al.*, 2014; Löhndorf and Diamantopoulos, 2014; Buil, Martínez and Matute, 2016). The identification construct as defined by Wieseke, Ahearne, Lam, & van Dick (2009, p. 124) and Dutton et.al (1994 p.239) highlights the emotional attachment of the employee to the organisation and a cognitive understanding of the identity and values that the organisation represents. Employee buy-in is similarly expressed as consisting of a cognitive and an emotional element (Thomson et al., 1999). The cognitive buy-in represents the employees understanding of the corporate brand's and organisations goals and strategies and the ways they can contribute to achieving them, while emotional buy-in is their added commitment to accomplish those goals (Thomson et al., 1999). Employees who identify strongly with the corporate brand will react in a way supportive of the organisation in an effort to preserve their self-identity which is more aligned with the organisations identity (VanKnippenberg et al., 2007; Wieseke et al., 2009). A study by Punjaisri, Evanschitzky and Wilson, (2009) found that identification of employees with the corporate brand influenced their commitment (extent of psychological attachment) to the corporate brand and their willingness to go the extra mile to fulfil the brand goals (Burmann and Zeplin, 2005 p.284). This relationship between corporate brand identification and post-rebranding buy-in is an important contribution to literature as; a study that examines the relationship between these two constructs due to corporate rebranding isn't prominent as far as the researcher is aware. The participants in this study showed a strong identification with the school's vision, values and a commitment to achieve the goals. It is therefore proposed that;

P3a): The stronger the Corporate Brand Identification the greater the Cognitive Buy-in to the new corporate brand

P3b): The stronger the Corporate Brand-Identification the greater the Emotional Buy-in to the new corporate brand

5.4 Employee Engagement and Post Rebranding Employee Buy-in

Employee engagement according to a few scholars is characterised as the positive psychological state of mind of an employee due to which they are cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally involved with their work or role in the organisation and in achieving its outcome (Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli, Salanova, González-romá, & Bakker, 2002; Shuck et al.,

2014). Since the concept of employee engagement has placed an emphasis on the role employees have in the organisation it's not surprising that research has mostly focused on job specific outcomes such as job satisfaction, job performance, organisational commitment and employee retention (Hakanen et al., 2006; Rich et al., 2010; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Albrecht (2013) defines engaged employee as one who has an authentic willingness to contribute to the organisation's success. The responses of participants provided evidence of their support both emotionally and cognitively for the school while describing the various activities they completed. Based on this it is proposed that;

P4a): The higher the employee engagement the greater the level of cognitive buy-in to the new corporate brand

P4b): The higher the employee engagement the greater the level of emotional buy-in to the new corporate brand

5.5 Rebranding Communication and Post Rebranding Employee Buy-in

The earliest study to establish this relationship was by Thomson et.al. (1999) where 350 managers and staff of organisations from a cross-section of industries were surveyed. The study evidenced that effective rebranding communication increased the level of cognitive and emotional buy-in post rebranding of a corporate brand (Thomson et al., 1999). Previous research has shown that an employee's buy-in can be negatively affected as a result of strategic changes to the organisation (Thomson et al., 1999; Thomson & Hecker, 2001) which are important to this study as they are also drivers of corporate rebranding (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Various well-known studies published on internal branding has examined outcomes such as brand commitment, brand identification, brand building behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour however, not in the context of significant strategic changes to the corporate brand (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018; King & Grace, 2007; Punjaisri et al., 2009; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). By disseminating corporate brand knowledge through internal corporate communication employees will gain enough understanding of the corporate brand and develop a closer relationship with the brand and the organisation. In other words, internal branding can influence an employee's buy-in to the changes. What is also important is who communicates the brand identity, promise and values. The participants in the interview consistently expressed the value they had for the rebranding communication by the leadership. This helped employees to share any concerns and for management to collect feedback on the rebranding process. This approach contributed to their confidence in the

changes being positive than negative towards them which allowed them to accept the changes and buy-in to the changes internally and at the corporate level.

P5a): An increase in the Rebranding Communication activities will increase the level of cognitive buy-in

P5b): An increase in the Rebranding Communication activities will increase the level of emotional buy-in

5.6 Rebranding Communication, Employee Engagement and Post Rebranding Employee Buy-in

As stated in P5 internal branding activities has a positive impact on organisational outcomes and specifically cognitive and emotional buy-in. However, if employees are disengaged it could affect their response to the Rebranding Communication and branding activities by management. Corporate rebranding can signify a strategic change to the brand values, culture and possibly structure of the organisation such as in a merger or acquisition (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006; Gotsi et.al. 2008). But as highly engaged employees have a positive attitude towards the organisation with a readiness to contribute to the organisation's success (Albrecht 2013), it is expected that they will respond positively to the corporate communication internally and be relatively more willing to adapt to the changes. However, disengaged employees will not exhibit the same willingness to receive the internal branding messages sent by the organisation during the rebranding process. Hence it is proposed that employee engagement could be a moderator in the relationship between rebranding communication and employee buy-in post rebranding of a corporate brand.

P6a): The lower the level of employee engagement the weaker the link between rebranding communication and post rebranding employee buy-in

P6b): The higher the level of employee engagement the stronger the link between rebranding communication and post rebranding employee buy-in

5.7 Corporate Brand Identification, Rebranding Communication and Post Rebranding Employee Buy-in

When employees identify with the organisation they feel a sense of belongingness and oneness to it and will find the organisation's goals and outcomes significant (Wieseke et al., 2009). During corporate rebranding however, new brand values, identity and vision could be developed. This would affect the employee's level of identification with the organisation and

brand. When the new values, vision and identity are then communicated through internal branding activities its ability to positively impact employee buy-in may be diminished. Hence it is proposed that an employee's brand-identification can act as a moderator in the relationship between rebranding communication and employee buy-in.

P7a): The lower the Corporate Brand Identification the weaker the relationship between rebranding communication and post rebranding employee buy-in

P7b): The higher the Corporate Brand Identification the stronger the relationship between rebranding communication and post rebranding employee buy-in

6.0 Conceptual Model

The theoretical propositions stated above are conceptualised as a framework below.

<< Insert Fig 2 about here>>

The framework explains the relationships between each of the constructs. Consistent rebranding communication by leadership has a positive effect on buy-in of employees post rebranding of a corporate brand. The engagement of employees is affected by what the leadership communicates, and it helps sustain their level of engagement. Engaged employees have a positive attitude towards the organisation and will therefore respond positively to the changes to the corporate brand and buy-in to it as corporate rebranding leads to changes to the brand identity an employee's identification with the brand can be affected. Regular and consistent corporate communication by leadership can influence the level of identification of employees with the brand. Consequently, employees with a higher level of identification with the brand are expected to buy-in to the rebranding of the corporate brand. The engagement and brand-identification of employees can also act as moderators in the effect that rebranding communication has on post rebranding employee buy-in. In other words, the buy-in cognitively and emotionally to the revised corporate brand happens when the employees are highly engaged and identify closely with the brand. This perspective on an employee's response to corporate rebranding is an important theoretical contribution to the literature.

7. Implications, Limitations and Future research

7.1 Theoretical Implications

This paper examined the process of corporate rebranding from an internal perspective in the education sector. Previous studies have focused on external stakeholders and in other sectors, which makes this study unique. A few studies have examined internal aspects of corporate rebranding such as culture (Gotsi et al., 2008), employee identity and identification in non-profit organisations (Gilstrap & Smith, 2016; Stuart, 2012) however none have examined corporate brand engagement of employees, rebranding communication and corporate brand identification collectively when an organisation undergoes rebranding. This is also one of the few studies to collectively examine constructs from Organisational Behaviour, HR and Marketing related to an employee when an institution undergoes rebranding. There is therefore a meaningful contribution to the literature and theory of corporate rebranding by evaluating what contributes to an employee buying-in to the changes.

7.2 Managerial Implications

Educational institutions in general and especially universities are preparing themselves for a post Brexit environment in the UK. Senior Managers involved in the rebranding process internally will appreciate the benefits this study has highlighted in attending to the psychological needs of employees and getting their support. One of the key messages communicated from the findings was the approach of the leadership to include internal and external stakeholders in the development of the vision of the school. A similar collaborative approach is recommended, as it will help management to collate valuable feedback thereby reducing the level of resistance to the changes to the corporate brand. Senior management especially should consider proactively using this approach when modifying or re-writing the vision and values of their corporate brand to pre-empt any setbacks from employees due to corporate rebranding. Another aspect is that the consistent and continuous stream of rebranding communication activities from the management about the changes to the corporate brand will help employees maintain a positive attitude and behaviour towards the organisation. This minimises any of the effects of the rebranding on their identification with the corporate brand and its values. An employee's engagement with their role and the organisation will not be significantly affected by corporate rebranding and in fact can be sustained if there is consistent corporate communication by management. Employee buy-in post rebranding is a gradual process and employees eventually must be able to comprehend the changes to the corporate brand, accept it and then continue to be committed to fulfilling the corporate goals. Managers need to recognise this and should consider evaluating an employee's commitment and understanding through bi-annual or annual performance reviews, especially during the initial period. They can also support the process by acknowledging employees that, closely identify with the corporate brand and are highly engaged, and then designate them as brand champions. Brand champions can then be influential and help other employees buy-in to the new corporate brand and model the right behaviour.

7.3 Limitations and Future Research

This study was aimed at the education sector however it only includes two representatives from this sector ie; a primary school and a university which is a limitation. Research needs to be conducted to the wider education sector that includes primary, secondary, further education and higher education. The participants interviewed were selected because they had

the greatest effect on the school's stakeholders such as the children, parents and the community. However, this maybe a limitation as participants from all levels of the hierarchy and other administrative functions were not included. The interview of the university staff didn't generate much insight on engagement and identification possibly because it was a senior member of staff that participated initiating and executing the rebranding. Future research should consider interviewing academic faculty who are research and teaching focused. Another limitation was the inability to access data from private sector organisations in other sectors and industries such as telecommunication. There could be further research to investigate if the theoretical propositions can be tested to quantitatively establish the relationships between the various constructs in the education and other sectors. Also, research should be considered to apply this study's findings to the dynamics of a corporate acquisition from an internal perspective where a stronger brand acquires a weaker brand resulting in the rebranding of the latter.

8. Conclusion

The findings helped answer the research question and supported extant literature on corporate rebranding. The rebranding process consisted of various stages that included formulating a revised vision and value statements for the institution and the rebranding communication of the new corporate vision and corporate values so that employees could buy-in and be committed to it (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). The employees responded positively to the leadership's rebranding communication as they had a collaborative approach. The identification of employees with the brand and the organisation played an important role in their positive response to the rebranding. The corporate brand identity had changed yet their identification didn't reach a low level as expected. Previous research has shown that internal communication and branding activities by corporations can impact the commitment of employees to the corporation (Foster et al., 2010) as they make sense of the changes to the brand and their roles if any. But at the same time this effect of rebranding communication is strengthened when employees had a higher level of identification and engagement with the corporate brand. This agrees with literature as a past study has shown how brand-identification, commitment and loyalty of an employee were strengthened as a result of internal branding activities (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2011). Employees are more likely to buy-in when they feel a higher sense of belonging to the organisation and are engaged emotionally and behaviourally in their roles. This is a novel finding as far as the researcher is aware.

What was clear from all the participants were that although the name of the school had been modified and there were new roles and responsibilities that came with it, there weren't any significant changes to their engagement and identification with the school and its values. The changes supported by the employees were partly because of the consistent rebranding communication by the leadership and partly due to their levels of identification and engagement. The existing identification of the employees including that of the respondent in a senior role wasn't affected significantly due to the consistent corporate communication from the leadership. Similarly, the engagement of the employees to their roles was evident in their commitment to achieve the goals they and the school had set in the form of the annual school improvement plan. The initial concerns from the participants with respect to their job security, pay and roles may have affected their engagement and identification with the name of the school, its reputation and values in other words its corporate brand identity. However, this did not continue for long and the responses evidences it. The employee's that therefore bought into the rebranding exercise were those that were engaged and had a stronger sense of identification with the corporate brand. It can be then concluded that employees will buy-in to the rebranding of the corporate brand when they closely identify with the brand and are also highly engaged.

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Table 1: Literature Review

	Authors	Theoretical Basis of study	Methodology	Findings	Res Focus
1	Daly and Moloney, (2004)	Conceptual paper	Case review of Vodafone's acquisition of Eircell- secondary	Proposed a rebranding framework	IB and Employee Buy-in
2	Melewar, Hussey and Srivoravilai (2005)	CVI, corporate identity	Case study of France Telecom	Positive change in perceptions from surveys conducted internally and externally post rebranding.	Employee Buy-in, customer perception and Corporate Identity
3	Muzellec and Lambkiin (2006)	Brand equity	Cross-sectional sample of 166 rebranded companies provides descriptive data on the context in which rebranding occurs and an intranet survey of employees	A decision to rebrand is most often provoked by structural changes particularly mergers and acquisitions, which have a fundamental effect on the corporation's identity and core strategy. They also suggest that a change in marketing aesthetics affects brand equity less than other factors such as employees' behaviour.	Rebranding outcomes and Corporate Identity
4	Ettenson and Knowles (2006)	Mergers and acquisition	207 mergers were studied from a database and a few interviews conducted	Corporate branding had low/moderate priorities before the merger. 64% of the cases the target brand was eliminated or they co-existed	Rebranding outcomes
5	Jaju, Joiner,Reddy (2006)		3 pre-tests with university students and a main study2 x 2 x 2 x 2 experimental design with all variables manipulated between subjects. online consumer panel of 3,000 contacts	Acquisitions where the target brand received the acquirers brand name had lesser loss of brand equity relative to synergistic strategies such as merger	Rebranding outcomes
6	Gotsi and Andriopoulos (2007)		exploratory qualitative study semi-structured in-depth interviews with executives involved in the corporate rebranding of a leading telecommunications firm	Four pitfalls in the rebranding process: disconnecting with the core; stakeholder myopia; emphasis on labels, not meanings; one company, one voice: the challenge of multiple identities	Corporate Identity
7	Hankinson, Lomax and Hand (2007)		Quantitative survey 465 responses	Time effect had a bigger impact on attitude of staff. acquisition of knowledge declines as time since the rebranding increases. behavioural changes are more pronounced closest to the point of re-branding	Employee Buy-in
8	Gotsi,Andriopoulos,Wilson (2008)	Organisational culture, change management, employee behavior	Case study Qualitative interviews	Little alignment of the staff's values to the new corporate brand values due to resistance	Internal Branding, Employee Buy-in and Corporate Identity
9	Merrilees and Miller, (2008)	PCR	Case study	Formulated the Principles of Corporate Rebranding theory	Employee Buy-in and Rebranding Outcome
10	Lambkin and Muzellec (2008)	Mergers and Acquisitions,	Review of 2 case studies in the banking	Size and marketing strength of the target relative to the	Rebranding Outcome

		Rebranding	industry in addition to literature on M&A and rebranding	one of the acquirers is the most significant variable influencing the branding decision	
11	Finney and Hansen (2010)	Internal Marketing change management	Case study of a Canadian university college change of name. Grounded theory 10 semi-structured interviews	Addressed the barriers/considerations of an internal marketing program when facing a significant organizational change project such as rebranding	Internal Branding and Employee Buy-in
12	Lambkin and Muzellec (2010)	B2B branding, M&A; s	Case study of a national construction materials company, 12 semi-structured interviews	In the case after merger when both brands still existed the target brand retained less brand equity. The acquirer wasn't affected much by the acquisition due to an existing strong equity	Rebranding Outcome
14	Stuart (2012) -NPF	Organisational structure, Employee identity and identification, nature of the rebranding activity	In-depth review	Variations in the type and level of employee identity and identification, organizational structure and its corresponding cultural effects, and the nature of the rebranding activity, which is influenced by organizational structure, impact on the degree to which employees can live the new corporate brand.	Employee Buy-in, Rebranding Outcome and Corporate Identity
15	Miller and Merrilees, (2013)	Principles of Corporate Rebranding (PCR)	Action Research	Non-Profit sector: Total stakeholder involvement of employee, client and management in corporate rebranding process resulted in total stakeholder buy-in	Internal Branding, Employee Buy-in and Rebranding Outcome
16	Lee (2013) - NPF		Case study (charity), 15 semi structured interviews, exploratory	3 tensions were identified 1. b/w identity and image 2. Multiple stakeholder dialogue and access 3. Balancing marketing requirement with organisational identity	Employee Buy-in and Corporate Identity
17	Hanh Le, Sung Cheng, Kuntjara, Lin, (2014)	Corporate rebranding	2×2 factorial experimental design. 120 undergraduate students in Taiwan evolutionary and revolutionary, brand name attitude brand preference and product expertise as moderators	the use of evolutionary rebranding strategies is superior in enhancing consumer brand preference in the case of pleasant original brand name attitude, while the use of revolutionary strategies is superior when consumers hold less pleasant attitude	Rebranding Outcome
18	Bolhuis,de Jong & van den Bosch (2015)	CVI	Survey of employees and customers of – 4 organisations	CVI changes had larger effect on employees than consumers	Employee Buy-in and Corporate Identity
19	Collange (2015)	Services rebranding, brand attachment	quantitative study was conducted of 320 customers and eight hypothetical brand name changes	evaluation of a service declined significantly after the brand name change	Rebranding Outcome
20	Roy and Sarkar (2015)	Cue utilisation theory and information integration theory	Experimental design 2x2 and 2x3	CBBE of an established brand diminishes following rebranding news whilst it enhanced for a less established brand, customers care more about	Rebranding Outcome

				revolutionary rebranding than evolutionary	
21	Gilstrap and Smith (2016) - NPF	Employee Identity	16 interviews	NGO managers expressed pride in their organization, frustration regarding public ignorance about their organization, and broader connection with NGO identity. managers identify more closely with their organization when it adheres to mission objectives and encourages stakeholder inclusivity, and less closely when their organization loses identity in the renaming process, or when there is less perceived transparency and inclusion	Employee Buy-in and Corporate Identity
	Lee and Bourne (2017) - NPF	Corporate rebranding	Exploratory, interviews with 10 charity managers and 4 consultants	Two types of identity normative and utilitarian were identified. four types of rebranding strategies based on the two identities and the potential drivers for their adoption	Corporate Identity

Table 2

|	Role and Responsibilities	Gender	Age	Length of Service	Interview Length	Location
CASE STUDY 1: CV Primary School/P Academy Trust						London
1	Executive Head	M	55-60	4 years	45 Mins	
2	Head Participant	M	45-50	2 years	25 Mins	
3	Maths Subject Lead, Participant and Assistant Head	M	25-30	6 years	24 Mins	
4	English Subject lead, Class Participant	F	25-30	5 years	21 Mins	
CASE STUDY 2: UK University Business School						London
5	Principal Lecturer	M	60-65	3+ years	25 Mins	
6	Corporate Brand and Communications manager	M	40-45	3+ years	45 Mins	

Fig 1: Thematic Visualisation
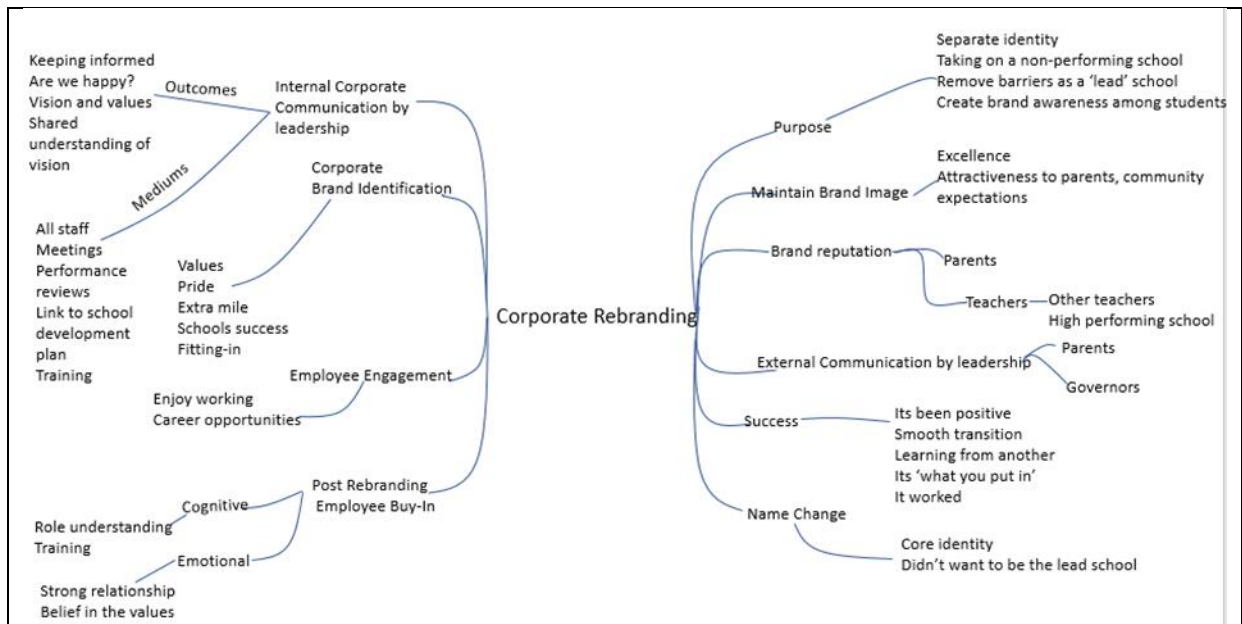
Fig 2: Corporate Rebranding Buy-in (Developed by authors)