



Corporate Storytelling Tactics for Branding of Public Universities in Western Kenya

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ABSTRACT

As competition in higher education intensifies, university branding has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Corporate storytelling has emerged as a branding strategy through which universities communicate institutional identity, values and achievements through strategic narratives. However, limited empirical evidence exists on the corporate storytelling tactics used by public universities in Western Kenya for branding. This study examined the corporate storytelling tactics used by four public universities in Western Kenya as a branding strategy. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was adopted. Quantitative data was collected using questionnaires administered to 135 departmental and sectional heads across the four universities. Qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with communication professionals from the respective universities. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The study was underpinned by Erving Goffman's Impression Management Theory and Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm Theory. Four corporate storytelling tactics employed by public universities in Western Kenya: platform-based, achievement-based, strategic identity-aligned, and emotion-driven storytelling. However, their implementation was constrained by weak coordination, limited professional capacity and inadequate leadership support. The findings further showed stronger branding outcomes in brand awareness, credibility and differentiation, while reputation enhancement and long-term stakeholder loyalty were comparatively weaker. Corporate storytelling constitutes a strategic approach to university branding through which public universities in Western Kenya construct and present institutional identity. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education provide policy guidance on corporate storytelling within university branding and communication, while university management strengthens its implementation through resources, capacity building and coordinated communication practices.

Keywords: Corporate Storytelling, Corporate Storytelling Tactics, Higher Education, Public Universities, University Branding

I. INTRODUCTION

Corporate storytelling gives organizations an important strategic communication approach through which they communicate who they are, their values, what they have achieved and experienced through narratives (Avery, 2019). In university branding, corporate storytelling goes beyond visual identity elements humanizing institutions, communicating institutional distinctiveness and strengthening relationships with stakeholders (Mucundorfeanu, 2018; Nyagadza, et al., 2020). Narratives centered on institutional history, achievements, values and activities enable universities to construct recognizable identities within increasingly competitive higher education environments (Muendo et al., 2024; Moywaywa et al., 2024; Kamau, 2025).

Universities in different parts of the world have incorporated corporate storytelling into their branding and strategic communication activities. European universities with long-standing reputations, for example, use narratives of heritage, innovation and academic achievement to reinforce their trustworthiness and uniqueness (Fischbach & Guerrero, 2020). In African universities, corporate storytelling has also been used to disseminate institutional transformation, social responsibility and broader societal relevance (Asmar et al., 2023). These varied applications indicate that corporate storytelling can serve different institutional depending on the specific communication context and identity that a university seeks to project.

Despite the growing interest in corporate storytelling, empirical evidence on how public universities employ corporate storytelling tactics for branding is limited. This issue is particularly relevant in Kenya, where expansion of the



higher education sector has intensified competition for visibility, reputation and stakeholder engagement (CUE, 2021). Public universities in Western Kenya, including Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kibabii University, Alupe University and Kaimosi Friends University, have adopted branding initiatives to strengthen their institutional presence (Muendo, Kijana, & Mutwiri, 2024). However, limited attention has been given to how these institutions use corporate storytelling to communicate their associations, activities, values and personality (Koku, 2023; Kogo, 2025). This article examines the corporate storytelling tactics employed by public universities in Western Kenya for branding. It contributes empirical insights into corporate storytelling practices within a public university context in Western Kenya, with relevance to similar higher education environments.

1.1 Research Objective

To examine the corporate storytelling tactics used by public universities in Western Kenya as a strategy for enhancing university branding

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This article was underpinned by Impression Management Theory (IMT) and Narrative Paradigm Theory (NPT) to explain how corporate storytelling tactics are used in branding of public universities in Western Kenya. Impression Management Theory, proposed by Goffman (1959), views organizations as social actors that strategically present themselves to shape stakeholder perceptions. In higher education, the theory explains how universities use corporate storytelling to communicate institutional achievements, activities, values and personality. Such narratives can strengthen brand identity and differentiation in competitive higher education environments (Bolino et al., 2008; Ellemers & Chopova, 2021). However, IMT cautions that narratives that emphasize institutional strengths without reflecting organizational realities may undermine brand credibility.

Narrative Paradigm Theory (Fisher, 1984, 1987) extends this perspective by explaining how stakeholders interpret institutional stories. The theory argues that effective narratives should demonstrate coherence and authenticity by aligning with stakeholder values, experiences and expectations. In university branding, relevant and credible institutional communications can contribute to the development of brand identity, reputation and stakeholder engagement (Eldegwy et al., 2018, O'Sullivan et al., 2024). The two theories provide complementary perspectives on corporate storytelling and university branding. IMT focuses on how public universities in Western Kenya construct institutional narratives, while NPT focuses on how stakeholders interpret them and assess their credibility.

2.2 Empirical Review

Corporate storytelling has been examined as a means through which organizations communicate aspects of their associations, activities, values and personality to stakeholders (Nyagadza et al., 2020; O'Sullivan et al., 2024). In the higher education, storytelling has similarly been linked to communication of institutional achievements and identity (Mogaji, 2020; Maore et al., 2019). However, less attention has been given to the specific corporate storytelling tactics that public universities in Western Kenya use to develop and communicate their narratives.

Corporate associations influence how stakeholders perceive an institution's competence, reputation and commitment to social responsibility (Brown & Dacin, 1997; Balmer & Greyser, 2006). In higher education, research and innovation output, industry linkages and institutional achievements can shape perceptions of a university and strengthen its brand (Maore et al., 2019; Muendo et al., 2024). Alumni success and community engagement also provide significant sources of institutional meaning and brand value (Mogaji, 2020). Although these studies establish the associations that can shape university brands, they offer limited insight into the storytelling tactics used by public universities in Western Kenya to communicate and develop these associations.

Corporate personality shapes brand perception and differentiation by giving stakeholders cues about an organization's values, character and distinctive attributes. Keller and Richey (2006, 2017) describes corporate brand personality in terms of characteristics communicated through an organization's values, words and actions. Yasin et al. (2023) similarly found that corporate social sustainability contributes positively to employer branding. This demonstrates how organization's practices can influence how its brand is perceived. However, most existing studies have focused on corporate and private-sector organizations. Little attention has been given to how public universities in Western Kenya communicate their personality and unique character through corporate storytelling.



According to Foroudi et al. (2020), corporate values can shape how stakeholders perceive an institution when those values are reflected in organizational practices and communicated consistently. Studies in higher education further show that institutional identity, brand characteristics and stakeholder perceptions are interconnected since university branding influences reputation, engagement and identification (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2021; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2022). These studies demonstrate the branding relevance of institutional values but give less attention to the corporate storytelling tactics through which public universities in Western Kenya present and humanize those values.

Nyagadza et al., 2021 argue that corporate activities constitute an important element of corporate storytelling for branding because organizational activities shape stakeholders' perceptions of the corporate brand. In higher education, community engagement and socially responsible activities can influence institutional reputation by demonstrating a university's commitment and contribution to society (Azizi & Sassen, 2023). University corporate social responsibility has also been associated with brand positioning and corporate brand trust (Amani, 2024a, 2024b). In Kenya, Mutwiri et al., (2022) found that strategic CSR communication was positively associated with the brand image of public universities. However, these studies focus primarily on the branding outcomes of institutional activities and CSR communication. This leaves a gap in understanding how public universities in Western Kenya use corporate storytelling tactics to communicate their activities as elements of their corporate brands.

There is limited evidence on how public universities in Western Kenya put these dimensions together use corporate storytelling tactics to in presenting institutional brands. In addition, limited research integrates Impression Management Theory and Narrative Paradigm Theory to examine both the construction of institutional narratives and their interpretation by stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2020; Ellemers & Chopova, 2021). This study therefore examines the corporate storytelling tactics employed by public universities in Western Kenya to presents and strengthen their brands.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to examine the corporate storytelling tactics used in the branding of public universities in Western Kenya. Quantitative data was collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews. The design was chosen because it provides a more comprehensive understanding by integrating measurable and deeper qualitative interpretations. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation stage to enhance the comprehensiveness of the analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The combination of methods was appropriate because corporate storytelling requires examining both stakeholder perceptions and symbolic interpretations that shape organizational identity and branding (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Aula & Tienari, 2011; Cornelissen, 2020).

3.2 Study Area

The research was carried out in four public universities in Western Kenya: Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kibabii University, Alupe University and Kaimosi Friends University.

3.3 Target Population

The quantitative target population comprised 135 departmental and sectional heads across four public universities in Western Kenya: Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kibabii University, Alupe University and Kaimosi Friends University in Western Kenya.

3.4 Sample size and sampling procedures

Proportionate stratified sampling was used to select One Hundred and One (101) participants, of whom 89 completed the questionnaires. These participants were selected because of their involvement in institutional decision making and their role in shaping stakeholder perceptions of the university brands. The qualitative component involved four purposively selected communication professionals, one from each university, who served as key informants on institutional storytelling practices. Purposive sampling was appropriate because the informants possessed direct knowledge of the universities' communication and storytelling practices (Etikan, 2016).

3.4 Research Instruments

Data was collected using questionnaires and in-depth interview schedules. The questionnaire assessed administrators' perceptions of corporate storytelling tactics, including institutional associations, activities, values and personality, using a five-point Likert scale (Bryman, 2021). The interviews explored how these storytelling tactics were



developed and applied in university branding. The instruments were pilot-tested at Maseno University and subjected to expert review. Content validity was established using the Content Validity Index (CVI), which exceeded the recommended threshold. Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.70 confirmed the reliability of the measurement scales (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011; Taber, 2018).

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations (Field, 2018). Qualitative data was analyzed manually using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly, manually coded and organized into themes aligned with the study objective. The findings from both strands were integrated during interpretation to provide a comprehensive understanding of corporate storytelling tactics for university branding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval and research authorization were obtained from the relevant institutional authorities and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Confidentiality and protection of participants' information were maintained throughout the research process (Israel & Hay, 2006; Resnik, 2020).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Response Rate

A total of one hundred (101) questionnaires were distributed out of which 89 were fully filled and returned, representing a response rate of 88%, as presented in table 1.

Table 1

Response Rate

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Returned Questionnaires	89	88%
Unreturned questionnaire	12	12%
Total	101	100%

4.2 Corporate storytelling tactics used by public universities

This objective examined the corporate storytelling tactics used by public universities in Western Kenya for branding. The research established four corporate storytelling tactics employed by public universities in Western Kenya: platform-based, achievement-based, strategic identity-aligned, and emotion-driven storytelling. The findings indicate that these tactics serve different communication and branding functions, with their contribution to branding outcomes varying across dimensions as indicated in the quantitative findings in Table 2.

Table 2

Corporate Storytelling Tactics Used by Public Universities

Corporate Storytelling Tactic	N	Mean	Std Dev
The university effectively uses multimedia elements (videos, graphics) in its corporate storytelling efforts.	89	3.73	0.69
Interactive storytelling features (polls, virtual tours) are regularly incorporated.	89	3.78	0.70
Alumni testimonials and success stories are prominently featured.	89	3.74	0.67
The university actively uses social media campaigns to share corporate stories.	89	3.51	0.68
Storytelling is effectively used in communicating during crises and managing public perception.	89	4.07	0.72
The university highlights community engagement and social impact through storytelling.	89	3.34	1.14
Corporate storytelling consistently reflects the university's mission and vision.	89	4.13	0.79
Core values (integrity, inclusivity) are effectively communicated through storytelling.	89	4.07	0.88
Storytelling campaigns support and highlight long-term strategic goals.	89	3.82	0.92
Commitment to diversity and equity is clearly represented.	89	3.04	0.64

Social responsibility (community service, sustainability) is a prominent theme.	89	3.70	0.69
Research achievements and innovation are regularly promoted.	89	3.82	0.92
Corporate storytelling messages are clear and easy to understand.	89	3.04	1.64
Corporate stories evoke emotional connection and resonate with the audience.	89	3.82	0.92
Storytelling content is tailored to various stakeholder groups.	89	3.04	1.64
Authenticity is maintained in all storytelling efforts.	89	3.73	0.96
Corporate storytelling encourages stakeholder interaction and participation.	89	3.78	0.70
Visual and multimedia content is high-quality and professionally presented.	89	3.61	0.69
Corporate storytelling activities successfully engage stakeholders.	89	3.61	0.69
Storytelling has increased awareness and recognition of the university brand.	89	4.13	0.79
Corporate storytelling positively influences perceptions of credibility and integrity.	89	4.07	0.88
The university's reputation has been enhanced through corporate storytelling.	89	3.34	1.14
Corporate storytelling clearly differentiates the university from other institutions.	89	4.13	0.79
Storytelling's impact on branding is sustained and contributes to long-term stakeholder loyalty.	89	3.70	0.69

Platform-based corporate storytelling was characterized by using multimedia content, interactive features, and social media campaigns to disseminate institutional narratives and facilitate stakeholder engagement. Most respondents strongly agreed 47 (52.8%) that the investigated universities effectively use multimedia elements such as videos and graphics for corporate storytelling, while 30 (33.7%) agreed. The respondents also indicated that the universities regularly incorporated interactive features such as polls and virtual tours in their corporate storytelling campaigns as reflected by 30 (33.7%) who agreed and 47 (52.8%) who strongly agreed. In addition, 44(49.4%) of the respondents agreed that the universities actively use social media campaigns to share corporate stories and engage stakeholders. Figure 4.1 shows the multimedia elements, interactive features and social media campaign tactics used by public universities in Western Kenya.

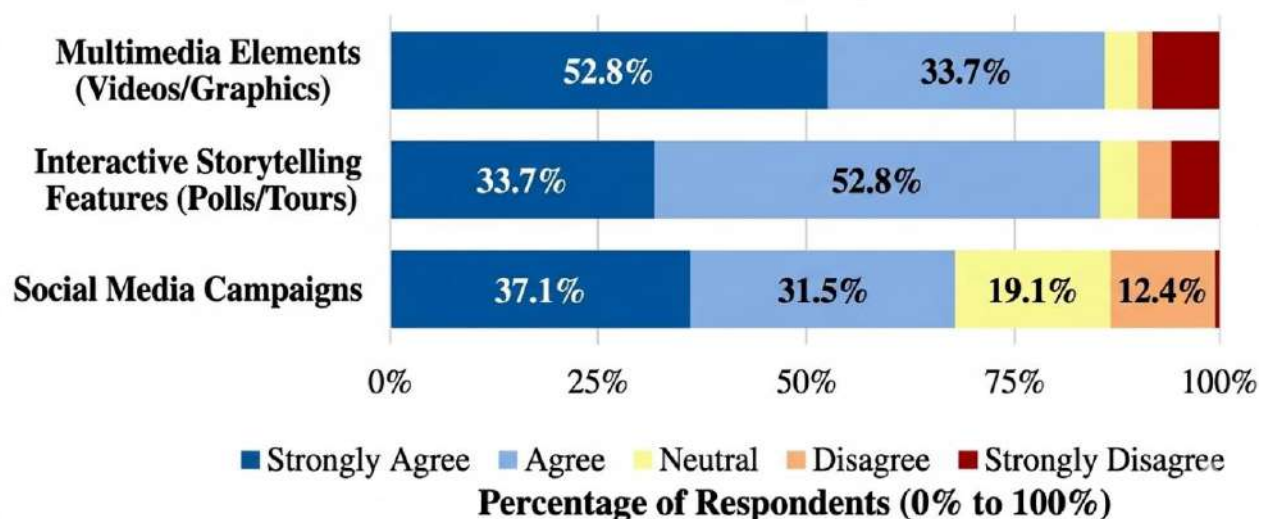


Figure 1

Use of multimedia elements, interactive features and social media campaigns

Qualitative evidence identified videos, graphics, virtual tours, live sessions, online polls and social media as channels for communicating institutional narratives. The findings are consistent with Jonsen et al. (2021), who associate multimedia storytelling with brand communication and stakeholder engagement, and Okafor (2025), who links activist narratives and cinematic visuals with corporate branding. The findings extend this literature by showing that public universities use different digital formats to communicate with different stakeholder groups. The choice of platform therefore shapes how institutional narratives are presented and how the university's identity is made visible to stakeholders. Achievement-based corporate storytelling centred on research and innovation, alumni success, social responsibility and community impact. Most respondents agreed 31 (34.8%) that alumni testimonials and success stories are prominently featured in the university's storytelling platforms. The universities highlight community engagement and social impact through its storytelling initiatives as strongly agreed by 33 (37.1%). Figure 4.4 demonstrates how the public universities in

Western Kenya use alumni testimonials, community engagement and social impact, and social responsibility and sustainability elements in corporate storytelling.

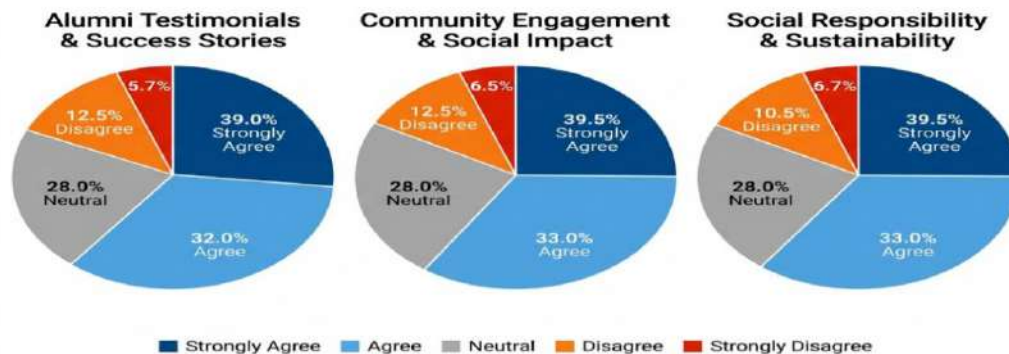


Figure 2

Achievement-based corporate storytelling tactic

Qualitative evidence showed the prominence of alumni and student success stories alongside research and innovation achievements. These findings support Maore et al. (2019), Mogaji (2020) and Fomunyam (2020), who associate institutional achievements, alumni narratives, research and social impact with university branding. The findings extend this literature by showing that achievement narratives combine institutional accomplishments with individual experiences. These narratives provide tangible accounts through which universities communicate desirable institutional attributes and stakeholders interpret claims about institutional capability and impact.

Strategic identity-aligned storytelling emerged strongly. The universities' commitment to diversity and equity was found to be clearly represented in its narrative activities with 33 (37.1%) of the respondents strongly agreeing. A significant portion of the respondents agreed 28 (31.5%) that storytelling campaigns support and highlight the university's long-term strategic goals. 40 (44.9%) of the respondents indicated that corporate storytelling consistently reflected the university's mission and vision. In addition, most of the respondents also strongly agreed 43 (48.3%) that corporate storytelling was effectively used in communicating during crises and managing public perception. Figure 4.5 demonstrates how the strategic identity-aligned corporate storytelling tactic is used for branding in public universities in Western Kenya.

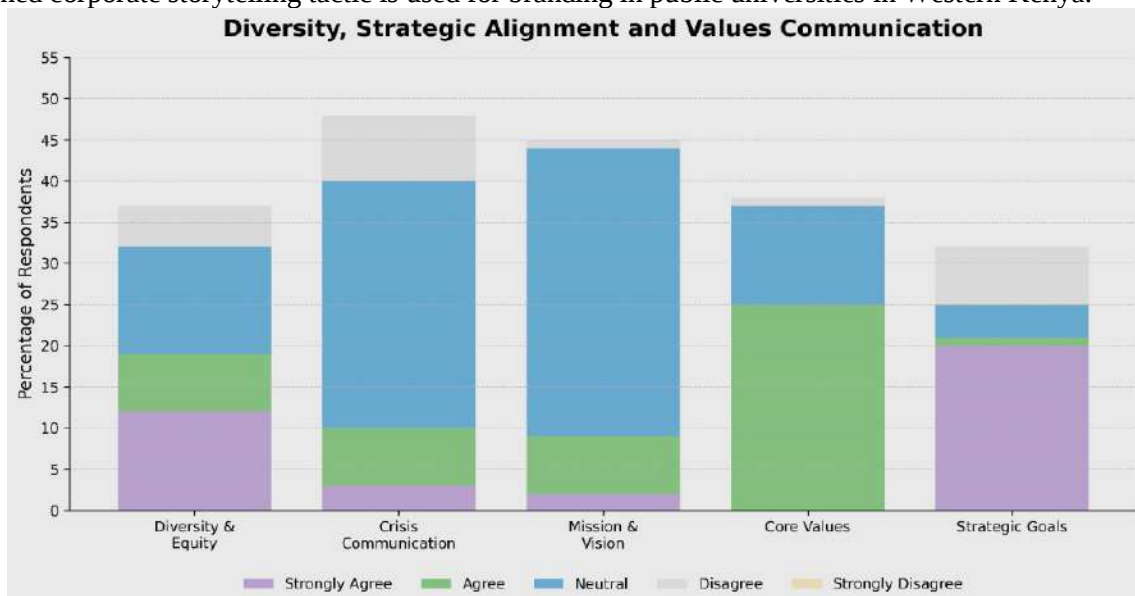


Figure 3

Strategic identity-aligned corporate storytelling tactic

Qualitative evidence also showed the use of storytelling during crises to maintain stakeholder trust and manage public perceptions. These findings support Mogaji (2020) on institutional identity and prestige in university communication and Jonsen et al. (2021) on authenticity and representation in organizational branding. The strong alignment with mission, vision and core values indicates that corporate storytelling is used to construct and project a coherent institutional identity. The use of corporate storytelling during crises further demonstrates how narratives can be employed to manage institutional impressions when public perceptions are at risk.

Emotion-driven storytelling involved emotional appeal and resonance, authenticity, stakeholder interaction and participation, and stakeholder engagement. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents fairly agreed 29(32.6%) storytelling content is tailored to address the interests and needs of various stakeholder groups. Additionally, majority of the respondents strongly agreed 33 (37.1%) that authenticity is maintained in all storytelling efforts, representing the university genuinely. Corporate storytelling encourages stakeholder interaction and participation, majority fairly agreed 31 (34.8%). Further, 33 (37.1%) of respondents strongly agreed that visual and multimedia content used in storytelling is of high quality and professionally presented. 33 (37.1%) of respondents also strongly agreed that corporate storytelling activities successfully engage and involve university stakeholders. Figure 4.4 presents an illustration of how corporate storytelling attributes influence brand communication effectiveness in public universities in Western Kenya.

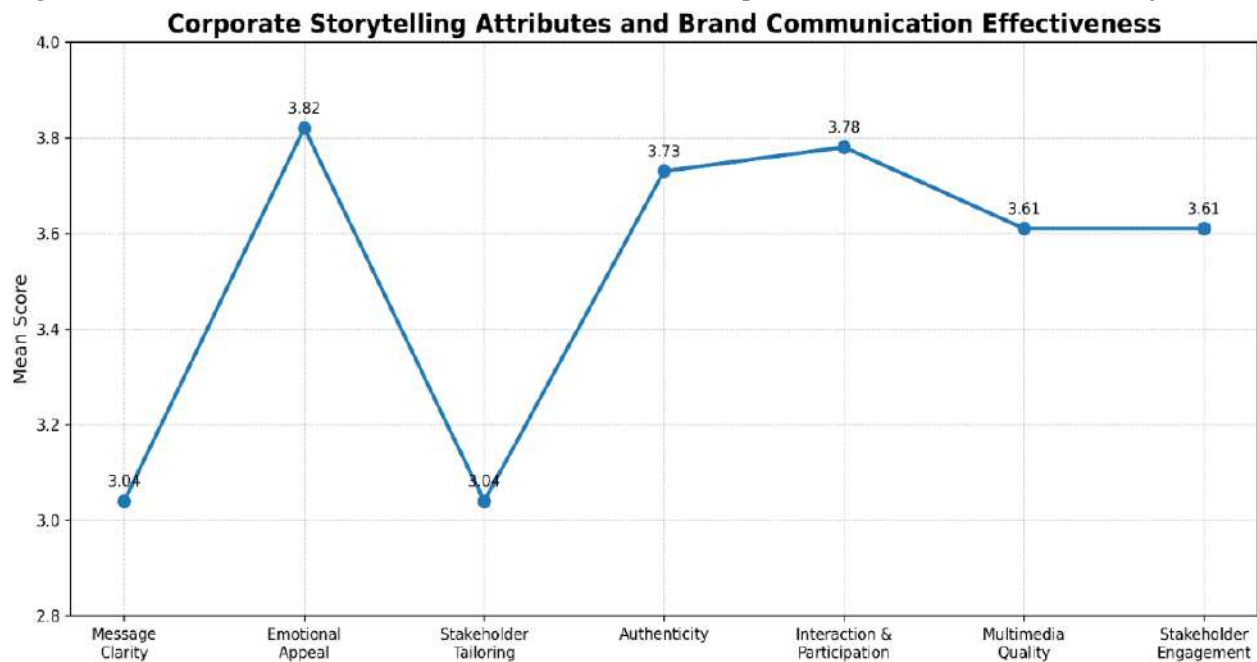


Figure 4
Emotion-driven corporate storytelling tactic

Qualitative evidence reinforced the emphasis on emotional resonance and authenticity. The findings suggest that the universities relied more on broadly resonant narratives than on extensively differentiated stories for particular stakeholder groups. Emotional resonance and authenticity provide a basis through which stakeholders attach meaning to institutional narratives. The relatively lower emphasis on stakeholder-specific tailoring suggests that this meaning was largely constructed around shared institutional experiences and values. The findings also show variation in branding outcomes. Brand awareness and recognition and institutional differentiation had the highest levels of strong agreement, with 40 (44.9%) respondents strongly agreeing about each outcome. Credibility and integrity perceptions had 34 (38.2%) strong-agreement responses. Reputation enhancement had 33 (37.1%), and long-term stakeholder loyalty had 25 (28.1%).

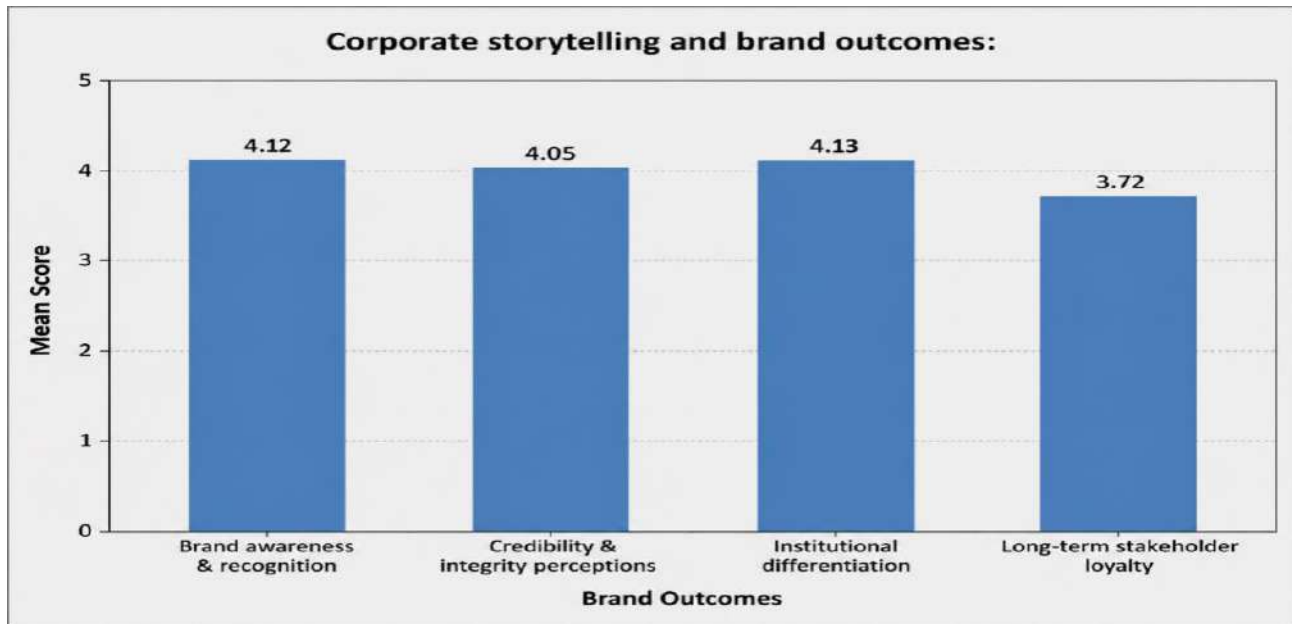


Figure 5
Brand positioning and awareness

The stronger outcomes for awareness, credibility and differentiation indicate that storytelling contributes to immediate brand perceptions. Reputation enhancement and long-term stakeholder loyalty were less pronounced. Qualitative evidence further indicated that limited resources and the need for continuous capacity building constrained the quality and sustainability of storytelling activities. The findings therefore suggest that constructing a favourable institutional image through corporate storytelling does not necessarily result in equally strong long-term stakeholder relationships. Sustained relationships depend on continued and consistent institutional communication and experience.

The findings are consistent with Mehdiabadi (2026) and Zimand-Sheiner (2026), who link corporate storytelling with brand engagement, trust and loyalty. The findings extend this literature by showing that storytelling outcomes differ within public universities in Western Kenya. The findings contribute to theoretical understanding by demonstrating how storytelling functions simultaneously as a means of institutional identity construction, impression formation and stakeholder meaning-making. The stronger outcomes for awareness, credibility and differentiation show the relevance of storytelling to how universities present and distinguish themselves. The less pronounced outcomes for reputation and loyalty indicate that narrative communication alone may not be sufficient to establish sustained stakeholder relationships.

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The findings position corporate storytelling as a strategic branding practice through which public universities communicate who they are, what they have achieved and what they represent. The findings show that institutional identity is constructed not through a single narrative form but through the combined use of platforms, achievements, strategic values and emotional narratives. The differentiated branding outcomes further demonstrate that these narratives may shape immediate perceptions more readily than longer-term stakeholder relationships.

5.2 Recommendations

The Ministry of Education should provide policy guidance on corporate storytelling within university branding and communication. Public university management should integrate corporate storytelling into institutional branding strategies and provide adequate resources and continuous capacity building for communication personnel. Communication and marketing units should coordinate storytelling across platforms, align narratives with institutional mission, vision, values and strategic goals, and tailor content to stakeholder groups. These measures would strengthen consistency, quality and sustainability in corporate storytelling and support stronger branding outcomes.



Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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