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Abstract

While the three-part mission of the land-grant university has been a pivotal component of agriculture and natural resources in the U.S., the land-grant mission is not always well understood by all audiences, including faculty members who are the key deliverers of the land-grant mission. As such, it is important to understand how faculty members view the land-grant brand identity. A series of focus groups were conducted with tenure and non-tenure track faculty members at [university]. Faculty members' perceptions of the university's brand came out in four themes: overall description of the brand identity, connections to [City], university values, and increased emphasis on research. How faculty members conceptualized the land-grant mission presented two themes: aware but uninformed about the land-grant mission (subthemes: concerns about public awareness and stakeholder priorities, and unawareness of Extension) and having varying definitions of the land-grant mission (subthemes: land-grant is about the land, the land-grant mission is for more than agriculture, the land-grant is successful when serving the state, the land-grant mission is intended to improve society, and the land-grant mission is delivering equal opportunity education). Recommendations for universities included providing faculty members with a full understanding of the land-grant missions and ensuring students are taught about the land-grant mission. Future research was recommended to assess perceptions of faculty members at other land-grant universities and perceptions of non-faculty audiences such as students and external stakeholders. A quantitative survey was also recommended to provide a more generalizable view of faculty perceptions of the brand of land-grant universities.

Keywords

Land-grant universities, internal branding, faculty members, online focus groups, Extension

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Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Land-grant institutions (LGIs) are specialized institutions of higher education in the United States created to deliver higher education to the common people (Campbell, 1995). LGIs are more than just places of higher education. These unique institutions are a system of organizations mandated to serve the needs of each state's population, both rural and urban (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). The land-grant mission emphasizes community involvement and participation (Bonnen, 1998; Collins, 2015; Nevins, 1962; Stephenson, 2010; Sternberg, 2014). This emphasis can be an avenue for advanced research, education, and outreach (Goldstein et al., 2019). Moreover, LGIs are mandated to provide inclusive, accessible, and affordable education at a post-secondary level. LGIs offer access to high-quality education that blends liberal arts and sciences with practical and applied sciences (Simon, 2009).

LGIs are made up of three pillars: teaching, research, and Extension. The Morrill Act of 1862 that established land-grant colleges (teaching), the Hatch Act of 1887 that established experiment stations (research), and the Smith-Lever Act of 1914 that established the Cooperative Extension System (Campbell, 1995). The model of teaching, research, and outreach is now widely used at all institutions of higher learning, whether private or public (Johnson, 1981). LGIs are institutions created by and for the public. LGIs are intended to integrate the challenges of everyday life with a liberal education (Flanagan et al., 2013).

LGIs are diverse, fragmented, and complex. These institutions were created to benefit the working class and democratize education (Campbell, 1995). Every year more than 1 million students graduate from LGIs and a vast majority of graduate education in the U.S. is delivered at LGIs (Sternberg, 2014). LGIs are "the most important sector of higher education in the country––nay, on the globe" (Nevins, 1962, p. 29).

However, these important institutions are not well understood or recognized by the public they were designed to serve (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). More alarming however is administrators' perceptions that faculty members do not understand the land-grant mission. Faculty members have the most influence and control over the execution of the land-grant mission (Flanagan et al., 2013). For it to be carried out effectively, faculty members must understand and embrace the land-grant mission (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Only then can the land-grant mission be effectively fulfilled and communicated to the public.

Role of Faculty Members in LGIs

Administrators, regents, and legislators may have some influence in how LGIs are operated. However, the key deliverers of the land-grant mission are faculty members, who are the primary vehicles for teaching, research, and Extension (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). One of the reasons faculty members are paramount in the delivery and communication of the land-grant mission is their role in the tenure and promotion of other faculty members. "Other than curriculum development and implementation, there is no greater role in governance played by faculty members than the evaluation of each other's performance regarding the tripartite mission of the land-grant university" (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018, p. 112). Some faculty members have specifically sought out employment at LGIs because of their own interest in the tripartite mission. Meanwhile, others just happen to be employed at an LGI with no interest in the mission.

Faculty members must be invested in a university's mission for it to move forward (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Furthermore, the faculty level is the most important to institute change within a university (Bonnen, 1996). "When faculty feel connected to the land-grant mission, they are going to think about how their scholarship engages with the communities they are serving" (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018, p. 123).

Conceptual Framework

Branding

Branding is both a theory and a practice centered around distinguishing a corporation, organization, or product (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). A brand cannot be understood when isolated from the world in which it exists. Therefore, the study of brands and branding is multifaceted (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). A brand is intangible yet invaluable (Aaker, 1996), and a strong brand is essential for organizations to succeed in today's markets (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009; Sartain & Schumann, 2006). Organizational branding is more intensive than product branding. An organization's brand comes from "the company's heritage" and "the values and beliefs that members of the enterprise hold in common" (Hatch & Schultz, 2008, p. 9). An organizational brand should encompass all stakeholders associated with the organization including employees, managers, customers, and investors (Sartain & Schumann, 2006). A brand should "stand on values, not just current offerings" (Sartain & Schumann, 2006, p. 10). Strong organizational brands come from the essence of the organization itself, and the essence of an organization begins with employees (Sartain & Schumann, 2006).

Internal Branding

Effective internal branding can create an environment where employees and external stakeholders take ownership of the brand and readily share the brand mission with customers or other stakeholders (Schiffenbauer, 2001; Thomson et al., 1999). Organizational identity should be a brand's source (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2009). The internal brand of an organization is not just the responsibility of those in communications and human resources (Balmer, 2013). The goal of internal branding efforts is to create "brand ambassadors" (Ind, 2008, p. 97) who "live the brand" (p. 1). A strong organizational brand should reflect the firm's vision and culture (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). A brand permeates from internal to external stakeholders (Meyer et al., 2002). An organization's internal practices and policies should be indicative of the brand as a whole (Punjaisri et al., 2011; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). An effectively managed brand is either adapted from the organizational culture or the organizational culture adapts to the brand (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Sartain and Schumann (2006) argued there is no other component as important for organizations to tackle as internal branding.

Branding in Higher Education

Branding higher education is a fairly new concept. Universities, like corporate entities, desire to differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace (Dholakia, 2017). Universities have come under scrutiny by their own researchers regarding their lack of strong branding (Jevons, 2006). Each university is responsible for creating unique and appealing value to attract students

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and employees alike (Jevons, 2006). An institution's brand image can help students differentiate between schools and help students determine the best fit for them (Chen & Chen, 2014). The brand of a university should be "congruent with its mission, defined by its values" and "match the institution's personality" (Black, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, an LGI's brand should be congruent with its tripartite mission. Due to the complicated nature of LGIs, this is difficult to execute because organizations with multiple missions are more difficult to brand (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2008). As each LGI is intended to serve the needs of citizens in its state, the manifestation looks different across the nation (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Sternberg, 2014). Some LGIs have multiple campuses across their states with Extension personnel present in each county of the state. A multi-layered and far-flung organization makes a consistent and cohesive internal brand more difficult to achieve (Sujchaphong et al., 2015). Moreover, there are multiple layers of audiences that must be accounted for, such as students, parents of students, Extension audiences, potential employees, etc. (Ng & Forbes, 2009; Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018).

Internal Branding in Higher Education: Faculty's Role

Researchers have recognized the internal audience as an integral part of brand management at universities (Chapleo, 2010; Leijerholt et al., 2019; Whisman, 2009). Faculty members are the primary and most valuable deliverers of brand promises and ideals at universities (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Pinar et al., 2014; Whisman, 2009). The task of branding is made more difficult in public universities as budget cuts and frequent leadership changes are commonplace (Whisman, 2009). To ensure the essence of the LGI brand is being communicated by faculty members, faculty members' awareness and interpretation of the land-grant mission needs to be researched.

Branding researchers in higher education have focused mainly on student brand co-creation rather than the faculty component (Yang & Mutum, 2015). However, internal branding literature supports looking at the brand from an employee's perspective. Internal branding should focus on the way the brand promise is communicated by employees to external audiences and how that final communication then sets expectations for future interactions (Dholakia, 2017; Punjaisri et al., 2011).

Faculty and staff who are passionate about the brand promise of an institution are more likely to deliver high quality educational experiences to students (Black, 2008). A recent study suggests all employees are responsible for the brand of a university (Endo et al., 2019). This study called for employees of universities to integrate their work into marketing the university. By offering their very best, employees can showcase what the university and brand have to offer. This study also suggested all employees were responsible for the brand and communicating it effectively (Endo et al., 2019).

Researchers call for employees of universities to be brand champions. By living the brand promise, university employees share the brand of the university in their everyday interactions with students and other stakeholders (Black, 2008). An institution's branding success is reliant on the level of buy-in from faculty and staff (Chapleo, 2009). Therefore, it is important to consider faculty's perceptions of the brand and even consider their voices when developing a brand and its associated efforts (Leijerholt et al., 2019).

The brand of an institution should be evident through its culture and delivered on a daily basis (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). One LGI, the University of Rhode Island, has found success in a rebrand by implementing internal brand management strategies before the new brand was

developed (Dholakia, 2017). Faculty involvement in an institution's brand creates an atmosphere in which the brand is more likely to be successful (Moorer, 2007). Moreover, universities that engage in internal branding are more likely to have higher levels of institutional commitment (Anwer et al., 2020).

University branding does not come without challenges. Some universities are so complex and fragmented with different schools and colleges that several brands exist for a single entity (Stripling, 2010; Wæraas & Solbakk, 2008). Faculty and staff may identify more closely with their department or college, rather than the university itself (Jevons, 2006). LGIs have another layer of complexity including Extension and Experiment Stations. Branding efforts can occur at every level of an organization (Vasquez et al., 2013).

Branding of the LGI

Several studies have examined the brand of LGIs (Abrams et al., 2010; Mourad et al., 2020; Settle et al., 2016; Zagonel et al., 2019). The first found mention of branding associated with Extension was in 1998 (Maddy & Kealy, 1998). This commentary piece, featured in the *Journal of Extension*, called for Extension to start using the now common corporate practice of branding to stay competitive in the 21st century. The authors envisioned Extension as "a household brand name associated with quality and accessible education programming that helps people put knowledge to work" (Maddy & Kealy, 1998, para. 21).

While the term "branding" may not have been explicitly used regarding LGIs until the 1990s, perceptions of Extension have been researched since the 1970s (Adkins, 1980). Legislators were the target population for the Adkins study. It was determined Extension was not keeping up with the urbanization of the population. Respondents saw Extension as exclusively for rural audiences. Adkins (1980) called for Extension to more intentionally label and market its programs as being associated with Extension to elevate its public image.

Public awareness of Extension is low (DeBord, 2007). However, university personnel are also unfamiliar with Extension and the land-grant mission in general (Zagonel et al., 2019). Extension is rapidly losing funding, personnel and programs while facing "increased pressure to evaluate and assess impacts with tools that ultimately do not capture the greatest public good" (Collins, 2015, p. 58).

Although not explicitly stated as such, different LGIs have been working to improve their brands for a long time. In 1991, researchers and Extension professionals from the University of Maryland urged every state Extension system to revise and overtly state its core values and identity (Smith & Oliver, 1991). This is essentially a call for improved and intentional branding. Moreover, Smith and Oliver commented on improving the internal brand of the organization:

> What we stand for as an organization—what our people believe in—is crucial to our success. Any control we have is philosophical and conceptual. It's our ideas about ourselves and others and the environment we exist in that make us believe and behave as we do (1991, para. 3).

The University of Maryland worked to improve its brand by distributing a document stating the guiding philosophy, values, and goals of the organization to all faculty members, using these guiding points to develop indicators for performance, setting priorities as an organization, and displaying the philosophy statement in every county office. Moreover, faculty members were urged to use the statement where they saw fit (Smith & Oliver, 1991). Although

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these efforts were not framed as branding, they encompass many of the steps needed to build a strong brand.

Abrams et al. (2010) examined the public perception of a brand associated with all three parts of the land-grant mission at the University of Florida. While Florida residents were mostly aware of the three primary efforts of the institution, they were unable to directly tie it to the existing brand (Abrams et al., 2010). Stakeholders were more likely to connect the land-grant mission to just the university, not the entire land-grant brand and system (i.e., teaching, research stations, and Cooperative Extension). Researchers recommended all land-grant systems associate closely with an existing university (Abrams et al., 2010).

When media professionals were asked about their awareness of land-grant efforts in Florida, those familiar with the brand associated it with a positive reputation (Baker et al., 2011). However, the overall awareness of the brand among media professionals was low. The information provided by the brand was perceived as credible and usable. Baker et al. encouraged practitioners to communicate to stakeholders about the value of LGIs service and information, rather than just the information itself.

Internal Branding of LGIs

When assessing the internal brand of K-State Research and Extension, it was found the brand was internally strong (Ray et al., 2015). Internal audiences saw Extension as providing research-based information, educational experiences, and providing valuable resources for low or no cost. Moreover, employees of Extension viewed their work as improving the lives of people and providing people with skills and information to make decisions (Ray et al., 2015). However, employees were concerned the brand was not widely known externally. Extension being the best kept secret was seen as very negative (Ray et al., 2015).

Researchers have also suggested the term Extension may confuse external audiences (Settle et al., 2016). When data was collected from Extension personnel in Florida, respondents framed the brand of Extension in Florida as an organization that provided research-based material and expert knowledge, and solved problems (Settle et al., 2016). Past research suggests Extension branches of LGIs should be clearly identified as part of its LGI. Moreover, Extension personnel are often relied upon to represent the LGI brand to the public (Settle et al., 2016). When assessing the perceptions among Extension agents, faculty, staff, and students at North Dakota State University, “state and local outreach” and “applied research” were most frequently associated with the land-grant mission (Kirkwood, 2018, p. 4). When considering the audiences served by an LGI, respondents did not view the land-grant as exclusively serving the agricultural sciences or as having disciplinary restrictions (Kirkwood, 2018).

Past research found people from different employment categories (i.e., faculty, non-faculty, state, and county) held different beliefs about Extension, denoting a lack of communal identity (Settle et al., 2016). When faculty members at 46 LGIs were surveyed, only 26% of the science faculty and 25% of the humanities faculty indicated outreach and public engagement as a priority for faculty members (Holesovsky et al., 2020). However, faculty members recognized the importance of public engagement and 98% of those surveyed had participated in outreach activities (Holesovsky et al., 2020).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the land-grant brand identity amongst faculty members at OSU. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are faculty members' perceptions of the OSU brand?
2. How do faculty members conceptualize the land-grant mission?

Methods and Procedures

To fully understand the multiple perspectives of faculty and the context in which the internal brand of the land-grant mission has manifested itself at OSU, a qualitative approach was used because qualitative research lends itself to understanding multiple perspectives and interactions (Flick, 2009). Qualitative methods are especially useful when researchers seek to explore or discover phenomenon that is multifaceted, poorly understood, or contextual (Flick, 2009). Focus groups were the specific qualitative technique used to collect data in this study. This type of inquiry allows researchers to ask follow-up questions to clarify points and reach the depth of answers desired by researchers (Flick, 2009; Rubin, 2005). Meaning is derived from individual thought but is often manifested in the behavior of groups. Focus groups are ideal when studying the social construction of meaning (Caillaud & Flick, 2017), such as an organization's brand.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, focus groups were conducted via Zoom in the summer of 2020. Online focus groups are different than the traditional face-to-face focus groups "in that they take place in a networked computer environment" (Abrams & Gaiser, 2017, para. 3). When the richness of data generated in online synchronous focus groups was compared to that of face-to-face focus groups, it was found to be similar. Online focus groups are most beneficial when groups are accustomed to communicating over the Internet (Abrams & Gaiser, 2017). Researchers recommend online focus groups use fewer participants than the traditional focus group (Abrams & Gaiser, 2017). Three to eight participants is the recommended size for online focus groups (Poynter, 2010).

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants. Ten colleges are present on OSU's Stillwater campus. The colleges studied were the Spears School of Business (SB), the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS), the College of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology (CEAT), the Ferguson College of Agriculture (COA), and the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). The remaining colleges were excluded because they either do not serve the broader student population (e.g., College of Veterinary Medicine) or do not house many (e.g., Global Studies and Partnerships and University College) or any (e.g., Honors College and Graduate College) faculty members

Each department head in the colleges was asked to suggest two to three faculty members to participate in focus groups. Participants came from various ranks and backgrounds. If department heads were non-responsive or the suggested participants were non-responsive, participants were recruited directly through department faculty website listings. Participants were selected to be as representative of gender, race, tenure rank, and department as possible. All suggested participants were invited to participate in a focus group via email.

Participants in each focus group were from the same college and were all either tenure track or non-tenure track faculty and from a variety of academic departments. These homogenous focus groups were used to increase participants' comfort level. A focus group for tenure track and non-tenure track faculty was conducted in each college. One extra session was

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done with tenure track COA faculty members because there was a higher-than-expected response to the recruiting email. A total of 11 focus groups were conducted. There were a total 51 participants. Due to scheduling conflicts, non-responses to emails, and other extenuating circumstances, there is an over representation of COA faculty and underrepresentation of non-tenure track faculty. Notably, the focus group for non-tenure track faculty in CEAT, only had one participant. Table 1 shows the breakdown of participants in each focus group.

Table 1

Focus Group Participation by College and Tenure Status

Focus Group	Number of Participants
College of Agriculture Non-Tenure Track Faculty	4
College of Agriculture Tenure Track Faculty 1	5
College of Agriculture Tenure Track Faculty 2	9
College of Arts and Sciences Non-Tenure Track	2
College of Arts and Sciences Tenure Track Faculty	7
College of Education and Human Sciences Non-Tenure Track Faculty	5
College of Education and Human Science Tenure Track Faculty	6
College of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology Non-Tenure Track Faculty	1
College of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology Tenure Track Faculty	5
School of Business Non-Tenure Track Faculty	3
School of Business Tenure Track Faculty	4

Focus groups lasted between an hour and two hours (Krueger, 1998; Litoselliti, 2003). A moderator's guide was used to guide the discussion between participants. It was developed by utilizing recommendations by Bloor et al. (2001), Krueger (1998), and Litoselliti (2003). The protocol was reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of experts made up of agricultural communication and education faculty familiar with focus groups and LGI experts. At the conclusion of each focus group the moderator summarized the major discussion points and asked participants if they viewed to be an adequate summary, this served as a member check (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Krueger 1998). Internal consistency was assured through comparing the moderator's notes, assistant moderators' notes, and the audio recording and transcripts of participants' responses. This created an audit trail (Flick, 2009). In order to protect participant confidentiality, all identifying information was removed.

Transcripts were formally analyzed with MAXQDA20 using Glaser's constant comparative method (1965). Analysis was guided by the research questions (Litoselliti, 2003). The lead researcher indexed the transcripts by assigning codes to data. Index codes were broad and became narrower as analysis progressed (Frankland & Bloor, 1999). Codes are labels that assign meaning to a piece of the transcript (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes were used to break the data into manageable pieces. Those pieces were then put together with other codes to create meaning (Flick, 2009). Next, codes were organized into categories around different phenomena related to the research questions. These categories were used to create themes (Flick, 2009). To increase credibility, the assistant moderators reviewed and confirmed the themes (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Data were further triangulated by collecting artifacts, e.g. presentation slides and faculty

handbook, from new faculty orientation sessions provided by OSU and the OSU website (Carter et al., 2014; Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). The 61 artifacts were inputted into MAXQDA20 and analyzed for mentions for the following terms: land, grant, mission, purpose, and role.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is a component of a researcher that may affect the way a researcher looks at a subject or impact the researcher's attitude toward the study's topic (Preissle, 2008). Qualitative experts suggest researchers be transparent and frank about their subjectivity so to better understand how his or her views may influence the research (Peshking, 1988). If the subjectivity of researchers is available to the reader, the reader can more accurately consider the credibility and quality of a study (Peshking, 1988; Preissle, 2008). Therefore, in the name of academic honesty and integrity and to enhance the confirmability of the study, the subjectivities of the authors have been detailed below.

At the time of research, completed for her dissertation, Audrey King was an agricultural education graduate student specializing in agricultural communications at OSU. She has been involved with components of the land-grant mission since the age of 8 as a member of 4-H, received all her post-secondary education at LGIs, and the majority of her professional employment have been at LGIs, specifically connected to colleges of agriculture. Quisto Settle participated in 4-H projects starting at the age of 8. He has worked at three LGIs but received his bachelor's and master's degrees from non-LGIs. Dwayne Cartmell has been involved with aspects of LGIs since an early age when he joined 4-H. All of his post-secondary degrees were earned at LGIs, and all of his career as a faculty member has been at a LGI. In addition, Cartmell has served as a committee member within the Association of Public Land-Grant Universities. Asya Cooley is an assistant professor of strategic communications at OSU. She received three degrees from other LGIs: Alcorn State University (B.A.), Louisiana State University (MMC), and Mississippi State University (Ph.D.). Prior to joining OSU, she served as a director of development at Mississippi State University Foundation, coordinating and implementing major gifts programs. During this research project Jeff Sallee was serving as an extension professor at an LGI and had been in similar roles at the same institution for 18 years. Over his 30-year career, Sallee served, advised, educated and planned 4-H programs for three LGIs. He has an in-depth understanding of the land-grant mission and believe LGIs serve their clientele well through, Extension, education and research.

Limitations

This study has potential limitations, which include those associated with all qualitative studies. The results of this study are not generalizable (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The results can only directly be applied to OSU. Purposive sampling also has limitations (Flick, 2009). Although every effort was made to select a diverse population from the faculty at OSU, it is possible the opinions offered were not representative of all faculty members at OSU since random sampling was not used. Focus groups also offer their own unique set of limitations (Krueger, 1998). There is a certain amount of social pressure within focus groups that can sometimes cause participants to voice socially desirable opinions rather than their actual opinions. This may have been exacerbated in this study as some people within my groups knew one another personally or professionally. Due to scheduling conflicts, non-responses to emails, and other extenuating

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circumstances, there is an over representation of COA faculty and underrepresentation of non-tenure track faculty. Priming may also be an issue in my study. Due to IRB regulations, participants were aware I was studying the land-grant mission and branding. Therefore, participants may have mentioned the land-grant mission and concepts related to branding more readily. My study may also be affected by COVID-19 and its many impacts. The data were collected in a time of general uncertainty, budget cuts, social distancing, and chaos.

Results

1. What Are Faculty Members' Perceptions of the OSU Brand?

To determine the internal brand, participants were asked to describe what came to mind when they thought of OSU, what they thought OSU was known for, and what OSU values as an institution. The themes associated with this research question were OSU's brand identity, Stillwater connections, university values, and an increased emphasis on research.

OSU's Brand Identity

Faculty in each of the 11 focus groups mentioned orange, Pistol Pete, and the Cowboy Code as major identifiers of OSU. Most focus groups also mentioned agriculture, T. Boone Pickens, athletic endeavors, diversity, community, and a friendly campus atmosphere as other major calling cards of OSU. Faculty members also mentioned aeronautical engineering, oil and gas, and fire programming as prominent, well-known programs at OSU. Many participants described OSU as a home or family. "I think a lot of people think of it as like a sort of a home away from home," said a non-tenure-track faculty member in COA. A non-tenure-track faculty member in CEAT made a similar statement: "It's kind of more like a family than just a place. I think it's just more homey." Faculty members also mentioned teaching, research, Extension, and the overall land-grant mission as cornerstones of the OSU brand. This is in line with OSU's website, which describes its efforts as "Building on its land-grant heritage, OSU promotes learning, advances knowledge, enriches lives, and stimulates economic development through teaching, research, Extension, outreach, and creative activities." Participants also mentioned the land-grant mission often in association with OSU, a tenure-track faculty member in CAS said, "Land-grant mission is the basic keyword that OSU is affiliated with."

Stillwater Connections

When participants were asked about the first things that came to mind when thinking of OSU, many mentioned Stillwater, Oklahoma. A non-tenure-track faculty member in CEAT stated, "I really think the biggest thing that comes to mind is Stillwater." A tenure-track faculty member in the SB was also of this opinion: "One thing I've heard here for many, many years is that OSU and Stillwater is like K-State and Manhattan. It's linked and related to the town." Another tenure-track faculty member in the SB said, "It's hard to separate Stillwater from OSU."

University Values

Faculty members were asked to describe the university's principles and what the

university valued. Faculty members believed the university valued tradition; integrity, honesty, and inclusion; people, both students and faculty members; and teaching.

Tradition. "I see a respect for the notion of tradition. The fact that, you know, 'my dad and my granddad went here.' Certainly, there's a lot of respect for that," said a non-tenure-track CAS faculty member. Another non-tenure-track CAS faculty member agreed saying, "I think tradition is really important at OSU. I think that that sort of bends both ways. Sometimes that's great and sometimes that makes us maybe less flexible or adaptable." A non-tenure-track faculty member in the COA said, "I hope we value that the tradition of what OSU was built upon."

Integrity, Honesty, and Inclusion. A tenure-track CEAT faculty member said, "I think the university values integrity and honesty from both the students' perspective and the faculty's perspective." One of the mission statements listed on OSU's website says "Integrity: Commitment to the principles of truth and honesty." A tenure-track faculty member in the COA saw inclusion as a high priority for the university: "I've been happy with the amount of inclusion that's been here. I mean, there are always problems, but I think the ideas of diversity and inclusion are strong here." The university website also cites the "Respect and value the diversity of individuals, beliefs and opinions" as a priority.

People. According to a tenure-track COA faculty member, OSU "values the people that make up the institution whether that's faculty, staff, or students . . . . I see that as the common thread amongst decisions that are made and in a lot of the efforts." A CEHS tenure-track faculty member said, "I think we feel like our first obligation is to our students." Faculty members also mentioned OSU valued alumni. A non-tenure-track faculty member in CAS found himself questioning whether or not OSU truly valued students or was more concerned about the financial aspect of the university: "In terms of the actual students, especially right now as we're being ordered back to class despite coronavirus. My cynical side thinks, 'Is it really just about the numbers? It's about the money?'"

Teaching. Along with valuing the people who make up the institution, most participants agreed teaching and instruction were high priorities of the university. One tenure-track faculty member in CEHS said, "I think OSU has had a really long-standing commitment to its students and providing really high-quality instruction." A tenure-track faculty member in COA said "it seems like the undergraduate education kind of takes priority. I don't know if that's because we're drowning in undergrad students compared to our faculty numbers." A tenure-track faculty member in SB said the university values teaching above the other branches of the land-grant mission: "OSU as a whole, I think my sense is that instruction is probably the main driver. I think probably research and then Extension, in that order." Although many participants cited teaching and instruction as the main priority and high value for the university, some participants said research seemed like the highest priority for the university.

Increased Emphasis on Research

Participants described an increased emphasis on research. Some attributed this to the shift to administration's goals, while others thought the switch was primarily due to an increased need for grant funding. A tenure-track faculty member from CEHS shared their view of the recent shift: "Since I started at OSU, I've seen increased emphasis on getting publications, securing grants and external funding, which goes back to the land-grant mission because they want the research to be connected to the local and state community." Another tenure-track faculty member in CEHS echoed the sentiment and added thoughts regarding the increased need for grant

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funding: “There’s been a shift even within research. It’s shifted from publications to grants. Now grants are the bigger emphasis.” Faculty members in other colleges also saw an increased importance for grant funding but not necessarily in productivity. One tenure-track faculty member in CEAT put it this way: “There’s too much emphasis on the money, not enough emphasis on outcomes. ‘Cause you can do a lot of outcomes with very little money, but it’s going to go pretty much unseen in most cases.”

Non-tenure-track faculty members also recognized a shift in university priorities. A non-tenure-track faculty member in the COA mentioned the university’s priorities being expressed through hiring decisions: “In our department, we’re really struggling on the teaching side, but the last few people we have hired have a 70% research and 30% teaching appointment.” Some participants believed research had longer-lasting effects and impacts than other parts of their work. “Teaching is great, but at the end of the day, students are gone. And Extension is within county, within the state. That is why faculty place high priority on research and give their heart and soul doing high-quality research,” said a tenure-track faculty member in COA. Moreover, participants also mentioned research as the way the university gains international recognition.

Participants expressed concerns about research, funding models, and getting grants. A COA tenure-track faculty member spoke of a lack of consistent funding: “Federal funds have gone down. The success rates on USDA grants are less than 10% . . . . The states have stopped supporting the university systems.” A CEAT tenure-track faculty member talked about the pressure of pursuing grant funding but not necessarily in the line of inquiry they were interested in: “We always feel the pressure of research money. Sometimes I have some interest in a topic, but because that topic isn’t in line with available funding, I have to abandon interests for topics that potentially could bring in money.”

2. How do Faculty Members Conceptualize the Land-Grant Mission?

To understand how faculty members conceptualized the land-grant mission, participants were asked what the land-grant mission meant to them, their own definition of the land-grant mission, and describe how the land-grant mission is manifested at OSU. The primary themes associated with this research question were aware of but uninformed about the land-grant mission, and varying definitions of the land-grant mission.

Aware of but Uninformed about the Land-Grant Mission

All participants had heard of the land-grant mission prior to the focus group sessions. However, some participants speculated many faculty members at OSU were unaware of the mission. Not all participants had a solid understanding of all branches of the land-grant mission, its implications, or how it related to their work. The subthemes related to this theme were concerns regarding public awareness and stakeholder priorities, and unawareness of Extension,

Concerns Regarding Public Awareness and Stakeholder Priorities. Participants spoke of the different expectations of external stakeholders and the opinions of the public. Participants were unsure if people understood or appreciated research. A CEAT tenure-track faculty member spoke of the perception of research throughout the state: “The average citizen probably doesn’t understand what research is, how it can help, or what it can accomplish.” A COA non-tenure-track faculty member said something similar: “I think people have no understanding of why people are doing research. They think that’s just a complete waste of money.” An SB non-

tenure-track faculty member spoke about the perceptions of advisory boards and alumni as it pertains to research: “I think there’s just great confusion. They just don’t really understand why we are researching and what practical use it has.” Participants viewed students as the main product OSU is judged by. A COA tenure-track faculty member spoke about students being the main interaction the public has with OSU: “If some young person goes out there and rocks it, we’re rock stars. If they go out there and fall on their face, we must not be doing our job.” There was also concern the public was unaware of resources available to them through OSU. A CEHS non-tenure-track faculty member spoke of the lack of public awareness of OSU and its resources: “There’s tons of people that don’t realize that OSU is available to them.” Extension is an example of those resources, which is the next subtheme.

Unawareness of Extension. Awareness of Extension was mentioned as a problem for both internal and external stakeholders. A COA non-tenure-track faculty member speaking about external stakeholders said, “[Extension users] are completely bought in. If they know us, they know us. And if not, I find they simply don’t know us and they’re not utilizing our services.” Another COA non-tenure-track faculty member spoke of the unawareness of Extension among Stillwater residents: “Even in Stillwater, when you tell people you work for the university, they will say, ‘Oh, so what do you teach?’ ‘I work for, you know, I work on the Extension side.’ They have no idea.”

Participants expressed concerns regarding internal stakeholders’ awareness of Extension. A tenure-track faculty member in CEHS reported their experience with describing an Extension appointment to colleagues: “I’ve run into faculty on our own college campus where I make the statement of, ‘I have an Extension appointment,’ and they look at me like I have a third head.” A non-tenure track faculty member in SB admitted to being unfamiliar with Extension: “I have a naive question. What does Extension mean exactly? My understanding of a land grant institution I’ve only gleaned from context. So, what does the Extension part refer to exactly?”

Participants believed students were unfamiliar with Extension as well. A non-tenure-track faculty member from the COA noted their unfamiliarity with Extension as a student: “I didn’t know what Extension was as a graduate in the College of Ag . . . . I didn’t know what it was until I applied for an Extension position.” Another non-tenure track COA faculty member mentioned that her own students did not understand the structure of the land-grant: “Our students don’t know Extension faculty and have no idea the actual structure of the university and the land-grant system. They have no idea.”

Varying Definitions of the Land-Grant Mission

Participants proposed many different definitions of what the land-grant mission meant and its primary focus. The subthemes associated with this theme were the land-grant is about the land, the land-grant is for more than agriculture, the land-grant is successful when serving the state, the land-grant mission is intended to improve society, and the land-grant mission is delivering equal opportunity education.

The Land-Grant is About the Land. Participants associated the land-grant mission with a connection to the land itself. “I mean, there are institutions where the land was set aside for people to study the land, in order to add to the betterment of that community,” said an CAS non-tenure-track faculty member. A CAS tenure-track faculty member did not see their discipline as relevant to the mission: “My field doesn’t have much to do with the land, so I don’t worry much about land-grant mission.” An SB faculty member associated land with the mission but was

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unsure as to why the association between the two existed: "The land is the key to the land-grant, right? So, here's a chunk of land, do this mission. The mission is pretty boilerplate, but I don't know why the land always matters, but I always make that association." A tenure-track faculty member in CEHS spoke about the duty and responsibility that comes with the land-grant: "I think about how the university was granted land. . . . I think we need to honor that and give back to kind of pay back what was given." A non-tenure-track CAS faculty member had similar sentiments stating, "We are the institution that has been built to study the land and to promote the people who have been working it for so long."

The Land-Grant Mission is For More than Agriculture. A tenure-track faculty member in COA described the land-grant mission this way: "The purpose of it is not just to serve people in the agriculture, but we serve all of the people." A tenure-track faculty member in CAS described the multifaceted nature of the land-grant mission like this: "I know land-grants started as A&M institutions, but clearly we're doing more than that now. We are covering almost every academic field here. I think that's what the modern land grant institution should be: cheap, affordable, and diverse." A few participants shared some dissenting thoughts. For example, one COA tenure-track faculty member associated the land-grant exclusively with the COA, "The land-grant system began in an era where we wanted to really help farmers, and we're completely embedded in agriculture . . . that culture has persevered."

The Land-Grant is Successful When Serving the State. Faculty members saw serving the broader state and its population as an essential part of the land-grant mission. A non-tenure-track faculty member in CEAT spoke of the benefits of having experts in the state: "The fact we have so many knowledgeable people this close to home and also provide resources to the rest of the state is super important." A non-tenure-track faculty member in the CAS spoke of maintaining the original mission of the land-grant: "The school was built here to help the people here and the area here. And I don't think we should lose sight of that." A COA non-tenure-track faculty member explained how he described his role to stakeholders: "I . . . am ears, eyes, and boots on ground for my institution. So, I am going to bring knowledge from there to serve you. And I'm going to take your queries back there to find solutions." Finally, a CEAT tenure-track faculty member described the land-grant mission's dedication to the state in which it lies: "We are this state's university. We're not a donor's university . . . . We're the state's university. In every regard, that is our mission. Our mission isn't to serve ourselves or to serve the elite."

The Land-Grant Mission is Intended to Improve Society. Many participants saw the land-grant mission as a duty and responsibility to better the world and society. "It has some responsibilities and duties towards the society, and it's fulfilling with its three branches" said a non-tenure-track faculty member in COA. A tenure-track faculty member from CAS explained an LGI like this: "It's supported by the people of the state, through taxation or other means. And it is our duty to serve them. We have a responsibility to make sure their lives are better, that we contribute." A non-tenure-track faculty member from SB described the contribution to society by saying, "The land-grant mission is a mandate to create and disseminate new knowledge that is for the betterment of society, for the betterment of Oklahoma, and humankind." Other participants described the land-grant mission as preparing students for society and providing practical knowledge for society. A tenure-track faculty member from CEHS described an LGI's role like this: "We are educating future professionals like other institutions might be, but we're also engaging in the research that informs what professionals need too. Then we also transmit that information to the broader public."

The Land-Grant Mission is Delivering Equal Opportunity Education. Many participants described the land-grant mission as providing education to students and the general population in an equal way. "Our purpose is specifically to provide higher education for the common man, so that higher education doesn't become some kind of exclusive unattainable thing that only the rich can have," said a non-tenure-track faculty member in SB. A non-tenure-track faculty member in CAS described the mission by saying, "We're offering a robust educational opportunity that ideally is affordable to people from the state or the local community." Participants also discussed the varying levels of students who are educated at OSU. Faculty members prioritized serving those students equally. This was the primary goal of one CEAT tenure-track faculty member: "I want all my students to be at the same spot. I want to make sure they're all going to come out on an equal playing field, so they all have the same opportunities for internships and jobs."

Conclusions and Discussion

Participants mentioned the land-grant mission was part of the brand identity of OSU, which is in accordance with Hatch and Schultz's (2008) recommendations that an organization's brand comes from the history and heritage of an organization. Participants' perceptions of the OSU brand being inclusive, accessible, and providing a high-quality education was in line with the mandate of LGIs according to Simon (2009). Participants related the brand of OSU to its surrounding environment, meaning Stillwater (Franzen & Moriarty, 2009). Although the terms participants used to describe OSU were mostly congruent with OSU's stated mission and much of its online content, participants did not specifically mention Extension when asked about OSU. As university brands should be consistent with its offerings and missions (Black, 2008) and Extension is a major component of the land-grant mission (Campbell, 1995), the internal branding of OSU could be improved. A lack of consistency is not surprising considering the multiple layers of OSU and the multiple audiences it serves (Sujchaphong et al., 2015).

Participants felt the pressure referred to by other scholars to pursue grant funding (Collins, 2015). They also referred to the lack of funding for applied research or research external stakeholders were interested in (Flanagan et al., 2013). Participants were passionate about teaching and creating high quality interactions with students. This is beneficial to the brand of OSU as it encourages a positive interaction between employees and "customers" of the organization (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). Moreover, participants mentioned OSU prioritized student experiences. Past research shows that the educational experience of students is imperative when branding a university (Ng & Forbes, 2009; Pinar et al., 2014).

Participants said the public was relatively unaware of the land-grant mission and the resources available to them, which aligns with previous research (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). The lack of a full understanding of the land-grant mission is problematic as faculty members must comprehend and embody the land-grant mission for it to be carried out effectively (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). These participants demonstrated low brand understanding (Piehler et al., 2015). All participants had heard about the land-grant mission prior to participating in the study. This contradicts the findings by Zagonel et al. (2019), but this could be attributed to a difference in population and institution. Zagonel et al. studied the awareness of the land-grant mission among printing and mailing personnel of K-State Research and Extension. In that study, participants did not necessarily see themselves as active contributors to the land-grant mission. It should be noted that although participants in the current study were aware of the land-grant

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mission, not all of them had a firm grasp of what the land-grant mission meant. They particularly had low understanding of the term "Extension" and its implications. Past research has suggested "Extension" could be confusing to external audiences (Settle et al., 2016), and this study indicates it could also confuse internal audiences.

Many of the participants were invested in the land-grant mission and saw themselves as pivotal deliverers of the mission, but some participants did not see their work as directly applicable to the land-grant mission. The participants who were invested in the mission were examples of strong internal branding (Schiffenbauer, 2001; Thomson et al., 1999), but the lack of consistent awareness across the institution indicates internal branding has room for improvement (Meyer et al., 2002). Understanding and committing to the brand makes employees better brand communicators and interpreters (Punjaisri et al., 2011). Participants who saw themselves as deliverers of the land-grant mission could be considered brand ambassadors or truly living the brand (Ind, 2008).

Past research has found that people from different employment categories (i.e., faculty vs. non-faculty and state vs. county) held different beliefs about Extension (Settle et al., 2016). In this study, faculty members from different colleges had different views of the land-grant mission as a whole. Participants had multiple definitions of the land-grant mission and different opinions of what the land-grant mission meant to them as faculty members. This does not necessarily indicate participants were misinformed as previous literature also describes the land-grant mission in a variety of ways (Bonnen, 1998; Collins, 2015; Flanagan et al., 2013; Nevins, 1962; Stephenson, 2010; Sternberg, 2014). Just as faculty defined the land-grant as serving the citizens of the state, previous literature echoes these sentiments by asserting that LGIs are meant to serve communities in the LGI's state (Bonnen, 1998; Nevins, 1962; Stephenson, 2010; Sternberg, 2014). Next, faculty defined the land-grant mission as seeking to better society as a whole, which aligns with past literature (Flanagan et al., 2013). The notion that the land-grant mission is centered around delivering equal opportunity education was a major theme of study and supports past publications (Collins, 2015; Simon, 2009). Participants agreed agriculture and applied research have been a cornerstone of LGIs but is not necessarily the primary focus of the system (Bonnen, 1996). The only conceptualization of the land-grant mission in the current study not found in past literature was the claim that the land-grant mission was about the land itself.

Of our participants, the COA faculty had a more comprehensive understanding of the land-grant mission. Furthermore, Several COA faculty mentioned they thought faculty in other colleges were either unaware of the land-grant mission or did not care about or see how it applied to their academic pursuits. This opinion was a direct contradiction of most participants' responses from other colleges. Literature related to this concept was not found. This disparity is concerning as it could create a chasm between disciplines and colleges and could lead to a disconnect about the value and execution of the land-grant mission. Moreover, it could lead to ill will between colleagues that could benefit professionally from collaborating across campus.

Participants were unsure if the public or students understood the extent of the work done at OSU. Other LGIs have reported similar findings (Abrams et al., 2010). This is problematic as past research has shown a positive relationship with community members and media is important for universities to succeed and maintain funding (Mourad et al., 2020). This problem is further exacerbated by faculty members' unfamiliarity with all aspects of the land-grant mission as evidenced in this study and past research (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Stephenson, 2010).

This study looks specifically at faculty members' perceptions of the land-grant mission, which has not been extensively explored previously. This could help inform internal

communication, differentiate LGIs in the marketplace of higher education, and perhaps improve the implementation and fulfillment of the land-grant mission. Each academic college has unique and useful information that could benefit each state's respective citizens as LGIs have a unique role in the stewardship of communities it serves (Gavazzi & Gee, 2018; Stephenson, 2010)

Recommendations

Although all faculty members in the sample had heard of the land-grant mission, they were not necessarily well versed in its intricacies. The first step to improving the overall internal brand at OSU should begin with ensuring all employees have a comprehensive understanding of the institution and its missions (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). By improving the internal understanding of the land-grant mission at OSU, the likelihood that external stakeholders will engage with and understand the land-grant brand are increased (Balmer, 2013; Piehler et al., 2015; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007). If OSU and its land-grant components are well-received, this could improve the brand image by showing what the university provides beyond education of students. The faculty members in this study reported student awareness of the land-grant mission is low. Therefore, it is recommended students be more overtly informed about the land-grant mission. If faculty members intentionally communicated about the land-grant mission in classes, the brand knowledge of all stakeholders may increase. New student orientation and freshmen seminar classes would be ideal avenues to introduce new students to land-grant concepts.

The qualitative nature of this research means the results cannot necessarily be applied to all LGIs. Each LGI is intended to adapt to the needs of the citizens of its state (Campbell, 1995; Gavazzi & Gee, 2018). Therefore, it is recommended this research is repeated at other LGIs. Due to the purposive sample and qualitative nature of this study, results may not be representative of all opinions at OSU. A follow-up quantitative survey of faculty members' brand perceptions could offer a more representative view of OSU's internal brand and inform branding efforts (Leijerholt et al., 2019). Internal branding focuses on the way brand promises are communicated or executed by employees to external audiences and how that communication affects the expectations for future interactions (Punjaisri et al., 2011). Future research should examine the onboarding and internal branding efforts of LGIs. Brands are not exclusively controlled by the organizations and its employees, future research should examine the perceptions of students and external stakeholders (Black, 2008).

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