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**FEATURE**

**The Role of Values in Building Brand Equity: A Case Study**

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***Abstract:** Adventist education is based on the premise that the “work of education and the work of redemption are one” (White, 1952, p. 30). At Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin, an Adventist High School in Japan, about 30% of the students are not Seventh-day Adventists at the time of their initial matriculation. However, approximately 80% of these non-Adventist students are baptized into the Adventist faith by the end of their study there. This case study investigates the reasons why non-Adventist parents, knowing what will likely happen, send their children to study at this school anyway. Onsite observations were made and ten interviews were conducted to find answers to this query. The findings suggest that the parents preferred this school for the following reasons: the values taught and practiced at the school, the changed lives of the students, students’ feeling of being loved and cared for just like at home, and the English language program.*

In general, a person is judged by the values he/she adheres to. Values are the beliefs a person holds, and when internalized, they guide an individual’s life. Values are based on a person’s worldview, i.e., their philosophy of life. One’s worldview is characterized by answers to the questions such as: Where did I come from? Who am I? Where am I going? What is the essence of living? What happens after death?

Values being guiding principles, they are inculcated into the lives of individuals from the early years of life. This has led to values education becoming an integral part of school curriculum globally. It is for the most part a mandatory provision of the education of children that comes from a country’s education department, with adherence checked by accrediting bodies. The fostering of basic values such as honesty, respect, tolerance, and fairness is

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common to both public and private schools. However, there are additional values that are important to private schools in general and Adventist schools in particular. These include but are not limited to the belief in the creator God, and the creation of humans in the image of God. From this belief, it follows that every individual should be treated with respect and dignity, faith is expected to transcend human understanding, and the primary purpose of education is recognized as being the redemption of souls (White, 1952). This leads to the belief that every student is a potential candidate for heaven (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003).

Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin is an Adventist boarding High School in Japan. Many non-Adventist parents send their children to study there. This school has similar tangible assets like any other school in Japan. The question is, why do parents prefer this Adventist school over similar non-Adventist schools? What distinctive characteristics does this school have? Does it have to do with intangible assets (brand equity) of the school? These questions intrigued and guided me to take up this study.

Brand equity is an intangible asset of a company or an organization. It is not measured by profit margin or promotion. These assets could include name recognition, popularly enhanced reputation, and positive attitude developed over a period of time in the mind of the customer. According to Blumberg (2011, para. 1), "Brand equity is the intangible value of a particular company or product based on consumer perception in the marketplace." She further states that it is measured "at the firm level, the product level, and the consumer level" (para. 2). At the firm level it is what is left when all measurable variables are subtracted; at the product level it is the difference between the value of the generic product and the value of the branded product; and at the consumer level measurement is based on brand recognition and opinion. In other words, it is not measured by a profit margin or promotion but rather by one's personal experience with the product. It is documented by ready recognition of the brand, its enhanced reputation, and positive attitude toward it in the mind of the customer. In essence she promotes that brand equity is not accurately quantifiable yet it is a strong asset for an organization.

A study conducted over 20 years on *The Russell 3000* companies (Sasson & Doron, 2011) found a sharp shift toward intangible values in building brand equity. In 1978, 95% of a company's market value was clear from their financial statements, but by the beginning of 2000 that proportion had fallen by 15%. Other studies among S & P-500 index companies and companies listed on London's FTSE could not explain 70-75% of companies' values by their books: companies such as for example, Disney (70%), Heinz (85%), Microsoft (98%), and Coca Cola (80%) (Sasson & Doron, 2011). This is because company value, to a large degree, is now mainly attributed to intangible assets.

There are definitely specific reasons why parents send their children to certain schools. Tangible as well as intangible assets of a school do play significant role in their choice of a school. In the U.S., fewer Adventists parents are sending their children to Adventist schools than in the past. This is mainly because of finances and lower school values and standards (La Borde, 2007). One study (Lekic, 2005) pointed to three main reasons that Adventist parents send children to Adventist schools, viz., spiritual focus, a safe and caring environment, and dedicated school personnel. Non-Adventist parents perceived spiritual aspects, interpersonal relationships, and student personal development as decision making reasons. This scenario was similar, and yet different when I examined Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin, a Seventh-day Adventist school in Hiroshima, Japan. Being an Adventist school, it attracts many non-Adventist students. This study investigates the intangible assets that attract non-Adventist students to the school since the tangible assets of San Iku Gakuin are similar to most of the other non-Adventist schools in Japan. The purpose of the study was to find out why non-Adventist parents send their children to the Adventist boarding school, knowing that their child will most likely become an Adventist by the end of his/her stay at school.

The questions that guided the study were:

- What motivates non-Adventist parents to send their children to study at this school?
- What school factors facilitate the parental motivators?
- What constitutes brand equity for the school?

### **Methodology**

This study followed a case study format. Interviews and observations were used to collect the data. Eight individuals from AIIAS, Philippines, visited Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin from November 4-9, 2010. Of the eight, three were AIIAS faculty, one AIIAS staff, three AIIAS students (one of them a former teacher of San Iku Gakuin school presently studying at AIIAS), and one staff-cum-student. It was decided by the group, before arriving on the campus of the school under study, that I would interview them upon returning to the AIIAS campus; and that they would also closely observe the school while there.

In all 10 interviews were conducted: the principal of the school (Japanese), two English teachers (One European male, one American/Japanese female), and seven AIIAS members (the eighth being the researcher). I observed the school from November 4-9, 2010 and made field notes. Places observed included offices, classrooms, library, cafeteria, dormitories, the work program, the church program, music lessons, playground activities, and choir sessions. After transcribing the interviews and organizing the field notes, I used codes, then

categories to generate the themes. My observations helped authenticate the interview data.

The study has limitations. It could be viewed as biased because parents, students, and Japanese teachers were not interviewed; parents because they do not stay there and Japanese teachers because we could not communicate with them properly in English or Japanese. We did talk to some students informally without following any structured interview format. Further study could be conducted to overcome or minimize these limitations. I do not think this is a strong limitation because this study tries to highlight the positive aspects of the school which are observable to all. The principal and teachers would naturally tell how their school is doing good things, and doing them better than in other places. The personal and cultural biases are minimized due to the inclusion of two non-native school teachers in the interview. Another limitation of the study is that the findings may not be applicable to Western cultural contexts. Cultural relevancy is important (Dudley, 1992). A study conducted by Tahara (1995) pointed out that Adventist school educators in the U.S. and Adventist school educators in Japan differed on Adventist educational philosophy, the mission of the Adventist teachers, and teachers' relationship with students. So some differences might be expected to be found in these areas.

### **The Setting**

- The school, Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin, Japan, is situated on the outskirts of the Hiroshima city. It is among the mountains away from the city. At this time of the year, November, the mountains were ablaze with Fall colors, giving campus added beauty.
- San Iku Gakuin is the only Adventist boarding secondary school in Japan, with an enrollment of about 320. Students are from all parts of Japan.
- It caters to both the junior high and high school education.
- It has four dormitories—one each for junior high boys, junior high girls, secondary boys, and secondary girls—a cafeteria, a gymnasium, two church buildings, prayer halls and recreation rooms for each dormitory, farm land, a playfield, and a library.
- Students are provided with variety of activities such as music, clubs, games, visits to other institutions, and work to keep them active, engaged, and busy.
- Of the 58 teachers 14 are part-time. All are Adventist.
- The school offers an English language program, supervised by the European teacher. The program includes a six-month visit to a sister educational institution in New Zealand for immersion learning. This

has greatly helped in the articulation of spoken English among the students enrolled in this program.

- Administrators and teachers live at the edge of the campus in the houses provided by the school.
- Though buildings look a little run down, they are very clean, properly maintained and suitably furnished.
- To us observers, the school seemed too secluded for security purposes. It did not have entry or exit gates, nor any campus security guards. The principal assured us, however, that the place was safe and secure.

### **Findings**

To find out what motivates non-Adventist parents to send their children to Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin, I focused on the intangible assets of the school because assets such as strong academic program, excellent facilities, accessibility, and affordability are common to most attractive institutions. Here are the plausible answers I found for the proposed research questions.

Unknown to themselves personally, it seems that non-Adventist parents send their children to Hiroshima San Iku Gauin for the reasons best known to Adventists: the Adventist philosophy of education. This philosophy encompasses the total development of an individual—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 2003).

### **General Motivating Factors**

The principal and male teacher pointed out that one of the factors that influenced parents' choice of this school was that often one or both parents of a child had studied at this school themselves. If the parents enjoyed their learning at a school and it is within their means, they tend to send their own children to that school (Lekic, 2005). This was true in my case. My father sent me to the school he studied at, even though it was several hundred kilometers from home.

Another reason given was, when children went home for the holidays the parents saw a marked change in their lifestyle. This encouraged parents to send the child's siblings to the same school. One of the interviewees said that students told of some of the negative things they used to do, and the habits they entertained back home. However, coming to this school had changed their life for the better. In addition, during holidays when children returned home, the neighbors observed these children and wanted their own children to have a similar experiences (interview with the principal). A student's testimony is the best advertisement for a school. Lekic (2005) found that students' personal development at school is a strong parental motivator.

In addition, children told their parents that they felt at home in their dormitories. The affection and care the children received is valued by the parents (interview with the dormitory deans). On dormitory visitation we noticed that they were well organized, clean, and comfortable with basic amenities all in place.

### **School Factors**

**School setting and climate.** It appears from the teacher and principal interviews that parents like the location of the school away from the influence of the city. According to White (1923), Adventist schools should be located away from the cities because of the negative influence of the city. In the school, buildings are reasonably spread out but well connected so that students and teachers find it easy to access various facilities. A friendly, respectful, and busy school climate seems to be a parental incentive to have their children in this atmosphere (interviews and observations).

### **The Importance of Values**

The school gave great importance to incorporating values into the student psyche. The purposeful integration in the taught curriculum and propagation through the hidden curriculum was clearly evident. We observed the practice of moral, ethical, and cultural/social values in the day-to-day school activities and through the observable lives of the students and teachers. The school believes that internalized values form the basis for human decision making. To a great degree “education has to do with the transmission of values” (Holmes, 1991, p.vii). This is nowhere more true than when the goal is for students to learn to make right decisions.

Moral values development was seen in the following values-laden priorities.

- **God first.** God was placed first in every activity. The principal pointed out that ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge’ (Proverbs 1:7) was the common refrain in the school. All activities began with prayer and ended with prayer. Every morning and evening, worships were conducted, and all students were required to attend. Chapel was scheduled for Saturday nights (schedule check and observation). This God-centeredness has resulted in baptisms. Generally, the school has 30% non-Adventist students, of which approximately 80% are baptized into the Adventist church by the end of their study (principal). This is truly a case where White’s statement that the “work of education and the work of redemption are one” (1952, p. 30). Generally, parents did not mind children accepting Christ as their personal Savior for two reasons; one, the changed lifestyle of their child, and the other, they themselves did not practice any religion (principal). Mainda (2001)

found a significant relationship between parental school choice and parents' perceptions of spiritual values-based education.

- **God's word.** Being an Adventist school, Bible was taught in every grade. Its importance was noticeable in that the school authorities had scheduled Bible class as the first period in most grades (schedule check and observation). Interviews revealed, however, that the principal and the teachers did not have a clear idea about the integration of faith and learning. They thought it meant only to teach Bible as a subject. During the discussion they maintained that there should be separation between faith and learning because of the objectivity of the completion of the government syllabi. This same view has been forwarded by Christian teachers in Nigeria (Olaore, 2007). Teachers must have adequate knowledge of the integration of faith and learning for its effective implementation (Korniejczuk, 1994). This is clearly an area that could be developed further.
- **Evangelism.** Though away from the city, students went off campus for Branch Sabbath School, taking their sack lunches with them. Sabbath morning, those desirous of going were on time for the school van, showing enthusiasm for the activity (observation). When we asked them if they really liked the activity, they waved the Branch Sabbath School materials and their lunch bags at us.
- **Living by example.** White (1952) states that work should be an integral part of education. Teachers at San Iku Gakuin practice what they teach about the dignity of work. They worked along with students. These teachers live in accordance with the General Conference proposal that a teacher ought to be "both a committed Adventist Christian and an exemplary role model" (2003, p. 222). Students are not paid for the mandatory work education activity. It is considered a moral values development activity. The school principal commented that over the years, work education has produced responsible church leaders. The school has twenty work departments: painting, farm, dorms, classrooms, library, cafeteria, grounds, hair cutting, to name just a few. We saw administrators working in the farm and on the grounds with the students. The principal of the school told us that he cuts students' hair. Teachers also take turns supervising the cafeteria. They mingle with the students, and work alongside them in serving food and cleaning up afterwards, and also have meals with them.
- **Character development.** Character development was very important to the school. It was encouraged through many avenues such as:

*The dress code* – students were dressed modestly. Boys wore regular clothes while girls wore long skirts and blouses. Scanty, flashy, worn-out clothes were not seen.

*Talking mannerisms* – though we did not understand what was being said in or out of the classroom, from the tone of their voices and the gestures we could gather that the students were very respectful to the teacher, and to each other.

*Concern for others' needs* – there was one incident that caught our eye. In the cafeteria, we saw a physically challenged boy who was being fed by another boy. The helper sat with the boy and talked and joked with him. He even wiped the boy's mouth and helped him carry the food tray. We wondered if the helper had been assigned to help the boy. But the next day we saw another boy doing the same. We asked the cafeteria supervising teacher how the students were assigned to help the boy. He told us that there was no assignment. The students did it on their own as they saw the need. We were highly impressed by this voluntary gesture.

*Cleanliness* – the campus was clean. The dormitories, offices, and classrooms were neat and clean. In fact one of us observers went in to the corner of a class room and checked for dust and found none.

*Disciplined and organized life* – schedules were religiously followed. All seem to know their roles and carried out role-specific activities. Things looked automated.

*Healthful living* – the cafeteria provided vegetarian meals. Students were allowed to have ice cream just once a week from the school store. Junk food was not available in the store or anywhere close to the school, as the campus is located away from any settlement. On the whole, a simple, yet dignified lifestyle was clearly visible on the school premises.

- **Redemptive discipline.** Disciplinary problems here were handled very differently from what is typical in other schools. For a severe infringement, a student was sent home for a definite period of time. This is a common practice in other Adventist schools too. However, for certain disciplinary problems, a unique strategy was adopted: students were assigned to a faculty home. There the student stayed, ate, attended family worships and did what the faculty member required of him/her at home. Although a student was under disciplinary action, the teacher's family was expected to treat him/her with respect and dignity. But certain privileges such as attending classes or social activities, visiting friends were withheld. Doing this, students were to learn the values practiced by the teacher's family, and hopefully, in the future, to



desist from violating school rules (principal and both the school teachers).

### **Ethical Values**

- **Punctuality.** Everything was time bound. It seemed everyone was perpetually in a hurry. In cafeteria all students ate food, washed, and dried cutlery, cleaned the place, and had it set for the next meal in half an hour. Teachers were all on time for the morning worship. When we were given time to talk during their worship, the teachers looked at the clock on the wall, hoping that we would finish the service in time for them to get to their classes. The culture of punctuality seemed to be all-pervading—in the classroom, on the playground, in the cafeteria, and in the church. We wondered how they could keep it up every day.
- **Respect for property.** Picking up after themselves as well as others was evident throughout the campus. When school was over for the day the students cleaned and arranged the classroom for the next day's classes. I purposely dropped a few pieces of paper at different locations to see what students would do. As they passed by they just picked them up and dropped them in a trash can, and it was a different student each time. This pleasantly surprised me.

### **Social/Cultural Values**

- **Hospitality.** Bowing is a common form of greeting in Japan. We were welcomed and greeted at the airport by the principal and finance manager. And to our surprise, the students were waiting for us at ten o'clock at night to sing a welcome song even though we were an hour late arriving. They sang with gusto and welcomed us with enthusiasm. The school authorities made sure our lodging and board were cared for. In fact the principal came regularly to check whether we were comfortable. In every building we visited, the personnel and the students were gracious and courteous. They were more than willing to talk to us but we were handicapped by the language barriers. We presumed that students' parents are taken care of just as we were when they come to visit.
- **Teacher-student and student-student interaction.** In the classroom teacher-student interactions were very formal. Only upon teacher acknowledgement did students stand up to answer a question, and they sat down only when the teacher told them to do so. Students were very attentive and did not talk to each other when the teacher was teaching. The only time we saw interaction among students during the class

period was when the teacher assigned group activities. But the atmosphere completely changed after the class. Teachers and students behaved like friends, laughing together, patting each other on the back, even pushing each other. Students interacted with each other as is generally seen in other Asian countries, boys with boys and girls with girls, with very little interaction between boys and girls.

- **Respect for elders and teachers.** As the culture dictates, students respect their elders and their teachers. They stop, bow, and respectfully greet them before moving on. In the cafeteria line we saw that they happily allowed teachers and other elders to cut in line and go ahead. According to the principal, parents see this behavior exhibited at home, too, when students return for the holidays. Some parents have informed him of this positive change in their child's life. As visitors, we felt that sometimes these cultural and traditional practices went too far, however. During the Sabbath School lesson study we observed that for 25 minutes the teacher read from the lesson book and the Bible and talked without asking a single question to the students; nor did students raise any questions or make any observations. Yet there was not one student among about 35 there who slept, or walked out or talked to a neighbor. In fact all were looking intently at the teacher. When we inquired later, a student said that they are supposed to listen when the teacher speaks.
- **Responsibility for others.** In the dormitories, an older student is assigned to a room with younger students. The older one is to be the role model for the room. We saw this evident in the dormitory rooms. As the leader folds the clothes and arranges them in the drawer, and as he/she fixes the bed or the study table, so the others do likewise. This kind of role modeling is something parents would surely appreciate.

### **Facilitating Factors for Effective Values Education**

From observation and interviews it was clear that the values education imparted and evident at the school was the major factor in parental choice of the school for their wards. As documented in this study the school promoted, advocated, and practiced values education. Listed below are the outstanding facilitating factors for effective values education in the school:

- Placing God first
- Values education in practice
- Location of the school
- All Adventist faculty

- Commitment of the faculty to the mission of the school
- Faculty-student interaction
- Variety of activities: music, clubs, games, visits to other institutions, work

### **Brand Equity of Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin**

The intangible assets that constitute brand equity in Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin are:

- The values taught and practiced at school
- Changed lives of students
- Students' feeling of being loved and cared for just like at home
- The English language program

### **Suggestions for Improvement**

Even though San Iku Gakuin school is doing well, to further enhance school reputation, a few suggestions can be offered, based on observations and interview data:

- Teachers spend too much time at school, even late at night. This may affect their family life. Therefore, teachers may be encouraged to complete their school work during working hours (observation).
- A faith and learning seminar and a workshop may be organized for the teachers. It appeared that the teachers do not have clear understanding of the concept (principal and teacher interview). Korniejczuk (1994) points out that the theoretical knowledge of integration of faith and learning, strategies used, and teacher concern for and interest in it influence the degree of implementation.
- There could be more student teacher interaction in the classroom. It was observed that mostly teacher talked in the classroom. It appeared that students were passive receptors (observation). Tahara (1995) found that culture, customs, and language plays significant role in how students and teachers interact in the class. Even though this is true, with the global milieu of knowledge and practice sharing, things can change if it is for the better.
- Air conditioners may be installed for summer use (teacher interview).
- Timely upkeep may be advisable for some buildings (observation).

### Conclusion

Brand equity alone is necessary but insufficient for a school to be recognized and appreciated. Brand equity is intangible; the basic tangible assets must also be in place. Every school needs to make sure that it has a strong academic program, a basic, yet progressive infrastructure, multiple avenues to acquire and/or develop resources, plans for teacher upgrading (development), strong parent-teacher bonding, and community affirmation and support. In short, the school should strive in unison to achieve the vision and mission of the school.

Once the tangible assets are in place, the all-pervasive intangible assets give added advantage to the school as evidenced at Hiroshima San Iku Gakuin. The strongest asset is the values that are taught and practiced at the school. The results of the study showed that this school for the most part follows Adventist blueprint of education, and that this is clearly recognized and valued by the students, their parents, and the surrounding community.

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