THE ROLE OF CORPORATE WEBSITE IN IDENTITY AND IMAGE RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

The World Wide Web (WWW) – the platform that host corporate website – is considered an important medium that possess unique characteristics that differentiates it from traditional corporate and marketing communication channels. This article sets out to show understanding on why firms use their websites as a corporate communication tool for corporate identity creation and corporate image formation. To achieve this objective, activity theory by Vygotsky (1978); Newcombe, (1953) communication model and van Riel (1993) corporate identity, strategy and corporate image model are used as basis to theorise the tri-partite relationship between corporate identity, corporate website and corporate image. In the course of this paper, three important findings were generated. Firstly, it is established that the unique interactive characteristic of a corporate website provides outstanding strategic contribution to the creation of corporate identity and the management of corporate image. Secondly, the ability to support previously established theory that corporate website is a mediator in the relationship between firms and stakeholders. This paper posits that firms use the corporate website to inform, remind and persuade stakeholders in the development and management of corporate identity and corporate image respectively. Finally, a synthesis of the three distinctive models led to the development of six basic factors that express why firms use corporate website to express corporate information.

Keyword: corporate identity, corporate image, mediation, strategy, communication.

JEL Classification: M31, M37

I. Introduction

Balmer, (2001) observed the fog that has been trying to limit the vision of having a succinct definition of corporate identity. There has been agreement within the plethora

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of definitions developed by both academics and practitioners on the distinct attributes of a firm (Balmer et al. 2016). These distinct attributes may either be a linguistic based definition in which visual symbols of an organisation is consistent or be the individuality or personality based definition because of the reality and uniqueness (Gray & Balmer, 2001) or distinct characteristic attributes that the organisation possess (Balmer, 1998). This implies that corporate identity can be the viewed in the same way, yet, translated differently. Nevertheless, earlier scholars such as Balmer & Greyser (2006) were able to identify the attributes that sum up a firms identity through answers to questions like "what are we"; "who are we" or "what the firm is". These questions (amongst others) guided the understanding of scholars to develop a multidisciplinary paradigm otherwise known as the 'Strathclyde statement' which demonstrate understanding and further assert that the concept of corporate identity as multidisciplinary and multifaceted in nature (Balmer et al. 2016).

As the construction of social theory models amplified conceptual literature and galvanized attention to corporate identity, Balmer & Soenen (1999) came up with the mnemonic 'ACID' to further operationalize four distinctive features of corporate identity namely actual, communicated, ideal and desired. Business strategy, values and philosophy, corporate culture and structure are incorporated in actual identity. On the other hand, communicated identity is similar to image and reputation, which in turn leads to actualising the desired identity of corporate management while ideal identity refers to what stakeholders see as the best for the firm. In short, corporate identity is observed as the bonding of strategy, structure, communication and culture, embracing both tangible (e.g. name, logo, colour) and intangible (e.g. firm's behaviour and reputation) elements that make it distinctive (Balmer, 2001).

However, the positivist philosophical background (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006) in which previous scholars have used in describing the meaning of corporate identity has been observed by Otubanjo, (2008) to lack the capacity to describe the meaning of corporate identity. This is because previous scholars took little cognisance of how firms construct (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) its meaning. This failure is attributed to their lack of capacity to fully explain the constructionist processes through which firms develop and convey various corporate personality messages that support the development of desired patterns of corporate relationships. This position the development of a social construction based definition (Otubanjo, 2008) that corporate identity is a phenomenon that emerges from on-going interactions between firms and stakeholders. It is a signification of several corporate personality actions, which like many human activities, is

founded on the pillars of order, direction and stability. It is reflective of how corporate personality is controlled and constructed repetitively or (habitually) through the corporate identity mix - and the varieties of ways that stakeholders reciprocate and respond to these constructed personalities.

Therefore, for firms to ensure alignment of the various identities to facilitate a pleasant impression on the mind of stakeholders (corporate Image), there should be an implicit or explicit promise between firms and their stakeholders (Tarnovskaya, 2015). Today, one of the corporate communication tools in use for disseminating a well aligned and managed corporate identity is a corporate website. The use of this medium is expected to be reflective of how corporate personality is repetitively constructed and controlled through the corporate identity mix to produce a positive corporate image. However, as literatures exist on how the meaning of corporate identity and corporate image are developed (Stuart, 1998), little cognisance is placed on how the new medium influence the development and communication of both identity and image. Likewise, what effect does the new medium have on the activities of both firms and stakeholders? Based on the above, the objective of this paper is to investigate why firms embrace the use of corporate website in the corporate identity and corporate image relationship. This will be achieved by the use of different models to establish the relationship in academic literature so as to inform on the essence of using corporate website for effective transactional activities.

Research Questions

Based on the above objectives, the following are the research questions:

1. Why do firms embrace the use of corporate website in the corporate identity and corporate image relationship?
2. What role does corporate website play in the dissemination of corporate identity and creation of corporate image?
3. What are the use of corporate website for effective transactional activities?

II.   Literature Review

This section tries to underscore how scholars have over the years explained the role of corporate website, corporate identity and corporate image in literatures. This will be achieved by first reviewing literatures on communication and communication models in order to show the importance of corporate website to both organisation and other stakeholders.

II.1   Communication

Trenholm, (2013) observed that we are in a world of a non - autonomous society that has made man to develop a well ordered system of communication within its communities for individuals to survive, communicate and form relationships with others. As a result, academics and practitioners have tried to understand the constant interplay between communications and experience that has shaped the world around us through several disciplines such as philosophy, history, geography, psychology, sociology, ethnology, economics, political science, biology, cybernetics and cognitive sciences (Mattelart & Mattelart, 1999). This multidisciplinary view of communication makes it impossible for a universally acceptable definition (Trenholm, 2013). Many scholars have defined communication based on its functions such as it being a coordinator of organisational activities or transmitter of persuasive information that fosters participatory decision making in order to gain the commitment and loyalty within and between organisation and its stakeholders while it enhances organisational strategy (Forman & Argenti, 2005).

Communication has been examined in literature as mechanistic (a perfect transaction of message from sender to receiver), Psychological (act of sending message which affects the feelings and thoughts of the receiver upon interpreting the message), Social constructionist or symbolic interactionist (Product of interaction sharing and creating meaning), systemic (the new messages created via through-put) and critical (a source of power and oppression of individuals and social groups) (Trenholm, 2001)**.** Broadly speaking, definitions about this concept are either constructed as a phenomenon that is independent of human knowledge which accurately records and describes something that already exist, or assumptions of human construction that exhibit mental representations (Trenholm, 2001). Stevens, (1950) see communication as the discriminatory response of an organism to a stimulus; while Miller (1966) as cited by Trenholm, (2001) observe communication as a process of message transmission that affects behavioural situations in which a source transmits a message to a receiver with conscious intent to affect the latter's behaviours. In summary, communication is a spoken, symbolic, or nonverbal interaction that is used to describe see or assign meanings to interpersonal or intrapersonal communication process in order to make sense, influence, act or respond to behaviour. In addition to these defining constructs of communication, scholars have used models to create representations and descriptions of the structures and functions of the communication process.

Communication Models

Models are consciously simplified graphic description of a piece of reality in order to appreciate this world. They are used to show the main elements of any structure or process and the relationships between these elements (McQuail and Windahl, 1993). Over the years, different names have been employed in order to simplify its meaning such as theories, paradigms, hypothesis or simply ideas. However, the term model is a generic term for any systematic set of conjectures about real world observations (Lave & March, 1993). After a review of literature on existing communication models (See Trenholm, 2001), it is observed that Newcomb (1958) ABX model (see Figure 1) has similar characteristics to the model of cognitive theory by Vygotsky, (1978) that serves as the crux of discussion in this paper.

Figure 1- Newcomb (1953) ABX Model
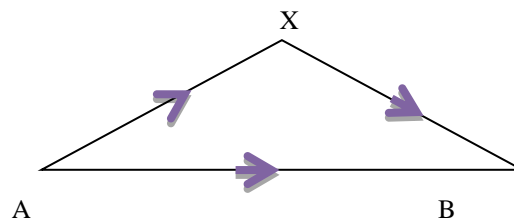
Source: Trenholm, (2001)

In the model above, it is assumed that the essential function of communication enables two or more individuals to maintain simultaneous orientations to each other and towards objects of an external environment. Newcomb (1953) argues that communication is a learned response to strain, and there is tendency of people to search for information under conditions of uncertainty and disequilibrium (Heider, 1946). Based on this assumption, communications is likely to be activated under certain conditions such as:

(a) where there is strong attraction between persons communicating (A – B);

(b) where the object is important to at least one of the participants (A –X, OR X - B) and

 (c) where the object has a joint relevance to both parties communicating (A – X – B).

II.2   Corporate Website

The WWW is an important commercial medium that possess unique characteristics that differentiates it from traditional corporate and marketing

communication channels that was invented as a gateway for global sharing of information based on hypermedia, the platform that supports the hoisting of corporate websites (Castanedor, Frais & Rodriguez, 2007). A unique characteristic of the WWW is its interactive nature which is different from traditional, one-to-many (monolithic), marketing communications media which consider the tastes of stakeholders as homogeneous and allows no interaction among consumers and organisation; the interactive, and multi-activity nature of the WWW enable stakeholders to communicate seamlessly (Chu, Leong, Hui & Cheung, 2007; Chen, et al. 1999; Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

Organisations have been provided with outstanding contributions to their service delivery through its unique characteristics of enhanced speed, agility, and provision of better opportunities in establishing distinct strategic positioning than did previous generations of information technology (Porter, 2001).

Although, the initial interest of many organisations with websites was to shovel versions of printed materials into digital formats by 1991, it became an attractive solution for organisations to meet up with the fast paced world of corporate communications due to its ability to play a part in business strategies to promote goods and services (products), increase organisation's response rate to customer demands irrespective of size, location or distance, while having a positive impact on customer expectation (Heinze &Hu, 2006; Basole, & Rouse, 2008). Also, it gives firms the pride to provide more features and improve on the content of their websites so as to continuously influence relationships with stakeholders (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Chen, et al. 1998). This interaction enables stakeholders to have optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), self-reinforcement, seamless sequence of responses, loss of self-consciousness (while interacting with the website) and intrinsic enjoyment (Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Chen, et al. 1998, 1999) while interacting with the firm through its website. This seamless and on-going interaction eventually builds up a corporate image.

The growth of research streams discussed in the previous sections demonstrates that a variety of scholars have addressed the corporate identity concept from their own standpoints. Likewise, the fog (Balmer, 2001) that limits a universal definition of corporate identity too affects the definition of corporate image because conceptualisation of corporate image is not devoid of corporate identity, organisational identity, and organisational image constructs as they have over the years been interchangeably used in literatures (Simoes, Dibb & Fisks, 2005). This overlapping definition of corporate image as corporate reputation, corporate personality and corporate identity (Karaosmanoglu & Melewar, 2006, Wilkinson & Balmer, 1996) is an indication that concepts of corporate

identity and corporate image are ambiguous and need clarification (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). Therefore, the problem of defining corporate image as a composite product of various factors which reflect and communicate the identity of an organisation (Karaosmanoglu & Melewar, 2006), can be traced to the multiplicity of interpretations and negative associations ascribed to the corporate image concept (Balmer, 2001) (see Figure 2).

This mirrors its broad disciplinary nature that is drawn from marketing, economics, social psychology and strategy (Balmer & Greyser, 2006). Furthermore, Christensen & Askegaard, (2001) argue that literatures dealing with the notion of corporate image are written at a superficial theoretical level, thereby making peoples notions to be based on common sense understandings of communication and reality. Given the importance of the corporate image, prior studies as highlighted in Stuart (1998) give a delineating background of factors that aided the formation of corporate image process models or paradigms. This includes the works of Kennedy, (1977); Dowling, (1986); Abratt, (1989); Markwick & Fill, (1997). These models propose various constructs towards creating the meaning or corporate image and its management. Likewise, studies such as Balmer & Stotvig, (1997), Balmer & Gray, (1999), Gotsi & Wilson, (2001); Melewar, et al. (2001) explored factors that serve as a basis to assert the existence of corporate image, whilst understanding how these images are formed and measured (Abratt & Mofokeng, 2001).

**Figure 2** - Corporate Image Management Process
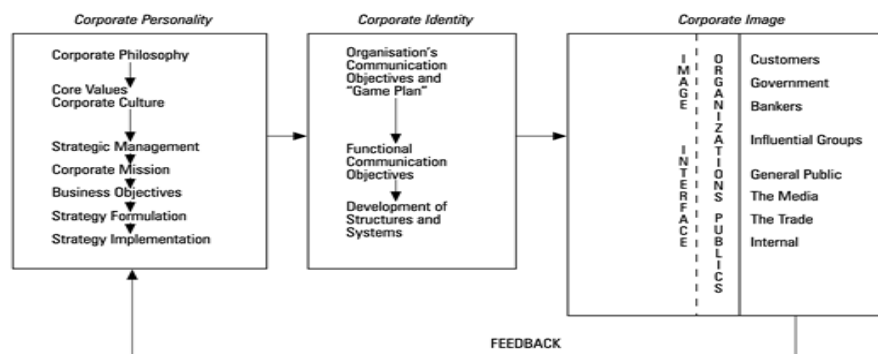
Source: Abratt, 1989: 71

In the above model, Shee & Abratt (1989) introduced the concept of corporate personality into his model. The auhors define corporate image as "the net result of the

interaction of all the experiences beliefs, feelings, knowledge and impressions that people have about a company. They argues that strategic management should develop a corporate philosophy through its corporate personality which is an embodiment of core values and assumptions of the company. This is supported by the argument of Hatch & Schultz (1997) that top management should be seen as a symbol of corporate identity. Although Abratt (1989) view corporate identity as basically a communication mechanism (Stuart, 1999), he recognises that the concept of corporate identity and corporate image were often used interchangeably as his model sought to differentiate between these concepts by introducing a corporate identity and corporate image interface in his model. This is found to be extremely useful by academic scholars in their effort to find accord in the meaning of corporate image.

Van Riel (1993) argued that for organisations to influence the development of corporate image, organisations must develop strategies which will greatly influence the formation of corporate image on the minds of stakeholders. Since corporate image is the result of communicated identity on the mind-set of stakeholders about a firm; van Riel (1993) illustrated this view as depicted in the figure below:

Figure 3- Corporate Identity, Strategy and Corporate Image Model
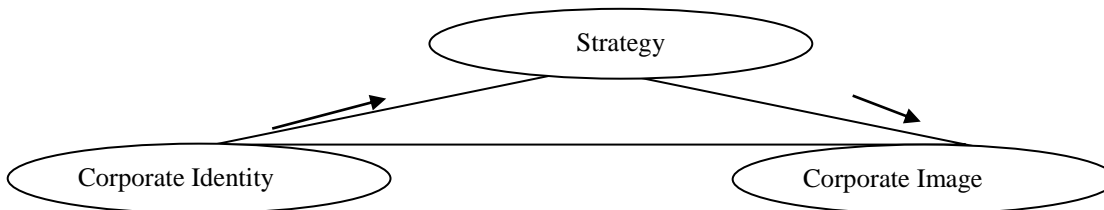
Source: van Riel, (1993)

## II.3   Theoretical Framework

In the history of psychological research or more specifically Cultural-historical psychology, many scholars have over the years divulged their assumption that there exist an intimate connection between human environment and human psychological processes. The concept of mediation has been studied over the years by different scholars in the fields of industrial and organisational psychology and organisational behaviour. But more recently, increasing emphasis is placed on its study (James & Brett, 1984) so as to understand more about the causal process by which independent variable affects a dependent variable (Mackinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West & Sheels, 2002; James &

Brett, 1984). Human beings are created with the wisdom and ability to modify or mediate the activities of their environment through the creation of artefacts that pervade our daily life activity. These creations did not only increase our speed, power, intelligence, and protection in various ways against predators; but also makes us smarter in the use of tools to increase our cognitive capabilities to meet up with the changes of this modern world. Over the years the importance of artefacts on human cognition was not of relative importance to cognitive scientists, as there was little understanding of the roles which artefacts play in information processing and how they interact with human activity. This has motivated the creation of several schools of thought to find alternative approaches to cognitive science in order to reframe human intelligence.

Eventually, the socio-cultural school of Soviet psychology, led by Lev Semenovic Vygotsky (1866 – 1934) refined the agenda of psychology by focusing on the study of human cognition through the socio- historical context. Although reservations exist about the acceptance of everyday day events as scientific scope of investigation or a feature of human behaviour that can be investigated; Vygotsky argued that the mental and physical relationship of man can be explained by the use of Tools (artefacts) which mediate man's daily activities. Kuutti, (1996) observe that the concept of mediation involves the idea that subjects interact with the object through the constraints that are imposed by the tools that mediate their action. Further, Baron & Kenny, (1986) believe that it is the generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest. In essence, the development of mediation models (James & Brett, 1984) clarify or enhance the understanding of meanings to which mediation can be described as a causal chain (Baron & Kenny, 1986; James & Brett, 1984) thereby reducing existing inconsistencies between mediation and moderation (Holmbeck, 1997). Vygotsky, (1978) argued about the notion of mediation of activity as a triangular representation (see Figure 4).

Figure 4- Vygotskian Model of Tool-Mediated Action
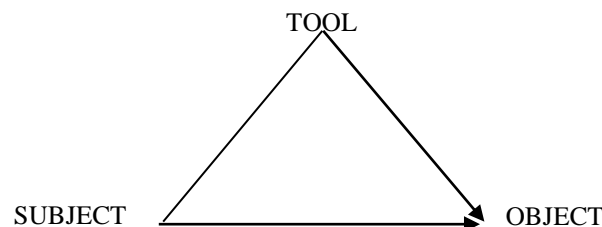
Source: Adapted from Cole & Engestrom, (1993)

He emphasised that tools (artefacts) are products of higher mental functions used by human being to distinguish self while changing and reacting with his environment in the form of evolution, creation, and transmission of psychological process, which is responsible for the development and performance of human being. Also, Wood (1993) observe that cognitive mediation through external artefacts and collaborators produce a result that is radically different in character, function and functionality than the cognition of the individual not mediated. Fundamentally, the notion of mediation by Vygotsky (1978) is being performed by a tool is based on two theoretical view-points:

(a)   Tools internally function cognitively to make discoveries in a cognitive mode i.e. this can come in form of attention, memory, numeric system and language.

(b)   Tools externally function as physical artefacts and collaborators towards the outside world i.e. the use of physical piece of equipment by man to enhance his daily activities.

In the development of Vygotsky's thought (Minick, 1987), three major phases have been identified as his analytical units and explanatory principles on the study of socio-historical context and human cognitive development.

(1) *The instrumental act*: this is the recognition of signs (artefacts or tools) as a unit of activity. He considers that human activities are mediated by the use of tools or instruments to control behaviour and the possibility of further creation of new mediating methods based on the relationship.

(2) *Psychological system:* he argued for a shift in psychological research to focus on the development of psychological systems that incorporates two or more distinct functions rather than individual mental function. This implies that there is need for re-modification of the disciplines schema within cognitive science.

(3) *Framework:* he explained psychological development in terms of differentiation and development of social systems by their interaction with external artefacts.

In the Figure 5, the 'subject' component of the model above portrays the individuals or group of people based on the social nature of the environment to manipulate the tools in order to satisfy the desired objectives. The 'tool' can be anything – physical or conceptual - used in the transformation process to manipulate or influence the object. It alters the environment (activity) and can be altered by the environment (activity) (Jonassen & Rohrer- Murphy, 1999). This is the role expected of a corporate website as explained in this model. The 'object' is the intention that motivates the subject's

interaction (Jonassen & Rohrer- Murphy, 1999). It allows the subject to control its own motives and behaviour through the manipulation of tools.

Figure 5- Feedback or circular interaction between the subject and the environment
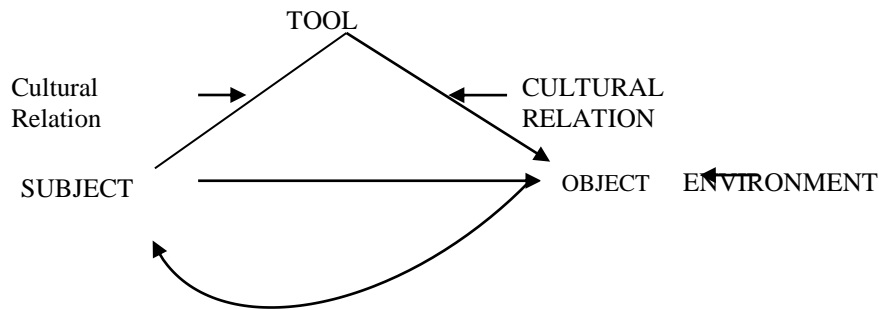

Source: Cole & Engestrom (1993)

Therefore, the subject must constantly improve his tool in response to the changing nature of the environment to be more empowered and be in control of the external resources (object). This strengthens the observation of Merleau-Ponty, (1999) that the interaction of the conscious mind and the external resources is circular. As the conscious mind changes the external resources, so does the external resources change the conscious mind in return in developing a higher awareness of intentions and actions. Gumpert & Cathcart (1990) believe that the concept of mediation includes more than the channels that carry information, awareness of the producers of media messages and the effect of such messages. Having illustrated how subject (Firm) use object (corporate website) to open possibilities in the environment based on the understanding of the Vygotsky (1978) mediation framework; the following section discusses organisation's external reality (corporate image) (see figure 6).

II.4   Synthesis of overlaps

In the previous paragraphs, attention was drawn to the tri-partite relationships that exist between the three distinctive models (Newcomb, 1953; Vygotsky, 1978; van Riel, 1993) in literature. This paragraph makes a follow-up by presenting a synthesis of relationships between the firm (corporate identity), the strategy (Corporate website) and the stakeholder (corporate image).

Figure 6- Adapted Mediation and Identity-Image- Strategy Triangle
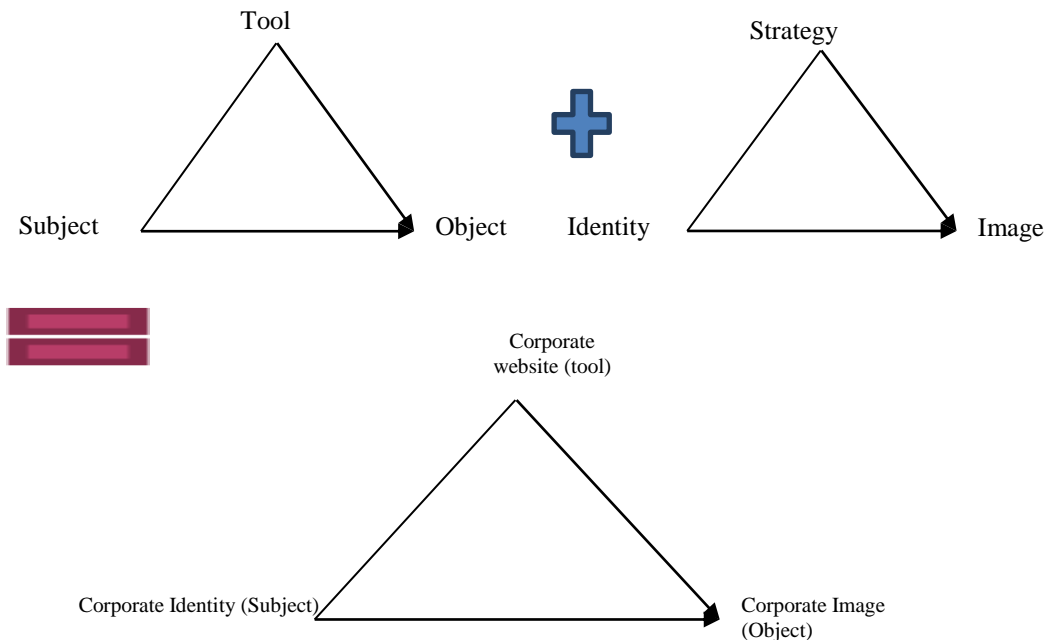
Source: Own elaboration

The focus of this section is to discuss the interconnected argument to expatiate the tri-partite relationship while at the same time answering the research questions asked above.

1.   Why do firms embrace the use of corporate website in the corporate identity and corporate image relationship?

Overlap 1: use of corporate website as a means of communication: Scholars (such as Chu, et al. 2007; Dahlen, et al. 2004 and Palmer & Griffith, 1998), have been highly vocal that the interactivity feature of WWW (the platform that hosts the corporate website) is a unique means for communication due to its interactive nature. Unlike traditional, one-to-many (monolithic) marketing communication media which consider the tastes of stakeholders as homogeneous and allows no interaction among consumers and organisation (Lasswell, 1948; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Hoffman & Novak, 1996); the interactive, and multi-activity nature of the corporate website enable stakeholders to

communicate (Chen, et al. 1999) seamlessly. This implies that the use of a corporate website does not only influence the development and alignment of the various identities (Balmer & Soenen, 1999); it also acts as an instrument (Minick, 1987) that communicates the distinct nature of a firm (Balmer, 2001) while stakeholders enjoy an optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Overlap 2: use of corporate website as competitive advantage: while Porter (2001) observed that the management of firms take-up WWW in order to create a distinctive position in the minds of stakeholders; scholars such as Varadarajan, et al., (2008); Benslimane & Yang, (2007); Stevens et. al., (2000); Fombrun & Shanley, (1990) argue that firms make use of a corporate website in order to have a competitive edge over competitors. This is achieved by deploying strategies (van Riel, 1993) that will effectively differentiate them from competitors. Also, the position of Vygotsky (1978) that tools are used as an instrument to enhance (or boost) the daily activity of man can also be seen as using a corporate website as a strategic tool (that a firm use to communicate across borders) to achieve competitive edge over rivals.

2. What role does corporate website play in the dissemination of corporate identity and creation of corporate image?

Overlap 3: use of corporate website as a means of corporate reputation management and promotion: Authors have over the years been stating the fear of stakeholders in the use of the corporate websites. Schlosser, White & Lloyd, (2006) observed that the uploading of personal and financial information on the corporate websites to make purchases involves a leap of faith from stakeholders that these information will not be used in unauthorised or fraudulent ways. In effect, organisations have to market their reputation by designing a corporate website that does not only serve an aesthetic function, but drives searchers online purchase intention to signal that a firm's ability can be trusted (Schlosser, et al (2006). Consequently, persuasive and strategic information about the business are conveyed to stakeholders (Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Van Doren, et al., 2000; Leichty & Esrock, 2001; Point & Singh, 2003; Xi et al, 2007) in order to develop and promote a corporate identity devoid of negative impressions and images about the firm (Heinze & Hu 2006; Guinaraes-Costa & Pina Cunha, 2008). This improves site attraction and effectiveness while customer satisfaction and online sales is generated (Huang, et al, 2006).

Overlap 4: use of corporate website as a tool for building a relationship between the firm and the customers: In response to the suggestion of social response theory that people treat computers as social actors even when they know that machines do not possess

human traits (Moon, 2000); Wang, et al, (2007) observed that the use of social cues facilitates the socialiness of the corporate websites, which in effect has an indirect, but critical influence on hedonic and utilitarian value perceptions of stakeholders and ultimately on their corporate website patronage. This implies, that the organisation – stakeholder interaction that exist in brick – and – mortar stores can be induced by using social cues (such as emoticons) on the corporate websites. This strengthen the observation of Muylle, et al. (1999) that corporate website content enable firms to meet different consumer interests and needs so as to deliver the expected benefits desired by consumer. Similarly, when stakeholders use corporate websites very often, it helps business organisations to generate commitment, satisfaction amongst consumers (Casalo et al., 2007). This inadvertently leads to the development of trust amongst stakeholders. Presently in Nigeria, firms use the social media (such as Facebook and Tweeter) to inform remind and persuade "social friends" about their product. An example is the use of facebook by banks as a medium for account openings.

3.   What are the advantages of using corporate website for effective transactional activities?

Overlap 5: use of corporate website as a strategic value or resource: in the review of literature on corporate websites in the paragraphs above, it is observed that corporate websites are used as a form of strategy (Chakraborty, et al., 2005) to convey information for consumer use (Azone, et al, 2001). Also, scholars such as Sullivan, (1999) and Lacross & Bernardi, (2005) see a corporate website as a strategic resource that is capable of carrying out business transactions while it also provides statutory disclosures. The use of corporate website to provide statutory disclosures (amongst others) supports the contribution of Kennedy (1977) as cited in Stuart, (1999) that for image to be enduring, it must be based on facts and reality of factors that exist around the organisations environment for effective build-up of stakeholder confidence and corporate image formation.

Overlap 6: use of corporate website as that which reduces transaction costs: The internet has over the years expanded the ways organisations compete with one another. According to Russ, et al., (1990) organisations rely on computer and high tech communications so as to achieve a competitive advantage (Stevens, et al. 2000). Therefore, the use of the corporate websites for business activities has helped organisations to effectively build and maintain market intelligence activities and strategies on the global market to considerably reduce the cost of business transaction (Zafiropoulos

& Vrana (2006). Likewise, the achievement of a competitive advantage can be attained through continuous multifaceted innovation on the corporate websites to enhance both business and social interactions that rapidly builds the consumer / stakeholder base of the organisation stakeholders (Varadarajan, et al., 2008). This also enhances organisational procurement processes to bring down the cost of distribution and logistics (Benslimane & Yang, (2007). Likewise this supports earlier literatures that favourable image positively affect customer retention, satisfaction, high quality enthusiastic workforce, investments, generation of customer confidence and loyalty towards organisation's products and services (Olins, 1989; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Keller & Aaker, 1992; Balmer, 1995; van Riel, 1995; VanHeerden & Puth, 1995; van Riel & Balmer, 1997; Brown & Dacin, 1997; Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2003; Melewar et al, 2005).

III.   Conclusion

This paper is drawn to examine the role of corporate website in the corporate identity and corporate image relationship. In the course of this paper, three important findings were generated. Firstly, it is established that the unique mediating and interactive characteristic of a corporate website provide outstanding strategic contribution to the creation of corporate identity and the management of corporate image. Also is the fit of corporate website to act as a mediator in the existing linear relationship between firms and stakeholders. This implies that firms can use the corporate website to inform, remind and persuade stakeholders in the development and management of corporate identity and corporate image respectively. Finally, a synthesis of the three distinctive models led to the development of six basic factors that express why firms use corporate website to express corporate information.

There are a number of limitations in this study that presents a window of opportunities for further research. For instance, this study is conceptual and the arguments presented in it are void of an empirical support. Thus, there is a need to commission a study that is firmly supported by views from the industry on the role of corporate website in corporate identity development and corporate image management in future. In addition, this study has only highlighted authors' anecdotal viewpoints on the uses of corporate website. It failed to explicate the relationship that subsist between the strategic use of corporate website and the development of a number of organizational phenomena such as positive brand image, increased sales level, increased market share, consumer purchase

decisions and so on. This provides a unique opportunity in future for further studies within these areas.

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