
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Discourse Analysis of How Moroccan Business Schools Establish Their Institutional Identities Through Mission Statements

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how Moroccan business and management schools construct their institutional identities, educational objectives, and social roles through their mission statements. In the context of the growing use of digital communication by educational institutions, mission statements constitute an important form of institutional discourse through which schools present what they seek to achieve, the qualities they aim to develop in students, and their relationship with the professional and social environment. The study focuses on the mission statements of five established Moroccan business and management schools and adopts a qualitative content-analysis approach. The analysis treats the mission statement as the primary unit of analysis and identifies concepts that are explicitly communicated by the institutions. Recurring concepts are grouped into broader analytical categories related to educational and professional objectives, graduate characteristics, institutional and developmental responsibilities, and local and international orientations. The findings show that business schools differ in how they communicate their identities and what they consider important in their institutional missions. There is an uneven distribution of themes, with only one universal theme shared by all schools: managers and leaders. This suggests that business schools do not share the same model of what a business school should focus on as its central purpose. The study contributes to the understanding of educational advertising and institutional communication by showing how business schools use mission discourse not merely to describe their educational offerings but also to construct institutional identities, define desired graduate profiles, and communicate their intended contribution to the economic and social environment. The analysis of Moroccan business-school mission statements therefore provides an opportunity to examine not only what these institutions claim to provide but also how they view their relationship with the wider professional and social environment.

KEYWORDS

Business school, advertising, mission statements, discourse

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1. Introduction

Advertising has long been an important part of contemporary society and has become increasingly pervasive in everyday life. As Cook (2001) observes, advertising constitutes a significant form of discourse that operates within broader social and cultural contexts. In contemporary society, advertisements are encountered across a wide range of media and platforms, making advertising an increasingly visible and influential form of communication. It forms an important part of social life and has undoubtedly become a powerful form of communication. With the emergence of digital technologies, advertising has changed significantly. Social media is a case in point, as it is now widely used to market products and services. The widespread use of social media platforms has consequently become an important feature of contemporary life.

The complexity of advertisements helps us understand how messages are constructed and how they influence audiences. To do so, advertisements should be viewed as whole texts rather than as collections of disconnected and isolated constituents, since linguistic and other semiotic resources are combined to convey particular messages (Myers, 1994).

The growing dominance of English in online communication has also facilitated the international circulation of information and communication. As English has become widely used as a medium of international communication, it is increasingly used in digital and online environments (von Rimscha et al., 2019)

These developments have also contributed to the promotion of educational institutions by increasing their visibility. In this context, marketing practices have changed the ways in which educational institutions communicate with their audiences, shifting from traditional communication tools, such as word of mouth, towards online strategies (Kumar & Raman, 2019). Institutional websites and social media platforms have been used to communicate schools' identities, values, programmes, and distinctive characteristics. Online communication has therefore become an important means through which educational institutions present themselves to prospective students and wider audiences.

The language used in advertising has been the subject of extensive research across a range of disciplines and perspectives because of the interconnectedness of the dimensions that define it. This interdisciplinary interest reveals the complexity of advertising, which encompasses social, cultural, psychological, and linguistic dimensions (Tanaka, 1994). The question that arises, then, is what makes advertisements specific communicative acts. This question can be addressed from a psychoanalytic perspective. From this perspective, advertisements tend to appeal to consumers' subconscious. Berger (2016) argues that unconscious processes can have a strong impact on consumer decision-making. From an ideological point of view, advertising can also be seen as conveying particular beliefs, ideologies, and interests. Simpson (1993) suggests that linguistic choices can manifest particular representations of reality and attitudes towards audiences.

This research aims to explain how these schools present themselves, communicate their objectives, and how they are influenced by the realities and their expectations regarding what students need and want, as well as how they understand their roles, values, and the problems they have to solve. This will be done by examining business-school mission statements found on their websites. These mission statements are meant to communicate their practical objectives so that they can convince students and parents to admire them and enrol.

1.1 Objectives of the research

This study has two objectives:

To uncover the underlying conceptual mechanisms that govern or influence the communication of the mission.

To examine the differences between schools of management in Morocco and how they differ in their mission statements.

1.2 Research questions

What are the concepts that define the mission statements of business schools?

What are the underlying mechanisms that define these concepts?

2. Literature review

Advertising has become an increasingly pervasive form of communication in contemporary society. It is not limited to the promotion of products and services; it also communicates lifestyles, expectations, values, and social meanings. Woodward-Smith and Eynullaeva (2009), for example, argue that advertising operates differently across cultural contexts and that advertising messages often need to be adapted to cultural differences rather than simply translated. Their work demonstrates that advertising can communicate not only information about products but also culturally embedded expectations and ways of life.

The language of advertising has therefore attracted considerable attention from researchers working in linguistics, communication, marketing, and related disciplines. Johannessen et al. (2010) emphasize that advertising is deeply embedded in the culture and economy of contemporary society and extends beyond the simple commercial promotion of products to the construction of images of individuals, groups, and organizations.

The development of digital technologies and the Internet has further transformed advertising practices. The increasing use of online platforms has created new forms of communication between advertisers and audiences and has made advertisements more interactive, immediate, and widely accessible. Arakelyan and Chobanyan (2017), in their study of online advertisements, note that advertising language may provide information but is more often designed to persuade and influence audiences. They also emphasize the careful selection of linguistic forms to make advertising messages accessible and effective.

This shift towards digital advertising is particularly relevant to educational institutions, which increasingly use websites and social media platforms to communicate with prospective students and wider audiences. Kumar and Raman (2019), in their study of

business schools' social media marketing, examined Facebook content and identified different content topics and formats used to increase engagement and organic reach. Their findings suggest that business schools can use strategically designed social media content to market their educational offerings more effectively.

Social media marketing may also influence students' decisions when selecting an educational institution. Karamang (2021) examined the effects of social media marketing and brand image on students' decisions to choose a business school in Bandung. The findings showed that both social media marketing and brand image significantly influenced students' choice, although brand image made a greater contribution than social media marketing. This suggests that, while social media constitutes an important promotional tool, the overall image and reputation of an educational institution may play a more substantial role in students' decisions.

The international dimension of digital communication also raises questions concerning language. Researchers have pointed out that English-language content and English-language companies possess a linguistic advantage in international media markets. von Rimscha et al. (2019), for instance, examine the linguistic and strategic disadvantages faced by German-language media companies and note the dominant position of English-language content in global media markets. Their study highlights the challenges faced by companies originating in non-dominant-language territories when expanding internationally.

These developments are particularly relevant to educational institutions, whose online advertisements can simultaneously promote programmes, construct institutional identities, communicate values, and position institutions within increasingly competitive educational markets.

Advertisements should therefore be viewed as complete communicative texts rather than as collections of disconnected linguistic elements. Linguistic and other semiotic resources work together to construct and convey advertising messages (Myers, 1994). Similarly, Forceville (1996) demonstrates that metaphors can occur not only verbally but also visually. His analysis of advertisements shows how pictorial metaphors can contribute to the construction of advertising meaning and persuasion.

The expressive dimension of advertising language is also significant. Aleksandrova, Korableva, and Kharkovskaya (2020) argue that advertising discourse makes extensive use of expressive linguistic means specifically designed to produce emotional effects on the addressee. Their analysis demonstrates that linguistic choices contribute to the rhetorical and persuasive force of advertising discourse.

Malyuga and Petrosyan (2024) provide a further perspective by examining pragmatic presupposition in the headlines of English-language business media. Their analysis identifies factive, evaluative, and axiological presuppositions and shows how such implicit meanings can contribute to manipulative rhetoric and influence audience perception.

2.1 Psychological and ideological dimensions

The persuasive power of advertising can also be examined from a psychological and psychoanalytic perspective. Berger (2016), for example, discusses the role of unconscious processes in marketing and argues that the unconscious can shape aspects of consumer decision-making. His psychoanalytic approach illustrates how advertising can appeal to desires, emotions, and symbolic associations that are not necessarily part of conscious decision-making.

This psychological dimension helps explain why advertising cannot be understood solely as the transmission of explicit information. Advertisements may simultaneously appeal to consumers' conscious evaluations and to less conscious emotional, symbolic, and cultural associations.

Advertising can also be examined from an ideological perspective. Language is not simply a neutral means of transmitting information; linguistic choices can contribute to the representation of reality and the positioning of audiences. Simpson's (1993) *Language, Ideology and Point of View* provides a particularly relevant framework for this perspective. Simpson examines how speakers and writers linguistically encode their beliefs, interests, and biases across different types of discourse, including advertisements and other media texts.

The cultural and ideological dimensions of advertising are also evident in public-service advertising. Fedorova, Ikonnikova, and Ye (2020), for example, examine the cultural characteristics of public-service advertising texts in China and show that such advertising is aimed not only at promoting products and services but also at promoting moral values and social norms.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that advertising should be understood as a complex communicative practice in which linguistic, visual, psychological, cultural, and ideological resources interact. The emergence of digital technologies has expanded this communicative practice by providing advertisers with new platforms through which they can reach, engage, and influence audiences.

The decision to focus on online advertisements in the present study therefore stems from the increasing importance of digital platforms in contemporary advertising. For educational institutions in particular, online advertisements provide opportunities not only to promote programmes and attract prospective students but also to construct institutional identities and communicate values.

Against this background, the present study asks how mission statements produced and presented by educational institutions in the Moroccan context seek to construct institutional identities, communicate particular values and points of view, and promote their educational brands.

This study fills a gap in research on online communication by comparing different schools to examine how they differ in or share their communicative perspectives. This comparison allows us to examine their linguistic choices and uncover their underlying conceptual views regarding what constitutes their priorities, students' priorities, current management and labour-market needs, as well as their views of business realities and future directions, and how these priorities are presented as meeting students' expectations and aspirations.

3. Methodology of the research

This study adopts a qualitative content-analysis approach to investigate the construction of institutional identities by examining the mission statements of five Moroccan business and management schools. These schools communicate their mission statements through their websites. The analysis uncovers recurring concepts and underlying perceptions, which are categorized into different categories, such as educational and professional objectives, graduates' qualifications and characteristics, local and international orientations, and institutional responsibilities. It identifies concepts such as competencies, innovation, critical and creative thinking, and social responsibility. Each mission statement is examined to clarify which concepts are communicated and which are absent. The study then makes a comparison of these schools based on the recurring concepts to understand how these schools construct their identities and communicate their educational objectives and intended outcomes.

3.1 School selection criteria

The selection of schools for this study was based on the following criteria:

The school has a publicly available mission statement.

The school is officially recognized and well established in Morocco.

The school offers a business programme under a distinct institutional identity.

These schools are as follows:

ESCA École de Management

Rabat Business School

National School of Commerce and Management, Casablanca (ENCG-C)

Africa Business School

School of Business Administration, Al Akhawayn University

3.2 Significance of the study

This study will draw the attention of managers to the nature of their communicative discourse, including its weaknesses and strengths. It changes their view of communication, as mission statements are not simply expressions of ideas; they are roadmaps that need to be explicit and clear and correspond to the actual teaching. This study also tackles an important aspect of communication: how communicators define their discourse when addressing clients who have less authority.

3.3 Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. First, it examines the mission statements of only five Moroccan business schools. Therefore, the findings are limited to these five schools and cannot be claimed to apply to other schools. The findings therefore cannot be generalized to all business schools in Morocco.

Second, this research focuses only on the mission statements and does not include other parts of the schools' websites, such as their vision statements and the words of their presidents. It also does not include other forms of communication, such as promotional materials or social media messages.

4. Data analysis

4.1 Mission statements

The following are the mission statements cited on the schools' websites.

4.1.1 ESCA mission statements

"We educate managers who foster innovation, internationalization, and sustainability in companies within Africa." (ESCA École de Management, n.d.).

4.1.2 Rabat Business School mission statement

"Prepare through education, practice and research, responsible and multicultural future leaders able to operate in a global context, contributing to a better Africa." (Rabat Business School, n.d.).

4.1.3 National School of Commerce and Management, Casablanca mission statement

"Prepare students, through the diverse trainings it offers, to play a major role in the management of organizations by combining operational and relational skills with the ability to adapt to the constantly changing environments;

'Actively participate in the promotion of research, the development of scientific production and its popularization at national and international levels;'

'Meet the educational needs of students to serve the nation as socially responsible citizens'.

"Prepare students to approach the globalization of exchanges serenely by apprehending other cultures and other methods of learning through conventions of research, double diplomas, and exchange programs in collaboration with our international partners." (École Nationale de Commerce et de Gestion de Casablanca, n.d.)

4.1.4 Africa Business School mission statement

Train: The next generation leaders to be critical thinkers, creative entrepreneurs, and socially responsible actors.

Develop: multi-disciplinary research and ground breaking education methods to enhance students' holistic and analytical competencies and allow them to embrace paradox and lead in fast moving and complex environments.

Stimulate: collaborative innovation that reaches beyond the classroom and connects students with stakeholders across a wide range of sectors.

Build: an ever-evolving thriving network of change makers: students, alumni, researchers, faculty, staff, organizations, academic institutions, and public sector players.

Act: as both an engine and a bridge for the diffusion and expansion of African, (Africa Business School, n.d.)

4.1.5 School of Business Administration, Al Akhawayn University mission statement

"To shape future ethical, successful managers and leaders with a local and global perspective." (Al Akhawayn University, n.d.).

4.2 The themes constituting the schools' mission statements

We find that there are eleven themes that constitute business-school mission statements, and these themes are either universal, shared, or exceptional:

Leadership/management development: ESCA, Rabat Business School, ENCG, ABS, SBA

Global/international orientation: Rabat Business School, ENCG, ABS, SBA

Social responsibility/ethics: Rabat Business School, ENCG, ABS, SBA

Africa focus: ESCA, Rabat Business School, ABS

Research: Rabat Business School, ENCG, ABS

Innovation: ESCA, ABS

Adaptability to change/complexity: ENCG, ABS

Multiculturalism: Rabat Business School, ENCG

Partnerships/networks: ENCG, ABS

Sustainability: ESCA

Entrepreneurship: ABS

The data analysis of these themes shows that the schools converge on certain aspects and differ in others. The main point of convergence is the preparation of managers and leaders. This role is shared by all five schools. This implies that these schools believe that the central function of a business school is to prepare managers and leaders. This is in harmony with parents' and students' expectations, as joining a management school is commonly associated with the desire to become a manager or a leader. Another point of convergence is the preparation of students to face international environments and social responsibility. All schools except Africa Business School mentioned the global environment. This is understandable, as business nowadays is no longer isolated from what is happening internationally. Africa Business School did not refer explicitly to the global context, possibly because of its focus on the African continent. Social responsibility is also shared by four schools. As businesses function within social systems, this aspect appears to be considered important by most of these schools. This dimension is expressed differently: Africa Business School uses "socially responsible actors"; Rabat Business School uses "responsible... leaders"; while ESCA and ENCG refer to "sustainability" and "to serve the nation," respectively.

The African dimension and research are less widely shared among the five schools. Research is mentioned by Rabat Business School, ENCG, and Africa Business School, while the other two schools do not mention it. This may be because they consider research to be primarily related to the work of academic staff and the institution rather than to the students' role or preparation. The African dimension appears in ESCA, Rabat Business School, and Africa Business School, while the other two schools do not refer explicitly to an African dimension. It could be that they consider the international environment to include the African environment.

Adaptability, multiculturalism, partnership, and innovation are also not shared by all the schools. Adaptability to change is mentioned by ENCG and Africa Business School. This may indicate that these two schools are particularly aware of the rapid developments taking place in business environments and contexts. Multiculturalism is not widely mentioned either. It is explicitly mentioned by Rabat Business School and ENCG. This may be because the other schools consider multiculturalism to be a natural consequence of internationalization rather than a dimension that needs to be explicitly stated in their missions.

Partnership is shared by Africa Business School and ENCG. This could be explained by the different contexts of the two institutions. For Africa Business School, partnership may be particularly relevant because of its focus on students from different African countries, which could create the foundations for future professional and institutional partnerships across the continent. For ENCG, partnerships may be associated with its position as a major public business school in Morocco and its numerous partnerships with other institutions, making it an important environment for international cooperation.

Sustainability and entrepreneurship are each mentioned by only one school. Sustainability is mentioned by ESCA, while the other four schools do not explicitly refer to it. This could be because sustainability is not necessarily viewed as a direct responsibility of students during their studies. Rather, it may be seen as an issue that can be implemented when graduates occupy economic and social positions and assume professional responsibilities.

Entrepreneurship is mentioned only by Africa Business School. This could be because the other schools do not consider it necessary to prepare students specifically for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship may also be understood as a characteristic of contemporary business environments rather than something that needs to be explicitly presented as a central educational objective. Africa Business School's emphasis on entrepreneurship is consistent with its broader emphasis on creativity, responsibility, and partnership, particularly given its African orientation and its expectation that its graduates will become future leaders across different African countries.

Innovation is mentioned by ESCA and Africa Business School. This may be because innovation, like creativity, can be taught either explicitly or implicitly without necessarily being presented as a central mission of every business school. It may also be related to the resources and infrastructure available to schools. Developing innovation may require appropriate technological, institutional, and organizational infrastructure, which may not be equally available in all business schools. Consequently, some schools may focus more on traditional forms of business education while others explicitly emphasize innovation in their missions.

5. Results and discussion

Analysing these data indicates that the mission statements allow these schools to establish their identities differently. The previous data analysis less to the following findings:

5.1 Producing managers and leaders

Producing managers and leaders is shared by all five schools. This is expected because business schools normally teach management as one of their core subjects. This means that the five schools are aware that their business schools have to perform their main function, that is, to produce managers, and that parents and students expect them to focus on this role.

5.2 Global outlook

Four of the five schools mention a global or international outlook as a focus. This is particularly due to the fact that managers have to face competition from different international companies and may also need to expand their products to other international

markets. We find that Africa Business School places greater emphasis on Africa rather than explicitly using the term “global.” I think this is due to the fact that Africa Business School is concentrated on the African continent, which the Moroccan state considers very important. The Moroccan government has many projects focused on Africa. By this, we can say that this business school aligns with its name and wants to show that it is realistic, as the global market is not an easy target due to competition from advanced countries such as Japan, China, Europe, and the USA.

5.3 Social responsibility and ethics

Social responsibility and ethics are shared by Rabat Business School, ENCG, Africa Business School, and SBA. This could be explained by the fact that these schools explicitly refer to responsibility or ethical dimensions in their mission statements.

5.4 African focus

Except for ENCG and SBA, the schools mention an African dimension in their mission statements. This is in line with the government's direction to expand in Africa and strengthen relations with other African nations. ENCG and SBA are local institutions; therefore, their main focus is Moroccan citizens and society.

5.5 Research

Research is shared by Rabat Business School, ENCG, and Africa Business School. This is important for the reputation of the school. For ESCA and SBA, the fact that they do not mention research does not necessarily mean that they are not aware of its importance; they may simply not have considered it at the moment of writing their mission statements.

5.6 Innovation

ESCA and Africa Business School mention innovation. The reason could be that these two schools wrote longer mission statements, allowing them to elaborate on additional aspects.

5.7 Adaptability to change/complexity

ENCG and Africa Business School mention adaptability to change and complexity. These two schools mention them as a description of their awareness of a business climate characterized by complexity.

5.8 Multiculturalism

Rabat Business School and ENCG mention multiculturalism. These two schools mention multiculturalism as a sign of their belief in diversity and their values of openness. The other schools may have missed talking about it because they may believe that students are not required to have different cultural backgrounds and that their preparedness for internationalization and globalization compensates for the cultural dimension.

5.9 Partnerships/networks

Only two schools have mentioned partnerships and networks, namely ENCG and Africa Business School. Africa Business School, by definition, extends to different countries and therefore has a large number of networks. ENCG is characterized by signing many partnerships with institutions in different countries, which may be why it mentions this aspect.

5.10 Sustainability

ESCA is the only school that mentions sustainability. The fact that ESCA has mentioned sustainability may mean that it wants to align with the UN Charter. It is hard to see how students may be inclined to serve sustainability or how this fits with their objectives. It could simply be that they want to show that they are aware of world needs as institutionalized by the UN.

5.11 Entrepreneurship

Only Africa Business School has mentioned this target, which may mean that the selected business schools think of students mainly as employees and not as entrepreneurs.

The mission statements are not the same in terms of length. Except for Africa Business School, which elaborates on its mission statement, the other schools only have one paragraph to explicitly clarify their central role.

Secondly, these schools do not agree on what constitutes the right identity of a perfect business school. This is a problem because, if these schools are teaching management as a science, and science is based on truth, then how can we trust these schools if what they consider to be the truth differs from one school to another?

The universal theme is producing managers or leaders. This is expected, as business schools basically teach management. However, business schools also produce salespeople, marketing professionals, and accountants, but they choose to talk only about management. This may be because the underlying psychological notion behind selecting “producing managers” is that everyone wishes to be ambitious and reach the highest positions, which, in this case, means management.

The study also finds that the schools are not treating mission statements as important communicative functions that convey major and core messages. It is clear that the five mission statements are of utmost importance, but all of them mention only some of their expected goals, with management being the most common. This means that school managements are communicating mainly their basic, normal functions, that is, management.

6. Conclusion

This study has investigated Moroccan business schools' mission statements to understand how these schools define their educational and business offerings, which can constitute an important link between the student and the school. It aimed to reveal how educational institutions seek to construct institutional identities and promote their institutional brands. In other words, linguistic choices can be used to represent reality and position audiences.

This study also investigated how institutions use linguistic choices through their mission statements to construct particular values and communicate beliefs, perspectives, and what they consider important enough to include in their mission statements.

Eleven themes were found in the mission statements: leadership and management development, global/international orientation, social responsibility and ethics, African focus, research, innovation, adaptability to change and complexity, multiculturalism, partnerships and networks, sustainability, and entrepreneurship.

However, it was found that the schools do not share a common conception of which themes should constitute their mission statements. While some themes, such as leadership and management development, are widely included across the business schools, others—such as innovation and partnerships—appear only in specific schools.

This raises an important question: if these schools do not agree on what constitutes their central mission, to what extent do the studies they offer reflect a universal understanding of management studies?

It is worthy to note that the analysis is limited to five selected Moroccan business schools and focuses only on their mission statements as advertised online. It therefore reflects only the themes explicitly expressed in their websites and does not represent all Moroccan business schools. More studies need to be conducted to provide a clearer overview of how Moroccan business schools construct their institutional identities.

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