
Higher Education Institution Branding: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This research delves into the comprehensive assessment of challenges faced by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) during the branding process and proposes effective solutions to enhance their branding strategies. Key obstacles include establishing a distinct brand identity, effectively communicating the brand through suitable activities, cultural influences impacting HEIs, the pros and cons of forming alliances and partnerships, and inadequate infrastructural facilities to showcase the brand's value. The suggested strategies comprise designing innovative logos and slogans, highlighting competitive advantages through appropriate channels, fostering an 'institutional brand' culture among staff, forging strategic partnerships with other universities, and embracing cutting-edge digital platforms and online presence. Implementing these techniques would enable HEIs to develop robust brand management processes and gain a competitive edge in the global market.

Keywords : Higher education, institution, branding, critical, analisis

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization has transformed higher education into a commodity that is bought and sold, prompting higher education institutions (HEIs) to adopt marketing strategies to thrive in the intensely competitive global landscape. In response to heightened rivalry within the global higher education market, HEIs have opted for a viable marketing tactic known as branding (Chapleo, 2015). Branding bestows a unique identity upon the institution and sets it apart from its competitors. In a competitive environment, branding generates positive effects and mitigates risks, providing the institution with a competitive advantage and ensuring its stability in the market (Beneke, 2011). In the realm of higher education, the potency of a brand lies in the amalgamation of ideas, emotions, perceptions, images, and experiences that stakeholders associate with it. Additionally, it encompasses everything that customers have learned, observed, imagined, and encountered about the brand over time (Harsha and Shah, 2011). To captivate their target audiences, including students, employees, faculty, alumni, donors, government, the media, and other university supporters, HEIs exert significant efforts to standardize their images, reputations, and core themes. Notably, students are often considered as clients of HEIs, and the educational programs offered by these institutions are regarded as products consumed by students (Natale and Doran, 2012). As a result, HEIs may incorporate students into their branding strategies due to their role as valuable customers.

Establishing a strong brand for higher education institutions (HEIs) is a challenging endeavor, as it is closely tied to the experiences that students encounter and what remains imprinted in their memories (Al Shorafa, 2017). Beyond students, the involvement of other stakeholders, including alumni, employers, parents, and others, plays a crucial role in shaping the brand image of HEIs. According to Karadag (2016), HEI branding revolves more around people and extends beyond mere products or services offered in the market. Unlike the commercial sector, higher education branding is focused on defining "who we are" rather than solely emphasizing "what the particular product offers to the marketplace." Building a brand in the educational realm is inherently challenging, as it requires conveying true distinctiveness, which can be a complex task compared to commercial branding approaches.

Differentiating higher education institutions (HEIs) from their competitors through branding is a widely adopted strategy, but it presents a more challenging task compared to traditional commercial contexts (Dholakia & Acciardo, 2014). The complexity arises from the distinct nature of marketing in higher education, which involves a multitude of elements such as programs, pricing, promotions, placement, staff, procedures, and prominence. Unlike commercial agencies that prioritize uniform

brand delivery through frontline workers, the higher education sector doesn't enforce such consistency, particularly in the teacher-student relationships where diverse interactions are common. Unlike commercial products, HEIs can enhance their brand equity through selectivity by admitting only the most academically capable students (Dholakia and Acciardo, 2014). Understanding the intricacies of branding in HEIs is crucial for educational administrators to navigate the branding process effectively.

METHOD

The strategy employed in this literature review is a streamlined, methodical approach to data analysis. The following Springer Link, ScienceDirect, Scopus, IEEE Xplore, ACM, Wiley, and ProQuest sources of indexed scholarly papers were used. In order to designate study domains on experiences, initiatives, or theories connected to branding for higher education, a scoping procedure was also developed.

RUSULT AND DISCUSSION

The Value of Branding for Institutions of Higher Education

The brand of a university represents a commitment to delivering a particular level of service that aligns with the expectations of its customers and students (Clarke, 2009). Numerous studies have underscored the importance of branding in the context of higher education.

2.1 Higher education itself

Branding plays a crucial role in the growth and survival of higher education institutions (HEIs) due to their inherent diversity in type, working environments, infrastructure, and motivations for upholding educational quality. It significantly influences the selection of students and faculty members and serves as a powerful tool for attracting new students, resources, and establishing trust (Harsha and Shah, 2011). As Bhayani (2010) highlights, branding is instrumental in both attracting and retaining students for a particular HEI. Factors that logically draw students to an institution include a well-established historical brand, an attractive educational environment, the presence of renowned faculty and researchers, familiar offerings, and public perception of the HEI's dedication to educating the next generation. Indeed, branding serves as a powerful tool for higher education institutions (HEIs) to address various challenges and achieve multiple objectives. It aids HEIs in tackling declining enrollments, improving retention rates, overcoming opposition or negative perceptions, and enhancing their overall image and reputation. Effective branding can also attract more financial assets and honor charitable donors, thus bolstering the institution's financial stability. Moreover, branding helps HEIs align with their mission and communicate their affiliations with other institutions, fostering collaborations and partnerships. Additionally, a strong brand positively impacts an institution's reputation, which can lead to increased revenue through the sale of their products or services. Overall, HEI branding plays a pivotal role in facilitating growth, sustainability, and success in the dynamic landscape of higher education.

Students and members of the community

According to Chapleo (2011), university branding is critical for communicating to all audiences about the many aspects of the university in order to get a competitive edge. It lets the community and prospective students to recognize and distinguish their university from others, and it is easily located in the social environment (Lambooy, 2011). As a result, students are more likely to identify with the university where they study and graduate (Hysi and Shyle, 2015).

Student employability as a graduate student

Branding not only provides graduates with an identity but also offers them a means to express themselves as both valued customers and lifelong members of a university brand community (Williams and Omar, 2014). In the present scenario, various industries, including hospitality, recognize the reputation and image of HEIs as crucial factors when hiring graduate students. For instance, in the hospitality industry, the school's brand is seen as an appealing and vital element in the recruitment process. A robust education brand possesses traits and benefits that align with the business's criteria for hiring a graduate student, depending on the industry sector. Additionally, students themselves acknowledge that the brand image of their HEIs directly influences their employability prospects (Naidoo et al., 2014). Thus, branding not only impacts how graduates perceive themselves but also significantly influences their employability and career opportunities in the job market.

Employers

Employability skills hold immense importance for both students and industries alike. Employers recognize the significance of personal image, communication abilities, and core competencies as key factors in determining an individual's employability (Ruetzler et al. 2014). In recent times, HEIs have strategically incorporated these employability components into their branding efforts. They focus on equipping their graduates with the necessary skills demanded by the job market and ensuring their professional growth and advancement. By emphasizing these employability skills, higher education institutions strengthen their brand image, attracting prospective students and gaining the trust and support of employers who value the competence and readiness of their graduates in the workforce.

Alumni

A positive university brand plays a vital role in the recruitment and retention of top students and faculty, as well as in fostering strong connections with various stakeholders, including the public, government, alumni, and donors (Shaari et al., 2012). Additionally, previous research has shown that HEIs acknowledge the significance of branding in enhancing alumni engagement and support. By cultivating a compelling and positive brand image, universities can build enduring relationships with their alumni, thus benefiting from their continued involvement and support in various aspects of the institution's growth and development.

Creating relationships and collaborations

Foroudi et al. (2014) define university brand image as an individual's instant mental image of the university. HEIs have recognized the importance of developing their brand image through collaborations and co-branding initiatives with universities worldwide. This strategy allows them to establish a clear identity and understand stakeholders' perceptions of their institutions (Hemsley-Brown et al., 2016). Moreover, HEIs aim to garner support from the corporate community by leveraging their branding efforts. In addition to these considerations, there is a pressing need for HEIs to create brand value due to the prevailing environmental changes in the education sector. Factors such as privatization, devolution, divergence, globalization, and increased competition are common challenges faced by institutions across many countries. With a growing number of students enrolling in higher education, HEIs are becoming more conscious of the significance of these aspects in positioning themselves effectively in the evolving educational landscape. By establishing a strong brand identity and delivering value through innovative approaches, HEIs can adapt to these changes and stand out amidst heightened competition, thereby attracting and retaining students and stakeholders.

In recent years, institutions have begun to use worldwide rankings as a marketing strategy. Students utilize rating websites to find acceptable institutions because they want to exhibit their education, research, or commercial expertise. Indeed, in the face of global competition and the quest to attract international students, HEIs must adopt effective branding strategies to position themselves favorably in the world league ranking table. However, to achieve this goal, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges HEIs encounter in establishing their unique 'brand' and to devise suitable approaches to address these issues successfully. By identifying and overcoming these obstacles, higher education institutions can enhance their reputation, visibility, and attractiveness to prospective students from around the world. Because of the growing number of students enrolling, HEIs are becoming more conscious of the significance of these aspects.

3. Problems experienced during the consolidation of higher education institutions

Branding plays a crucial role for higher education institutions (HEIs) seeking to differentiate themselves from their competitors. However, the intricacies of the higher education sector make branding an even more formidable challenge compared to traditional commercial contexts (Dholakia and Acciardo, 2014). The authors highlight several key issues encountered by HEIs, based on a comprehensive survey of the existing literature.

Developing a Brand Identity

Moreover, a significant issue facing most HEIs is the striking similarity in their slogans and branding. Marketing efforts in higher education must address this concern by effectively informing students about the exceptional aspects that set each institution apart as a great place to study. To achieve this, HEIs must develop a robust brand identity that highlights their unique strengths and qualities (QS Digital Marketing, 2018). However, many universities struggle with selecting appropriate, relevant, and

distinctive taglines or slogans to complement their logos during the branding process. Often, these slogans may seem inspirational at first glance, but they lack the depth, meaning, and emotional connection necessary to convey what the institution truly stands for. To establish a more compelling brand presence, universities should focus on creating taglines that genuinely reflect their values and distinctiveness, allowing students to better understand the essence of the institution and fostering a stronger emotional connection with prospective learners.

Consequently, HEIs must avoid using uninteresting phrases in their branding, as it can lead to consumer dissatisfaction, boycotts, and potential revenue loss due to resistance to a brand makeover (Walsh et al., 2019). It's important to acknowledge that creating a strong brand identity for a multi-campus HEI with local centers in various locations is a challenging task. Dean emphasizes that the tertiary education landscape emphasizes the significance of internal marketing and the internal market in recognizing brand identity and fostering a shared brand meaning. To maintain employee loyalty, internal branding efforts should be consistently nurtured and upheld over time. By doing so, HEIs can create a unified and compelling brand experience that resonates with their target audience and fosters lasting connections with students, faculty, and staff.

Creating a brand

HEIs encounter a significant challenge in creating an efficient communication channel and other brand-building activities that contribute to the establishment and definition of their brand identity. Previous research highlights the importance of effective brand building initiatives, which should not only alter customer perceptions but also reinforce positive attitudes and cultivate loyalty. To achieve this, exploring alternative media avenues alongside traditional advertising methods can be beneficial. It becomes crucial for HEIs to identify their unique strengths that resonate with the motivations of their target audience, aligning their strategies with what truly connects with their potential students and stakeholders. After identifying their unique strengths, HEIs can reassess their brand positioning and highlight these distinctive characteristics to gain prominence in a competitive landscape (Hanover Research, 2015). For universities, branding can be particularly challenging due to their inherently academic nature, making it harder to express genuine differentiation. However, despite these difficulties, HEIs recognize the significance of branding as a means to set themselves apart from their competitors. By strategically leveraging their strengths and crafting a compelling brand story, universities can establish a distinctive identity that resonates with their target audience and helps them stand out in the highly competitive educational market.

In the current social web era, HEI audiences are highly involved with Facebook, making it a crucial platform that should not be underestimated in brand-building efforts. Additionally, to achieve excellent brand growth, HEIs must possess a clear vision and receive strong support from their leadership, as emphasized by Al Shorafa (2017). Moreover, a significant aspect of HEI brand construction is internal branding, which focuses on describing how the brand is built from within the organization and how it fulfills its promises. This internal branding approach is closely linked to employee loyalty and commitment, both of which play a vital role in delivering on the brand's promises. Any absence of a clear goal, leadership backing, social media utility, and staff dedication may pose difficulties and hamper progress.

Cultural concerns

HEI branding faces considerable challenges, and among them, cultural concerns stand out as one of the most formidable obstacles (Chapleo, 2015). This is because cultural codes play a significant role in the development of a brand, affecting the entire process of creating and conveying brand value. Because the brand name, language, logo, and visual identity all carry a distinct meaning, all brands are placed in a cultural context. Nonetheless, some organizations choose to explicitly demonstrate their interest in certain cultural concerns by incorporating them into their brand strategies (Hajdas, 2017). A healthy organizational culture is critical for developing and sustaining brands, and it serves as a foundation for differentiating a brand in ways that customers frequently appreciate (De Chernatony et al., 2006). Language, logo, and visual identity are all examples of visual identity.

Cultural factors have a significant impact on brand equity. A recent study conducted by Filieri et al. (2019) revealed that culturally contextualized dimensions of brand equity, such as brand mianzi (face) and cultural perceptions, surpass traditional metrics like brand associations and loyalty. This study emphasizes the need for tailored brand equity frameworks that consider the specific culture of a

country. Furthermore, the researchers highlighted the crucial role of cultural aspects in branding operations within emerging markets (Filiari et al., 2019). Therefore, higher education institutions (HEIs) should draw upon their country's cultural values when crafting and promoting their brand image.

3.4 Alliance and collaborations are required.

As a result, HEIs can form national/regional/international alliances in order to recruit more students, strengthen brand identification, recognize exceptional academic programs, and boost graduate employability. Customers may have a negative view toward an alliance if the partner brands do not fit (Lafferty et al., 2004; Simonin and others). Furthermore, client feedback on the. The place of origin of HEIs offering co-branded products can have a significant impact on co-branded products. Finally, this requirement may determine whether the alliance succeeds or fails (Chee et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

The necessity of branding HEIs and the difficulties HEIs encounter in branding their educational processes and products are the two key concerns this study addresses. The difficulty of HEIs to produce new things is one of the difficulties they face. the problem of communicating; form partnerships and alliances; and take advantage of insufficient infrastructure facilities to display the value of the brand. This paper outlines difficulties experienced with branding HEIs and suggests solutions based on recommended practices from published literature. Future research, however, can concentrate on obtaining primary information via interviews and qualitative analysis to hear from internal and external stakeholders about the issues facing HEI branding and create a suitable strategy plan for branding universities.

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