

Factors Affecting Higher Education Branding According to the Students – A Study of Engineering and Management Institutes in the State of Punjab.

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Abstract

This study focuses on the perception of students regarding various dimensions that create and improve the brand of a university/ institute. Previous research highlights students as key stakeholders in higher education system. The purpose of this study is to understand the perspective of students, who essentially are the customers in the higher education market regarding the branding of the institutes of higher education. A survey was conducted with 400 students of various institutes/universities of Punjab. Exploratory factor analysis was used to find out various factors that they considered to be most important for branding of higher education institutes. Findings suggest that student support and development was the most important factor followed by marketing and media activities.

Introduction

Marketization of higher education happens when higher education institutes adopt the marketing tactics and strategies of open market players and start operating like firms in service sector and regard the student as customer. With students as their customers, the universities, institutes and colleges have slowly become business organizations. These organizations have a limit to their educational resources but they need to enhance their competitiveness, so they resort to value marketing for establishing a brand image and attracting students. As a result, leaders in education fixate on the perceived image of their institute and its value equation in the education market and obsess about brand image like corporate leaders. (Dogan, 2013; Lockwood & Hadd, 2008). A university's brand is a manifestation of the institution's features that distinguish it from others, reflect its capacity to satisfy students' needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education, and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions (Bick, Jacobson, & Abratt, 2003). For this the unique and vital essence of the institution is defined and articulated in a clear and distinct message which is then effectively communicated to all the internal as well as external stakeholders. (Chapleo, 2011). For the branding and marketing process of higher education institutes to be successful, it is important to study the factors affecting the student's choice of an institute. (Blaga, 2014). According to Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006) branding activities in the higher education market are largely stimulated by the university's desire to anticipate the key factors governing the students' decisions, assuming that the students are informed consumers with the ability and intent of making rational choices.

Literature Review

Many studies suggested that infrastructure, environment quality of life at the institute/university, is of utmost importance to the students and hence that is what they associate with a desirable institute to seek admission. (Joseph et al 2014, Azoury et al 2014, Salami & Abdi 2021, Ley et al 2019, Jevons 2006). Other factors that researchers have pointed out to be important in their studies include quality of education and faculty (Lockwood & Hadd 2008, Sabando et al 2018, Tomlinson 2018); word of mouth (Jiewanto et al 2012, Casidy 2013, Balaji et al 2016, Appuhamilage & Sriyalatha 2019); and marketing and promotional strategies (Melewar et al 2017, Waeraas & Solbakk 2013); campus placements (Chung 2010, Valitov 2014, Duarte et al 2010, Tas & Ergin 2012). Various studies point out different factors that are considered to be most important by the students while seeking admission as they make the institute a reliable and reputed brand name in the market.

According to Vrontis et al (2007), there are three stages of the process in which a student decides to prefer one HEI over the other. In the first stage the brand of the institute/university is not given any thought. This stage is all about student's own academic achievements and aspirations, their family background and social context. It's only in the second stage that institute's attributes and branding comes in to play as the student is attracted to some and excludes or eliminate some

from 'the list'. After that finally in the third stage the student makes a choice and decides upon the HEI he/she wants to join.

Purpose of research

The purpose of the research was to find out the factors affecting higher education branding according to the engineering and management students in Punjab. An endeavor is made to see if a new factor emerges that has not been discussed in the existing literature available on the topic. This would enable the HEIs to effectively execute their branding strategies keeping in mind the preferences of the students.

Research Methodology

Primary data was collected through a questionnaire. A sample size of 400 engineering and management students from the state of Punjab was taken. Detailed sampling plan is presented below:

Table 1: Sampling Plan of the study

Field	No. of Students
Engineering	200 (100 Under Graduate, 100 Post Graduate)
Management	200 (100 Under Graduate, 100 Post Graduate)
Total	400

These students were primarily from the institutes/universities located in Jalandhar, Amritsar and Ludhiana. They were explained to provide response regarding the elements they considered important for branding of the HEIs/Universities. Normality testing was done with the help of the values of kurtosis and skewness. These values were then divided by the standard errors value in order to obtain the Z-value. Reliability testing was also done using Cronbach's Alpha. The results, which have not been tabulated and presented here, proved that the data was suitable for further analysis. Factor analysis was then applied in order to find out the factors affecting higher education branding considered important by students.

Analysis and Findings

Table no. 2 - Factor Analysis – KMO and Bartlett's Test.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.794
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3584.771
	Df	630
	Sig.	.000

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy (0.794) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were found to be adequate for conducting the Exploratory Factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient, which indicates whether or not each factor predicts a sufficient number of items, should be larger than or equal to 0.70. The KMO Here it is 0.794,

which is acceptable. The Bartlett test should be significant (i.e., less than 0.05), indicating that the variables are sufficiently correlated to give a suitable basis for factor analysis, as seen in this case.

Table 3: Total Variance Explained

Total Variance Explained									
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.84	14.002	14.002	7.841	14.002	14.002	6.837	12.208	12.208
2	7.47	13.339	27.341	7.470	13.339	27.341	6.661	11.894	24.102
3	5.97	10.672	38.013	5.976	10.672	38.013	6.458	11.531	35.633
4	5.74	10.252	48.265	5.741	10.252	48.265	6.009	10.730	46.363
5	4.72	8.432	56.697	4.722	8.432	56.697	5.787	10.334	56.697
6	3.82	7.717	64.414						
7	3.50	6.254	70.668						
8	2.77	4.957	75.624						
9	2.17	3.884	79.508						
10	1.84	3.285	82.793						
11	1.43	2.553	85.346						
12	1.28	2.291	87.638						
13	1.17	2.094	89.731						
14	1.04	1.858	91.589						
15	.94	1.678	93.267						
16	.82	1.464	94.731						
17	.76	1.367	96.098						
18	.58	1.043	97.142						
19	.43	.770	97.911						
20	.36	.650	98.561						

21	.33	.598	99.160						
22	.27	.482	99.642						
23	.17	.317	99.959						
24	.02	.041	100.000						
25	.01	.039	100.000						
26	.009	.032	100.000						
27	.007	.025	100.000						
28	.0069	.023	100.000						
29	.0065	.019	100.000						
30	.0061	.015	100.000						
31	.0057	.011	100.000						
32	.0052	.010	100.000						
33	.0047	.009	100.000						
34	.0041	.008	100.000						
35	.0039	.006	100.000						
36	.0031	.005	100.000						
37	.0024	.001	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

For the purpose of forming factors eigen values greater than 4.00 have been considered. As can be inferred from the results in above table there are 5 components with Eigen values > 4.00. So the appropriate number of factors which could be extracted out of the given statements is 5. The total variance explained by these five factors is 56.697%. This means that 56.697% of the variation in the responses of the students can be attributed to the factors so constructed in this study while the remaining variations can be a result of the aspects which have not been included. This is a reasonably fair degree of variation explained by the factors so formed to explain the phenomenon (perception of the students) under consideration.

The Rotation Component Matrix shown below in table no. 4 reveals the factor loadings.

Table no. 4: Rotated component matrix

Rotated Component Matrix ^a	
	Component

	1	2	3	4	5
Institute/University must have a properly designed Personality Development Programme.	.781				
Student participation in events like - academic, cultural and entrepreneurial fairs and fests is an important aspect of a quality Institute/ University.	.713				
An effective grievance redressal system for students, parents and guardians should be in place.	.696				
Design and construction of the campus building should be impressive and aesthetic.	.676				
I prefer campus which is spacious with wi-fi, hi-tech computer labs and other state of the art facilities.	.659				
A system for fee concession, scholarships, student support programs and schemes for meritorious and needy students should be in place.	.654				
Institutes/ Universities should have spacious and hygienic hostels.	.606				
Admission counselors should come across as genuine and honest and should focus not only on Institute/ University goal but also on student needs.	.586				
The Institute/ University must focus on developing entrepreneurial skills of the students.	.575				
The institute should take the summer training and other training projects of the students seriously and put in efforts to enable maximum learning out of them.	.573				
The program and hostel fee must be commensurate with the quality of education and campus lifestyle.	.508				
The Institute/ University must have a well-defined mission and vision statement that clearly puts out its value system, beliefs and goals.		.740			
Institute/ University presence on social media platforms for constantly providing relevant information and updates is important.		.656			
A credible journal/ magazine published by the Institute/ University helps in increasing the number of interested admission seekers		.637			

The Institute/ University logo should be striking, impressive and must reflect what the institution stands for.		.612			
Celebrity endorsement helps in promotion and appeal.		.610			
Institute/University should have an app of its own that provides real time notifications and alerts.		.607			
There should be a good amount of exposure and presence of Institute/ University on various media platforms.		.597			
Website of the Institute/ University is an important tool to attract students.		.558			
Recommendation by schools/ coaching centers regarding an Institute/ University is taken seriously by the admission seekers.		.558			
Placement team should arrange for career counseling and guidance, mock interviews and group discussions for the students.			.690		
Regular job fairs and joint campus placement drives should be conducted by the Institute/ University.			.676		
A well organised placement cell with IT enabled Placement Management System is an important requirement of Institute/ University.			.662		
Campus placement record is an important factor contributing to the brand development of an Institute/ University.			.619		
The salary and job profile offered to the earlier batches is an important criteria for me.			.564		
Placement team should be able to call MNCs and top players from various industries for campus placements.			.559		
Good career path and growth of Institute's/ University's alumni helps in Institute's/ University admissions.				.706	
The Institute/ University should offer admission to students subject to their clearing a selection test.				.678	
The employees should come across as committed and satisfied and present an inspiring image of Institute/ University to the outsiders.				.654	

Institute/ University must have obtained recognition and approval from statutory bodies like AICTE/ UGC.				.579	
There should be positive word of mouth publicity from the alumni and current students of the Institute/ University.				.541	
Institute/ University should have a good NIRF ranking				.528	
The Institute/ University must have a pedagogy that offers opportunities to students to improve and develop their employability skills.					.640
Institute/ University must conduct conferences/ summits/ seminars and FDPs on regular basis.					.628
Teaching and research experience of the faculty is an important factor while deciding an Institute/ University.					.555
The Institute/ University must offer academically enriching and industry relevant curriculum.					.550
Academic results of the Institute/ University are crucial for students to take decision regarding admission.					.506
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.					
a. 5 components extracted.					

As shown below in table no. 5, the various factors gathered from the Rotated component matrix have been given a name and presented along with their components.

Table 5: Factors formed along with their components and % variance explained

Factor No.	Factor Name	Statements	Factor Loading	% Variance explained
1.	Student Development and Support	Properly designed Personality Development Programme.	.781	14.00
		Student participation in organizing events and fests etc.	.713	
		Effective grievance redressal system.	.696	
		Design and construction of campus building.	.676	
		Spacious campus with good infrastructure	.659	
		Fee concessions and scholarships for meritorious and needy students.	.654	

		Spacious and hygienic hostels.	.606	
		Genuine and honest admission counselors.	.586	
		Focus on developing entrepreneurial skills if the students.	.575	
		Summer training projects of the students taken seriously.	.573	
		Programme and hostel fee commensurate with quality of education and campus lifestyle.	.508	
2.	Media & Marketing	A well-defined mission and vision statement.	.740	13.33
		Active on social media.	.656	
		Publishing a credible journal magazine.	.637	
		Striking and impressive logo.	.612	
		Celebrity endorsements.	.610	
		Should have an app of its own	.607	
		Good amount of exposure on various electronic and print media.	.597	
		Well maintained website.	.558	
		Recommendation by schools/coaching centers.	.558	
3.	Placements	Career counseling, mock interviews and group discussion.	.690	10.67
		Regular job fairs and joint campus placement drives.	.676	
		A well organised placement cell with IT enabled Placement Management System.	.662	
		Campus placements accomplished in the past.	.619	
		Salary and job profile offered to the earlier batches	.564	
		MNCs and top players from various industries for campus placements.	.559	
4.	Existing image and reputation	The career path and growth of the alumni.	.706	10.25
		Admissionbased on clearing a selection test.	.678	
		The employees should come across as committed and satisfied.	.654	
		Recognition and approval from AICTE/ UGC.	.579	
		Positive word of mouth publicity from the alumni and current students.	.541	
		NIRF ranking.	.528	

5.	Academics and Faculty	Pedagogy to improve and develop employability skills.	.640	8.43
		Conferences/ summits/ seminars and FDPs	.628	
		Teaching and research experience of the faculty.	.555	
		Academically enriching and industry relevant curriculum.	.550	
		Academic results.	.506	

As shown in the above table, 5 factors affecting higher education branding emerged from the responses provided by the students. Student Development and Support turns out to be the most important with 14% of total variance explained; having elements like skill development, grievance redressal, infrastructure, fee, counseling. Other factors are Media and Marketing with 13.33%; Placement cell activities with 10.67%; Existing image and reputation with 10.25% and Academics & Faculty with 8.43% of the total variance explained.

Conclusion

It was found out that the endeavors that an institute takes for the development and support of its students were considered most important by the students for higher education branding. For effective branding in the higher education market, and to attract maximum number of students the institutes and universities need to ensure that the students are provided with an environment of growth and learning, in addition to good quality of life and amenities at campus and hostel. Good infrastructure and facilities will make the learning and skill development process more effective, easy and enjoyable for them. The experiences and level of satisfaction they derive right from their association with the institute/university, are considered an important part of the return students get on the time and money invested with the HEI. Also it was noticed that existing image and reputation of the institute/university in the higher education market emerged as a factor that had not been discussed as important in the previous studies.

Thus an HEI must consider above mentioned factors as per their significance and devise a comprehensive branding strategy that establishes it as a name with which students want to be associated for the long term and where they hope their expectations will be understood and met.

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