



BRAND BUILDING STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR B-SCHOOLS

Mr. Mrityunjay Kumar

Research Student

Dr. Louis Radha Jerry

Research Guide

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Abstract

The higher education sector has undergone significant transformation in recent years due to globalization, technological advancements, increased competition, changing student expectations, and evolving industry requirements. Business Schools (B-Schools), in particular, operate in a highly competitive environment where attracting quality students, recruiting competent faculty, establishing industry partnerships, and maintaining institutional reputation have become major strategic priorities. In this context, brand building has emerged as an essential management function that enables educational institutions to differentiate themselves, create stakeholder trust, and achieve long-term sustainability. Unlike commercial organizations, educational institutions build their brands through academic excellence, quality teaching, research contributions, student development, ethical governance, industry engagement, and positive stakeholder experiences.

Keywords: *Brand Building, Higher Education, Business Schools, Educational Branding, Brand Identity, Brand Image, Brand Equity, Institutional Reputation, Higher Education Marketing, Strategic Management, Student Satisfaction, Stakeholder Engagement, Digital Branding, Conceptual Framework.*

Introduction

Higher education plays a vital role in the economic, social, and intellectual development of every nation. It creates skilled human resources, promotes innovation, develops leadership, supports research, and contributes to national progress. In the twenty-first century, the higher education landscape has changed considerably due to globalization, technological innovation, international competition, and increasing student mobility. Educational institutions are no longer viewed only as centres of teaching and learning; they are expected to function as knowledge-driven organizations that deliver value to students, employers, industries, governments, and society. As a result, higher education institutions must continuously improve their academic quality while simultaneously establishing a strong institutional identity that distinguishes them from competitors.

Objectives of the Study

The present study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine the concept and significance of brand building in higher education.
2. To explore the major theories and concepts related to institutional branding.
3. To identify the key strategic factors influencing brand building in Business Schools.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this conceptual study is to develop a comprehensive understanding of brand building strategies in higher education, with particular reference to Business Schools. The study seeks to synthesize established branding theories and contemporary research to explain how educational institutions create, strengthen, and sustain their institutional brands in an increasingly competitive environment.

Review of Literature

Kotler and Fox (1995), Kotler and Fox were among the earliest scholars to explain the application of marketing principles in educational institutions. They argued that educational institutions should adopt strategic marketing to understand stakeholder needs and develop a strong institutional image. Aaker (1996), Aaker introduced the concept of brand equity, explaining that a strong brand creates value through brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and customer loyalty. Aaker emphasized that institutional reputation is developed through consistent performance rather than promotional campaigns alone. Keller (1993; 2003), Keller proposed the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, which explains that brand value is determined by consumers' knowledge, perceptions, and experiences. In higher education, students, parents, employers, and alumni collectively shape institutional brand equity.

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006), Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka examined marketing practices in higher education and concluded that branding should be viewed as a long-term strategic process rather than a short-term promotional activity. Chapleo (2011), Chapleo highlighted that branding has become an essential strategic function for universities operating in competitive educational markets. Mourad, Ennew, and Kortam (2011), The researchers investigated factors influencing university brand equity and found that institutional reputation, service quality, academic excellence, and emotional attachment significantly affect students' perceptions. Their study emphasized that positive educational experiences contribute directly to institutional loyalty and brand advocacy among students and alumni.

Ivy (2008), Ivy proposed the 7Ps marketing mix specifically for higher education institutions. Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009), Bennett and Ali-Choudhury emphasized that universities should position themselves based on unique institutional characteristics rather than imitating competitors. Sultan and Wong (2019), Sultan and Wong examined institutional reputation in higher education and found that service quality, teaching effectiveness, administrative support, campus facilities, and student engagement significantly influence institutional image. Their study highlighted that student satisfaction serves as a bridge between educational quality and institutional reputation. Foroudi et al. (2019), Foroudi and colleagues explored the relationship between brand identity and institutional reputation.

Dwivedi et al. (2021), Dwivedi and co-authors discussed the growing importance of digital technologies in brand management. They emphasized that social media, artificial intelligence. Digital communication platforms, and online engagement have transformed branding strategies across service industries, including higher education. Maringe (2021), Maringe observed that higher education branding has shifted from institutional promotion to value creation. Dennis, Papagiannidis, Alamanos, and Bourlakis (2021), These researchers highlighted the increasing influence of online communication on student decision-making.

Gupta and Singh (2022), Gupta and Singh examined branding practices among Indian private universities. Their findings revealed that accreditation status, faculty qualifications, placement performance, research activities, and student support services are major contributors to institutional reputation. Sharma and Verma (2022), Sharma and Verma investigated student perceptions of educational brands in India. They found that students primarily evaluate institutions based on academic quality, employability, infrastructure, faculty expertise, and placement opportunities. Mishra and Tiwari (2023), Mishra and Tiwari studied the relationship between digital marketing and institutional branding in higher education. Kumar and Joshi (2023), Kumar and Joshi examined the role of alumni in institutional branding. They found that successful alumni contribute significantly to institutional reputation by acting as brand ambassadors, supporting industry partnerships, mentoring students, and promoting positive word-of-mouth communication. Patel and Shah (2024), Patel and Shah explored stakeholder engagement in higher education branding. Rao and Mehta (2024), Rao and Mehta examined the impact of accreditation on institutional branding. Choudhary and Agarwal (2025), Choudhary and Agarwal discussed emerging trends in educational branding. Their study concluded that educational institutions must continuously adapt to changing stakeholder expectations to maintain long-term competitive advantage.

Research Gap

The literature indicates that substantial research has been conducted on educational branding, institutional reputation, service quality, student satisfaction, digital marketing, and brand equity. However, several gaps remain.

1. Most studies examine individual dimensions of branding rather than providing an integrated conceptual framework specifically for Business Schools.
2. Limited conceptual research has synthesized academic quality, digital branding, faculty excellence, stakeholder engagement, accreditation, industry collaboration, and alumni relations into a unified model.
3. There is relatively little literature focusing specifically on B-Schools in the Indian context.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopts a conceptual research design, as it aims to develop a theoretical understanding of brand building strategies in higher education rather than testing empirical relationships. Conceptual research is appropriate for synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying relationships among variables, and proposing a framework that can guide future empirical investigations. The study integrates theories of branding, strategic management, service marketing, and higher education management to explain how Business Schools can develop sustainable institutional brands.

Nature of the Study

This research is descriptive and exploratory in nature. It describes the concept of brand building in higher education and explores the strategic dimensions that contribute to institutional brand development. The study also examines the interrelationship among branding determinants, stakeholder perceptions, institutional reputation, and long-term organizational success.

Sources of Data

The study is entirely based on secondary data. Information has been collected from credible academic and professional sources, including: Peer-reviewed research journals, Books on branding and higher education management, Conference proceedings, Government policy documents, Reports of accreditation agencies, Institutional publications, Scholarly databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, Web of Science, and Research Gate.

Literature Selection Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: Publications related to branding and higher education, Studies focusing on institutional reputation and brand equity, Research discussing Business Schools or universities, Peer-reviewed journal articles, Books published by recognized academic publishers, Recent publications together with foundational theoretical works.

Exclusion Criteria: Non-academic websites, Newspaper articles, Unverified online sources, Duplicate publications, Studies unrelated to educational branding.

Method of Analysis

The collected literature was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis. Similar concepts were grouped into common themes to identify the major determinants of institutional branding. The analysis enabled the researcher to synthesize different viewpoints and develop a comprehensive conceptual framework.

Findings and Discussions

The review of literature indicates that brand building in higher education is a multidimensional and continuous strategic process rather than a single marketing activity. Unlike commercial organizations, educational institutions create their brands through educational quality, institutional values, stakeholder trust, and long-term academic performance. The literature consistently identifies academic quality as the foundation of institutional branding. Curriculum relevance, innovative pedagogy, research output, learning outcomes, and academic integrity significantly influence institutional reputation. Business Schools offering industry-oriented programmes, experiential learning, international exposure, and quality research are more likely to establish strong brands. Academic excellence creates confidence among students, parents, employers, and accreditation agencies. Faculty members represent one of the most visible components of institutional identity.

Conclusion

Overall, the study concludes that brand building is a strategic necessity for Business Schools operating in today's competitive educational environment. Institutions that continuously invest in academic excellence, stakeholder satisfaction, innovation, ethical leadership, industry partnerships, and digital engagement are more likely to establish strong institutional brands and achieve sustainable success. The conceptual framework proposed in this paper provides valuable guidance for educational administrators, policymakers, researchers, and institutional leaders seeking to strengthen the brand identity, reputation, and long-term competitiveness of Business Schools.

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