BRANDING OF SCHOOLS: THE NEED TO EXPLORE THE PERSPECTIVES IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Ms . Megha Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of Management, Banasthali Vidyapith, Banasthali, Rajasthan.

ABSTRACT

In an era, where people are highly influenced by brands, the educational institutes have also started their branding. Earlier, this branding of educational institutions was confined to colleges providing higher education. But with the changing time, it has come down to schools. There is a buzz among the parents to send their children to the most renowned-cum-"branded" school which can provide quality education to their children. This has led to a stiff competition among the schools. Thus, the schools are leaving no stone unturned to prove that they are better than others. Further, it has compelled to explore the perspective that the parents, students, teachers, and management hold towards the branding of school. Along with these four contributors, there are various parameters which affect this branding. If these perspectives and parameters are studied properly, the branding of school can become much easier. The study undertaken deals with the importance of branding of schools in Indian context, relying on the previous literature conducted. The study would be helpful for academicians, parents, students, teachers, as well as school management to analyze the different level of branding of school.

Keywords: Branding, School branding, Competition, Indian schools.

1.1.INTRODUCTION

In this competitive era, branding plays a vital role in forming the strategy of the organization's management, including that of schools. Today, schools focus on providing different tangible services, apart from just providing quality education. As per the study of **Lovelock and Wirtz (2011)**, the tangible services are process-oriented. These process-oriented services include people processing, possession processing, mental stimulus processing, and information processing. These services do not include ownership transfers. Apart from this, all the business programs and co-curricular activities lay the foundation for quality-based educational institution. These set the parameters for the overall assessment of the institution.

There are n number of schools competing with each other. With the stiff competition, each school is developing itself as a brand. Along with developing the brand, it is necessary to position itself in such a way that it creates a unique place in the minds of the parents. There are various ways by which the schools can position themselves **(Ghodeshwar, 2008).** But it is not easy to position a school as a quality-based school because it involves a great number of resources, right from money, time to strategies. To effectively position the school branding, it is necessary to incorporate society's culture with school culture.

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

School leaders should not only focus on providing quality education but also provide holistic development to the students. Further, all these efforts should be done in such a way that it enhances the brand image of the school. With reference to India, it has been evident that teachers only provide lip service to provide education to disabled students. Thus, the schools to progress and retain itself in the competition, should provide inclusive education to weak and disabled students with the help of special education teacher. There

are many schools where disabled students spend their time in a pullout classroom. This classroom is kept separate from classroom providing general education **(Tiwari et al., 2015).**

The school management, principal, and teachers need to make the quality education as a base for increasing the brand equity. A negative word-of-mouth for poor education quality can result in poor enrollment. To gain positive image, the school brand may also focus on cordial yet professional relationship between students and teachers **(Oei, 2015)**. The international schools need to penetrate deeper by creating and bringing out its unique proposition. Developing brand image of the school need strategic marketing. **(Bock, Poole, & Joseph, 2014).**

Ho (2014) stated that there cannot be any particular type of marketing approach which can be followed by every school. Every school need to form its branding strategies according to its unique environment by adopting a targeted approach. At the same time, the schools need to face problem of lack of enough resources, which affects the overall branding strategy. The capability of addressing these hindrances create a bold impression of the school on the consumer (students).

Lubienski (2007) conducted a study in a district of Michigan about school branding. It was based on distinguishing the branding format of public and private schools. By using the "theory of goods", he studied the ways by which the school represents itself. Usually these ways include brochures, pamphlets, official websites, and advertisement on different social media platforms. By this study, he concluded that public and private schools differ in branding, because of the difference in methods adoption. Further, public schools remain uninfluenced by any funding from bureaucrats.

Davis and Dunn (2002), in their study, mentioned the basic factors which influence the branding strategies. The innovativeness, knowledge enhancement, learning resources, and perception of stakeholders play a great role in enhancing the brand image of the school. Also, it was evident that in a developing or developed country, private schools are preferred over government schools because of the below expected quality of education and lack of teacher's attention to the students in government schools.

To effectively enhance the school branding, principals along with teachers need to understand the consumer needs and make strategies to cater to those needs. If the branding strategies favour the school, the parents are more likely to approach it for re-evaluating and re-assessing if the school is able to stand on the pre-set parameters. Along with this, the school leaders need to create awareness of the school in their surroundings individually or in groups by word of mouth. This will help to develop the strong vision of the school and establish it as a brand **(Foskett, 2002; Harvey, 1996; James & Phillips, 1995)**.

3.1. PRESCRIBED METHODOLOGY FOR CONDUCTING STUDIES ON BRANDING OF SCHOOL

3.1.1. OBJECTIVES

i. To study the current popularity status of Public Schools / Missionary Schools /I.B. Schools / K.V's & JNV's / Private Schools based in UP and analyze about the branding actions taken up by these schools in select cities of UP.

ii. To explore factors contributing towards branding decisions taken up by K12 schools in select cities of UP.

iii. To evaluate the relative significance of branding when parents take up the decision of choosing the school in select cities of UP.

iv. To acquire information about the branding strategies of schools through social media in select cities of UP.

v. To recommend appropriate brand management / branding strategies / measures that can be taken up by the K12 for enhancing / sustaining the brand image in select cities of UP.

3.1.2. LIKELY BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING SUCH STUDIES

It can be concluded from the literature review that not much work has been done on this topic. The studies that have been carried out till now do not give a holistic view of branding from all the four perspectives namely parents, students, teachers and management. The study undertaken will contribute in maintaining and enhancing the existing popularity among the stakeholders, improving the enrollment rate, reducing the dropout rate, and sustaining and surviving competition.

4.1. CONCLUSION

4.1.1. INDIAN AND GLOBAL COMPARISON

S.NO.	INDIAN SCHOOLS	GLOBAL SCHOOLS
1.	Indian schools are governed by Central or State Boards.	Global schools are governed by International Boards.
2.	The course curriculum focuses primarily on the country itself.	The course curriculum is broad as it undertakes the globalization concept.
3.	Indian schools may have branches within the city or within the national boundaries.	Global schools have world-wide branches.
4.	Co-curriculum activities are undertaken, comparatively at a smaller-scale.	Co-curriculum activities are undertaken all over the globe.
5.	Exposure of the students to the outside environment is confined.	The students are able to feel global exposure.

4.1.2. RURAL AND URBAN COMPARISON

S.NO.	RURAL SCHOOLS	URBAN SCHOOLS
1.	Number of schools is few.	There are a great number of schools in urban areas.
2.	Students need to walk miles for reaching the school.	There are different modes of transportation including school buses for the students.
3.	Lack of basic amenities like drinking water.	Urban schools are well-equipped in basic amenities.
4.	Out of the few schools, only some give preference to computer training for the students.	Computer education and training is given the highest preference in the urban schools.
5.	Education of students remain confined to course curriculum.	Along with course curriculum, the students are also encouraged to participate in different co-curricular activities.

4.1.3. FRANCHISE AND NON-FRANCHISE COMPARISON

S.NO.	FRANCHISE SCHOOLS	NON-FRANCHISE SCHOOLS
1.	Total Quality Management process is conducted regularly to enhance the quality of education.	There is no or less scope of Talent Quality Management process.
2.	Royalty share of the schools in franchise goes to the main brand/company.	There is no concept of royalty share. The school is head in itself.

3.	Lenient management	Strict management
4.	All rights of the schools in franchise are reserved with the main brand/company.	All rights of the school is reserved to itself.
5.	Franchise schools may or may not be considered as chain schools or the branches of the main brand/company.	The branches of non-franchise school are considered as chain of the school.

5.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

To emerge as a brand, the schools need to focus on the concept of consistent communication between the schools, parents, teachers, and students. This will help the school understand the needs of the consumers and to be aware of the challenges to be faced. By sharing learning and teaching outcomes on different social media platforms, the brand image of the school can be enhanced to a larger extent. The emergence of school brand is important and later the brand will speak up for itself while the promotion can be done by word-of-mouth. When the contributors come collectively, it will be easy to understand each other's perspectives. The school branding can effectively make use of print media like weekly newsletters, to sustain the level of brand. The basic elements of branding strategy include a strong mission, vision, and values. External branding will make a stronger impact if the internal school branding is strengthened.

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