

BRANDING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs)

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Abstract

India has a rich tradition and culture so far as education is concern. In ancient times there were Ashrams, where students were living with their Gurus with the sole aim of learning. That was the holistic system of learning. That was the 'Gurukul System'. Even there were great centres of learning of a world repute like 'Nalanda' and 'Takshila' - the ancient Indian Universities. They were the centre of quality education and excellence. They were the strong education brands. All these are regaining its importance in those modern days.

Nowadays, our education system is undergoing through the process of transformation. In coming years the new policy will take place of the existing one, which will demand for a lot of new things. Not only in India, but all over the world massive changes in terms of policy, governance, structure and status of higher education are continuously taking place. Most importantly, the changes such as modernization, diversification, decentralization, internationalization and increase in competition are becoming a common phenomenon. Therefore, in these days of Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization (LPG) and Competition, marketing of education as a service is of great significance. In fact, the higher education institutions in particular are supposed to create a strong education brand of their own.

Keywords: *Marketing of Education Service, Branding of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Need for Branding, Ways for Branding, Guidelines for Branding.*

Introduction: Although marketing of education as a service and branding of education institutions is found necessary today, it is not a new phenomenon. Now day's education systems all over the world are in the process of transformation in terms of changes in policy, governance, structure and status of higher education in particular. Globalisation, liberalisation, privatisation, autonomy, competition and marketing etc. are becoming the buzzwords now days. In this scenario, it becomes necessary for the educational institutions to come up as strong brands with the help of quality education and excellence. The changing world of education essentially has a lot of expectations from the educational institutions. And these centres of education must have to fulfil these expectations and demands. At the same time they must have to keep themselves update and competitive enough in order to grow and survive in this competitive world. In fact they have to create a strong educational brand of their own. They should always remember that when there is a competition there is marketing.

The concept of branding as applied to higher education is somewhat different from branding in the commercial sector. And branding of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is all about who we are and is not what a particular product offers to the market place. Someone rightly said about branding that if one didn't build a brand as quickly as possible, someone else may take the position that one want. We are aware that the massive changes in policy, governance, structure and status of higher education are going on all over the world. We also know that higher education is widely deemed and considered as a great national asset. Quality education fulfilling diversified needs can create skilled and employable manpower in the country. In these days of marketing, branding has become the latest focus in tertiary education to attract both national as well as international students. The technological changes and shrinking global boundaries have increased the significance of marketing and branding of education. In today's higher education landscape, institute and university leaders may well consider principles of brand management to assure their positions vis-à-vis their competitors. In today's complex and highly competitive marketplace, universities and institutes have turned to branding as a solution in dealing with the global challenges. There is a growing importance of branding for the institutes and universities, and it is expected to become even more important and vital for their growth and survival. But at the same time it should be noted that quality of education and its utility in terms of employability are the important pillars of successful brand. Moreover, institutions must have to take into account certain factors contributing towards quality of education like faculty development, course material, industry interactions, employability, research, infrastructure and technology at present and years to come.

This conceptual article necessarily emphasises the need for branding, elaborates some ways for branding, and also put forth some guidelines helpful to the higher education institutes while establishing themselves as a strong education brand.

Need for Branding: Gone are the days when education was considered as a destination, today education is seen as an opportunity that it opens up for people. In these days of competition, branding is reaching newer frontier and necessitates marketing of education across all categories such as primary, secondary and higher education levels. In the higher education domain in particular, there seems to be overpowering rush in brand building. Every institution is trying to establish as a reputed brand. Today people use to spend larger share of their income on quality education and education has become their priority. In coming years due policy initiatives of the government there will be entry of international players in India, which will lead to increase in the number of career options for the students in India. There will be an increase in competition in the field of education in India in future.

In fact, the fast globalizing world, which is moving towards a knowledge economy, has opened immense opportunities for building education brands. On account of global trends towards privatization of education, there is an increased competition be it haloed IITs, IIMs or ISB, MICA or IMT or international institutions like Harvard, Stanford, Princeton Yale etc. In today's dynamic environment the approach of branding and the role of education are both changing side by side. As education can make life transforming impact, it is inevitable to understand the synergy and the changing environment. Education being an experiential product is built on lot of trust and relationship. In this field, there are multiple stakeholders like students, faculty, prospective employees, employers, parents, and the society. An appropriate balancing of multiple stakeholders' interest will be a key requirement of the leadership of each education brand. It should remember that education being a complete experiential business, earns its customers from word of mouth of satisfied and well placed individuals. This will necessarily build a strong foundation on which today's success and future survival depends.

Ways for Branding: Basically, branding of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should be done more scientifically and systematically. While doing this certain ways need to be used. Some of the ways are:

- In order to make a sound brand promise, brand tactics, brand strategy must be in line with institute's mission and value; and institute must also clearly define how it wants to be seen by others i.e. desired brand identity.
- The institution must then focus on 5M's of branding and positioning i.e. mission, media, message, money and measurement. Success of the education branding depends on the degree to which above mentioned practical aspects i.e. 5M's and tactical moves are strictly adhered.
- It should be noted that enabling the brand promise is all about the internal marketing programme that is targeted to internal customers such as faculty members, administrative staff, support staff etc. to enable them to fulfill what was promised to external customers.
- In order to deliver the brand promise effectively, there must be an analogy between what an institution claims to be and what its stakeholders actually experience in all the service encounters i.e. moments of truth. Once the brand promise is broadly understood, the brand promise can be effectively delivered by first defining it clearly.
- Always remember that the most challenging task is to implement and execute what was promised to the stakeholders that mean the brand promise must be executed and personified through services, business transactions, human interactions, teaching learning process, information delivery and learning experiences.
- Finally, it is to be suggested that branding in higher education is very much a strategic process in which fundamental questions such as Who are we?, What are our values?, What do we want to become? etc. is needed to be carefully addressed.

Guidelines for Branding: Besides, the above to create a strong brand an institute must go through certain guidelines. They are:

- Understand brand meaning and market appropriate product or service in a right manner.
- Properly position the brand in the competitive market.
- Provide superior delivery of desired benefits to the target.
- Employ a full range of complementary brand element and supporting marketing activities.
- Embrace integrated marketing communications and communicate with a consistent voice.
- Measure consumer perception of value and develop a pricing strategy accordingly.
- Establish credibility and appropriate brand personality and imagery.
- Maintain innovation and relevance for the brand.
- Strategically design and implement a brand hierarchy and brand portfolio.

- Implement a brand equity management system to ensure that marketing actions properly reflect the brand equity concept.
- Always remember the need of the time.

Concluding Remarks: On account of increased competition in the field of higher education, both at national and international fronts, amongst the higher education institutions there is an emerging trend to stay competitive. The image and brand of a higher education institution has become more important than ever before and it also has become a major strategic issue. Moreover, branding must be focused on bringing systematic institutional change by applying three pronged approach i.e. making the brand promise, enabling the brand promise and delivering the brand promise. In higher education, branding should also be used as a catalyst for defining who the institution is and also what it wants to become. Branding in higher education can also be a means of unifying the institution around a common purpose and vision. In the context of changing meaning of a brand and its application in higher education it can be said that, education being branded is natural and holds promise.

Last saying, while creating a brand institutional leaders and managers should always remember that, educational brand strategy should not limited to marketing and advertising campaigns. Most importantly academic quality matters a great deal when institutions try to build their public identity or brand, the definitions of quality are likely to vary with the local situation and be measured differently. What is constant, however, is the requirement that institutions declare themselves focused on quality standards and be willing to meet them. Thus, brand and quality are directly related to each other.

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