

# EXPLORING INDICATORS FOR BRANDING HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Branding and separation is a great deal more unpredictable today than any time in recent memory, particularly in advanced education. The served public determines the value of the education institution brand. Education institutions are trying hard to improve their status and rank. With the large number of communication and digital channels today, a brand strategy for the establishment of institution is more important than ever. Branding of education is gaining momentum with increasing number of educational institutions. This paper mainly seeks to take vital step to find out the indicators of branding higher educational institutions. This was done through qualitative research. This qualitative research paper explores the opinion of 45 interviews with those charged with the duty of university marketing activities by higher educational institution to maximize student's enrollment and to improve and create the brand value of institutions. Finding identifies that promoting may contribute to a brand, but the brand is bigger than any particular promoting effort. However, before venturing a guess as to precisely how branding may influence trust in a university, it would seem useful to reflect a little on the things for which universities could and should be trusted, ideally speaking.*

**Keywords:** Branding, Enrollment, Higher Educational Institutions, Marketing, Brand Value.

## INTRODUCTION

From last decade due to the growing realization that brands are among the most important intangible assets that an organization have, branding has emerged as a top management priority. In higher education, branding is getting complex day by day. The real value of any higher educational institution is identifies only through the willingness of parents and students to pay for it and donors and faculty is willing to contribute to make it worth. One of the complexities set up today encompassing institutions image is that objective ordinarily as of now has an apparent idea of the association's offerings even before an official interaction happens. Over that, by and large, the genuine effect of an institutions branding on the consumer most of the time is very hard to quantify. With the huge number of correspondence channels today, a key brand system for organization is more critical than any other time in recent memory. The advanced education colleges and other higher education institutions (HEIs) are progressively compelled to change to associations that go about as organizations in a focused market. Therefore, branding and marketing activities are progressively vital for building image in consumers mind. From several years higher education institutions are capitalizing on their brand identity either unconsciously or consciously. The goal is to identify indicators of branding that higher education institutions are using to improve their quality, brand building and continuous improvement processes. Branding should be an imperative part of any business growth strategy. Branding in higher education, as an area that may be questionable, has so far received limited scrutiny among academics.

Branding is a symbolic strategy and a delegate system that does not necessarily represent the substantive, internal activities or, indeed, the identity of the HEI. Hence, branding is about image management, emotional attachment and quality in service. From this perspective, brands and images are related to the interactions between internal and their external environment, whereas the concept of identity should rather be situated in the internal context of the educational institution. Although this is changing, however, there is little evidence of much work to investigate how and whether the effectiveness and indicators of branding activity in the HE sector should be evaluated, surveyed and measured. This paper hopes to figure out how to cure that situation through exploratory work expected to highlight issues and offer proposals to energize observational work.

The research study is divided into various segments. First segment includes the relevant review of literature on indicators of branding higher education institution and information about higher education in India. Second part includes the objectives of the study and the research methodology appropriate for the study. Third segment contains the report of the findings and the marketing activities helps in enhancing the brand value of educational institutions. In the last segment discussion and conclusion part were given.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA**

India holds an important place in the global education industry. India as a developing country has been systematically progressing on the educational sector since its autonomy has seen an apparent surge in reaching out to all the classes of its society. India has a long and respected history in the field of higher education. At the season of Independence of India, there were only 20 Universities and 500 Colleges in the country with 2.1 lacks students in higher education. The numbers now have increased to several times in the case of the Universities, colleges and the students enrolments in comparison to the figures at the time of independence. As of 2016, India has 799 universities, with a break up of 44 central universities, 540 state universities, 122 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act and 75 Institutes of National Importance which include AIIMS, IIT's and NIT's among others. Other institutions include 39,071 colleges as Government Degree Colleges and Private Degree Colleges, including 1800 exclusive women's colleges, functioning under these universities and institutions as reported by the UGC in 2016. The phenomenal increase in enrolment of this order would not have been possible without the growth in the number of institutions of higher learning, both universities and colleges in particular and increase in intake capacity of courses. The competition among the institution and the university imparting higher education has increased significantly and today the concept of branding, its application and exploration of key indicators of branding has become essential to position the product/services among prospect. In the present research work, researcher tries to explore the key brand indicator of higher educational institution and universities in India. Research will be based on extensive literature survey and analyzing the research work of eminent personality engaged in promoting and imparting higher education in India.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

After independence, there has been tremendous increase in institutions of higher learning in all disciplines. But with the quantitative growth has it been able to attend to the core issue of quality. Quality should grasp every one of its capacities and exercises, educating and scholastic

projects, research and grant, staffing, understudies, building, offices, supplies, administrations to the group and the scholarly condition. Inward self-assessment and outer survey, directed straightforwardly by free masters, if conceivable with global specialists, are indispensable for improving quality. Due consideration ought to be paid to particular institutional, national and local setting keeping in mind the end goal to consider the decent variety and to maintain a strategic distance from consistency. Quality likewise requires that advanced education ought to be described by its global measurements: trade of learning, intuitive systems administration, versatility of instructors and understudies and universal research ventures, while considering the national social esteems and circumstances.

Dr. Mithilesh Kr Singh down to earth essentialness of distinguishing the indicators of institutional notoriety is very much recognized in Europe, examines focusing on it have been for the most part directed past its fringes (Alessandri et al., 2006; Brewer & Zhao, 2010; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). The concept of a brand however is not a new phenomenon. Brick makers in ancient Egypt placed symbols on their bricks to recognize their products; in the sixteenth century whiskey distillers shipped their barrels with the name of the producer 'branded' (literally) on each barrel; and by the eighteenth century pictures of animals and places of origin were used in lieu of the producer's name (Farquhar, 1990). Today, a brand can be a name, symbol, design, or mark that enhances the value of a product beyond its functional purpose (Ibid, 1990). This evolution of the meaning of brand is captured by Keller & Lehmann (2006): 'While at first a brand might be synonymous with the item it makes, after some time through promoting, use understanding and different exercises and impacts it can build up a progression of connections and affiliations that exist over and past the target product.'

Therefore, through effective marketing activities attributes can be added to a brand that span further than simply the functionality of the product. It should be noted, however, that showing irrelevant information could be counterproductive in consumer decision-making (Meyvis & Janiszewski, 2002). As such, there is a point at which marketing activities can detrimental to the brand in the eyes of the consumer.

The elements of a brand are tremendous and fluctuated as they not just fill in as markers for the offerings of a firm yet additionally mirror the total experience that clients have with items (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). This gives an association with the shopper to the brand, a proclivity of sorts. In addition, the immaterial idea of a brand is a typical means by which advertisers separate their image with shoppers (Park et al., 1986). It has been set up that brands are at first based on the capacity of the item and would then be able to be upgraded through advertising exercises. A definitive accomplishment of a brand is measured by the utilization (or non-use) by clients (Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Empirical investigations of reputation in countries in which no or few academic studies have been conducted are particularly useful given the different kinds of education systems in those countries: universities may be either private or government funded, for example and they may or may not charge tuition fees. Accordingly, the system may have an effect on the assumed importance of various stakeholders and on the dimensions considered relevant to reputation. Reputation covers both internal and external stakeholders' perceptions and is based on the experiences of multiple stakeholder groups (Chun, 2005; Jarvinen & Suomi, 2011). It appears that college marking is an issue of key significance and colleges are using extensive measures of asset on marking their establishments (Rolfe, 2003) however the writing on marking in advanced education is restricted, in spite of the view that advanced education and marking backpedal far (Temple, 2006).

Kati Soumi (2014), theoretical and practical implications made in the area of brand reputation of higher education, is a complex and multidimensional construct. The empirical results reveal one new dimension of branding i.e. visibility and many of the existing dimensions were re-labeled or amalgamated. The problem with studies on reputation is that many do not make a clear distinction between dimensions (i.e., predictors) and assessments (Safon, 2009; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007).

Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006) noted although that there have been a number of studies that examined image and reputation, the notion of branding have barely made its mark in higher education marketing. These researchers noted that a number of concepts associated with higher education branding are yet to be explored. Fill (2003) cited by Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006) noted that not much research has gone into the HE sector in relation to issues like the development of product lines, product extensions, raising brand awareness, brand recognition and brand recall. All these topics could provide platforms for future research. Obviously, much research is expected to inspect the effect of brand markers on notoriety administration on the brand estimation of HEIs.

Chris Chapleo (2005), marking in colleges is a topical issue, UK colleges have completely created "effective" brands in the way of business associations, couple of foundations with "fruitful" brands, yet those that are recommended are considered for traits and constrained shared trait discovered; territories, for example, advertising interchanges, notoriety, area and advertising are all contended to be contributory to fruitful brands. Be that as it may, the entire train of brand administration has been portrayed as "A discord of all the while contending and covering approaches".

The ultimate branding aims should focus on students' minds and their perceived value gains, with an HEI strategic concentration on managing the perception of (as well as the actual) corresponding value offerings. At the end of the day the still-strong strategic branding imperative now calls for a marketing shift from the tangible to the intangible, from function to perception. (Yioula, Alkis & Demetris, 2017).

A college, which not just thinks about its conventional missions, i.e., educating and inquire about, yet additionally seeks after a third mission, i.e., business enterprise. Such organizations should consider a few issues, with a specific end goal to end up noticeably more entrepreneurial and to understand their mission. Along these lines, entrepreneurial colleges need to give careful consideration to various issues, for example, innovation exchange, scholastic business enterprise, making spinoffs, enhancing entrepreneurial exercises and so on. (Salamzadeh, Kesim & Salamzadeh, 2016).

Pragya & Smita (2011) in their article on title "Creating Brand Value of Higher Education Institution" emphasis the need of creating brand value of higher educational institution as the environmental changes, such as privatization, diversification, decentralization, internationalization and increased competition are common to most countries. These changes have effected higher education institutions operation as Branding of education is gaining momentum with increasing number of private institutions, change in people's attitude towards education and changing scope for the different courses being offered.

## OBJECTIVES

The participation of private sector into Indian higher education system may be engineering, management, science and technology or other professional courses has enhanced the competition among the institution and between the universities. The concept of branding, its

application and exploration of key indicators of branding has become essential to position the product/services among prospect. Present piece of research work has taken up with the following objectives:

1. To explore the indicators of branding to maximize students enrollment to higher education institutions.
2. To explore the marketing activities that was perceived to be performed by the institutions to create its brand value.

## METHODOLOGY

In this study the prominent goal is to explore the branding and marketing activities undertaken by higher educational institution to maximize student's enrollment and to improve and create the brand value of institution. This exploration used a marvel driven inductive approach that tried to comprehend the social world through an examination of the translation of the world by its members (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The study was exploratory, trying to investigate seen objective. The example included 45 interviews with those accused of obligation of college showcasing programs by higher education institutions to amplify understudy's enlistment and to enhance and make the brand estimation of foundation. College pioneers, senior advertising and vocations faculty were chosen as they spoke to specialists who can draw on their expert learning to characterize the crucial attributes of significant issues (Tremblay, 1982; De Chernatony & Segal, 2003). The rundown of traits was created through a broad writing survey.

Semi-organized meetings were viewed as proper, as a picture of respondent's actual sentiments on an issue was wanted (Chisnall, 1992; Daymon & Holloway, 2004) and is like that embraced by different investigations on brands (Hankinson 2004). Construct were developed from the various review of literature and discussion from the professionals engaged in the field. Further variable were identified for information exploration about key indicators of institutional branding. The validity of the construct and variable under consideration were specially taken cared. For social science research like this, the validity is the extent to which a measure, indicator or method of data collection possesses the quality of being sound or true as far as can be judged.(Jary & Jary, 1995). In other words, the validity of information is its relevance and appropriateness to the research question and the strength of its association with the concepts under scrutiny. Validity of the construct and variable for identifying key indicators of branding of higher institutions in India were assured by discussing the concept with academicians, institution owners, researchers, professionals, media planners and other stake holders. Reliability is, literally, the extent to which we can rely on the source of the data and, therefore, the data itself. Reliable data is dependable, trustworthy, unflinching, sure, authentic, genuine, reputable. Consistency is the main measure of reliability. So, in literary accounts, the reputation of the source is critical. Indicators of reliability will include proximity to events, likely impartiality and whether, the record or trend is really the reflection of the events. A meeting guide was utilized to control the discourse; however respondents were likewise permitted to develop thoughts and ideas as they wished. The specific inquiries investigated with regards to the meetings connected back to the destinations of investigating current information and sentiment on issues influencing marking in colleges, specifically investigating conclusion former's 'perceptions of potential and genuine difficulties to marking in their establishments. These are expressly explained in the presentation. The meetings were deciphered and subjected to content examination to search for shared characteristics in reactions or patterns through coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Emphasize that the namelessness required by respondents makes coordinate attribution of quotes

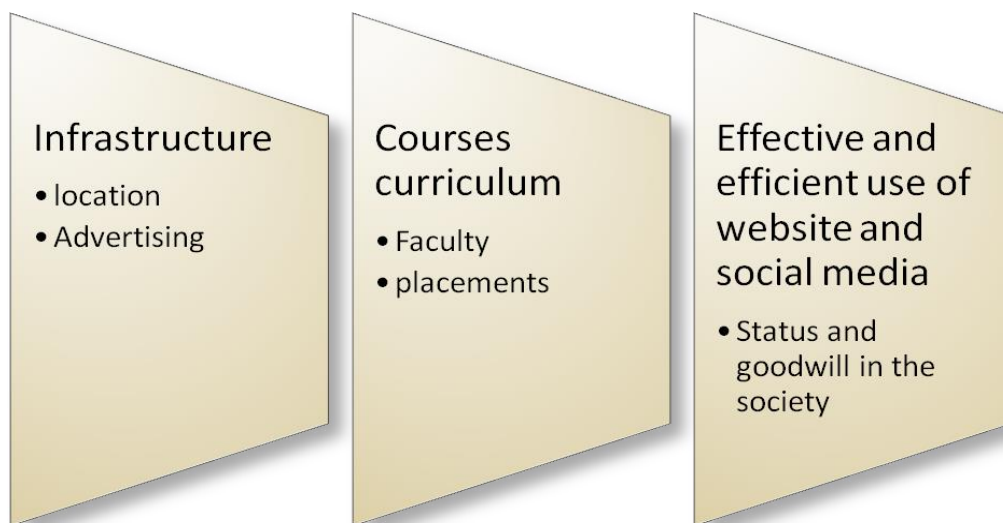
troublesome. Be that as it may, a number of correlated quotes were ascribed by work part trying to address this issue in any event incompletely.

## Findings

To be able to compete in a proactive approach that outshines others, a higher education institution needs to differentiate itself from its competitors (Marzo et al., 2007) by creating a unique brand of value, which should be successfully conveyed to students and employers enabling it to build a competitive position in the market (Parameswaram & Glowacka, 1995). Similar approach was suggested by Pragya & Smita (2011) in their article on title “Creating Brand Value of Higher Education Institution” emphasis the need of creating brand value of higher educational institution.

## Indicators of Branding

A brand is the entirety of all the efforts to deliver products and services and actions take to present them. There is no sure recipe for success, but successful brands have some common characteristics. Respondents were asked about the indicators of branding that helps in brand building and enhancing the brand value of the educational institutions. Several indicators are identified that are worthy of exploration and helps to maximize the enrollments in the institutions.



**Figure 1**  
**INDICATORS OF BRANDING**

## Marketing Activities for Enhancing Brand Value of Educational Institutions

Marketing is currently advancing an item or service. Branding is the only way customers perceive the service and product. Marketing may add to a brand; however the brand is greater than a specific showcasing exertion. Most of the higher education marketing professionals are of the opinion that their institution does not have a brand. The truth lie that their institutions have failed to manage their brand. At colleges and universities where

positive constituent experiences occur by chance or randomly rather than through a tightly integrated, promise-driven and planned approach, a brand exists, but it suffers from benign neglect. The brand is the thing that remaining parts after the advertising has cleared through the room. It's what sticks in the brain related with an item, administration, or association-regardless of whether or not, at that specific minute, you purchased or did not purchase. Therefore building a good relationship with the customers is very necessary. Around half of the respondents recommended that their part was to regulate advertising experts in dealing with the brand. Some of the respondents suggested that marketing should “guide or directs in brand construction.” Others alluded more to “implementation” and even of “leaving it to marketing not being enough, as everyone in the university has to understand and involve themselves in brand building activities. Therefore the innovative approach of everyone belongs to the institution only helps to enhance the brand value and image. Some of the marketing activities advised by the respondents are:

1. Advertising in newspaper, TV, Digital and Social Media.
2. Students satisfaction measurement.
3. Participating in social causes like blood donation, Marathon etc.
4. Scholarship to meritorious and poor students.
5. Organizing fest and exhibition.
6. Using celebrity endorsement.
7. Recommendation by alumni.
8. Efficient and effective usage of website and social media.
9. External consultants and experts for promoting the brand.
10. Contacting and promoting institution to various schools and coaching centers.
11. Arranging competitive examinations and contest.
12. Promoting institution in neighboring states and countries.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The educational brand strategy should not be limited in scope. The research aims to contribute to the better understanding of indicators of branding educational institutions which helps in making institutions able to compete in the market among their competitors and tries to clarify the importance of marketing activities that should be perceived by the institutions for their betterment. It should not be limited to marketing and advertising campaigns only. Other brand value creation strategies like delivering on the Promise of the Brand and creating the trust of promised brand among stake holders must be explored. The challenge of building an educational brand is compounded by collegiate ranking methodologies, which make institutions' value propositions transparent, though not necessarily accurate. While 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. (Pragya & Smita, 2011) Branding of higher educational institution has become the need of the present as this has become a global phenomenon and having strong potential of getting considered for it's that the institute created value at the globe.

The higher education institutions must now emphasizes on creating value of its brand to acquire talented faculty and students at both national and international level, thus enhance the overall economy of nation. The main aim of this research paper was to identify the indicators or dimensions of branding the educational institutions. A number of branding

factors are, however worthy of exploration and further studies. This research mainly focuses on clarity in marketing activities, undertaken to enhance the brand value of the educational institutions. In addition to consideration of students' needs, higher education institutions must also take into consideration wishes of other groups such as staff, alumni, parents and the state. The difficult task for an educational institution is to synchronize interests of different groups and to keep up adjusts in order to satisfy interests of the society and service users at the same time. However, before venturing a guess as to precisely how branding may influence trust in a university, it would seem useful to reflect a little on the things for which universities could and should be trusted, ideally speaking. However, in spite of the significant progress made during the past few years, India's higher education sector is still in danger with several challenges with its relatively low Gross enrollment ratio (GER). According to the report on Higher Education in India: Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017) and beyond, the India's higher education system faces challenges on three levels exploration, quality and equity. Such challenges call for branding the in-person experience and differentiating it from competing institutions. Another suggested important branding strategy is to begin building an identity that transcends the physical campus. In the age of digitalization and its heavy application in higher educational institutions, some of the traditional branding indicators like gorgeous campus, the mild climate, the stylish urban environment etc. may not matter a bit to the student residing thousands of miles away. Interestingly, all the institution has branding messages like happy students, engaged professors that are interchangeable with hundreds of other schools. There is need to emphasis on innovation in the brand message. Each school imparting higher education needs to define what makes its brand different from other schools and focus relentlessly on communicating that difference. The shifting landscape is a threat, but it's also an opportunity. To exploit the future opportunity the key indicator of effective branding need to be explored involving all the stake holders of school itself-its president, board, key administrators and faculty and other. The message should be defined online with mission and accompanying strategy that clearly sets the school apart from other schools. The entire institution needs to live the brand to accomplish its long term mission. Exploring the indicator of effective brand of colleges and universities will help these successful schools from reaching an increasing number of students worldwide. The future potential does consider while selecting a higher education institute the brand that the institute created value at the globe.

In conclusion, the higher education institutions must now emphasizes on creating value of its brand to acquire talented faculty and students at both national and international level, thus enhance the overall economy of nation. It is also concluded that higher education has become larger and more central to society and individuals; hence, there a need to develop scale for measuring brand performance indicator and measurement. Universities need to be consciously and explicitly managing the processes associated with the creation of their knowledge assets and to recognize the value of their intellectual capital to their branding strategy in a wider global marketplace for higher education.



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