

University Branding: A Conceptualizing Model

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Abstract

Appropriate branding needs to attract the right people and invest time, money, experience, knowledge, and commitment of international organizations to create powerful and influential university brand. Acceptance the branding principles makes strategic approach focused the introducing of a university. Branding should be strategy-centered framework for coordination and integration messages and experiences of the university brand. Among the factors which is influencing the strategy formulation process, the amount of funding available, stage of development, market complexity, the complexity of the economic infrastructure and the perception in key markets. On the other hand, each place has its own dynamics in which products, politics, history, attitudes, and practices of the location will appear.

Key Words: Branding, University of Brand, Model.

Introduction

Recently, a proper branding will grants a powerful image for universities in the international environment, therefore, places are making multiple efforts in order to present their unique characteristics. alongside with the traditional economic agents and infrastructure, other norms such as life quality, aesthetics and the policies of place development are among the touchstones of development in recent framework, role of the policy making, place marketing and branding has progressively have become important in Europe and all the world (Metaxas, 2010). Branding is progressively entering the untraditional social markets such as politic. For instance, the "improbable" organizations such as the London metropolitan police, Rome's Catholic Church and the universities can be mentioned (Marsh & Fawcett, 2010).

The place brand has increasingly considered as a crucial possession in development and an effective tool for differentiation and improving the place's niche (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009: 520). In addition, Globalization has led to mobility of resources, assets, and work forces. Hence, competing over capturing the attention and investments of business, visitors, elites, and important events has been intensified.

Place branding is a part of place marketing which is a difficult and sophisticated process. Place marketing researches often focused on subjects such as identity and image in a theory level. Theory development requires more studies in order to receive the related reflection to the actual needs of places for a desire development. Contest between places has highlighted the importance of university branding (Virgo & Chenatony, 2006).

Creating brand for a place like university, as a strategic tool for creating a competitive advantage has forged into a common action in order to advertise its history, quality of education, life style of students and dominant culture and to increase its opportunities and influence on the competitive environment (Zhang & Xiaoping Zhao, 2009). Hence, it is need that the policy makers pay attention to the role of university branding, as a strategic development tool for clarification of identity, positioning in target markets and increasing the self-devotion feeling of workforce.

The sophisticated strategy of university branding is creating an identity for the university which has been expanded from the variables such as history, anthropology, economy, politic and policies. A university often has recognizable imaginations or the perfected inner values from its staff. University branding is a strategy that gives an unforgettable identity to the university and a tool that is able to transmit the focal value of the university. As like as a the vision, the university branding encounters a big challenge which is rooted in creation and alliance the identity of various values which are not always tangible and they have to illustrate the interests of different groups and people (Merrilees et al., 2009).

Four major reasons that have increased the attentions to the university branding -regarding the inquisition factors provided by (Gaggiotti,2008)- have writer below: 1. Environmental changes: globalization has eased the competition of the newly famed universities and the old famous ones because the possibility of living and working everywhere has been provided to the humans. Nowadays, in order to choose their living place for studying, people do not only care about the best financial view but they also consider quality of life. Hence, nowadays the universities have good restaurants, sport clubs and teams, forums, recreation programs and cultural events (Winfield-Pfeffekon, 2005).

The gradual transformation and deterioration of universities: During some inevitable situations, universities are dealing with slump and growth. A good university branding helps for passing the difficult periods with the least harms (Virgo & Chenatony, 2006). University brand helps to create an image that reveals the "place's quality." This leads to positive perceptions about the brand that is crucial for the university's survival (Winfield-Pfeffekon, 2005).

2. Competition increasingly over obtaining the rare resources: Universities are progressively competing over attracting the target groups. More than ever, they are monitoring their rivals and trying to find the ways of being unique in order to become more attractive for the target groups (Virgo & Chenatony, 2006). For example, there is a contest between the Harvard University and Stanford University, which are trying to improve their capabilities for attracting the elite students, and professors. Furthermore, branding of places be regarded as a way of satisfaction of the human's self-prosperity; for instance, Cambridge University owns the academic brand.

3. Self-governing and budget securement: Universities have become the economic entity in the international arenas and with decreasing of governments' tendency for helping the universities; their responsibility has increased regarding their own fates. Thus, the university leaders have become aware of the benefits, which are lied in brand's investments. Unlike, the products' brand or the market-oriented service, the place branding is based on the local economic diversity for facing to the industrial crisis.

Like the products, the personality of university's branding is a critical elements but there are some differences, therefore defining a personality for university branding is more difficult and it's usually caused confusion (Winfield-Pfeffekon, 2005) but it results countless benefits, makes connection with the real needs of target groups, and provides wants with added values.

University branding should be concern about how to mix the culture, history, economic growth, social development, architecture and infrastructure, landscape and environmental aspects; in order to create an understandable and enthusiastic identity that is accepted from all the target groups. The brand identity and value of the university are important. Moreover, the most important matter of place branding is how perception of its identity, or what its image in audience minds (Zhang & Xiaoping Zhao, 2009). Universities that already were the outstanding ones now have concluded that regarding their exclusivities and capabilities from and the wants and future demands from; they should organize and appraise their brands in the future.

Literature Review

BLAKE project (2010) which is written by Brad Van Auken; Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and American University have made outstanding efforts to find a proper strategies of their brands and they were focusing on the ideas and needs of the present and future students. Another university that is on the similar path is the Paul Smith's College in Adirondacks. Even though, its motto is not properly chosen and it is not able to be a good representative of Adirondacks College, but its main website's page by demonstrating the special slides of its student's scientific activities in beautiful country sides was trying to attract the cooperation and responding of needs people who are interested in such activities. Focusing on forestry, mapping, wild life, recreational activities, arboriculture, hospitality, and restaurants creates a feeling that beside education, going to the college also provides an opportunity to have enjoyable life and recreation, which improves the value of the college's brand. Therefore, alongside with meeting the present needs of students and professors, universities and colleges must try to meet the future needs of their students, professors, and members of scientific board through paying attention to rapid changes of environment.

Place branding studied generally, but just in few study, authors investigated university branding. There are only few research to find how creating a successful university branding. The stimuli of branding and marketing is multi-formation of the local economy in face of the slump of the industry sector which would be feasible via attracting students, internal investments, events, famous forums and earning prizes (Parkerson & Saunders, 2005).

Research and Methodology

According to Grounded Theory, first, in order to gain an initial sample of interviewees answered questions. Participants were and asked: to define the university brand, to list any activities that a university brand do; to list the goals which they think describe university brand; and to address some effective strategies of university brands. The answers helped extract items and guide to find next relevant interviewee – as the method of sampling was snowball. This resulted in a list of 152 items, obtained from 14 interviews that were finished when the items were matured. After an initial review of the items, only the clear, non-synonymous, and

concise items representative of university brands are retained and finally 27 items were gain in three coding steps – open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

In the present study, to calculate the reliability by method of agreement within two coders, other researcher (coder) helped in research as research assistance participate; education and techniques for coding the interviews were transferred to him. Then the researcher along with research partner decodes two interviews. Then, the agreed percentage of the topic that is use as an indicator of reliability analysis estimated. In this study, researcher and associate research was record 215 codes. The total numbers of agreements between the coders were 83 cods and disagreements between them were 49 codes. The reliability of the coding for the interviews was 77 percent. As more than 60 percent, reliability rate is acceptable (20), so reliability of coding approved and could claim that the reliability of analysis is appropriate.

Findings

The first step of the data extraction is the process coding in grounded theory. To extract data from the interviews, there is two methods- micro-analysis and the key points analysis there. In this study, coding the contents of all the interviews were performed through implementation of the key points analysis. Thus the the interviews were written, then paragraph by paragraph, line by line analysis were coded and open coding obtained.

After the coding key points, those codes that had noted, "common thread," were grouped. This is a common axle called "concept. Then, the generated code in the previous step, for findings links of among codes were rewritten in categories.

There are three methods for coding but paradigmatic model – introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1998) were used. This template helps theorists do to ease the process of theorizing. Axial components include central phenomenon, causal conditions, context, mediator, strategies and outcome. According to the concepts from the previous steps, the re- investigation and review process and sweep the concepts and categories; paradigmatic model of this study was obtained.

The essence of science is the modeling and comprehensive models rather sparse data. Because the data could be discovered, explained, and interpreted through model. The theoretical development in the field of marketing has facilitated understanding marketing applications in other areas and helped the transition from university marketing to branding university with the expansion and success of the branding. This study attempted to study the various aspects of the university branding literature and by planning and analysis, in-depth interviews with experts in branding, to offer relatively deep theoretical knowledge of university branding. In paradigmatic model were examined; the causal conditions required for the formation and branding, the contextual conditions which has been the important elements of branding in recent decades,

In addition, intermediaries that facilitate or accelerate the branding and necessities of the process of branding strategies (actions and interactions) were examined that the result is achieving brand loyalty.

In the final step of theorizing, based on the original story line and the order inferred from the interviews, the frame of categories was revised.

Conclusion

This model is a simplified representation of university branding with a holistic view (emphasizing on both behavioral and the organizational elements) which is moved to tangible and level of branding event. A brand with a distinct identity, great and valuable personality will go towards the development and perfection through continuous learning from environment at. In the meantime, with utilizing of communications between brand and its audience will create strong links and obtain valuable positioning in audience mind. This distinctive position lead to attract more audiences, grow market share, increase competitive advantage and profitability. The privileged position to influence in the hearts and minds of the audience and create a sensory-emotional link with them. Thus brand loyalty are shaped and grantee its survival.

Finally, it is necessary to attract target audiences and their investing of time, money, experience, knowledge, and commitment for creating powerful and influential university brand.

Focusing on branding principles makes strategic approach for offering a university branding properly. Branding should utilize strategic approaches for coordination and integration messages and experiences of the university alongside with its branding.

Considering branding model, attention to all five components of branding, mission, brand identity, brand positioning, brand communication, and brand loyalty, ultimately, seem necessary in the branding process.

What is important is that the framework should be strategic with long-term vision. The factors which influence on of strategy process includes; available budget, rate of development, market complexity, the complexity of the economic infrastructure and the perception in key markets.

On the other hand, each place has its own dynamics elements, which is shown in products, politics, history, attitudes, and performance of the place.

Since this model can be as a base for the intellectual and strategic development of university branding in which provided continuous assessment, it has assumed that the decision maker for determining policies and develop programs could be consider the branding model and its' components.

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