

# Brand Image of Higher Education in Pakistan

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**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this research is to investigate the influence of different dimensions i.e. awareness, acceptance and quality on brand image of higher education. These three components are used by Prasad and Dev (2000) as identified by Aaker, (1991). Lamb & Low Jr. (2000) used the same mentioned three components of Aaker (1991). Therefore, for this study, the researcher intends to practice the similar three above mentioned attributes; brand awareness, brand acceptance and brand quality to determine the brand image of higher education (university level).

**KEYWORDS:** Brand awareness, Brand acceptance, Brand quality, Brand Image, HEIs

## INTRODUCTION

Brand image has nothing to deal with product or services features/technology or definite service itself. In fact, it develops through provided knowledge to the customer about the service or product. Image of the institution has great importance for external customers especially in the case of higher education sector i.e. friends, parents, industry etc. these external customers are influential in decision making choice of the students. Therefore, a good image is considered as an uppermost branding tool in case of the higher education industry. According to Engel and Miniard, (1993) the image of a brand is developed due to the collective impact of brand association and consumer's perception. Beckwith & Leman, (1975); Hill & Neeley, (1988); Levitt, (1986); Nicholls et al., (1995) nominated the reputation of the university as the most important factor in taking selection decision while discussing the image of the higher education institute. Especially when there is an absence of experience as it reduces the perceived risk. For good image, quality and recognition are the best sources of competitive advantage (Aaker, 1989; Fombrun, 1996. Pitta and Katsanis, 1995). Therefore, as proposed by Cubillo, Sanchez & Cervino (2006) the researcher will employ quality and acceptance as the constructs of the image for present study.

The above-mentioned literature directs in establishing the fact that awareness creates acceptance, and acceptance of any brand in combination with quality develops a powerful brand image in the service industry. Likewise, Yoo, B., Donthu, N. and Lee, S. (2000) & (2001), Lin and Chang, (2003) has noticed that awareness, acceptance, and quality played a key role in developing the image of the product. Therefore, the main objective of this research is also to check the influence of mentioned dimensions i.e. brand awareness, brand acceptance, and brand quality on brand image.

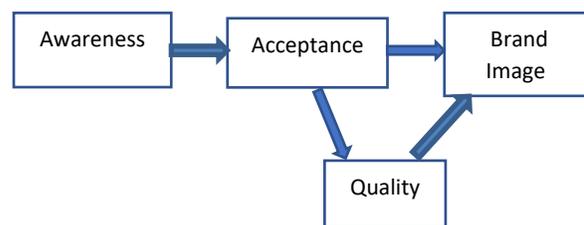


Figure 1: Model for University Branding

Quality is found to be the strongest construct followed by prestige, acceptance and incentives during the previous studies conducted by Chen

(2006), Litten and Hall (1989), Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Bone (2009). Cronin and Taylor (1992) investigated that quality in education and other related services provided by the university develop satisfaction which resultantly enhance the image of the university. Muller and woods (1994) underlined the importance of brand image formation and the reliability of brand name in the service industry. Moreover, they suggested that collection of quality, service delivery and image help in developing brand's trustworthiness.

### **EVOLUTION AND BACKGROUND OF BRAND IMAGE**

Over the last decades, a large body of research has focused on brand image. (Gardner & Levy, 1955) introduced the construct "brand image" and described its social and psychological nature in 1950s. Furthermore, brand image is based on different psychological variants which has been described the consumer behavior. So, brand image has its roots in the discipline of psychology that is why it has captured its place in the consumer behavior research. Therefore, brand image has been an important concept in consumer behavior research.

With the development in the concept in its era of 1960s and early 1970s, it was researched and conceptualized on the basis of social psychological construct "attitude". Bird, Channon, and Ehrenberg 1970 defined it as "an attitude about a given brand". Later it played a vital role in marketing management and captured the attention of marketing managers and empirical research supported its importance during purchase decisions (Dolich 1969). For instance, Gensch (1978) in his research on brand image, found a significant relationship between brand image and brand preference. Then in 1980s, attitude-based image research dominated in the research, and created more hype in linking the brand image with the consumer behavior and marketing management (Zinkhan & Hirschheim 1992).

In the studies conducted after 1990, multidimensional perspective of brand image prevailed. Empirical evidences were generated confirming the multidimensionality of the construct. Such as, Aaker's (1991) and Keller's

(1993) have proposed a similar definition of brand image, but differed regarding its components. they both have defined brand image as a set of associations that are usually organized in a meaningful way and can be linked to the memory of a brand. Aaker has defined product attributes, customer benefits, or relative price as brand components. On the other hand, Keller has defined attributes, benefits, or attitudes. So, consumers form an image of the brand based on the associations that they have remembered with respect to that brand.

### **FROM IDENTITY TO IMAGE**

One of the most notable features of this area of marketing is the confusion in terminology employed. At the corporate level, image and identity are often used to mean the same thing (Ind, 1990) while "marketers often use the terms brand equity, brand image and brand personality interchangeably" (Tauber, 1988, p. 26). Essentially "identity means the sum of all the ways a company chooses to identify itself to all its publics...image on the other hand, is the perception of the company by these publics" (Marguiles, 1977, p. 66). In seeking to manage the image development process, a company will focus on that element which it can control, its identity. Ultimately image is formed in the mind of the receiver. In short, identity is sent, while image is received/perceived.

### **CONCLUSION**

Every university wants a brand and an image that can be trusted and believed and that will distinguish it from others. University brand, actually, is the perception and reputation advanced in the minds of the people about the university or institution. It is the response appears in the minds of the publics when they hear or see a name or symbol of some university or institution. This research aims to identify key factors that are required to be taken care of while developing university brand image.

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