

IMPACT OF NAMING UNDER 'INTERNATIONAL' TAG ON THE BRAND EQUITY OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Private universities in India are growing rapidly to cater a large number of students seeking better career prospect. With the growing number of private universities the higher education market has become more competitive thereby necessitating them to adopt branding strategy in order to gain the edge of brand differentiation. When we consider universities as service provider firms, its names are identified as brand names; and choosing a brand name remain a vital factor to attract customers. Of late, private universities in India are adopting International tag in their names in order to place a unique brand in the market. Therefore it becomes necessary to measure impact of international tag on the brand equity of private universities. This paper essentially attempts to achieve this objective. To do this, the researchers have identified two private universities, as a case study, located in Delhi NCR region using International tag. Thorough literature review and focus group interviews helped formulate hypotheses and through survey questionnaire method primary data were collected. These data were analyzed and conclusions were drawn through SPSS.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Private Universities, Naming Strategy, Brand Equity, Branding tool*

Introduction

Private universities are business entities having profitability as one of the prime objectives. Therefore, they adopt similar strategies as private business firms. The branding strategy consists of multiple activities including naming i.e. choosing a brand name to develop positive

customers' perceptions. Brand values of universities are the mix of several attributes such as image, quality of education, teaching faculties, naming, brochures, stickers, website, logo, slogan, etc. Choosing an attractive name for a university create favourable image and has to be chosen carefully (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). Naming of universities help in creating brand differentiation as a unique education provider from other universities. Name of a university is perceived as a brand name becomes on the indicators of brand value of the university. To meet the challenges of growing challenges of competition in higher education sector, the private universities have started using 'International' tag as strategic branding tool. Peluso and Guido (2012) findings shows that location-based names of a university behold better preference, reputation, credibility, distinctiveness and memorability in the eyes of consumers. To develop universities as a brand, "International" tag can provide unique positioning and better brand equity. Earlier the strategy of using International tag has been adopted by public schools to woo target audience. Adoption of same naming strategy in private universities needs to be substantiated by brand evidence.

Need for the Study

The previous researches have addressed the issues related to naming and re-naming strategies of universities based on famous personalities, regions, city-locations, geographical attributes, et al. However, no study has been carried out on naming strategy under International tag and the associated behavioral aspects of consumers related to International tags. Aiming to fill this gap, this study examines the impact of International tag on brand equity of private universities. It would also attempt to identify the latent consumer preference towards International tags in the names of private universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Naming of universities as branding strategy Parameswaran and Glowacka, (1995) observed that to differentiate from competitor, universities needs a positive image and a brand that reflect the image. The image of a university can be more effective than the quality of its instruction in terms of prospective students' preference for universities (Mazzarol, 1998). To study the role of naming strategy in image building process becomes more important as Bulotaite, (2003) pointed out that the name of a university evoke image and experiences in the

minds of consumers. For universities, creating a favourable image begins with being careful about choosing their names. A university's name can help it be distinguished from other universities (Coulson, 2007) because name of a university as a brand name is the most important indicator of the brand value of the same university (Muzellec et al., 2003). Universities need to be focused about the selection of brand names in similar way as other services because the brand names not only builds the image, it also reflect reputation and identity of the institution (Aaker, 1996; Kohli and Labahn, 1997; Tadelis, 1999). Even the pronunciation of the brand name evoke a sense of preference (Bao et al., 2008). Turley and Moore (1995) divide brand names into two categories: person-based names and geographic names. In service sector and these naming strategies are being seen since long. However, in university naming few more types we tend to see, for example, naming on proper names, political names, names of famous people and geographical location names, etc. Moreover, some names of universities are based on their founders to grandiose their historical background (Muzellec, 2006).

Brand Equity There are several competing definitions of brand equity in marketing literature with their own merits and flaws. Probably the most inclusive definition of brand equity is from the Marketing Science Institute which defines it as: "The set of associations and behaviour on the part of a brand's customers, channel members and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it could without the brand name." (Leuthesser, 1988). The definition highlights three key aspects of brand equity (Kapferer and Page, 2015): Brand equity involves more than just customers; Brand equity is related to both associations and behaviors of the parties involved; and Brand equity has the ability to enhance the value of the brand. Brand equity is the added value endowed on products and services. It may be reflected in the way consumers think, feel, and act with respect to the brand, as well as in the prices, market share, and profitability the brand commands (Keller, 2008). Marketers build brand equity by creating the right brand knowledge structures with the right consumers. This process depends on all brand-related contacts—whether marketer-initiated or not. From a marketing management perspective, however, there are three main sets of brand equity drivers: Brand elements or evidence: Enrolled foreign students and foreign teaching faculties; Marketing activities and supporting marketing programs to position as an affordable luxury and brand experience: State-of-the-art facilities and International educational tour; and Other associations indirectly

transferred to the brand by linking it to some other entity (Brand Promise): International Accreditation, International placements and International curriculum

From this discussion, it is evident that private universities are struggling to cope with stiff competition in domestic market because of the enhanced standards in higher education market. The expectations force parents and students to think carefully before choosing a private institution for higher education.

Objectives of the Study

Based on the above-discussed issues, the focus of this study would be: (1) To identify the factors that determine the brand equity of a private university naming under International tag, and (2) To study the impact of International tags as a branding tool on the brand equity of private universities. These two broad objectives altogether would help establish the success of this naming strategy and provide justification for adopting this branding strategy.

Methodology

A quantitative research method has been chosen to examine the brand equity of private universities naming under International tag. The study is based on data collected from two universities Manav Rachna International University Faridabad 1 and Noida International University Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.) India located in Delhi National Capital Territory (NCR) (as they use 'International' tag in their name).

Questionnaire and target group

The formulation of questionnaire has been carried out at two phases. The first phase was to identify the requisite factors that influence the brand equity of a private university using International tag as naming strategy. To achieve this objective two separate focus group discussions involving ten post-graduate students of both the private universities selected above were held in the month of October 2017. They were introduced with a modified version of Noel-

¹In November 2017, University Grant Commission (UGC) issued orders to deemed universities to drop the word "university" from their names on directions of the Supreme Court of India. The move affected institutions such as Manav Rachna University and Lingaya's University in Haryana, Christ's University and Jain University in Bengaluru and Symbiosis International University in Pune. (https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/7165498_UGC-LETTER.pdf)

Levitz® student satisfaction inventory (SSI), a reliable instrument widely used by a large number of universities to improve consumer satisfaction, to identify the attributes more appropriate and relevant for consumers of higher education. The questions discussed in the focus group was mainly related to naming strategy of private universities under International tag that covered broad areas of brand attributes, especially tangible and intangible brand attributes. In the second phase of questionnaire formulation, a pre-test activity was carried out and finally 48 variable item questions were used in preparation of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to rank the different dimensions on five-point Likert Scale where (1) represents “Strongly Disagree and (5) represents “Strongly Agree”. In the second part, respondents were asked about their profile or background. The statements used in the questionnaire were designed in the form of factors. A survey on the selected factors was conducted in the month of November 2017. The study covered significant number of respondents as per detailed sampling plan and a total of 500 questionnaires were got filled-in. Non-probabilistic, convenience sampling method was adopted for the study, though this may limit the generalization of the result.

Hypotheses

To assess the brand equity, dependent variable in this study, of private university having ‘International’ tag; the following seven independent variables were taken into account, namely, Enrolled Foreign Students, International accreditation, State-of-the-art facilities, International curriculum, International placements, International educational tours and International tie-ups. The naming of the factors was highly arbitrary decision of the researchers. The third component, State-of-the-art facilities, generally comprised of infrastructural physical attributes such as design of the building and campus, clean and tidy environment, internet/computer facilities, sports facilities, et al. Based on above seven independent variables the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Enrolled-foreign-student is significantly correlated with ‘International’ tag as an effective branding tool.

H2: International accreditation is significantly correlated with ‘International’ tag as an effective branding tool.

H3: State-of-the-art Facilities is significantly correlated with ‘International’ tag as an effective branding tool.

H4: international curriculum is significantly correlated with ‘International’ tag as an effective branding tool.

H5: International placement is significantly correlated with 'International' tag as an effective branding tool.

H6: International educational tour is significantly correlated with 'International' tag as an effective branding tool.

H7: International Tie-ups is significantly correlated with 'International' tag as an effective branding tool.

Analysis

Statistical software SPSS was used for testing the data. Reliability test exclude 20 responses as missing data from total 500 responses leaving only 480 valid responses. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire were assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient and item-to-total correlation. Cronbach's alpha value ranges from 0 to 1 in which a value closer to 1 indicates greater stability and consistency; however, for basic research, the threshold value of 0.60 was set by the researchers (Nunnally, 1978). The result of Cronbach's alpha for the variables used in the current study in which the value of alpha 0.733 (Table 1), indicates acceptable consistency and stability of the instrument. Statistical approach of single t-test was used for testing the hypotheses.

Table 1 Reliability statistics of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.733	0.743	7

Table 2 the correlation matrix shows strong relation between International curriculum and International accreditation (0.582) and between International placement and international educational tour (0.540). Whereas poor relation was found between international educational tour and foreign students (0.021) and international curriculum and foreign students (0.039).

Table 2 Inter-Item Correlation Matrix

	Foreign students	International accreditation	state-of-the-art facilities	International curriculum	international placement	international educational tour	tie-ups with international institutions
Foreign students	1	0.295	0.445	0.039	0.229	0.021	0.141
International accreditation	0.295	1.000	0.278	0.582	0.344	0.286	0.174
state-of-the-art facilities	0.445	0.278	1.000	0.245	0.328	0.420	0.402
International curriculum	0.039	0.582	0.245	1.000	0.173	0.217	0.142
international placement	0.229	0.344	0.328	0.173	1.000	0.540	0.420
international educational tour	0.021	0.286	0.420	0.217	0.540	1.000	0.427
tie-ups with international institutions	0.141	0.174	0.402	0.142	0.420	0.427	1.000

Table 3 shows that tie-ups with international institutions has the highest mean value (4.014) at N=500 followed by international placement (4.000) at N=495 and international educational tour (3.931) at N=495. Remaining factors also have mean value more than 3. The standard deviations for many of the items are above below or around 1.000, implying consistencies in the answers given by the respondents.

Table 3 One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Foreign students	500	3.514	1.031	0.046
International accreditation	490	3.320	0.866	0.039
state-of-the-art facilities	500	3.830	0.752	0.034
International curriculum	500	3.486	0.829	0.037
international placement	495	4.000	0.805	0.036
international educational tour	495	3.931	0.917	0.041
tie-ups with international institutions	500	4.014	0.766	0.034

Table 4 shows the results of one sample t-test at test value =4 to check the significance of the independent variables. The analysis results showed significant differences in importance of International placement (p =1.000); International educational tour (p=.096) and tie-ups with international institutions (p=0.683). No significant differences were observed in rest four categories (p < 0.005).

Table 4 One-Sample Test

	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		p value	p< (α=0.05)	Reject/ Accept Null Hypothesis	Relation
Foreign students	-10.536	499	0.000	-0.486	-0.577	-0.395	0.000	Yes	Reject	Positive
International accreditation	-17.372	489	0.000	-0.680	-0.756	-0.603	0.000	Yes	Reject	Positive
state-of-the-art facilities	-5.052	499	0.000	-0.170	-0.236	-0.104	0.000	Yes	Reject	Positive
International curriculum	-13.865	499	0.000	-0.514	-0.587	-0.441	0.000	Yes	Reject	Positive
international placement	0.000	494	1.000	0.000	-0.071	0.071	1.000	No	Accept	Negative
international educational tour	-1.666	494	0.096	-0.069	-0.150	0.012	0.096	No	Accept	Negative
tie-ups with international institutions	0.409	499	0.683	0.014	-0.053	0.081	0.683	No	Accept	Negative

Result of the Analysis

As can be seen, the highest brand equity is reflected through international accreditation (m=3.320; sd=0.866; t= -17.372; p=0.000) while the lowest brand equity reflected through

International placement ($m=4.000$; $sd=0.805$; $t= 0.000$; $p=1.000$). As can be seen in Table 4, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4 were supported while H5, H6 and H1g hypotheses were not supported. The results revealed that Foreign student enrolment was statistically significant with $p < 0.005$ level supporting hypothesis H1. Therefore the null hypothesis in this case was rejected and found that foreign student enrolment significantly influence brand equity of private university with 'International' tag. Moreover, it was hypothesized that International Accreditation significantly influences brand equity of private university with 'International' tag (H2). The results also emerged as $p < 0.005$ level supporting this hypothesis. Further, Hypothesis, H3 State-of-the-art facilities significantly influence the brand equity of private university with 'International' tag was also supported based on the results $p < 0.005$. Hypothesis H4, International curriculum significantly influence brand equity of private university with 'International' tag was statistically significant as $p > 0.005$. The Hypothesis H5, H6 and H7, whether International Placements, International educational tour and tie-up with international institutions significantly influence brand equity of private university with 'International' tag was not supported as p-value was 1.000 ($p>0.005$), 0.096 ($p>.005$) and 0.683 ($p>.005$) respectively. Hence the null hypothesis of H5, H6 and H7 were accepted and no positive relations were found.

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this article was to identify the factors that determine the brand equity of a private university using International tag in its name and to study the impact of naming strategy under international tag on brand equity of the universities. At the first phase of the study, important factors were identified that influence the band equity of a private university naming under International tag. With the help of focus groups of enrolled post graduate students and modified Noel-Levitz® student satisfaction inventory (SSI) a general consensus was made in order to identify the important factors that determine the brand equity of private universities using international tag as naming strategy. The identified factors were seven in numbers, namely, Enrolled Foreign Students, International accreditation, State-of-the-art facilities, International curriculum, International placements, International educational tours and International tie-ups. To find out the impact of International tag on brand equity of private universities naming under international tags, the seven identified factors were tested for significant relations with the brand equity of the universities. It was found that the main factors that impact on brand equity of

international tagged universities are four, namely, Enrolled Foreign Students, International accreditation, State-of-the-art facilities and International curriculum. These four factors have positive relations with the brand equity of consumers except three; International placements, International educational tours and International tie-ups, which are not related significantly to the brand equity of international tagged private university. The findings can be useful to different institutions of higher education in designing strategies to enhance brand equity in the highly competitive environment. The findings of this study suggests that the brand strategists of private universities are to focus more and more on the factors that directly improves the brand equity which includes Enrolled Foreign Students, International accreditation, State-of-the-art facilities and International curriculum as the part of distinctive areas inside the campus. These factors substantiate their claim to be an International institution and may prove to be a better branding strategy in long run as the brand equity is empower with better bargaining power and improving brand equity has potential revenue gain.

Directions for Further Research

Future studies should focus on the comparative performance of universities naming under International tag and the universities do not named under international tags yet practicing international strategy. Two types of universities may be selected as case study and accordingly respondents may be selected. Importance-Performance (IP) Analysis in prescribed format may be undertaken from existing customers which subsequently help in charting IP Matrix. Evaluation based on such findings would enable generate more information on branding strategy under International tags. The valuable inputs would help formulate policies on branding strategy of private universities.

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