BRANDING OF SERVICES - ITS EFFECT ON THE GROWTH OF NON -AIDED MANAGEMENT INSTITUTES IN PUNE

Abhijit Chandratreya[1] and Pallavi Sajanapwar[2]

[1]Manager (Training & Research), Indira Institute of Management, Pune, India
Email: abhijitc@indiraiimp.edu.in
[2]Assistant Professor, Indira Institute of Management, Pune, India
Email: pallavi.sajanapawar@indiraiimp.edu.in

PURPOSE

There's a simple definition for branding: a name, logo, slogan, and/or design scheme associated with a product or service. But branding, brand management and brand awareness are as much art as they are science, and getting them right isn't simply a matter of designing a logo or some pretty packaging. Branding is at the heart of advertising and marketing. If people don't have a clear idea of what they're buying, they generally won't buy. Branding is the process of forming that clear idea in their hearts and minds. The brand is the image held in the consumer's mind. The value of the brand comes from the consumer's familiarity with and acceptance of the brand. Branding differentiates one product from another. A brand that cannot differentiate itself from its competitors will almost certainly fail.

The purpose of this research paper is to find out the effect branding has on the growth of non-aided management institutes.

Keywords: Branding of Services, Customer Perceptions, Branding of Management Institutes

Design/Methodology/Approach

Student Category

A structured questionnaire was distributed to 10 non-aided management institutes in Pune and 200 students studying in these institutes have filled it up. The study highlighted the perception of quality of service provided by these institutes through the effect of branding.

Faculty Category

A interview of 50 faculty members teaching in 10 non-aided management institutes in Pune was taken. The study highlighted the perception of image of the management because of the branding.

Management Category

A interview of 10 directors of the management institute was taken to understand the effect of management thought process about branding.

Findings

The researchers hope to find out how branding helps in the growth of non-aided management institutes and the various types of branding methodology used.

Research limitations/implications

The present study provides a starting-point for further research in the national / international perception of branding of management institutes as our study is limited to one city only.

Originality/value

This study will prove beneficial to the management of the various Institutes in upgrading their services.

Chapterization

Introduction

1. What is Branding?

2. What is branding of services?

3. Features of current non-aided management institutes in Pune.

Methodology

1. Sample.

2. Survey Instruments.

3. Pilot survey

4. Deployment of questionnaire.

5. Data Collection and Analysis.

Findings

Application of Results

Conclusions and Recommendations

Scope for future research

References

"A brand is a living entity – and it is enriched or undermined cumulatively over time, the product of a thousand small gestures."

Michael Eisner, CEO Disney

INTRODUCTION

Service quality may be viewed from three perspectives: the performance of the product, behavior of service provider's personnel and attitude of customers. The diverse viewpoint of service quality and its intangibility characteristic leads one to express service quality as the difference between customer expectations (before delivery of service) and perceptions (after delivery of service) (Berry et al., 1985). A positive difference (or gap) implies that

expectations are greater than performance, i.e., perceived quality is less than satisfactory, leading to occurrence of dissatisfaction of the customer (Parasuraman et al., 1985). In an organizational context, any effective quality control program focuses on the identification of areas having large gaps so that efforts can be made to minimize the gap to obtain a competitive edge over competitors.

Among all service sectors, the education sector, particularly the Management Education System, has direct bearing on society for society's growth and socio-economic development. One of the key skills required of a management graduate is the ability to produce systems that satisfy users' requirements by correct selection, configuration, integration, operation and control of proprietary building blocks. Today, in India, many management colleges and universities with different courses in undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels are in existence and compete with each other as well as with the foreign institutes for imparting education.

The limited number of state-funded institutions and diminishing funding in higher education from the government caused the mushrooming of private institutions in India. Therefore, the students have a wide range of options to choose from which the institution to pursue their interests. As the students bear the complete expenditure of education, they deserve the best education. Therefore, quality and branding has become a competitive weapon for the institutions to serve and attract their primary customers (students).

To this end, the development of a quality measurement instrument for the educational set-up and a methodology for the assessment of quality is of prime importance for providing guidelines to the administrators of the institutions. The quality indicators must satisfy all the stakeholders involved in the system. In an educational set-up, multiple stakeholders, viz. students, alumni, parents, recruiters, faculties, supporting staff, government, society and administrators, interact with the system in different ways and have diverse expectations. Therefore, the service items are likely to differ amongst stakeholders. The administrators of the educational set-up find it very difficult to fix the norms that would suit all the stakeholders. Branding of the Institute also plays a major role for the new students in taking admission to a particular institute. The purpose of this study is to highlight the perception of quality of service provided by the non-aided management institutes in Pune through the help of branding of their services.

An effective brand position captures the distinctive mission, aspirations, and strengths of an institution and appeal to the motivations and interests of the marketplace. A positive corporate brand is expected to have an impact on recruitment of students and academic staff, for attracting resources and to create goodwill.

Branding efforts may help higher education institutions to rediscover what they are, and their basic purposes. In an age with new stakeholders entering higher education, new demands being directed at universities, and more tasks than ever to handle, has resulted in a situation of capacity overload. Branding may be of assistance in the process of trying to prioritize between all the tasks and objectives on the agenda, and help institutions to remind themselves what the core activities are.

This paper investigates the following issues among students in Pune enrolled in non-aided management institutes as to:

1. How cultural values influence a student's decision on study destinations?

2. Which are the most effective brand positioning statements (promotion messages) in drawing students to Pune?

3. Which of the communication media are effective channels for institute promotion in the society?

Branding Of Educational Institute

The increased competition in higher education - both at the national and international level - has led to an emerging interest for how higher education institutions profile themselves. The image or brand a given higher education institution have in its surrounding seems to be considered as more important than before, and to an increasing extent, a strategic and managerial issue. The reason is the possible impact a positive image or brand is expected to have concerning recruitment of students and academic staff, for attracting resources and to create goodwill. As a consequence, new images have been proposed for higher education institutions. The service-university, the corporate enterprise and the entrepreneurial university are only some of the new organizational ideals stimulating new and dynamic branding efforts.

Many educational executives are cognizant of the need for "marketization" – the marketing of their education institutions. The marketing of education is needed for successful recruitment and for increasing market share of resources and students. One particularly important marketing concept that has not been addressed adequately in the marketing of services is that of branding, particularly in the context of branding education.

There is, however, a gap in how branding can be used strategically and conceptually by educational institutions. In addressing this gap, this paper provides an additional contribution to the theory and practice about branding for services: how educational institutions can use "branding" to unite their various clientele or stakeholders in strategically branding their organization. In fact, top-of-mind responses from service organizations suggest that managers perceive branding as major sources of advantage for their organizations. It is apparent that there is a paucity of research on holistic strategies for branding in one of Pune's most important and economically viable industries.

This paper provides an important contribution into how educational organizations can use branding and the implications this strategy has on an educational institution' brand management strategies.

A recent paper by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka systematically reviewing literature on higher education (HE) marketing suggests that 'HE marketing is incoherent, even inchoate and lacks theoretical models that reflect upon the particular context of HE and the nature of their service'. It adds that research into higher education marketing 'is still at a relatively pioneer stage with much research still to be carried out from both a problem identification and strategic perspective'. Their review of 15 empirical papers suggests, inter alia, that:

1. A substantial information gap exists between the choice factors important to student consumers and the information provided by universities in their communications;

2. As against transactional (price, place, promotion, product) marketing models, relational marketing (based on building an ongoing relationship between customer and service provider) might be a more viable and identity building approach, promoting 'the involvement of students in the marketing and image-building of their institutions' .

3. The power and flexibility of electronic databases were now allowing for 'segment profiling', streamlining marketing practices behind multiple brand differentiations.

4. Universities may need to re-position them to attract successive generations of students and to direct marketing efforts at 'developing longer-term institutional visions and missions that incorporated marketing as an integral component of development plans'.

'The notion of branding', the authors assert, 'has barely made its mark in higher education marketing'. Literature specifically on marketing the sustainability credentials of a university is thin on the ground and largely tangential to topic. Carrying implications for sustainability marketing is a research report from the UK-based Student Force for Sustainability [2] exploring the interface between sustainability and employability? It cites evidence that for students the environmental and social responsibility of the prospective employer is 'not the main deciding factor' but a 'differentiating' factor in choice of job, the report concluding that, while higher education institutions are responding to the sustainability agenda in terms of campus changes, curriculum development and community partnerships, they are lagging behind in terms of giving prominence to sustainability competencies and careers. Employers, for their part, expressed the need for graduate recruits with the competencies to support their corporate social responsibility endeavors. Following Cade [2], but also Veloutsou et al.'s [3] finding that applicants to university apply a cost/benefit analysis in their choice of institution, there would seem to be potential in marketing the skills and career opportunities, and overall professional advantage, arising from sustainability immersion at university.

Branding of Services

Literature gives several definitions of the term brand. The common themes are that a brand is more than just a combination of a name, a design, a symbol or other features that differentiate a good or a service from others. It is a unique set of tangible and intangible added values that are perceived and valued by the customer. In addition a brand is said to have personality, an emotional bond to the customer that grows out of the perceived characteristics.

These certain features of a brand grow out of a complex set of added values that can comprise of history and tradition, additional services, marketing messages, quality, popularity of the product amongst a certain group of users (status) and others. These basis's of a brand perception prove that a strong brand can not be established over night The development of a brand takes time, strong financial marketing muscle and good marketing skills such as insight into customer needs,   ability to offer products or services that meet those needs, creativity to produce exiting and compelling advertising, ability to communicate differentiation in a way that customers understand and that motivates them. Without this process you do not have a brand but only a name and a sign for a product.

Although the principles for branding of goods and services are generally the same there occur some differences. These arise from the different natures of both categories. The main differences that influence branding policies are that services

- have a changing level of quality,

- the consumer has to become involved in the consumption of a service actively,

- they are intangible and not storable.

When a brand in general gives the consumer more confidence in his choice this is even more important for services. Their quality and other features are more difficult to asses. Because of their intangibility and complexity it is harder for the customer to distinguish between the offers from the wide range of service companies operating in the market place.

Current Status of Education in Pune

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development. It is considered to be the most effective weapon for implementing social change.

It is said that "When the doors of education close, the doors of jails open". This may sound a little exaggeration; nevertheless it's a fact. Perhaps this is the reason that the education system in India has not only expanded its outreach and coverage but has diversified into new areas. The present day educational system in India comprises of about 600,000 primary, 150,000 upper primary, and 70,000 secondary and higher secondary schools. The network of institutions of higher education includes more than 7,000 colleges of general education, about 1000 professional colleges and about 150 universities and a number of specialized institutions of industrial, scientific, technical and social sciences research. These institutions taken together have an enrolment of more than 150 million students and employ about 4 million teachers.

In this scenario, Pune has played an important role. Pune has produced number of scholars of national and international repute in the past. But over the last few years, the city has given rise to a large number of academic institutions covering almost all fields of education. There are institutes like the National Defense Academy, National Institute of Virology, Defense Research and Development 0rganisation, the National Chemical Laboratory, etc. Presence of such a large number of institutions means more choices and more chances of pursuing a good career. Apart from government-aided institutes, Pune has also witnessed the autonomy culture in education, which led to the mushrooming of several educational institutes continuously revising their curricula as per the changing needs of the job market. This has added to the dynamism of Pune.

Rationale Behind the Study: Why Pune?

If Takshashila and Nalanda were the two cities that attracted students from all corners of India and even the world as centers of education during the early part of India's history, **today, Pune is making news as an "Educational Hub".** Why??? What are the advantages of studying in Pune? Why is it preferred over other metro cities? What are the reasons for Pune emerging as the **'intellectual capital'** of the country?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of Higher Education In India

In our country, the present system of higher education started in 19th Century under the British India. Journey of higher education can be observed under following periods:

a) Period of colleges: This period comprises from the beginning of the British Rule up to 1857 when the first three Universities were set up at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The British rulers established many Government and private colleges till 1857. The more prominent of such colleges were Banaras Sanskrit College, Hindu College-Calcutta, Christian College-Madras and Agra College. There were 23 colleges of general education, 3 Medical Colleges, and 1 Civil Engineering School in the year 1857.

b) Period of first University: This period ranges from 1857 to 1917. Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were established in 1857 on the model of London University. All the three Universities performed the functions of only conducting examinations. Emulating the examples of these Universities, Punjab and Allahabad Universities were established in 1882 and 1887respectively. There was a rather slow growth in the number of colleges which increased from 27 in 1857 to 68 in 1982, i.e. in 25 years. However, thereafter the college education seems to have received a great impetus, the number of colleges having gone up to 179 in 1901-02.

Indian University Commission was appointed in 1902 in order to enquire into the conditions and working of the Indian Universities and make necessary suggestions. Two years later, the Indian Universities Act was passed. This Act brought about many important changes in the organization, jurisdiction, powers and administration, etc. of the Universities. This Act rejected the plea of establishment of more Universities. Consequently, the expansion of the University education was checked for some time. However, it must be admitted that this Act went a long way to improve and reform the conditions and standards of the contemporary Universities and Colleges.

c) Establishment of new Universities: After the establishment of Allahabad University in 1887, no new University was established for a period of 30 years. However, a number of new colleges were created during this period. In view of the increase in the number of colleges it was felt that the existing five Universities (Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Punjab and Allahabad) were incapable to cope with the increased work. Hence, it was thought necessary to increase the number of Universities. The Government Resolution of 1913 emphasized the establishment of new Universities. The Calcutta University Commission, 1917 also advised the establishment of new Universities. Consequently the following Universities were established between 1916 and 1947. Mysore (1916), Patna (1917), Banaras Hindu (1917), Osmania (1918), Aligarh Muslim (1920), Dacca (1920), Lucknow (1920), Delhi (1922), Nagpur (1923), Andhra (1926), Agra (1927), Annamalai (1929), Travancore (1937), Utkal (1943), Sagar (1947), and Rajputana (1947).

d) Higher Education since Independence: The higher education per lakh population in 1947-48 was just 30. As a result of the investments made in the successive Five Year Plans for various developmental projects under higher education in the post-independence period, there has been a phenomenal growth in institutions and enrolment.

In Pune city, in 1998-99 there were 81 colleges providing higher education in varied disciplines of liberal and professional education. The total exceeded 53,930 at the graduation level. It must be conceded that the universities and large expanse of colleges of higher education have kept moving the wheels of socio-economic life in the city of Pune, and that they have provided most of the skilled manpower needed by the economy.

RESEARCH IN BRIEF

For any non aided management institute there are majorly five stake holders:

- Management of the College representing the Director and Board of Directors
- Faculty of the institute
- Students
- Parents
- Industry.

Out of this, for the current study, we have considered Students, Faculty and Management of the college as our respondent category. The research was consisted of structured interviews with each of the respondents from the category.

Student Category

A structured questionnaire was distributed to 10 non-aided management institutes in Pune and 200 students studying in these institutes have filled it up. The study highlighted the perception of quality of service provided by these institutes through the effect of branding.

Faculty Category

A interview of 50 faculty members teaching in 10 non-aided management institutes in Pune was taken. The study highlighted the perception of image of the management because of the branding.

Management Category

A interview of 10 directors of the management institute was taken to understand the effect of management thought process about branding.

A pilot was conducted in the first week of October 09.

The sample size for pilot survey was 50 students, 10 faculty members and 2 directors from 2 non aided management college of Pune.

After the analysis of pilot study, the main study was conducted in the second and third week of October 09.

Around six students helped us in collecting the data from category of students.

DATA ANALYSIS AND COLLECTION

Data Analysis for Student Category

1. Students have selected to study in Pune because they feel it as a cultural and educational hub with excellent learning environment. The family references and social media have played very important in developing this perception.

2. Students have selected a particular institute because of the trust and credibility of the brand name. This is built through the proper pre sale communication, service experience and through the social networking.

3. Many students are not ready to recommend the institute as the brand perception is not supported by the experience offered.

Data Analysis for Faculty Category

1. Faculty has selected to teach in Pune because of the image that Pune attracts the top talent or best of the students to study.

2. Faculty has selected a particular institute because of the same value sharing system of the institute.

3. Many faculties are the brand ambassadors of the institute as their perception and expectations have came out to be the same.

Data Analysis for Management Category

1. The management institute was started in Pune because the trustee can see enough business potential from the city.

2. The major branding technique used was advertisement and the institute website.

3. The social networking sites as well as referral power are not thought by any institute for the branding activity.

CONCLUSION

For any student, the quality of teaching and placement assistance is very important criteria for selection of any management institute. The image of the institute is built by the referral power, communication in any format as well as through the experience they have from the institute.

For a faculty image and brand name of the institute plays very important role. The faculty is easy with that institute where the value system is same. It can be either delivering a quality education through latest techniques or being known as good paymaster.

Many management institutes have a dilemma in the mind as what they should brand them selves as: Placement agency or the educational provider.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While branding the institute the management can make use of following strategy:

Step 1: Insight – understand your stake holders.

Step 2: Communication- Understand the expectations of the stake holder

Step3: Build and Modify – design the strategy

Step 4: Customer Orientation. – Give an experience of same brand image to the customer.

It can be divided in the following 12 steps.

No	Characteristics	Institute Strategy
1	Understand the customer	Understand all the stakeholders and their expectations from the institute. Design the branding strategy keeping these expectations in mind.
2	Manage quality customer data	Take a time to time feedback from all the customers and make the update in the branding strategy
3	Predict customer behavior	The service sector and especially management education sector is changing rapidly. The stakeholder requirement will be changing with the time. One needs to predict the requirement well ahead of time and change the strategy accordingly. s
4	Profile and segment customers.	Have a clear cut distinction between your customers. Let it be the students or the industry. So that you will be able to brand yourself as a institute with good placement or An institute with good academics orientation. This clearly removes the ambiguity about branding.
5	Communication	Active communication with stakeholders will give you the clear insight about the current environment.
6	Understand the importance of social networking	You need to understand the effect of social networking and should track the news about your institute on these social networking sites.
7	Improvement	After the communication and feedback , your brand strategy must highlights the improvements
8	Measure and report	You must measure the improved brand strategy.
9	Optimize marketing investment	Brand Strategy must be done by optimum utilization of resources. Your own alumina can be your best brand ambassadors. So you need to involve them in your strategy.
10	Customer Orientation	At every touch point the students must understand that the institute understands their requirement.
11	Trust	"If we really want students to bring us more business and advocate for us, we need to demonstrate that we are acting like we know, look out for and reward them. Executing on this is what builds the trust."
12	Employee behaviors	It comes down to the trust issue, and having employees know that you trust them to make good decisions

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to constraints the researchers were not able to consider all the stakeholders for this research. There is scope for further research considering the holistic view of all the stake holders.

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