



Factors Affecting University Brand Management in Vietnam: An Exploratory Study at Private Universities in Hanoi

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ABSTRACT

The research is aimed at identifying factors affecting university brand management by surveying private universities in Hanoi. Despite the vast amount of brand literature, it has received little attention in higher education settings, making the exploratory research method an appropriate choice. When observing the current situation from an unexplored perspective, the exploration design is a reasonable choice. Face-to-face and online interviews were conducted to exchange information and analyze the interaction of factors in brand management activities and the future university development orientation. Brand behavior and brand management of the university, competitiveness enhancement, and policies on university branding are among the factors that have a significant impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Vietnam joined the WTO, the nation's significant trade has made training collaboration possible. Vietnamese students have quickly begun to trust universities around the world thanks to their advantages in terms of financial resources, expertise, technology, and particularly well-known brands. The selection of foreign universities has become an increasingly popular trend in the field of education in Vietnam. In the meantime, a growing number of Vietnamese colleges still lack a distinctive identity. Weaknesses in development strategies, reasonable fund allocation for research activities, teaching collaboration, and especially investment in branding are unavoidable. Branding is not a new concept for universities, but studies show an incomplete theoretical system. In fact, not every university understands the importance of branding, the stages of establishing and developing brands, how to allocate resources, and so on. Many universities are still perplexed when it comes to establishing and developing brands. As a result, the purpose of this research is to identify the factors influencing the brand management process of universities in Vietnam. The findings of the study will provide a scientific foundation for relevant agencies, associations, universities, and colleges to develop policies to support their brand development in order to improve their market competitiveness and adapt to the increasingly extensive training integration and cooperation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lim et al. (2018) affirm that intense competition in admissions creates a strong need for higher education institutions, especially those offering postgraduate degree programs, to make their own identities. Strategic brand management is a path to establish the identity of higher education and tertiary institutions offering postgraduate programs to strategically manage the brand through complex higher education marketing (i.e., prominence,

announcements, programs, pricing, people, fees, and benefits). To build a strong brand, universities need to enhance their awareness of existence and the quality of their educational services in order to differentiate themselves from competitors and gain market share. According to Bennett et al. (2008), universities need reliable brands to enhance community awareness of themselves and their services. Pinar (2010) also points out that, in highly competitive markets, branding and brand management are more and more important as organizations seek competitive advantages. When colleges and universities face increasing competition, university managers realize that only external marketing is not enough, and that strong university branding and brand value enhancement efforts are also needed. Empirical studies indicate that universities are complex systems, requiring the consideration of all relevant aspects of brand value as a whole within the framework of the brand ecosystem to show the direct and indirect relationship in developing a university with a strong brand and brand assets. These findings provide important insights that may have strategic implications for developing successful university branding strategies.

Chapleo (2015) argues that brands in higher education are thought to be particularly driven by tuition fees and funding issues which change the attitudes of students as consumers and facilitate the government to foster differentiation, mergers, and alliances. Although universities unusually own brands naturally, they must occupy characteristic positions. However, it is still a matter of controversy whether the distinction is natural or constructive. The key elements proposed as core criteria that universities must have are Initial Instruction; Research Guidance; Science-Based Teaching; Art-Based Teaching; Basic Teaching; Advanced Teaching. Therefore, leaders at all levels need to gain prestige and brand management.

New development trends of higher education in the world on university branding are through specific activities such as expanding educational institutions, promoting international cooperation in scientific research; diversifying cooperation relationships between universities and enterprises; developing educational centers to attract foreign investment; gathering experts in brand development and investing financial and human resources in brand development; developing brands on the Internet and digital media, etc. These activities help to enhance the university brand and create prestige for the university in the community, society, and the world. University brand management creates unity in the university development orientation and mutual trust among the leaders, the managers, and the executive and management apparatus. When those parties know their responsibilities, understand and respect each other, and strive for the university brand values, their relationship will be good, optimizing strength and combining into a common, stronger, and more effective power. Identifying the factors affecting the brand management activities will help universities to review and improve the implementation process, clearly determine the level of interest in each step, and have reasonable investment.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study consists of 3 phases:

Phase 1: The qualitative research method was used by developing a concept, scale system and observation variables and adjusting the observation variables in practice. The concept of university brand has not been fully explored so far, and the choice of research method was therefore justified by a statement which suggests that the inductive approach is appropriate for new and relatively undeveloped research. Based on the reference framework, it is clear that the scarcity of existing literature will result in contradiction in developing a hypothesis, which is also consistent with the exploratory nature of this study. Moreover, current studies only focus on the concept of brand activities from the external point of view. Instead of applying it to this study, the research team concentrated on the concept of brand activities inside the university's organization to learn the influencing factors, and gradually expand to those outside the university. Thus, literature review and theory mainly guide the first stage of data collection, which is to formulate an interview questionnaire.

At this stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviewees started with leaders of private universities in Hanoi city, then expanded to staff involved in brand management activities in these universities. According to the original plan of the research team, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. However, in March-April 2022, the number of covid cases increased, so most of the interviews turned to online format, with an average exchange time of 45 minutes/1 conversation.

Phase 2: In the next stage, conducting face-to-face interviews with 23 conversations, including managers and officials directly involved in international governance activities at 7 universities of information technology in Hanoi,

02 media partners, and 02 representatives of cooperation partners of universities on enrollment and recruitment (from October 2022 to March 2023). The content of factors affecting the activities of international relations in a university was synthesized by the research team at this stage. After using the methodology to systematize the views and principles to synthesize the interviewed opinions, including the opinions of some experts in the field of education, the group synthesizes 9 factors affecting the brand management activities of private universities in Hanoi

Phase 3: The research team is expected to design in detail the content of the questionnaire to represent the factors affecting the activities of brand management, then use quantitative research methods to analyze. This is an effective analysis method for finding the most influential groups of factors and determining the importance of each factor in each group. In addition, the research team plans to use the crosstab analysis to identify the relationship between branding decisions and some attributes of the university such as history, scale, university culture, etc.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

This article presented the results of Phase 2 - exploring and analyzing the contents of the factors affecting brand management activities in private universities in Hanoi.

The implementation of face-to-face interviews, including school leaders/managers and officials directly involved in international education activities at universities in Hanoi, media partners, and representatives of university cooperation partners. Specifically: 23 participants from 7 universities (Hoa Binh University, East Asia University of Technology, NguyenTrai University, Dai Nam University, Phenikaa University, Hanoi University of Business and Technology, and Phuong Dong University), 2 press representatives (The Labor Newspaper and Education and Times Newspaper) and 2 enterprises (01 cooperation partner on enrollment, 01 associate partner on recruitment). The data of the study interviewees are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Demographics of interviewees

Participant characteristics	Symbol	Quantity	Ratio	Chart
Age				
Under 30	T1	1	4.35%	
31-40	T2	5	21.74%	
41-50	T3	13	56.52%	
51-60	T4	2	8.70%	
Over 60	T5	2	8.70%	
Sex				
Male		13	56.52%	
Female		10	43.48%	
Years of service/follow-up in higher education				
Under 5	N1	3	13.04%	
5-10	N2	3	13.04%	
11-20	N3	10	43.48%	
Over 20	N4	7	30.43%	

Seniority in charge/participation in activities/monitoring the university's brand			
Under 5	Q1	10	43.48%
5-10	Q2	3	13.04%
11-20	Q3	6	26.09%
Over 20	Q4	4	17.39%

Academic/degree			
Bachelor		5	21.74%
Master		11	47.83%
Doctor		5	21.74%
Assoc.Prof.Dr		2	8.70%

Job title/position			
Officers implementing university brand management activities	V1	5	21.74%
Leader/manager	V2	12	52.17%
Researcher/teacher on brand management	V3	2	8.70%
Media/Journalists	V4	2	8.70%
Employer	V5	1	4.35%
Collaborative/associated partner	V6	1	4.35%

The factors affecting brand management, recorded by the research team from the interviews with leaders of universities, were as follows:

Human resources in charge of brand management activities

The human resources in charge of brand management not only establish the university brand identity and embed brand image in the hearts of learners, parents, and society but also must be aware and capable of making plans to align the internal brand with the employee brand in the university. The human resources in charge of brand management activities rely on the brand management strategy chosen by the university. They are responsible for: (1) Enabling all university activities and making decisions on the basis of common values, creating organizational synchronization, and effectively using resources in operations; (2) Establishing the trust, pride, work inspiration, and duties of all lecturers in the university in building and developing the university brand; (3) Effectively using resources to develop, manage and exploit university brand assets.

Some university brand management positions are Content Curators, Data Analysts, Strategists, Writers/Editors/Content Creators - "writers" are the core creative talents of the university brand management, Visual Designer Curators - Visual Designers, Content Editor Curators, Content Publisher Curators, Social Media Curators, Public Relations Specialists.

Branding is a comprehensive work that requires both resources and accuracy. It should not be done by one person. It takes more than a good mind to establish a strong brand. Employees are a resource-rich channel and an essential connection between the university and the admission market. Employees' daily life with the university brand has a

great influence on brand strategy and is, therefore, an important asset in developing the human resource for brand management.

Sujchaphong et al. (2015) discussed the influence of leadership traits on brands in universities. Employees' support for the brand is an important element of brand activities. It is found that the human resource in charge of brand management and the capacity of the leaders who orient the brand are key to successful branding, as they provide space to stimulate wisdom and ego of personal branding for all employees in the university. From a resource-based perspective, organizations can gain a competitive advantage through a unique combination of resources, with people being the most important asset (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). By linking employee behaviors to brand values, the internal brand is recognized as a new phenomenon and important for universities in the increasingly competitive market these days (Whisman, 2009). Competition drives universities to focus on clarifying and developing their brands, internally to externally.

Brand behavior and brand management of the university management

According to Vallaster and Chernatony (2005), the leaders of the entire organization play an important role in branding and are responsible for determining and promoting the organizational brand identity and encouraging the connection between employee behaviors and the desired brand identity. Leaders can influence internal branding by initiating and facilitating behavior changes that align with the desired brand. Leaders are capable of affecting behavior changes consistent with brand-supporting behaviors.

Forming brand behaviors for leaders in the university starts with strengthening brand-oriented leadership. Because brand-oriented leadership is considered an important role for an organization, first of all, leadership should be focused on strengthening at all university levels, starting with the highest leadership one. It is implemented not only by continuously communicating the vision and promise of the university brand, but also by "living with the brand". Only in this way can leadership really be enhanced. As a result, subordinate leaders will also have a coherent vision, beliefs, and the same guidance.

Level of interest of employees in the university and internal branding

Vallaster and Chernatony (2005) emphasize the role of employees in communicating the brand's promises if necessary and that such behaviors can lead to a competitive advantage. Therefore, the ideas about brand experience actually have potential in university branding. Punjaisri and Wilson (2007) also state that the success of the corporate brand "relies largely on employees' attitudes and behaviors in making the brand promises to external stakeholders." Employees make a brand promise naturally, which potentially makes better performance. However, for their employees to deliver on their brand promises, organizations should ensure that their employees understand 'what the brand stands for' and 'why it is special and unique'. This suggests that brand representation and distinctiveness can be used to describe brand values. Therefore, in order to enable university employees to provide the brand's promises to learners, the brand values should be clearly understood. The internal university brand can also be considered as a process of aligning the employee behaviors with the university's brand identity.

Brand management is based on identity, focusing on the role of employees in ensuring the consistency of the university's brand identity. Identity is a trait, purpose, and value that expresses a sense of individuality and differentiates the organization in a competitive environment. It is developed to fulfill the organization's values, overall mission, and vision. Brand values and the communication of brand values to employees to align their understanding of them are the main emphasis of the internal brand. The internal brand is to promote the brand to employees and educate them about the university brand values. The employees of the university must be informed of the core brand values and understand them ideally in order to live with and reproduce the value from their actions and interactions. Therefore, internal branding activities in the university must communicate the values of the university brand: those inherent in the brand's mission and vision; the university's values, and core values in the development of the university. These will be constantly reminiscent of the brand identity. The greater the brand value and the employee value are, the more consistent the employees' attitudes and behaviors are with the brand promises of the university so that the employees behave consistently with the efforts to create a brand image. Internal branding is important in universities because its purpose is to educate and train employees to promote the brand values of the university where they are working. It can shape the employees' behaviors mainly by assuming when the employees understand and commit to brand values, they will perform in ways consistent with the learners' expectations of the university's brand. Therefore, universities should recognize the importance of employee values and motivate

employees to understand these values to guide learners appropriately. Ideas should be meaningful so that employees can truly live with the brand in their lives. In addition, developing the university culture and establishing the internal brand and internal communication channels to ensure the objectives and strategies of brand development are understood and supported by the employees and learners in the university. Also, their feedback is collected to finalize the university brand strategy. Universities must be aware of the risk of competition, and loss of market share of potential learners if there is no solid long-term brand.

Competitiveness with other universities (Size, Training capacity, and Training results of the university)

In the conversations, most of the interviewees commented that although marketing was a factor prioritized for implementation by most universities at present, it was not the only solution to develop the university brand. When the university management considers using marketing activities to attract students, they often think of well-presented advertisements, leaflets or brochures, and activities attracting potential learners. Certainly, that is not the right attitude. Marketing in practice must fulfill consumer expectations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2009; Keller, 2008). In that significance, the university needs to satisfy its learners by creating an educational experience. Obviously, pure marketing campaigns conducted by universities are not enough to address the need for a long-term overall campaign to develop and maintain the brand values. The production of educational services requires introducing people (academics, administrators, and students); processes, and material exhibits (facilities, teaching and entertainment materials, etc.) on the grounds of tuition, location, training programs, and support services. It is identified that the secondary factors (additional services) are directly related to the educational experience. The core factor (core services) is the learning experience that is co-created with learners. In the process of co-creating service results, learners are assigned two roles: the first is a “source of productivity” and the second is a “contributor” to quality, value, and satisfaction. Core services in education cannot be fully performed without additional services. Basically, a university with a large scale and long history will have an advantage in developing its brand. The large scale will help it to have voluntary “communicators” who are its students, their friends, and parents. Numerous alumni (especially successful alumni) will also be a useful force in developing the brand of the university.

The two prerequisites for making a brand popular are quality and people. Therefore, for university brands, in addition to leaders who are interested in brand development, a strong force of students and alumni as communicators, and excellent brand development plans, training quality always comes first if the university wants its brand to be in the position of “trust”, “high quality” in the minds of students and social members. Thus, the competitiveness of the university has a great impact on creating the overall brand value. Universities should focus on improving their competitiveness, i.e., expanding the size and improving training capacity and results. This should be done first, before focusing too much on brand marketing programs.

Awareness of the university brand by learners, parents, and society

In the context of increasingly competitive higher education, universities face significant challenges in admissions. It is only the beginning of a long-term relationship that higher education institutions should establish for students during their studies and after their graduation. The university’s management of the relationship with students and their perceptions of the university brand can impact student engagement with the university, thereby shaping students’ intentions to participate in the university’s future activities. The quality of experience and prestige serve as the first factor influencing the selection and admission to a higher education institution before students can begin to form personal and closer views of the brand. On the other hand, potential students cannot assess the quality before admission, and the assessment of prestige becomes more and more difficult, especially for universities in Vietnam. Thus, brands can provide a baseline measure of criteria to help students make decisions about choosing a university (Jevons, 2006). The mission of the universities is to raise brand awareness of learners and their parents and to show responsibility for the community and society in order to have positive influences.

Universities should establish their brand identity which influences learners’ and parents’ perceptions, enhances the university’s standing in society, and shows responsibility to the community. With the huge amount of information available to students today, the competition between universities has never been more intense. As the number of people attending universities grows, everyone is looking for the advantage of getting their desired career. As a result, they need to choose the right university for them. It is important to ensure the university stands out to attract students successfully. The brand is now an essential part of the marketing strategy for any university, especially for private universities in Vietnam. Establishing a strong identity is the best way to attract students because it strengthens any

advertising message and promotes differentiation among other universities, being “unique” or “different” or “suitable for students.” The university brand marketing should be specific and affect the recipients’ perception of exactly what makes that university the perfect destination for students. Accordingly, the university should have a strong brand identity. It is necessary to consider what will influence the fundamental perception of the university’s brand among students, parents, and society.

Universities should consider all the points that help the university marketing to successfully deliver its own brand identity and accurately reflect what the university offers. This honesty and openness are the best way to attract new students and will set the university apart from popular referral signs and advertising strategies.

Regulations, documents, and policies of the university on brand management

Most of the leaders of the interviewed universities confirmed that they did not have regulations on brand management in their university; while admitting this is necessary. Formulating a legal corridor is a significant factor in any management activity. For example, the legal corridor initiates the branding process by giving autonomy to universities, which is taken into account in legal documents on education. The implementation of university autonomy will give more options for universities to establish their own brand and compete with other universities in the world in the current extensive integration. In the revised Law on Higher Education valid from July 1st, 2019, the adjustments and supplements are considered quite timely and adequately tackle the problems for Vietnamese education.

Most interviewees reported that their university was not really interested in brand policies, especially the brand management and image identification policies, and procedures that apply to all forms of promotion and any materials with the university logo or nameplate (or official documents), including materials produced for internal and/or external circulation. The legal corridor in the university will help the brand management to perform properly and be the basis for the implementation of activities. Some issues need to be specifically addressed in writing to help the university run its brand management activities properly and effectively. The legal document sets out the university’s policy on its brand identity and image in order to protect its image, prestige, and visual identity; provides a framework to enhance and expand its brand and image identification; ensures a consistent approach to applying the brand values to the visual identity of the university brand; helps its employees and suppliers maintain a consistent, high-quality visual brand identity in target markets and the wider community; guides the development of promotional and other materials both in writing and the university’s brand image; protect the use of brands related to the university.

Branding budget

5/7 universities admitted that they often do not have a clear budget for branding activities; which is completely spontaneous - work as much as you can spend. A university brand development program implemented with a large budget will basically be more effective than one with a limited budget. The large budget allows the university to fully invest in brand identity factors, develop a more diversified brand identity system and use a stronger communication system, ensuring more power for the brand development process.

Currently, universities have concentrated their budgets on marketing activities in the admission battle, mainly through digital advertisements and social networks, and high schools, to directly attract potential learners. Advertising contributes to one of the major expenditures, then admission cooperation with specialized units in charge of seeking admission sources (usually from 1 million to 7 million VND - depending on each admission sector) and face-to-face promotion in high schools. The employees in the university’s marketing teams take on a variety of responsibilities, including admissions, access to schools, interaction with alumni, website administration, etc. Both financial and human resources directly involved in university brand management are limited and not synchronized from the top down.

These universities have operated effectively with different scales of students, which means that marketing budgets will vary greatly among these institutions. The exact determination of target audiences, expenditure from the budget, and growth targets can help determine the budget. Actively reviewing operating and annual expenses helps provide a more accurate model on which future budgets are based. A better understanding of marketing budgets can help universities determine where they are and where they want to be. Once they have the basic budget analysis, universities can identify activities to improve. Are they aimed at attracting new students or achieving better market share? Should the university refresh the old marketing strategies or completely change into a new brand? Clear

answers to these questions will stipulate implementing marketing and will enable universities to set the organization's objectives in future advertising.

Branding movement of universities

Discussing this, university leaders said that in recent years, the brand building movement has taken place strongly, especially in the block of private universities. In the current market economy in our country, universities are also influenced by the rules of the market mechanism, especially the law of supply and demand, the law of value, etc. Universities must meet the needs of all economic sectors of the national economy for human resources and meet the people's learning needs. To achieve these objectives, universities must be truly autonomous in training. The policy of granting autonomy to universities is also a natural planning solution. In particular, each university must actively study the market because it has its own segment and accordingly must adjust the contents, syllabi, and majors. To attract learners and affirm their position in society, universities should establish and develop their own brand, manage it, and create their own identity. Following that trend, non-public universities are empowered to be active and flexible in finance to make full use of their potential. They must compete with public universities (more and more modes of training) and non-public ones to attract students. This competitive process proves which universities have quality, prestige, impression, and trust from parents and students. Quality, reputation, distinctiveness, and societal trust are integral parts of building the university's brand. Establishing and developing brands is becoming more and more essential for universities.

The university brand is the synthesis of the level of affirmation and public awareness of the university, accumulated step by step throughout the university's development. When they are autonomous and manage the brand, the universities will actively control and orient the activities of seeking admission sources and planning long-term financial investment. Most universities are gradually becoming aware of the power of branding which is very valuable in the strategy of building and developing universities. Therefore, they are constantly developing their brands, especially when they are granted autonomy today. This context allows them to step up their investment of resources to develop their brands.

History of development, structure, and development-oriented strategy of the university

In fact, many universities establish their brands from the values accumulated over a long process, resulting from the development process with numerous achievements. However, some brands are established by spectacular, synchronous breakthroughs, and others are known for their outstanding and unique products. Historical factors play a critical role in establishing and developing a university brand. For long-standing universities, their historical value is a priceless asset that they always would like to include in their brand image. Basically, the history of a university is often seen as a measure of its quality and prestige. However, academics and inactivity are the opposite sides of a long-standing university's image. Therefore, new universities often take advantage of this weakness and build a novel, young, dynamic brand image to attract learners.

A university determining its strategy and development orientation to reach the level of conventional international education will also adjust its brand identity factors to be more international. The university structure plays a decisive role in choosing the brand structure. Single-disciplinary universities often opt for a single brand development structure. Meanwhile, large, multidisciplinary universities tend to choose brand structures under the Mother-Child model. However, the child brands are still "under control" and are often subject to the brand identity standards prescribed by the mother brand.

4.2. Discussion

In this study, we conducted interviews with 23 leaders from the selected private universities in Hanoi, 2 press representatives and 2 enterprises to investigate the factors influencing brand management in the higher education sector. The discussions revolved around various key factors, including: (1) human resources responsible for brand-related activities, (2) brand-building behavior and brand management capabilities of university leaders, (3) the level of faculty and staff engagement and internal brand building, (4) competitiveness in terms of scale, training capacity, and educational outcomes, (5) stakeholders' perceptions of university brands, including students, parents, and the wider society, (6) institutional regulations, policies, and documents pertaining to brand management, (7) budget allocation for brand-building activities, (8) the branding movement within universities, and (9) the historical development, structure, and strategic orientation of the universities under study.

Through the interviews, we gained valuable insights into the brand management practices and challenges faced by private universities in Hanoi. The findings suggest several important implications for university administrators.

Firstly, the role of human resources dedicated to brand management emerged as a critical factor. Effective brand management requires skilled and knowledgeable personnel who can effectively strategize, communicate, and implement brand initiatives. University leaders need to prioritize the development and training of their staff members to enhance their brand management capabilities.

Secondly, the study highlighted the significance of leadership behavior in brand building and brand management. University leaders play a crucial role in setting the vision, values, and strategic direction of the institution's brand. Their commitment, engagement, and ability to inspire others are essential for building a strong and cohesive brand identity.

Furthermore, faculty and staff engagement emerged as a crucial element in internal brand building. Creating a sense of belonging and fostering a positive brand culture among employees can significantly contribute to brand reputation and image. University administrators should actively involve faculty and staff in brand-related activities and promote a shared understanding of the institution's brand values and goals.

Moreover, the study shed light on the importance of understanding stakeholders' perceptions of university brands. Institutions must continually assess and monitor students' and parents' expectations, as well as the broader society's perceptions of the brand. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and focus groups, can help universities stay attuned to stakeholder needs and adapt their branding strategies accordingly.

Additionally, the study revealed the significance of institutional regulations, policies, and documents in guiding brand management efforts. Clear guidelines and well-defined procedures can provide a framework for brand consistency and ensure that brand-related activities align with the institution's overall mission and values.

Furthermore, financial resources dedicated to brand-building activities were found to influence the effectiveness and scope of brand management initiatives. Universities should allocate sufficient budgets to support branding efforts, including marketing campaigns, website development, and other promotional activities, to enhance brand visibility and recognition.

Lastly, the branding movement within universities and the historical development, structure, and strategic orientation of the institutions were found to shape brand management practices. Understanding the unique contexts and trajectories of each university can help identify best practices and tailor branding strategies to suit their specific needs and goals.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that several factors have a significant impact on brand management in private universities in Hanoi. The factors that emerged as strong influencers include the leadership capabilities of university administrators, enhancing competitive capabilities, and institutional policies regarding brand building: Firstly, the leadership capabilities of university administrators play a crucial role in brand management. Effective leaders possess the vision, strategic thinking, and communication skills necessary to drive brand development and create a brand-oriented culture within the institution. Their ability to inspire and mobilize stakeholders towards a unified brand vision is vital in establishing a strong and differentiated brand identity. Secondly, enhancing competitive capabilities is imperative for effective brand management. Private universities must strive to differentiate themselves from competitors by offering unique programs, innovative teaching methods, and state-of-the-art facilities. The ability to provide quality education and deliver measurable outcomes that meet the demands of students and employers is paramount in establishing a strong brand reputation. Lastly, institutional policies pertaining to brand building play a significant role in shaping brand management efforts. Clear and comprehensive policies that outline the brand's values, guidelines for brand representation, and mechanisms for maintaining brand consistency are essential.

After the discussions on the factors affecting brand management in universities, the research team proposed the interviewees give some recommendations on implementing brand management activities at universities. The following are some of the recommendations synthesized by the research team:

Firstly, the legal system, policies, and action programs on university brands should be improved. There should be a consistent policy and guidelines at all levels to develop university brands. Not only is it a National Brand Program, but the State needs to develop long-term and coherent policies and action programs to help establish a

strong university brand for key training sectors under the country's development orientation, facilitating access and benefits for universities.

Secondly, the role of branding support from the societies and associations of universities and colleges should be strengthened. They should promote close cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Training to promptly keep up with the information on laws, state policies, and national action programs and coordinate organizing programs to help establish the university brand. Gathering experts with experience in the field of branding and brand protection, introducing and providing information to universities to connect with domestic and foreign organizations in terms of training cooperation, and seeking projects to enhance training capacity to promote brand development should be carried out.

Thirdly, the awareness and capacity of human resources in charge of branding at universities should be raised. First of all, the university management must update the knowledge of branding and brand development to be fully capable of determining the appropriate development orientation for their university brand. Universities should proactively re-organize their employees in charge of brand management to be professional and efficient, provide training for them to increase their knowledge and skills in university branding, and encourage creativity at work to take initiatives or promote the brands effectively.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of brand management in the context of private universities in Hanoi. The findings highlight the importance of human resources, leadership behavior, faculty and staff engagement, stakeholder perceptions, institutional regulations, financial resources, and the unique characteristics of each university in shaping effective brand management. Future research could explore additional factors influencing brand management and examine the long-term impact of brand management practices on university performance and reputation.

5. CONCLUSION

The success or failure of branding is influenced by internal factors in universities. Human resources play an important role in supporting the branding process, including those who directly manage and are in charge of branding and all employees and learners in the university. If they have an interest in and understanding of the objectives and policies of the university brand, there will be a favorable effect on branding efficiency. In particular, the role of leaders is significant in forming support channels within the university. In addition, university branding movements are also a driving factor for branding at each university. Policies supporting brand development and laws on brand protection are important factors in promoting the university branding process.

The process of establishing and developing brands in private universities in Hanoi is influenced by many factors, but the factors initially identified from the face-to-face interviews show that the factors with the strongest influence are Management capacity of the university management staff, Competitiveness enhancement, and Policies on university branding. This requires empirical research to measure the most dominant factors in the process of establishing and developing a university brand. Accordingly, universities can plan the most effective brand management activities, which is also the purpose of Phase 3 to understand the factors affecting university brand management activities in Vietnam.

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