

Using a Brand Identity Index for Relevancy In Teaching Collegiate Marketing

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In this age of micromarketing and integrated marketing communications there is greater need for brand identity along with a distinctive competitive advantage. This situation is significant for collegiate organizations, i.e. universities and colleges. It begins or is uncovered by simply asking students who attend a college or a university: “what is your occupation?” Typically, and all too frequently, the common response is: “I am a college student or I go to college”. Responses such as these indicate an absence of association (e.g. brand identity) with a collegiate institution where the respondent is a student. As a student-faculty collaborative project related to an undergraduate international marketing course a self-administered questionnaire survey of 200 students at a private university was done to measure what level of brand identity existed here among students. It represents a relevant situation that a marketing professor may use to advantage to demonstrate the challenges and issues associated with creating, designing, and establishing a brand identity for a collegiate institution or service organization. This is no simple task, but by using available resources in the literature it is approachable in ways that add relevancy to marketing course experiences while illustrating applications of significant concepts, namely brand identity, brand equity, brand image, and brand position. Additionally, some documentation for assurance of learning requirements is derived by accomplishing such collaborative projects as course requirements. A resultant student brand identity index with related data and experiences offers enhanced relevancy of marketing course activities for students, i.e. to assess their individual level of brand identity (aka commitment to) with their college or university.

INTRODUCTION

In this age of micromarketing and integrated marketing communications there is greater need for brand identity along with a distinctive competitive advantage. This has significance for marketing professors who strive to bring relevancy to foster growing enthusiasm among students in their courses. A means for doing the latter is a common situation that exists at many collegiate institutions. It begins or is uncovered by simply asking students who attend a college or university: “what is your occupation?” Typically, and all too frequently, the common response is: “I am a college student or I go to college”. Responses such as these indicate an absence of

association or commitment (e.g. brand identity) with a collegiate institution where the respondent is a student. This reflects an inability of the respective college or university to establish a brand identity and to successfully convey this to their students. Here is a matter of insufficient brand equity, i.e. the collegiate institution's name fails to convey adequate perceived assets which generate "value". Given that there are 4200+ collegiate institutions in the United States, ample reasons for developing a brand identity among student populations are evident. The collegiate education industry is essentially a fractured marketplace for most colleges and universities, especially private institutions which are about 70% of the total for higher education institutions, and mostly small (approximately 60%) with less than 1000 students! This factor alone makes most of these private institutions "tuition dependent". Customer relationship management is critical for collegiate institutions due to factors, such as student enrollment, retention and matriculation rates. By establishing a brand identity, a collegiate institution may do a lot to remedy and improve these rates. Here is a relevant situation that a marketing professor may use to advantage to demonstrate the challenges and issues associated with creating, designing, and establishing a brand identity for a collegiate institution or service organization. This is no simple task, but by using available resources in the literature it is approachable in ways that add relevancy to marketing course experiences while illustrating applications of significant concepts, namely brand identity, brand image, and brand equity.

RELEVANT BRANDING PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS

Here, *brand identity* is a combination of many factors, in the name, logo, symbols, design, packaging and performance of a product or service as well as the image or types of associations that come to mind when consumers think about a brand. It encompasses the entire spectrum of consumers' awareness, knowledge, and image of the brand as well as the organization behind it. It is the sum of all points of encounter or contact that consumers have with the brand; and it extends beyond the experience or outcome of using it.¹ In this instance, the objective is to assess how students think about and/or relate to the name (brand name) of the college or university that they attend. It is important to note that the objective is to create a desired brand image (brand-as-an institution/organization name). But, image is how your college name is perceived, while a brand identity is how you desire or seek this college or university name to be perceived. These factors, i.e. brand image versus brand identity, are both many times misunderstood and/or are not correlated in ways that are useful and telling for building brand equity together with elevating a college's image!

Brand equity is the value of a brand's overall strength in the market.² It (brand equity) is a set of assets divided into major categories:

- A. Brand Name Awareness
- B. Brand Loyalty
- C. Brand Quality
- D. Brand Associations
- E. Brand Relationships

Brand Name Awareness: How well known is this collegiate institution, i.e. on a local, regional, national, or international basis within relevant populations?

Brand Loyalty: How many students who have attended this collegiate institution accept its value proposition and will recommend it to others?

Brand Quality: How much perceived value does the collegiate institution's name convey to students, parents, educators, counselors, and the higher education marketplace?

Brand Associations: How well are the assets which support brand equity linked with the collegiate institution's name and/or symbol?

Brand Relationships: How are channel relationships, e.g. high schools and college preparatory schools, attached or connected to the collegiate institution?

For example, a higher brand identity among student populations is more likely if the name of a collegiate institution is well respected/regarded, is well known for academics, for achievements, for athletics, i.e. depending upon the scope and extent of same on a local, regional, national, and/or international basis. This is reflected in the level of brand identity that is attained in the respective market. Establishing and maintaining brand identity and brand equity necessitate the creation of well-known brands which have strong, favorable, and unique associations in the mind of the consumer.³ In regard to many collegiate administrators, faculty, staff and students, such concepts as brand equity and brand identity may hold little or no meaning or value. However, a simple self-assessment exercise applied to current students who are enrolled in their respective collegiate institution may do a lot to alter their thinking here. It will also illustrate that there is a cost effective and efficient means for addressing issues which affect student enrollment, retention, matriculation, and which fosters alumni loyalty to their alma mater. This latter factor surely is a major concern for viability and for vitality of any college or university.

A METRIC FOR ESTIMATING BRAND IDENTITY FOR COLLEGIATE ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational commitment is a critical issue for determining both behavior and performance of members of an organization⁴, i.e. whether a business, a government agency, or an educational institution, such as students at a college or university. It has been defined as an individual's emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in a particular organization. A high level of commitment can induce a similar level of member loyalty (e.g. brand identity) and may induce *competitive advantage*--- i.e. *derived brand equity*.⁵ Loyal members are more likely, (a) to become long tenure, (b) to be more well-versed and competent in work practices, and (c) to be better motivated to vigorously pursue improving their performance. Clients or customers prefer to deal with knowledgeable professionals who know their organization's offerings and are able to both readily and consistently deliver customer-friendly values. In the same regard, students who are able to sense on a first-hand basis how marketing concepts, such as brand identity and brand equity, apply to themselves are more likely to better understand and to appreciate more the functions of marketing. Plus, this exposes them to problems and issues related to their current collegiate attitudes and experiences.

In the instance of an educational organization, such as a college or university, there are constant efforts to retain students once enrolled, to deliver consistently effective educational programs, and to elicit loyalty both as a student and, especially, as an alumnus! Ability to assess the organizational commitment of students may in many ways foretells a college's or university's success rate with students--their retention, performance, scholarship, involvement,

and loyalty. Knowledge about student academic commitment (i.e. brand identity for a collegiate institution) ought to be both desired and valuable for administration, faculty, and staff of any university or college! It may also be a revelation to students which explains, in part, why a student has enthusiasm or lacks same for academic tasks and/or for activities of collegiate life at their respective college or university.

Commitment to an organization is related to factors, such as humanitarian values, effective communication, trust, and involvement.⁶ Humanitarian values are shown by grade forgiveness programs, by plain language statements of degree program merits, by evident university commitment to promoting student success (e.g. due to peer-based mentoring of student progression through graduation), and consistent and accessible student support agencies. Effective communication is displayed through clear, simple terms, and by readily understood documents and forms which students have to read and use to fulfill educational tasks, such as registration, application for financial aid, or course changes. Trust is seen and witnessed by students when dealing with administrators, faculty, and staff which convey an honest and straightforward attitude that results in positive student perceptions. Student involvement is forthcoming when incentives are evident for such due to apparent educational, social, recognition benefits which accrue from participating in various university activities, such as fraternal groups, competitive team sports, service organizations, and honor societies. Thus, there are many reasons to have a sense of the level, type, and strength of commitment to their college or university that exists among students. The metrics of such commitment translates into a *brand identity index* measure which students will be able to relate to, and to measure their own level of commitment (i.e. brand identity) with their respective collegiate institution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A study of organizational commitment (i.e. brand identity) among students enrolled in a college or university is as important or is as relevant as commitment levels of employees who work for a company. By using a reliable organizational commitment questionnaire/instrument (Exhibit I) from the literature⁷, measures of both *affective* and *continuance* commitment may be obtained. *Affective commitment* refers to a student's identification with, emotional attachment to, and involvement with a college or university, i.e. an organization. *Continuance commitment* derives when students believe that they are better off, or it is in their best interest to stay with their current college or university. Therefore, estimates of both affective and continuance associations (identity) with a university may be obtained and a brand identity index measure derived from same. This may be replicated in successive academic years to track development of brand identity among students.

A student-faculty collaborative research project was done to measure brand identity for a university among students as a requirement for an undergraduate course in international marketing. It employed a self-administered questionnaire survey with a quota sample of 200 students (100 international and 100 domestic students) at a 130 year old private university. This survey was done on campus over an 8-week period. The chosen sample size was sufficiently large to derive an adequate 'N', served as a control measure in the survey procedure, and facilitated both compilation and analysis of data. Every effort was made to solicit a broad array of students in all areas of study and among all classes--freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate students. The international student population numbered about 300 who were from 32 different countries, while domestic students (about 2700) mostly came from four eastern States

in the USA. This situation offered an opportunity to make an analysis of both domestic student and international student commitment (i.e. brand identity) with the university. It also was quite relevant to a course in international marketing, e.g. to illustrate possible influence of culture on student perspectives and values for collegiate education.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A scoring method that was used for interpreting questionnaire responses (Exhibit II in Appendix) will yield indicators of the level of each form of organizational commitment (i.e. brand identity) among students which in this case is a university. Sum values of responses to individual items in the questionnaire (Exhibit III in Appendix) were as follows:

EXHIBIT I DOMESTIC VERSUS INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SCORES

Statement Item	D	I
(1) a. I would be very happy to complete the rest of my education at this University.	5.8	5.9
(2) b. One of the difficulties of leaving this University is that there are few alternatives for me.	3.5	5.2
(3) c. I really feel as if this University's problems are my own.	0.9	5.2
(4) d. Right now, staying enrolled at this University is a matter of necessity as much as desire.	4.5	4.9
(5) e. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this University. *	3.0	4.7
(6) f. It would be hard for me to leave this University right now even if I was able to.	4.4	4.3
(7) g. I do not feel emotionally attached to this University. *	3.5	5.1
(8) h. Too much of my life would be interrupted if I decide to move to a different University	4.7	4.6
(9) i. I do not feel like part of the "family" here at this University. *	3.2	5.3
(10) j. I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this University.	3.3	4.3
(11) k. This University has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	4.5	4.2
(12) l. If I had not already put so much of myself into this University, I might consider completing my education elsewhere.	3.9	4.5

*Reverse value scale item, i.e. SA = 1, MA = 2, Slightly A = 3, N = 4, Slightly D = 5, MD = 6, SD = 7.

reflected in changes in student enrollment, retention, matriculation, and loyalty, e.g. survey incoming 1st year students to develop a base measure for the Brand Identity Index.

Additionally, given that this project was done as a student-faculty collaborative project to fulfill partial requirements of an undergraduate course in International Marketing, the experience gives students a first-hand exposure (a) to primary marketing research, (b) to cultural influences on perception and behavior of students, and (c) to relevancy of marketing principles and concepts to their collegiate experience. This illustrates how students relate to (identify with) the university that they attend. The project described herein may be duplicated at any university or college to assess brand identity of students with their respective collegiate institution. Today's collegiate environment requires greater use of pedagogy which elicits direct involvement of students in gathering, processing, and assessing primary data to better appreciate research as a significant and integral element of collegiate life, and particularly marketing studies.

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www.ed.gov National Center for Educational Data, Table 224.

APPENDIX

EXHIBIT II SCORING PROCEDURE FOR ASSESSING QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES**

Scoring Key for Assessing Commitment Scale:

For statement items:

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12

Strongly Agree = 7

Moderately Agree = 6

Slightly Agree = 5

Neutral = 4

Slightly Disagree = 3

Moderately Disagree = 2

Strongly Disagree = 1

For Statement Items:

5, 7, 9.

Strongly Agree = 1

Moderately Agree = 2

Slightly Agree = 3

Neutral = 4

Slightly Disagree = 5

Moderately Disagree = 6

Strongly Disagree = 7

$$\text{Affective Commitment Score (AC)} = \frac{_ + _ + _ + _ + _ + _}{(1) (3) (5) (7) (9) (11)} = \frac{_}{\text{AC}}$$

Score

Interpretation

>37

High level of Affective Commitment

32-36

Above average level of Affective Commitment

28-31

Average level of Affective Commitment

20-27

Below average level of Affective Commitment

< 20

Low level of Affective Commitment

High levels of *affective commitment* reflect affinity (e.g. identification) with this university.

$$\text{Continuance Commitment Score (CC)} = \frac{_ + _ + _ + _ + _ + _}{(2) (4) (6) (8) (10) (12)} = \frac{_}{\text{CC}}$$

Score

Interpretation

>32

High level of Continuance Commitment

26-31

Above Average level of Continuance Commitment

21-25

Average level of Continuance Commitment

13-20

Below Average level of Continuance Commitment

<12

Low level of Continuance Commitment

Low levels of *continuance commitment* reflect lack of attachment (e.g. desire to leave) this university.

**Derived from a sample of employees.

EXHIBIT III

This is a study of student views on their college experiences & preferences. It is being done as part of a class,

Please show how each statement below describes you?

Indicate your level of agreement to each statement

by marking a (x) to show your response

to the *right* of each statement:

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Moderately Agree</u>	<u>Slightly Agree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Slightly Disagree</u>	<u>Moderately Disagree</u>
[a.] I would be very happy to complete the rest of my education at this University...	()	()	()	()	()	()
[b.] One of the difficulties of leaving this University is that there are few alternatives for me.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[c.] I really feel as if this University's problems are my own	()	()	()	()	()	()
[d.] Right now, staying enrolled at this University is a matter of necessity as much as desire.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[e.] I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to this University.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[f.] It would be hard for me to leave this University right now even if I was able to.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[g.] I do not feel emotionally attached to this University.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[h.] Too much of my life would be interrupted if I decided to move to a different University...	()	()	()	()	()	()
[i.] I do not feel like part of the "family" here at this University.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[j.] I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this University.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[k.] This University has a great deal of personal meaning for me.....	()	()	()	()	()	()
[l.] If I had not already put so much of myself into this University, I might consider completing my education elsewhere.....	()	()	()	()	()	()

Please *CIRCLE* a response for each of the following:

Student Class: Freshmen Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate

Gender: Male Female **International Student:** Yes No

Age: 17-21 22-26 27-31 32-36 37 & older

Home Continent: AFRICA ASIA AUSTRALIA EUROPE CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICA NORTH AMERICA

College/School: Arts & Sciences Business Conservatory Education Health Professions Pharmacy

Thank you for your help with this project!