

## UNIVERSITY BRAND GOVERNANCE - WHAT IS ALL ABOUT?

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**Abstract:** The topic of brand management in the field of education has become an object of scientific research relatively recently in the 80s of XX century. Competition among universities goes on constantly - for financial flows or sympathy among rating agencies and analysts, for talented students and experienced teachers, for the attention of national and international media, political, economic and scientific organisations in their country and in the world. A strong brand is a guarantee of the successful development of the university. There are already many studies proving that a strong brand is a real competitive advantage and a source of value creation for institutions. The university brand development strategy and increasing the competitiveness of the university ensures its sustainable and progressive development. Branding is communication aimed at target audiences in order to communicate unique competitive advantages. The analysis of Western experience in the formation of the university brand has shown that branding is quite actively used in Western educational institutions as an effective mechanism for forming and improving the competitiveness of an educational institution, creating a strong reputation that strengthens the trust of employees and consumers. The formation of a successful brand and its effective management solves a number of tasks assigned to the university. In this article, the author explores issues related to the governance of the university brand in postnormal times.

**Key words:** Higher Education, management, university brand governance, effective management, postnormal times

### Introduction

Education is an integral part of human life, and is constantly in demand among the general public. In the modern world, getting a first-class education is prestigious and one of the most important components for creating a successful career, as well as for self-development and self-improvement. High-quality education has always been of great value, both for the individual and for the development of society as a whole (Skokova 2017). Only a good education can improve the quality of managerial, technological, design, engineering tasks, on the solution of which the development of mankind depends. Education and science are what create competitiveness and labour productivity. The specificity of higher education at the present stage is that it sets the standard of competitiveness, readiness to generate and introduce innovations in various spheres of life (Anichkin i in. 2015a). Radical transformations are taking place in the higher education systems of economically developed countries, associated with the crucial importance of universities for innovative development and economic growth and, as a result, leading to the prosperity of states and the growth of people's well-being. A modern university is not only a higher professional school focused exclusively on the development of science and vocational training; it is the core of society, the most important channel for the transfer of technology and knowledge; playing the role of innovation hubs within the national innovation system of the country (Atoyán & Kazakova 2002). This is an institution of society, the so-called University 3.0, which plays the role of an innovation centre in the economy of the state. From the very beginning of its existence, the university has been a significant, and currently the main social institution of society, therefore, in each socio-historical period there is its own socio-cultural model of the university, thanks to which its institutional significance for economic, political, social and spiritual development is preserved. Changes in the society of the XXI century have necessitated the search for new paradigms of university education that could meet the increased needs of industrial society. The development of higher education at the turn of the century indicates significant structural and institutional changes. Modern universities face a difficult task to preserve the role of the vanguard of knowledge dissemination; a new one is added to their traditional functions close connection with industry, business and government structures, technology

transfer, innovative enterprises and entire industries. This is how universities become educational and research centres that integrate new knowledge and innovative technologies that affect economic growth and increase the competitiveness of countries at the global level. This role of universities objectively takes them beyond the national framework. Current trends in higher education should be considered precisely in the context of globalisation and internationalisation of modern international life of society. Globalisation and internationalisation are two interrelated processes that lead to the transformation of universities into new forms of social practice (Anichkin i in. 2015b). In modern conditions, education is gaining more and more economic value, becoming a driving force for improving the efficiency and competitiveness of the national economy and a strategic resource for the development of the state. The educational policy of Uzbekistan is aimed at providing innovative quality education on the basis of preserving its foundational entity in accordance with the needs of the individual, society and the country.

In the last two decades, the governments of many countries, in particular the CIS have been chasing the creation of world-class universities. For many, the definition of "world-class university" is synonymous with the word "elite Western". In the late 90s, the term "world-class university" became an attractive phrase, not just denoting the improvement of the quality of education and research, but also, more importantly, the development of the ability to compete in the global market of educational services, through the acquisition, adaptation and creation of advanced knowledge. Students are currently striving to enrol in the best educational institutions economically available to them, and governments are interested in maximising the return on their investments in universities. In this regard, the recognition of an educational institution at the global level becomes a matter of concern for universities around the world (Williams and Van Dyke 2007). A university cannot proclaim itself a world-class university; elite status must be confirmed by the outside world on the basis of international recognition (Salmi 2009). According to Altbach's precise and concise observation, the paradox of a world-class university is that "everyone wants to create such a university, however, no one knows what it is, and no one knows how to get it" (Altbach 2004). It is not a mystery anymore, since to create a world-class University, the following key ingredients are needed: qualified teaching staff, academically talented students, superiority in research, high-quality international teaching standards, high level of funding and well equipped conditions (Tayeb 2016). In other words, to create a world-class university of high standards, a leader in the market of educational services, a conqueror of consumers, it is necessary to use marketing competently, create and govern a brand of a university, which should have a human-oriented approach, that are stakeholders. Competent-proper use of branding will help the university become a leading university with a competitive advantage. The topic of marketing educational services, not to mention branding of higher education institutions, is relatively new and undisclosed for Uzbekistan.

## Literature Review

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA): A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination thereof, designed to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to distinguish them from other sellers. The word "brand" means, on the one hand, the object through which a certain impression is formed, and on the other hand, the process of forming this impression (Ellwood, 2002). A brand is a set of associations that arise in the minds of consumers that add perceived value to a product or service (Keller 1998). Keegan (2002) defines brand as an indicator for the value of an organisation that might be a product or service, companies, persons, or even countries. Whereas Kapferer (2007) states that a brand is not a product, but it gives it a meaning and defines its distinctive features. Brands are not just products they now represent lifestyle (The Economist, Sept. 8, 2001). Brands have advanced over the years in an array of significant ways. Contemporary, refined branding is about progressively with a brand's Gestalt, with compiling and sustaining a blend of tangible and intangible values, which are related to consumers and characterise a brand from the other one meaningfully and appropriately (Room 1998). A brand in the modern sense is an image in the consumer's

mind, a set of impressions and associations, and this image allows the consumer to distinguish and choose a particular product. A brand is the embodiment in iconic and other forms of the key components of a stable positive image of an enterprise and/or products formed by market participants and a set of ideas, consumer expectations regarding this “branded” product (Meldebekova 2015). The key task of branding is to skilfully manage marketing communications to achieve the maximum coincidence of the designed and perceived brand images. If there are discrepancies between the planned image of the brand and its current perception, it is necessary to eliminate the causes of this gap. The company must coordinate its actions in order to either reduce the discrepancies between its own perception of the brand and its perception by consumers, or to pay special attention to those aspects of the brand that are most significant for the target audience (Chernatony 2007). Importance of brands is in the ability to communicate meaning which allow people to imbue their actions with a sense of added significance (Knowels 2001). Branding is a powerful marketing concept that does not just focus on one element of the marketing mix, but represents the result of a carefully comprehended range of activities which are difficult for competitors to emulate. A strategic perspective on branding has emerged, with firms beginning to recognise that they are sitting on valuable assets that need careful attention (Chernatony & McDonald 2000). Blackett (2003, p.23) has developed five keys, guidelines to good brand management: “protecting brand (elements of brand); honouring stakeholders (meeting customers' and employees' expectations); treating brand as an investment not as a cost (investing in advertising and marketing as well as new product development); exploiting the financial potential of brand (looking for opportunities of co-branding, licensing and franchising) and understanding that successful brand management nowadays is a complex task”. Sadly, the power of a brand is not recognized to a certain extent. “Whereas brands determine the price, liberate the company to create values for internal, external and investor customers, indicate a value of the firm's products and services. Thus, it is important to use, build and protect brands. It is the brand that will enable the company to avoid commodity-like trap” (Keegan 2002, p.24).

Branding substantially differs in the service sector. Here, the consumer often occupies a special place in the service company itself, in contrast to product branding, which does not know who the manufacturer of a particular brand is. In this regard, such a concept as a corporate brand plays an important role. The brand for the educational environment and its ecosystem is pivotal and plays a significant role, through the prism of the system of values, traditions, norms of an educational institution, provides maximum useful information, guaranteeing stable quality and a range of educational services to gain the trust and loyalty of consumers by creating stable, long-term, positive relationships with them (Narimanova 2021). In the field of service, it can be noted that the brand is mainly the reputation of the manufacturer. “It is formed on the basis of trust, which, in turn, is based on the satisfaction of the quality of service that exceeds the expectations of the consumer” (Lowrie 2018). Marketing experts say that if more than 20% of consumers positively evaluate a product, it can be called a brand. In other words, a brand is a personalised trademark that has been fixed in the minds of a significant part of the target audience. A brand is an image in the mind of a consumer, which is based on a product or service. And branding, respectively, is the process of designing this image. The point is to identify the unmet needs of customers and find a solution to this. This is how the values and advantages of the future brand are determined. A strong brand is an asset that is based on the relationship between the company and customers. Therefore, creating a brand is just as time-consuming and laborious as creating and maintaining relationships. Brand management is an activity that consists in constant analysis and search for means to improve the brand. The brand of the university is based on a variety of related phenomena such as the history of the university, key educational programs and their quality, the teaching staff, its traditions and scientific schools; students, its educational level and creative potential; the quality of management and management models. The brand of the university becomes strong due to the common values and identity shared by the university community; developed corporate culture; impeccable academic and corporate reputation; high standards of the educational process and

management; fame; high-quality communication system. The goals of building a strong brand of the university at the same time can be: increasing the competitiveness of the university in the local and international market educational space; increasing attractiveness for applicants; improving the image in the eyes of the authorities and partners; attracting additional sources of resources; improving the image of the university as an employer, which will contribute to the influx of the best professors, researchers, practitioners and experts. The key trends in university branding are: digital identity as the basis of the brand of a modern university; involvement of university community leaders, including students, in the development of branding programmes (Chechulin 2020, pp. 97-104).

If a university wants to meet the requirements of world standards and meet the demand of an international consumer, it is necessary to use marketing competently, create a brand of the university and, accordingly, effectively manage it. People-oriented right branding will ensure that a higher educational institution becomes a leading university with a competitive advantage not only in the local market, but also in the international educational arena.

## Methodology

The experience of marketing activities and brand promotion of a number of public, private, local and foreign universities was studied through personal interviews with heads of universities, heads of marketing departments, analysis of available official strategies for promoting universities, as well as Internet resources of universities. The purpose of the study is to explore the significance of university brand governance in the context of increased competition in the educational services market, intensified under the influence of the pandemic, and attempts to be flexible in post-normal times to achieve success in the long term. Scientific research methods such as general analysis and comparative methods were used in the work. The object of the study was the activities of local and international universities.

## Discussion

University Brand Management is the process that focuses on advancing the reputation of a University and reinforcing its holistic positive image via creation, development and promotion of the brand in the education market. *What about university brand governance?* and *What is the difference between university brand management and university brand governance?*

University brand management and university brand governance are related concepts but have distinct focuses and responsibilities. **University Brand Management** refers to the activities and strategies involved in actively managing and promoting a university's brand. It encompasses the day-to-day tasks and initiatives aimed at building, maintaining, and enhancing the university's brand reputation. This includes activities such as marketing campaigns, advertising, social media management, public relations, and other communication efforts. Brand management focuses on the tactical implementation of the brand strategy to create awareness, attract stakeholders, and shape the perception of the university. **University Brand Governance**, on the other hand, refers to the strategic oversight and management of a university's brand. It involves establishing policies, guidelines, and frameworks to ensure consistency, coherence, and alignment with the institution's values and goals. Brand governance focuses on the long-term management and protection of the brand, ensuring that it is effectively communicated and represented across all touch points. It involves setting brand standards, monitoring brand usage, training stakeholders, and making strategic decisions to safeguard and enhance the university's brand reputation. Here are some examples to illustrate the difference between university brand management and university brand governance Table 1.

*Table 1. Difference between university brand management and university brand governance*

| University Brand Management:  | University Brand Governance:  |
|---|---|
| 1. Developing and executing a marketing campaign to promote a new programme or initiative.  | 1. Establishing brand guidelines that outline the proper usage of the university's logo, colours, typography, and other visual elements.  |
| 2. Creating engaging content for social media platforms to increase brand visibility and engagement.                              | 2. Conducting regular brand audits to ensure consistency and compliance with brand standards across all university departments and units. |
| 3. Designing and producing promotional materials, such as brochures, flyers, and banners, to showcase the university's offerings. | 3. Developing a brand messaging framework that articulates the university's mission, values, and unique selling points.                   |
| 4. Conducting market research and competitor analysis to identify target audiences and develop targeted messaging.                | 4. Providing brand training and resources to faculty, staff, and student ambassadors to ensure consistent brand representation.           |
| 5. Collaborating with external partners, such as advertising agencies or media outlets, to amplify the university's brand reach.  | 5. Monitoring and enforcing brand usage to prevent unauthorised or inconsistent use of the university's brand assets.                     |

Source: Own work

Briefly, university brand management is concerned with the day-to-day implementation and promotion of the brand, while university brand governance is focused on the strategic management, oversight, and protection of the brand to ensure consistency, alignment with the institution's values and goals, and long-term success. Both aspects are important for building and maintaining a strong university brand.

### **Bolt from the blue ... Black Swan or Black Elephant**

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the flow of everyday life, causing the largest disruption of the educational process in history and had an almost universal impact on students and teachers around the world and on the work of educational institutions of all types, from preschool institutions to universities and advanced training centres (UN Indonesia 2020). In the field of higher education, where distance learning, in most cases, has taken the form of broadcasting recorded lectures and working with online platforms, some universities have suspended their work indefinitely due to the lack of information technology infrastructure for both students and teachers. The pandemic X-rayed all the flaws lurking in the higher education system. The balloon, which had been filled with problems for years, could not withstand the onslaught of the pandemic and burst revealing the unwillingness of either universities or teachers or students to make such changes. Almost total Information Technology illiteracy not only of teachers, but also of students, despite the fact that the latter are children of the 21st century, “born with phones in their hands”.

Apart from psychological difficulties that were common for all, there were other issues exposed by the pandemic that not all universities have successfully overcome, because not all were ready for it either technologically or methodically. Only those universities that strategically thought about their future and implemented modern educational technologies related to individual training sessions, project training and a modular system long before the pandemic found themselves in a more advantageous situation. COVID-19 practically forced everyone and everything to use and implement information technologies. Universities had to react in a state of “shock” and solve problems in order to fulfil their responsibilities



simply to continue their “existence”. Communication, work and just being online have become the norm. The world had changed overnight and people had to cope with new realities. The COVID-19 pandemic for all was like a bolt from the blue, so unexpected and crushing that seemed it was impossible to prepare for. Therefore when COVID-19 “unexpectedly” descended, initially some scientists put forward a verdict that the pandemic was a black swan (Arsenyev 2020). The term "black swan" came from the Latin expression *rara avis in terris, nigroque simillima cygno* - "a rare bird on earth like a black swan". This expression was used to characterise a rare or almost impossible event, until the end of the XVII century it was believed that swans are exclusively white (Idioms in five languages, n.d.). The term "black swan" entered the lexicon of risk management specialists in 2007, when Nassim Taleb's book (2007) of the same name was published, who used the image of a "Black Swan" as a metaphor for the fact that seemingly impossible events that no one, nothing, could ever even think of suddenly occur. This event, which appeared suddenly, had a great effect and was a surprise to experts. Yet, there were also those who believed that the pandemic was a Black Elephant (Big Ideas, n.d.). This is an event that is extremely likely and widely predicted by experts, either no one sees the black elephant, or they prefer to ignore it, when it finally happens, people try to pass it off as a black swan (DOUGALD HINE, May 1, 2010). Despite the divergent opinions of scientists in choosing a representative of the menagerie, for our part, we initially believed that the pandemic, at least in Uzbekistan, was originally a Black Elephant, which was caused by being ignored for a long time, not taken seriously, these were issues that had been accumulating for years, were brewing in the form of problems and when the time came, everything was highlighted, came out as it was. Regardless, the labels “Black Swan” or “Black elephant” COVID became a life changing reformer that no one “expected”.

Not only in Uzbekistan, but all over the world, even the most notorious world-class universities were not ready for the pandemic and its challenges, for a full transition to online education. Online education in Uzbekistan was surely a “Black elephant” that no one noticed or did not want to notice. Although there were who were proactive by creating a platform for online sessions, years and even a decade earlier. COVID forced educational systems not only to rethink their teaching methods, but also to start figuring out how they could start using technology in the best way, deal with IT illiteracy of teachers as well as students worldwide. In the modern world, it is more important than ever to have knowledge and competencies that will help to be effective and successful in an era of constant changes. Since University Brand Governance is about strategic long term development it also covers agility, how University can proactively evolve or promptly react and settle the possible issues and obstacles. In Uzbek we have a saying “*Bir xor bo'lgan, bir aziz bo'ladi*”, which means *once humiliated, will be appreciated once*. It totally suits online education which used to utterly not be popular in Uzbekistan. Many universities undoubtedly did know about the online approach, but did not pay attention, and strenuously ignored it without seeing the point. Despite the anti-online attitude, there were pioneers who were thinking about the future. If the institution is human-oriented, then intentionally or sometimes without realising the significance of their decisions, it can become a leader and a pioneer in its own way. In 2012, the Singapore Institute of Management Development in Tashkent became the first university in Uzbekistan that successfully organised and implemented online admission. Among the local universities, the Tashkent University of Information Technologies became the first to undertake its admission in online format in Uzbekistan. Their pilot document submission service was launched on the unified portal of interactive public services of Uzbekistan in 2016 (Gazeta.uz, June 28, 2016). To attract more applicants from all over Uzbekistan, increase their number, by providing them conditions for submitting documents remotely that would help applicants save time and money on travel expenses The Charitable Foundation of Education named after the first President of Uzbekistan in 2017 introduced to their target audience online admission as an option. The human-oriented approach, which was expressed in hybrid admission, gave its positive yields and entailed an increase of a number of applicants by 200%. As it was mentioned earlier, advanced educational institutions, which began using their own digital platform long before the

pandemic, were able to overcome this problem relatively easily. In 2015, the Academy of Public Administration of the Republic of Uzbekistan created its online platform for remote lectures. The only problem during the pandemic was the low and sometimes unstable Internet level in Uzbekistan. On the other hand, many universities were puzzled by the issue of distance learning “caused” by the pandemic and quarantine restrictions, but thanks to Zoom and Microsoft Teams platforms the issue of conducting classes and just communication was solved - education was “saved”. Although how well and quickly people, teachers or students were able to adapt as well as skillfully use these programmes was another issue. It is worth noting that there have been cases of lessons in the form of messages via WhatsApp messenger, as well as Telegram. Moreover, this phenomenon was usual and had been observed in both developing and developed countries (University World News, Nov. 14, 2020).

## Summary

Universities play a major role in the transformation of knowledge into human capital, participate in scientific research and the creation of innovations (Danchenko & Simchenko 2018). Historically, universities were an individual process of evolution and formation of a personality, a human. In the XX century, what we call the mass production and marketisation of education took place. This happened largely due to the growing demand for education, which, as a result, has become a conveyor belt. Today, training is still a production line, but already taking into account personal settings. This means that education strives to personify the educational process in the conditions of the mass character of the phenomenon itself. The attitude to higher education has changed a long time ago, a modern student needs flexibility, a broad outlook, hard and soft skills, a lot of things that lie beyond the first class or second class degree. In a rapidly changing world, people who foresee and are able to solve problems in conditions of turbulence while being able to maintain psycho-emotional stability will be needed. It should be taken into account that educational services are seasonal and long-term in nature, have a high level of uncertainty i.e. intangible, are characterised by the impossibility of resale and cannot be preserved i.e. perishable, are volatile in quality i.e. heterogeneous simply variable and cannot be separated from the providers i.e. inseparable (Regan 1963).

University brand management involves the day-to-day activities and initiatives aimed at promoting the brand, while university brand governance focuses on the strategic management, guidelines, and oversight to ensure consistency and alignment with the institution's values and goals.

Thanks to the Reformer-COVID-19, the world will never be the same again. The changes have affected all industries, the education system is also being rebuilt, the process has been launched. In order to prolong their existence and fully effective functioning, universities should draw conclusions and intensively implement changes. The first is to change the focus and make it human-oriented. Here we are talking not only about consumers-students, but also teachers and other employees of an educational institution, who are key pillars in the work of a university. The status and quality of a university will be based and shaped by the work of a faculty and administration of the university. One can't try to make a respectable, world class university without valuing, supporting and creating conditions for one's staff. Because unhappy and unvalued personnel will leave for the place where they will be appreciated and respected accordingly.

The number of universities in Uzbekistan is growing annually, thereby expanding the choice of higher education opportunities for potential consumer students. The growth in the number of universities has its advantages as well as disadvantages. If a growing number of universities met high quality benchmarks, it would promote growth and revolutionise the entire educational scenario in Uzbekistan. Yet, alas, due to the lack of universities meeting the expected norms, these new universities mostly have low standards. This is what leads to the destruction of any further prospects that could be expected from these universities. When the simple making money becomes on the agenda, leaving aside any goals of providing students with a standard quality education, an increase in the number of educational

institutions increases the cost of inconveniences. On the other hand, a competition should lead universities in the market to improve the quality of their educational programmes as well as their services, quality of management procedures and in general the efficiency of their universities in the pursuit of consumers. These all require competent governance. A qualified manager with the help of a holistic application of brand governance will be able to cope not only with the consequences of the pandemic, but also make a university positively popular, occupying high positions in the world rankings of higher education institutions. But most importantly, thanks to competent management, the university will train qualified specialists in demand for an era of instability and agility.

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