

University brand management as a strategy for innovative development

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Abstract. The study attempts to analyze the university brand management as a positioning strategy component in the international scientific and educational space, examines the relationship between the marketing and brand strategy of Rostov State Economic University (RINH). The purpose of the study is to determine the place of branding in the university innovative development strategy; to analyze the way branding affects the university attractiveness for foreign applicants and to present, using the example of RSUE practical experience, the influence of branding on the applicants motivation to study at a particular university. Considering scientific and theoretical approaches, we can note a multidimensional understanding such category as “branding”. At the same time, both foreign and Russian colleagues refer to common features: the opinion about the consumer brand, popularity and demand in the relevant market. Despite the pandemic and its negative consequences for educational migration, in 2021 RSUE confirmed and strengthened its position in the world and national rankings. Rostov State Economic University entered the top 401-600 best universities in the world in the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings 2021, took first place among universities in the South of Russia and entered the Top 20 universities in Russia. It seems that the formation of a general strategy of brand management and marketing of the university can be considered as an innovative practice of management of educational organizations and determines the policy of choosing the strategy of educational services as a specific product of the educational institution.

Keywords: brand, university strategy, scientific community, educational space, slogan, brand-bookings, export of educational services

1 Introduction

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1.1 Literature review

Having studied the works of Mathew Joseph [1], Belen Gutiérrez-Villar [2], Burak Özdemir [3], Roshan Bhadel [4], Nguyen Thu Huong [5], Zack Pedersen [6], Ivan Yunyk [7], Alam Waqar [8] we will be in a position to expose antecedents of brand image of a university and typologies of university brands through brand awareness and attractiveness.

The results indicated by Burak Özdemir that "intangible aspect of organizational image affects student loyalty positively. In that sense, it was suggested that intangible aspect of organizational image might provide competitive advantage to universities by enhancing student loyalty within the scope of resource-based theory" [3].

Nguyen Thu Huong base on the social identity theory and social exchange theory, focuses on "... the role of university identification from students' perceptions in university branding activities" [5].

In the article by Waqar Alam for the first time development of typology for university brands through brand knowledge and brand equity is considered [8].

The analysis of various definitions of the brand made it possible to identify the main concepts of branding used in further research.

According to Olesya Nefedova, "a brand is a combination of functional and emotional characteristics of a product or service existing in the mind of the consumer, which determine the individuality of this product or service, which, in its turn, stimulates consumer preferences of a certain category of people" [9].

On the other hand, Nguyen Thu Huong believes that "...branding as an independent direction of marketing is a continuous and purposeful activity of a company (organization) to form a positive public opinion that ensures a stable position in the market in an increasingly competitive environment, as well as the commercial and social effects of its activities" [10].

Vera Balabanova, based on the specifics of services, defines branding in the field of educational services as "... a set of techniques, methods and ways of bringing the developed university brand to the educational services consumer and forming the image of the university in ones mind to help the applicant in the perception of the distinctive features of the university" [11].

In this context, the university brand, in our opinion, is the expectation of educational services consumers to receive specific benefits as a result of studying in a particular specialty, including successful career growth, promotion, etc.

1.2 Hypotheses

H1: any brand has certain attributes (brand attributes) – functional or emotional advantages attributed to the brand by consumers and potential participants. "Brand attributes can be both positive and negative; they can have different strength and significance for different segments of the educational services market" [9].

H2: all brand attributes together make up the brand identity, which the organization believes expresses the core meaning of the brand and is a long-term promise to consumers.

H3: the formation of a general strategy of brand management and marketing of the university can be considered as an innovative practice of managing an educational organization.

1.3 The purpose and objectives of the study

Studying the relationship between branding, marketing of the university and the strategic goals of society and the presentation of praxeological aspects of the formation of strategies for innovative development of the university in the context of post-pandemic and digitalization.

Research objectives:

- analysis of the mutual influence of brand management and university marketing;
- determining the place of branding in the strategy of innovative development of the university;
- studying of the influence of branding on the attractiveness of the university for foreign applicants.

2 Materials and methods

The study used quantitative and qualitative methods, an analytical and thematic approach to data generalization.

Data collection methods: analysis of open sources of information, field research, surveys of foreign citizens studying at the university.

3 Results and discussion

The purpose of brand management is to analyze the instrumental base used to increase its effectiveness in promoting not only the brand of the university as a whole, but also structural units in the international scientific and educational space.

Brand identification includes the following components:

- positioning (Brand Positioning) – the place that the brand occupies in the minds of consumers of educational services and in relation to brands of other universities;
- attitude (Brand Attitude) to consumers in the market of educational services.

At any given moment, any brand has a certain Brand Image – a unique set of associations that are in the minds of consumers.

It is important to note that "...the brand image is something that is in the minds of educational services consumers" [12], while the brand identity is "...the way an educational organization sees a certain brand and how it seeks to convey to its target audiences" [13].

The tasks facing the university in the framework of the innovative development strategy:

1. To integrate the RSUE (RINH) and its structural divisions into the international scientific and educational space more active;
2. To increase the competitiveness of the faculties of the Rostov State Economic University (RINH) in the global scientific space;
3. To expand the geography of educational services exports, attract more foreigners to study in master's programs and postgraduate studies.

Analysis of university brand parameters and structural divisions:

1. Brand reputation (time parameters, place of the Rostov State Economic University (RINH) in the ranking of universities both in Russia and abroad, scientific communications of the university as a whole, individual faculties and the Institute of Master's)
2. Brand recognition (mention in the media, official website easy enough to find information, positioning in social networks)
3. Brand loyalty (alumni demand in the labor market, interaction with employers at the stage of preparation of final qualification works, positive feedback and

recommendations)

The most significant branding elements are shown in Fig. 1.

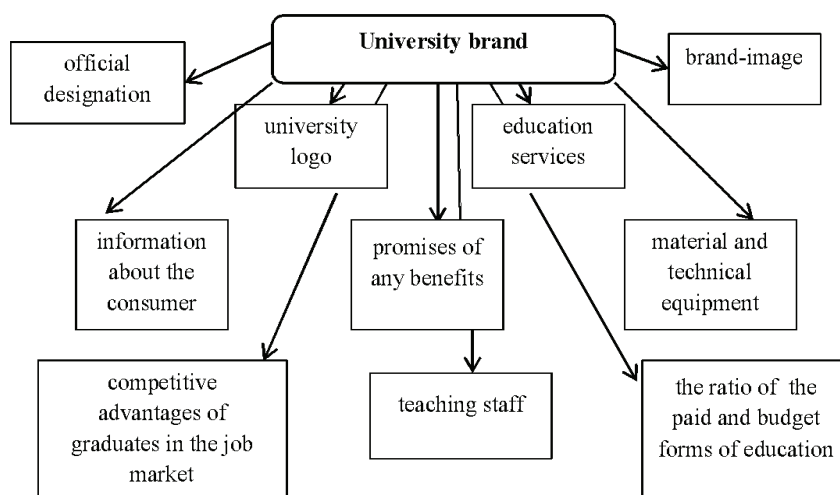


Fig. 1. Elements of the university brand.

On the website of the Rostov State Economic University, one can note the use of English-language Internet resources, which is an important factor in increasing the attractiveness of a regional university for foreign students, both in higher education and post-graduate studies.

477 foreign citizens from 31 countries of the world study at the Rostov State Economic University (RINH) in higher and secondary vocational education programs; some students are citizens of certain regions of Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk regions).

In order to correct the situation, in 2021 a set of measures was launched to increase the admission of foreign applicants, including the conclusion of cooperation agreements with educational and recruiting organizations, the promotion of the university digital brand via the Internet and at international fairs and exhibitions, the opening of a preparatory department for foreign citizens.

The English-language website of the Rostov State Economic University (RINH) is quite well developed on the technical side, but the branding of the faculties is not sufficiently represented. Perhaps this is the motivating factor for foreign applicants to enter the "economic" fields of training, which are historically traditional for the university.

Currently, out of 477 foreign citizens, 70% are studying in programs related to finance, accounting and consulting, industry and regional economics. Despite the fact that the faculties open and successfully implement the standards "Organization of work with youth", "HR management", "Business Administration", "Commodity science", etc.

It should also be borne in mind that an important component for attracting students from abroad is the scientific brand of the university, which includes not only the scientific image of the university as a whole, but also of individual structural units (Institute of Master's degrees, Faculties, Student Bureau, coordinating the scientific activities of young scientists).

Considering brand management, it is impossible not to touch upon the specifics of university marketing.

When choosing an education, the importance of the brand is of paramount importance, because the applicant first chooses the university brand and only second – the program that he enters at this university.

Relatively speaking, the university “sells” three things. Firstly, a certain value that the student, his parents, school teachers see and on the basis of which a decision is made. Secondly, the community. “You integrate into the community that will surround you for many years, you form your future social circle”. Thirdly, the university “sells” the emotion, the feeling “this is yours”.

If educational, career value is more important for parents and someone else from the applicant’s environment, whose opinion when choosing a university is significant for him, and in this case emotion affects his own choice. Therefore, it is possible and necessary to appeal to emotions when promoting a university brand.

The project budget can be replenished from several sources:

1. Own funds of the university
2. Budget financing
3. Attracting investors (both permanent partners – Commercial Bank “Center-Invest”, and from among graduates)

Planned expenses should be directed to:

- systematic updating of information on the website (on the implementation of new educational programs, startups, scientific and practical conferences);
- increase of the use of social networks for positioning an external brand;
- holding “summer schools” for citizens from abroad;
- conducting elective classes in Russian for foreign students and in foreign languages for teaching staff of the university;
- creation of the university brand-bookings, etc.

Based on the foregoing, we can say that within the framework of the strategy of innovative development, the university needs to improve its tools.

In our opinion, includes:

In our opinion, the brand promotion of individual structural divisions of the university includes the elements shown in Fig. 2.

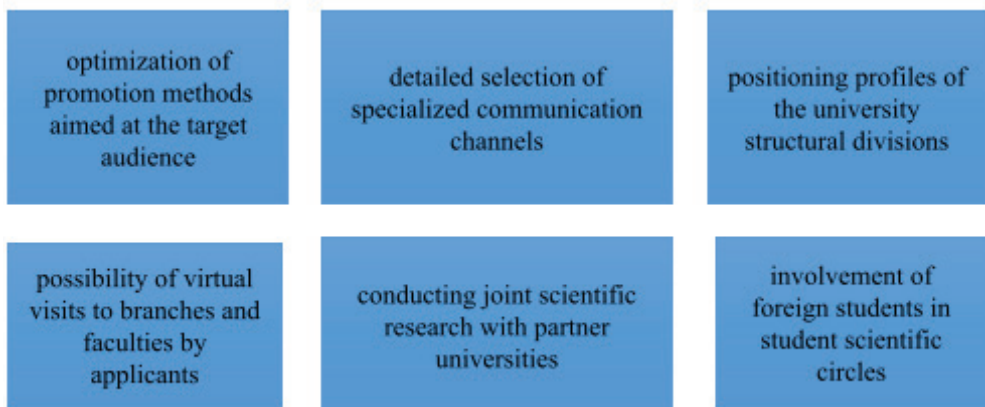


Fig. 2. The elements of the brand promotion of individual structural divisions of the university.

Management of the external brand of the university as a whole consists in the fact that brand management “...contributes to the growth of demand for the university both in the domestic market of educational services and abroad, levels out negative changes in a crisis

situation, allows to activate student mobility, develop and implement a double degree program" [14].

We consider it possible to refer to the predicted results of the project:

1. Annual expansion of the geography of exports of educational services Rostov State Economic University (RINH)

2. Increase the level of competitiveness among regional universities and increasing the prestige of the university (annual growth in foreign applicants by 2%)

3. Increase the level of university brand awareness in the international scientific and educational space

4. Increase in the volume of international bilateral academic mobility by 3% annually

5. Expansion of areas of cooperation and increase in the scale of participation of employees and students of the university in international conferences, grants, etc.

6. Activation of the involvement of foreign students in the research activities of the RSEU (RINH)

The effectiveness of the project is subject to evaluation through such tools as Interfax – National University Ranking, ResearchGate, Google Academy, Socionet.

We are solidarity with the position Vera Vanyushkina and the university's branding strategy "...regarded by us as the joint creation of social and ethical values of the university brand, based on the use of best practices of its identification, differentiation and impact on the target audience" [15].

4 Conclusion

We predict the period of implementation of the updated brand management strategy for 2021-2026.

It can be stated that in 2020 the university confirmed and strengthened its position in the world and national rankings. RSUE (RINH) was among the 401-600 best universities in the world in the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings 2021, ranked first among universities in the South of Russia (Southern and North Caucasian federal districts) and entered the Top-20 universities in Russia.

We come to the conclusion that the formation of a general strategy for brand management and marketing of a university can be considered as an innovative practice of managing educational organizations and determines the policy for choosing a strategy for educational services as a specific product of an educational institution.

The differentiation strategy consists in giving an educational institution special properties of educational services and qualities that are difficult to repeat for competitors. The low-cost strategy is to provide competitive advantages through the use of cheaper learning technologies in education, the use of economies of scale.

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