

## The Effect of Brand Awareness on University Choice: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** Brand awareness is pivotal in prospective students' decision-making when selecting a higher education institution (HEI). This research explores how brand awareness influences the likelihood of students choosing a university. The study delves into factors such as recognition, recall, and trust, which contribute to developing a university's brand image and student enrolment intentions. The review of existing literature highlights the importance of strategic marketing, reputation, service quality, and promotional efforts in enhancing brand awareness. Furthermore, this paper discusses key metrics for measuring brand awareness, including perceived quality, university reputation, and emotional engagement, which collectively influence student preferences. The findings suggest that universities with stronger brand awareness are more likely to attract students, thus emphasising the importance of sustained branding efforts. The paper concludes by offering strategies for universities to improve their brand awareness and enhance their competitive edge in the educational sector.

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**Keywords:** Brand Awareness, University Choice, Higher Education, Enrolment Intention.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

Choosing a university is one of a prospective student's most critical life decisions. This decision is influenced by various factors, including financial concerns, geographical location, the institution's reputation, and the quality of education delivered. Among these aspects, brand awareness plays a key role in moulding the decision-making process. As students are sometimes overwhelmed by the quantity of options accessible to them, brand awareness helps simplify the decision by making specific universities more familiar and recognisable, which can lead to higher trust and preference for such schools. This awareness or recall of a university's name, logo, or other brand aspects might eventually guide a student's decision (Ngo & Ismandoyo, 2017; Stephenson et al., 2016).

Brand awareness in the context of higher education refers to the extent to which potential students can identify or recall a university's name, logo, or other brand-related elements (Bohara et al., 2022; Minh & Mai, 2024). It reflects how well an institution's image is imprinted in the minds of the target audience, which can greatly affect their choice of education. Universities with more brand recognition are frequently seen as more prestigious, reliable, and attractive options, making them more likely to be selected by potential students. Therefore, knowing the effects of brand awareness can help colleges successfully position themselves in a competitive education market and attract more candidates.

In the extremely competitive world of higher education, colleges are continuously finding methods to distinguish themselves from their counterparts to attract potential students. A well-established and identifiable brand can provide a considerable competitive advantage by enhancing the institution's visibility in the market (Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024). Beyond mere awareness, a great brand helps develop trust with potential students and their families, which is vital for influencing their decision-making process. By boosting the perceived value of the institution, colleges may establish a more compelling case for why students should select them over alternative options.

Brand awareness has a significant influence in moulding students' opinions and attitudes about an institution. The more familiar and pleasant the image of an institution is, the more probable it is that students will consider it as a desirable location to study. Research has demonstrated that brand awareness can influence students' enrolment intentions by generating a sense of trust and legitimacy in the school (Bohara et al., 2022; Chen, 2019). This connection between brand identification and enrolment decisions underlines the importance of effective branding in higher education, as it directly impacts student attraction and retention.

This study intends to explore the crucial role of brand awareness in the university selection process, with an emphasis on essential elements such as brand recognition, recall, trust, and image. It explores how these components influence prospective students' decision-making when choosing a university, as they often rely on familiarity and positive opinions of a university's brand. Additionally, the study dives into many factors that contribute to boosting brand awareness, including successful marketing, consistent messaging, and strategic partnerships. It also discusses the tactics universities can implement to increase their brand equity, ensuring they are seen favourably by potential students and stand out in a competitive educational landscape.

## **B. METHOD**

This study adopts a literature review methodology, which is well suitable for synthesising previous research on a certain issue and identifying patterns, gaps, and developing trends. By reviewing a wide range of academic sources, including peer-reviewed journals, conference proceedings, and other scholarly publications, this review focuses on brand awareness within the context of higher education. The literature included in this study was carefully selected based on its relevance to the research objectives, as well as the effect and impact these works have had within the academic community.

Several crucial procedures were followed in the technique to ensure a full evaluation of the topic. First, an exhaustive and systematic literature search was undertaken across key academic databases, such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. The goal of this search was to uncover significant studies that study brand awareness and its impact on university choices. To ensure the relevance and integrity of the findings, only research published within the last decade were considered for inclusion in the study.

Subsequently, the selected literature was painstakingly synthesised to identify similar themes and conclusions about the relationship between brand awareness and students'

institution choice. Key elements impacting students' decisions – such as trust, reputation, and the effectiveness of marketing strategies – were investigated and underlined. In the final stage of the research, a critical analysis was undertaken to examine the influence of brand awareness in altering students' decision-making processes. The investigation primarily focused on how institutions might harness brand recognition to effectively influence potential students' decisions and boost their competitive stance in the higher education market.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Key Influences of Brand Awareness:**

#### **a. Recognition and Recall:**

Brand awareness is essential for a potential student's capacity to identify and recall a university's brand. Bohara et al. (2022) observe that students are more likely to choose a university that they can readily remember from prior encounters, whether through advertising, word-of-mouth, or personal experiences. The capacity to identify a university's brand diminishes the uncertainty or perceived risk linked to decision-making. Consequently, brand awareness emerges as a pivotal element influencing students' choices in picking an institution. It underscores the significance of continuous and effective brand marketing in shaping potential students' decisions.

#### **b. Impact on Decision-Making:**

Brand awareness exerts a substantial influence on the decision-making process of pupils. Royo-Vela & Hünermund (2016) assert that colleges with elevated brand recognition are frequently perceived as more credible and trustworthy. This perception amplifies their attractiveness, hence augmenting the probability that potential students may contemplate these institutions when determining their educational choices. The research indicates that robust brand awareness favourably influences students' attitudes, making them more inclined to register in these universities. A reputable brand can significantly influence student attraction.

#### **c. Brand Image and Trust:**

A robust brand image is crucial in cultivating trust, which significantly impacts prospective students' enrolment choices. Chen (2019) asserts that institutions that successfully cultivate a favourable and identifiable brand image are more inclined to earn the trust of prospective students. This confidence, in turn, motivates students to contemplate enrolment at these institutions. The establishment of trust is predominantly influenced by continuous and effective branding efforts, encompassing the fulfilment of commitments about educational quality and the support provided to students. Thus, a meticulously curated brand image not only draws students but also bolsters their trust in the university's capacity to fulfil its commitments.

#### **d. Promotional Strategies:**

Promotional techniques are essential for augmenting brand recognition, with marketing communication serving as a pivotal element. Engagement on social media and interactive inbound marketing are especially efficacious in attracting prospective students and establishing a robust brand presence. Royo-Vela & Hünermund (2016) contend that universities, regardless of their modest renown, can enhance their

exposure through strategically focused promotional initiatives. When conducted well, these activities can substantially enhance enrolment rates by attracting the interest of potential students.

e. **Influence on Enrolment Intention:**

Research conducted by Bohara et al. (2022) demonstrates that brand awareness, in conjunction with brand trust, directly influences students' intention to enrol in a university. The research indicates that students who recognise a university's brand and have confidence in its reputation are more likely to apply and subsequently enrol. This discovery underscores the importance of establishing and sustaining a robust, coherent, and dependable brand image. Universities that effectively establish and convey trust through their branding are likely to attract a greater number of prospective students. Consequently, institutions ought to prioritise the augmentation of brand awareness and the cultivation of trust to favourably impact enrolment choices.

f. **Differentiation and Competitive Edge:**

In a highly competitive market, colleges employ branding as a fundamental tactic to differentiate themselves from their peers. An established brand enables an institution to cultivate a distinctive character, facilitating its differentiation in the perceptions of potential students. Institutions with a robust brand presence are more likely to achieve a competitive advantage (Joseph et al., 2017; Snadrou & Haoucha, 2024; Stephenson et al., 2016). This advantage facilitates the attraction of elite students to these colleges, which are frequently appealing due to their esteemed and renowned status. Ultimately, successful branding amplifies a university's attractiveness and strengthens its capacity to attract top people.

## **2. Factors Enhancing Brand Awareness:**

a. **Service Quality:**

Universities that provide excellent service quality, encompassing both academic programs and student support services, play a crucial role in strengthening their brand equity. Soni and Govender (2018) assert that both tangible components and intangible facets of service delivery are crucial in establishing robust brand awareness. This increased awareness is a significant factor for potential students when selecting their educational institution. Consequently, upholding elevated service standards directly influences a university's reputation and selection by students.

b. **Advertising and Promotion:**

Ensuring brand awareness necessitates systematic and strategically devised advertising initiatives. Bohara et al. (2022) assert that universities investing in advertising and promotional initiatives achieve greater success in maintaining their exposure. These universities guarantee that their brand remains prominent and readily identifiable to prospective students. Strategic marketing measures maintain the university's visibility among prospective applicants, strengthening its position in a competitive educational landscape.

c. **Reputation and Employability:**

The reputation of a university and the employability prospects of its graduates significantly influence brand awareness. Institutions recognised for their academic superiority and robust job achievements are generally more attractive to potential students. A robust reputation fosters trust and indicates superior education and enhanced professional prospects. Shamsudin et al. (2022) assert that these characteristics substantially enhance brand recognition and positively influence students' institution selection decisions. Consequently, universities that emphasise both academic excellence and graduate achievement are more strategically positioned in the competitive educational landscape.

**3. Strategies for Improving Brand Awareness:**

a. **Branding Activities:**

Universities are urged to use branding techniques that enhance the relationship between students and the school. Naheen and Elsharnouby (2024) assert that such initiatives are essential for cultivating a sense of identification among pupils. These branding initiatives can enhance students' emotional connections with the university, fostering a more robust affiliation. Consequently, students are more inclined to demonstrate positive behaviours that enhance the university's reputation and sustained success.

b. **Brand Communication:**

Brand communication is essential for harmonising marketing and communication strategies to highlight unique brand characteristics. Naheen and Elsharnouby (2024) assert that institutions must to emphasise their distinctive attributes to enhance their engagement with potential students. By emphasising these distinguishing attributes, colleges can enhance student engagement and strengthen brand identification. This strategy improves the entire brand identity and increases its attraction to the target audience.

c. **Focus on Brand Awareness Programs:**

Institutions that emphasise brand awareness campaigns frequently observe an increase in enrolling numbers. Bohara et al. (2022) assert that these universities acknowledge the crucial importance of brand recognition in attracting prospective students. By strategically emphasising brand promotion, institutions may nurture enduring student engagement and develop long-term allegiance. This deliberate emphasis bolsters the university's reputation, rendering it more attractive to potential students. This leads to heightened enrolments and a more robust, recognisable institutional presence.

**4. Key Metrics for Measuring Brand Awareness:**

a. **Perceived Quality:**

Perceived quality, particularly concerning the calibre of faculty and educational services, is pivotal to brand equity. This is a crucial element that greatly influences the perceptions of potential students and the wider community regarding an institution. Puspitasari et al. (2022b, 2022a) assert that the calibre of educational programs is a

crucial factor in determining the reputation of an academic institution. Naheen & Elsharnouby (2024) assert that the perceived quality of faculty is the paramount aspect in cultivating a robust university brand, underscoring its critical significance in the overall brand perception of higher education institutions.

b. **University Reputation:**

The reputation of a university is a vital indicator of its brand strength. A reputable university generally enjoys increased recognition and trust among potential students. Shamsudin et al. (2022) indicate that colleges with a robust reputation generally achieve heightened brand recognition and trust. This favourable reputation substantially affects students' choices, frequently leading to enhanced enrolment rates for these institutions. Consequently, preserving and augmenting their reputation is crucial for colleges seeking to fortify their market standing.

c. **Emotional Engagement:**

Emotional involvement is a crucial determinant in the selection of universities. Universities that cultivate a pleasant emotional environment and promote a robust sense of identification among students typically facilitate deeper connections. This emotional connection is essential for fostering enduring devotion to the institution. Girardin et al. (2024) assert that universities with high emotional involvement are more inclined to cultivate enduring brand loyalty. Greater emotional connections increase the likelihood of students maintaining long-term commitment to the university.

#### **D. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

In conclusion, brand awareness is an essential element in the decision-making process of potential students. Institutions with robust brand recognition are more inclined to draw students and attain elevated enrolment rates. This highlights the significance of strategic marketing, reputation management, and service excellence in establishing a university's brand. Universities must allocate resources to branding initiatives that enhance student involvement and trust, as these elements directly impact students' decisions. To fortify their standing in the higher education sector, universities should prioritise the improvement of service quality and the enhancement of faculty reputation. This enhances the institution's overall reputation and is essential for developing brand equity. Institutions with superior service quality and esteemed faculty can distinguish themselves from rivals, enhancing their attractiveness to potential students.

Moreover, institutions might consider the adoption of targeted advertising and promotional tactics to enhance brand visibility. By meticulously choosing appropriate venues and ideas that resonate with their target population, institutions can get increased attention and engage a broader spectrum of prospective students. This strategy enhances their visibility in the fiercely competitive business. Universities must establish brand identification initiatives that prioritise the cultivation of robust emotional relationships with potential students. Students are more inclined to engage with and select a university when they resonate with its

values, mission, and culture. By fostering these emotional connections, institutions may strengthen brand loyalty and elevate enrolment rates.

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