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UNIVERSITY BRANDING AS A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CREATING A BRANDBOOK

Abstract. The article examines university branding as a holistic communication strategy that helps shape a competitive image for a higher education institution amid the transformation of the educational environment and increased competition. It is substantiated that the university brand is not only a tool for visual identification, but also an important factor in the formation of trust, reputation, and sustainable relationships with key stakeholders - students, teachers, employers, and partners. Theoretical approaches to understanding branding in the field of educational services are analyzed, and scientific approaches to brand management and organizational positioning are summarized.

Particular attention is paid to the brand book as a key tool for implementing the university's branding strategy. Its essence, functions, and structure, which include ideological, graphic, and legal components, are determined. The content of each brand book element is disclosed, including the formation of the mission, vision, and values; positioning; the principles of visual identification; and the rules for using corporate style. The concepts of "brand book", "guideline", "logo book", and "cut guide" were distinguished, which allowed us to clarify their role in the brand management system.

It is proven that the presence of a clearly structured brand book contributes to the coherence of internal and external communications, the formation of corporate culture, and increases the effectiveness of the university's marketing activities. At the same time, specific problems of implementing branding in domestic higher education institutions are outlined, in particular, insufficient awareness of its strategic role and resistance from the academic community.

It is generally accepted that developing a brand book is a necessary condition for forming a holistic university brand, which ensures recognition, strengthens competitive advantages, and promotes effective communication with target audiences. Prospects for further research include developing methodological approaches to assess the effectiveness of branding for higher education institutions.

Keywords: university branding, communication strategy, brand, brand book, visual identity, positioning, higher education institution.

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БРЕНДИНГ УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ ЯК КОМУНІКАЦІЙНА СТРАТЕГІЯ: ТЕОРІЯ ТА ПРАКТИКА СТВОРЕННЯ БРЕНДБУКУ

Анотація. У статті досліджено брендинг університету як цілісну комунікаційну стратегію, що забезпечує формування конкурентоспроможного образу закладу вищої освіти в умовах трансформації освітнього середовища та посилення конкуренції. Обґрунтовано, що бренд університету є не лише інструментом візуальної ідентифікації, а й важливим чинником формування довіри, репутації та сталих взаємин із ключовими стейкхолдерами – здобувачами освіти, викладачами, роботодавцями та партнерами. Проаналізовано теоретичні підходи до розуміння брендингу в сфері освітніх послуг, а також узагальнено наукові підходи до бренд-менеджменту та позиціонування організацій.

Особливу увагу приділено брендбуку як ключовому інструменту реалізації брендингової стратегії університету. Визначено його сутність, функції та структуру, що охоплює ідеологічні, графічні та правові складові. Розкрито зміст кожного з елементів брендбуку, зокрема формування місії, візії, цінностей, позиціонування, а також принципів візуальної ідентифікації та правил використання фірмового стилю. Проведено розмежування понять «брендбук», «гайдлайн», «логобук» і «кат-гайд», що дозволило уточнити їх роль у системі управління брендом.

Доведено, що наявність чітко структурованого брендбуку сприяє узгодженості внутрішніх і зовнішніх комунікацій, формуванню корпоративної культури та підвищенню ефективності маркетингової діяльності університету. Водночас окреслено специфічні проблеми впровадження брендингу у вітчизняних закладах вищої освіти, зокрема недостатнє усвідомлення його стратегічної ролі та опір з боку академічної спільноти.

Узагальнено, що розроблення брендбуку є необхідною умовою формування цілісного бренду університету, який забезпечує його впізнаваність, посилює конкурентні переваги та сприяє ефективній комунікації з цільовими

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аудиторіями. Перспективи подальших досліджень пов'язані з розробленням методичних підходів до оцінювання ефективності брендингу закладів вищої освіти.

Ключові слова: брендинг університету, комунікаційна стратегія, бренд, брендбук, візуальна ідентичність, позиціонування, заклад вищої освіти.

Problem statement. The urgent need to address the problems of higher education outlined in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education in Ukraine for 2021–2031 [10] makes it urgent to study ways to implement high-quality branding both at the level of the higher education system as a whole and at the level of universities. In this context, university branding has become an important tool that enables universities to develop their unique identity, increase visibility, and attract target audiences, including students, teachers, and potential partners. The university brand not only reflects its status and reputation, but is also an important element of its communication strategy, contributing to the formation of a positive image and competitive advantages in the educational services market.

Branding in higher education is becoming a key area of theory and practice for developing specific trademarks, which should be given special attention in a strategic perspective. This approach is already widely used in Western educational institutions as a key tool for increasing their competitiveness in the educational services market [8].

Branding not only helps create a recognizable image but also plays an important role in building trust in the educational institution among students, their parents, potential employers, and employees. Thus, a strong reputation built through effective branding becomes the key to the institution's sustainable development and success in the educational market.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The features of the development and use of brand management in organizations were studied by such leading domestic and foreign scientists as D. Aaker, E. Brooking, F. Kotler, T. Nilsson, V. Bazylevich, S. Pyashenko, D. Kozeichuk, N. Moiseyeva, S. Moskalyuk, A. Stas, O. Shevchenko, T. Yakubova, etc. The features of brand book formation were studied in the works of G. Okhrimenko, Yu. Protsyshyn, etc.

The topic of branding Ukrainian higher education institutions is relatively new and remains insufficiently researched. Scientists such as S. Semenyuk, I. Grishchenko, N. Krokmalova, I. Kucherak, and others studied the branding and promotion of higher education institutions in Ukraine.

That is why in-depth research and analysis of key goals and objectives, as well as the features of developing a branding strategy for a higher education institution, are relevant.

The purpose of the article is to substantiate the theoretical foundations and practical principles of university branding as a communication strategy, and to analyze the process, structure, and key elements of developing a brandbook as an effective tool for ensuring a consistent and holistic representation of a higher education institution's brand.

Presentation of the main material. Branding in the field of educational services is a marketing activity aimed at creating a positive image of an educational institution, based on the social responsibility of all participants in the process of providing, receiving, and using educational services, including building trust and defining unique brand characteristics that contribute to its positioning in the market [1].

An important element in creating a strong organization brand is a brandbook, an official internal corporate document that contains the main information about the brand. The brandbook is also a physical embodiment of the organization's brand concept and mission, with the main task of establishing specific principles for maintaining the business identity across all internal and external communications [3].

The brandbook is an official document that reveals the full identity of the organization's brand by systematizing all ideological elements and collecting all rules for the use of graphic and verbal components (rules for writing texts and headlines, communication style) [5].

The key task of the brandbook is to create a holistic image of the organization, which, in turn, will ensure a positive customer perception.

A brandbook is an official document for an organization that provides a comprehensive description of its brand, including visual materials. In fact, it is an "instruction manual" that ensures a consistent and holistic perception of the organization across all communication channels.

The purpose of a brandbook is:

- creating a brand image for recognition among the target audience;
- ensuring the necessary perception of the brand by consumers, employees, and partners of the organization;
- formation and development of corporate culture. The brandbook formulates the brand's purpose, development direction, and core values, transparently explaining the organization's business ethics and general philosophy.
- integration of communications. The brand book ensures visual consistency: business documentation, advertising, employee uniforms, etc., and therefore serves as a guideline for the development of visual identity
- Among the functions of a brandbook, the following can be distinguished [11]:
 - gives all participants in the positioning process a clear understanding of what the organization's brand is;
 - allows for the correct use of the corporate identity;
 - unites all external communications, which allows customers who encounter elements of the corporate identity to identify the organization or brand clearly.
 - simplifies the system of design of retail outlets and the production of advertising products in places (regions/countries);
 - contributes to the formation of a visual image of the brand among sales representatives, and also helps to distinguish the brand from competitors and increase sales volumes.

Developing a brandbook for an organization ensures the solution of several tasks [5]:

1) solving a business task: a brandbook is a necessary tool for creating a new business or expanding it, in particular, entering new foreign markets.

2) solving several marketing tasks: how to build communication with customers; how to attract new customers; how to ensure a high level of loyalty; how to launch a new organization product or service, etc.

3) solving communication tasks: a brand book can change the perception of the brand by employees, as well as customers.

The concept of a brand book is often equated with a guideline, a logo book, and a cut guide. Therefore, let's analyze each of these concepts.

Guideline is a narrower concept that covers the description of external attributes and the visual representation of the brand.

It contains general rules for using corporate style elements, using the logo, designing advertising media, determining options for souvenir products, dress code, interior, corporate transport, etc. [4].

A guideline is usually a section of a brand book that lists and describes all the technical components of visual identification. This part is necessary to ensure that all marketing and printing materials are created in a single format without violating the corporate identity. Since the key element of visual identification is the logo, the main focus is on it.

The key elements of the guideline are:

- the protective field of the logo;
- permissible and unacceptable possibilities of using the logo;
- methods of applying it to various media.

In addition, the guideline provides a list of all the characteristics of the brand's color scheme and the possibilities of its application in the visual identification system. Be sure to include its digital characteristic next to the color itself so it can be reproduced down to the smallest shade.

The guidelines also prescribe the names of all the fonts used by the brand and their characteristics: font size, permissible colors, and the ability to replace fonts with others. An important element of the guideline is the elements that form a single style. This can include corporate patterns, visual symbols, patterns, and or additional geometric shapes. Their features, media presence, and technical specifications are also detailed in the brand book [7].

Cut-guide is a narrower concept that can be a part/section of the previous concepts, as it describes the technological processes for creating corporate identities and adapting them to the corporate style, for example, during the development of a website or the opening or renovation of an office [4].

Thanks to the cut-guide, products in shop windows across different retail outlets and regions are placed in the same way, and the interiors are also the same. Usually, the cut guide contains clear requirements, detailed instructions, and drawings.

A logo book is a set of rules that specifically define the correct use of a logo. It includes: the basic logo version, its permissible placement, rules for creating a corporate logo, and color coding that determines the organization's or brand's style. All of this is part of a guideline or a separate initial instruction [5].

Thus, the concept of a brandbook is much broader and may even include the above-mentioned terms, since the brandbook contains complete information about the brand, including a description of the trademark, as well as the mission, vision, philosophy, values, and key identifiers. This document serves as the basis for creating a corporate identity. It is the main document for organizational employees, especially for marketers and advertisers involved in developing, promoting, and popularizing the brand.

Developing a brandbook is an integral part of an organization's development and outlines the prospects for adopting and implementing future marketing activities. Creating an organization's brand book in a highly competitive market is a time-consuming necessity that ensures achieving specific goals [5].

Traditionally, an organization's brand book consists of at least three main parts: [9; 12]:

1. Ideological part, which includes:

- description of the organization's field of activity and legend;
- formulation of the brand's mission, philosophy, and values;
- expected brand life cycle;
- description of corporate culture;
- certain development strategies that reflect the advantages of the product or organization in a competitive environment;
- description of the specifics of the brand's business processes.

The ideological part reflects the brand's main concept, idea, and values. All the brand's main elements and characteristics are outlined, and the organization's target audience is identified.

This part provides full brand awareness to the organization's employees. To write this part, it is necessary to determine the very understanding of the brand: for what, to whom, and what is the essence and policy of the organization [5].

Components of this part of the brandbook:

- brand platform: organization vision;
- long-term brand development goals;
- organization mission and main purpose of existence in the market;
- brand values;
- brand communication features;
- brand strategy;
- positioning of the organization.

2. The graphic part includes:

- description of the corporate sign and its elements (logo, corporate symbol);
- options for using the corporate sign (full-color, b/w, monochrome);

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- options for using the main and additional logos depending on the brightness of the background;
- unacceptable options for using the corporate sign;
- slogan and explanation to it;
- principles for composing the slogan (indents, location relative to the logo);
- options for using the logo and slogan (in full-color, b/w, monochrome);
- characteristics of the areas of application of the corporate sign and slogan;
- rules for using the corporate sign on various materials;
- main and additional corporate fonts, rules for text design;
- main and additional corporate colors;
- general principles for building layouts;- principles of co-branding;
- principles of design and layout of outdoor advertising (big boards, megaboards, pillars, city lights, etc.);
- principles of using corporate elements on Internet media (Internet banners).

3. The legal part involves the regulation of copyright and related rights, rights to patented trademarks, etc.

The brandbook is useful not only for marketers and clients, but primarily for organization managers, PR managers, and all employees of the enterprise, as it establishes brand integrity and a single ideological and design concept, and provides an opportunity to promote and popularize your brand effectively.

A brandbook is a document that will be used for many years, so its development must be taken seriously. In the absence of experienced specialists, it is advisable to use the services of specialized organizations.

A brandbook should describe the general strategy for brand development, taking into account possible changes in external and internal environmental factors, and ensure the formation of a single image of the organization in the eyes of the target audience. At the same time, it should be noted that the content and structure of the brand book depend on the organization, its activity profile, size, and time on the market, and are inextricably linked to the organization's business processes.

Branding in the university environment has certain obstacles. This is due to teachers' attitudes toward the positioning of higher education institutions. A common phenomenon in Ukraine is the teacher's failure to perceive himself as part of the brand, and the student as a consumer, because it is difficult to correlate the educational process with the process of purchasing a product. That is, to receive quality service, the consumer (student) needs to make some effort.

In Western countries, university branding is becoming a narrow specialization within the branding and marketing consulting services that consulting firms provide to universities. The general market image of a university comprises many elements, such as its name, logo, quality of educational services, teaching staff, and social characteristics [1].

The formation of a brand for an educational institution is a complex, multifaceted process encompassing management mechanisms, organizational culture, knowledge, and visual identity [2; 6].

In today's competitive higher education environment, the institution's brand plays a crucial role in attracting students, strengthening its reputation, and enhancing its competitiveness. Brand design, in particular the logo and corporate identity, is an integral part of this process.

Conclusions. University branding as a communication strategy is not merely a visual or promotional activity, but a comprehensive, systemic process that integrates strategic management, marketing, design, and organizational culture. In the context of increasing competition in the educational services market – both globally and in Ukraine – the development of a strong, consistent university brand is a critical factor for institutional sustainability, recognition, and growth.

The study has shown that branding in higher education performs a multidimensional function. It not only ensures the visual identification of a university but also shapes its reputation, communicates its values, and builds long-term relationships with key stakeholders, including students, academic staff, partners, and society at large. A well-developed brand enhances trust, supports positioning, and creates a distinctive image that differentiates a university from its competitors.

A central element in implementing university branding is the brandbook, which serves as a strategic and operational tool for maintaining brand consistency across all communication channels. Unlike narrower documents such as guidelines, logo books, or cut guides, the brandbook encompasses ideological, visual, and legal components, providing a holistic framework for brand development and management. Its ideological part defines the institution's mission, vision, values, and positioning; the graphic part ensures visual coherence and recognizability; and the legal part protects intellectual property and governs brand use.

The research highlights that developing a brand book helps address key business, marketing, and communication challenges. It facilitates coherent internal communication, strengthens corporate culture, and ensures the effective external representation of the university. Moreover, it provides clear standards for the use of visual and verbal elements, which is essential for maintaining a unified brand identity in both traditional and digital environments.

At the same time, specific challenges in university branding have been identified, particularly in the Ukrainian context. These include an insufficient perception of branding as a strategic priority and academic staff's resistance to viewing themselves as active participants in brand formation. Overcoming these challenges requires a shift in institutional mindset, where branding is understood not as commercialization of education, but as a tool for communicating value, quality, and social responsibility.

In conclusion, creating a university brandbook should be considered an essential stage in developing an effective communication strategy. It enables higher education institutions to articulate their identity, ensure consistency in communication, and enhance their competitiveness in a rapidly changing educational landscape. Future research may focus on practical methodologies for brandbook development in universities and the evaluation of branding effectiveness in relation to institutional performance and stakeholder engagement.

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