

The importance of a successful brand for enhancing marketing performance case study of two private higher education institutions in Tizi Ouzou-Algeria.

HOCINE Lynda

University of Mouloud MAMMARI, Tizi-Ouzu, (Algeria), hocinelynda45@gmail.com

 **ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8102-7110>**

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Abstract:

This study investigates the increasingly competitive landscape of Algerian higher education due to the proliferation of private universities. Employing a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with key figures from diverse institutions, the research explores the impact of branding strategies on marketing effectiveness and the influence of digital tools in fostering brand equity. The findings unveil a dynamic environment where institutions actively utilize targeted marketing strategies to attract high-caliber students. A robust brand identity emerges as a critical factor in shaping student decisions, while digital tools, particularly social media platforms, play an essential role in outreach and student engagement. To effectively navigate this competitive terrain, the study recommends prioritizing the development of a strong brand identity, leveraging the power of digital marketing strategies, and continuously adapting these approaches to align with evolving student preferences and market trends

Keywords: Higher education marketing, Branding, Marketing performance

I. Introduction

Driven by forces like privatization and globalization (Margine, 2006), higher education is transitioning from a public service to a market-driven system. This has intensified competition, forcing universities to adapt their operations and consider students as "consumers" with evolving needs (Gajić, 2012). Beyond service offerings, branding has become crucial. A strong reputation and emotional connection with prospective students significantly influence their choices (C. Vásquez, 2015). This is evident in Algeria, where the recent establishment of private universities has exacerbated competition. These institutions now utilize sophisticated marketing strategies to attract students and build a sense of community (Chapleo, 2010).

The purpose of this research is to answer the following question: **To what extent does the effectiveness of branding strategies influence the marketing efforts and overall performance of higher education institutions in Algeria?»**

To answer the question, we propose the following hypotheses:

- Institutions with a good branding strategy are more likely to meet marketing objectives and enhance marketing performance.
- While the brand is vital for marketing effectiveness, it cannot help improving the performance if the service quality is inadequate.
- Branding has no direct influence on marketing performance and cannot improve it.

Research objectives:

This study aims to explore the marketing of higher education services, and its implementation by private higher education institutions in Algeria, but also to analyze the impact of branding on their marketing strategy results and performance. To do so our empirical study is based on the data collected in three well-known higher education institutions in Tizi-Ouzou-Algeria.

Research methodology

Interviews were conducted in two private institutions of higher education as well as a study of theoretical literature and previous brand management researches, as parts of the methodology for this work.

The study uses two brand equity models, Aaker's and Keller's. (According to the model, businesses with strong brand awareness can utilize their visibility in a community to attract more clients, which will boost their profit. Customers may feel more confident in their choice to buy goods or services from a business if they are aware of.) .

An original interview guide was created to collect empirical data on higher education marketing and branding in Algerian institutions.

Interview guide questions were divided by three important parts:

1. The marketing function in higher education institution;
2. Branding importance in a higher education institution;
3. The impact of the digital transformation on the marketing and branding of higher education institutions.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on higher education branding, specifically in the Algerian context. The research will provide valuable insights for institutions in Algeria and other similar contexts, guiding them in developing effective branding strategies that align with their unique goals, values, and target audience. The results will also inform policymakers and stakeholders in the higher education sector, offering evidence-based recommendations to enhance marketing performance through branding initiatives.

1. Literature review

1.1 Marketing in higher education:

If we speak about applying marketing concepts in higher education, we must start by emphasizing that, the higher education sector is influenced by two major factors that might be used to generate marketing concepts. First off, higher education is a non-profit industry in most countries, therefore marketing techniques applied to the sector do not operate as they do in the commercial or business sector, where profit is the primary aim. Second, because higher education is a service, all of the features that apply to the marketing of services apply to higher education. (NICOLESCU, 2009).

“Higher education possesses all the characteristics of a service industry. Educational services are intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable from the person delivering it, variable, perishable and the customer (student) participates in the process.” (Shanks, 1993). But, that doesn't exclude the particularities of the higher education sector that must be taken in consideration, by the institutions while building their marketing strategy.

Marketing strategies and activities in the educational system are much more limited than in other service and production industries, owing to the direct influence of state regulations defining the educational system, with established control mechanisms of accreditation bodies, prescribing the evaluation system, and quality control system. (Jelena, 2019)

Every college and institution is currently engaged in some form of marketing efforts. Many colleges make significant efforts to recruit students. Advertising (posters, bulletins and announcements, letters to colleagues) and personal selling are regularly used in persuasive attempts (direct contact with promising students). Pricing considerations (scholarships and other types of subsidies) exist, and a "product" (a collection of both physical and intangible utilities summed up by the phrase "education") is clearly being sold. Products, pricing, and persuasion are all essential components of the marketing process. (Krachenberg, 1972).

Most educational institutions today recognize the need to promote themselves in a competitive environment that is frequently global for universities, and a large literature on the transfer of marketing strategies and concepts from other sectors to HE has been generated (Gibbs, (2002))

The formulation of a higher education institutional marketing strategy involves decisions about: 1. The institution's present programs and markets - whether to keep, expanding, or not. 2. Potential new program and market potential in the future. 3.

Competitor analysis 4. The institution's position in reference to rivals. 5. Target market selection and marketing mix development. (Kotler & Keller, 2009)

Modern universities must take into consideration that students now are no longer users, instead they must be considered as customers or clients, who have needs they want to satisfy or fulfil. And, higher education institutions must take into consideration those student's needs, not only but also take into consideration wishes of other groups such as staff, alumni, parents and the state, «A great challenge for an educational institution is to synchronize interests of different groups, and to maintain balance in order to satisfy interests of the society and service users at the same time » (Gajić, 2012)

1.2 Marketing mix in higher education:

The marketing mix method developed by McCarthy in 1964, is mandatory for the success of any organization's marketing strategy, being the instrument that allows its implementation in the field. The model of McCarthy consists of the 4P (product, price, promotion and place). This model has been used over the years by manufacturing industries and by the service industry too. But given that services has particularities and characteristics that are different from goods, Booms and Bitner created a marketing mix model for the service business in 1980 that was suitable for those characteristics. The model consists of 7P (product, price, promotion, place, process, people and physical evidence). (Goi, 2009).

Table 01: 7 Ps of Educational Services Marketing Mix

<p>1. PRODUCT The product/services that the institutions are selling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum • Quality teachers • Spiritual values • Good students • Safe environment • Courses/ Programmes offered • Values (Moral, social, ethical, practical) 	<p>2. PRICE This is the issue most affecting our enrollments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target market vs price point • Quality vs price • Value vs price • Facilities vs price • Discounts – budget driven scholarships 	<p>3. PLACE The channel by which a product or service is sold.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: Urban-Rural • On the road • Easy Accessibility • Transportation facilities by college/institutes • Public Transport 	<p>4. PROMOTION Advertising, promoting the school/College or institution; publicity etc. through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • websites, • e-mails, • newspapers • television, • Internet • Word-of-mouth • Overt and natural promotion “A good product sells itself
<p>5. PEOPLE The persons involved directly/indirectly in education services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative authority Board • Principal • Teachers • Students • Employers • Society 	<p>6. PROCESS Procedures/ Methodologies adopted by the institutes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Methods • Learning Opportunities • Practice Sessions • Evaluation processes 	<p>7. PHYSICALEVIDENCE Unlike a product, a service cannot be experienced before it is delivered. So, physical evidence of educational services can be experienced by following components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical infrastructure : Institution’s Building, Classrooms, Play-grounds • Library facilities • Lab facilities • Teaching/Learning materials • Audio/Visual aids etc. • Provide case studies, testimonies, 	

		samples
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Source: (CHAWLA, 2013)

The *product* as we know it, is what we buy, or what the organization sells. It is a complicated package of advantages that satisfies client needs rather than just a list of physical characteristics (Ivy, 2008). The definition of the product in higher education constitutes is widely debated. There are those who argue, that the product of a higher education institution is their programs and the courses. And others who say, that the product of a higher education institution is the student himself, and that's because they're not the same before and after the learning process, in other words they change and become different and that happens because of the institution. (Canterbury, 2008). *“College isn't a business. It's a peculiar industry where the customer is also the product--and what the customer wants may not always be the best for the product”* (Edmondson, 1987)

The *price* (tuition fee) is the second element of marketing mix, in higher education, it refers to the amount of money that individuals have to pay in order to pursue an academic program or benefit from academic activities. (Rațiu & Avram, 2013).

The pricing component of the services marketing mix is dominated by the degree or tuition costs necessary to enroll at the institution. The price aspect influences not just the money generated by a university's enrollment, but also student evaluations of the quality. (Ivy, 2008).

Pricing combined with other instruments, allows realizing the institutions' goals, the educational institution mission, and the achievement of short and long-term goals.

Price is considered both an economic and a psychological factor. Economic, because it's determines the income and profit of the institution. Psychological, because it determines the values that the service has, but it's can also a quality indicator that influences the company's image and other elements too. (Jelena, 2019).

Place is the technique of distribution used by the institution to distribute tuition to its market in a way that meets, if not exceeds, student expectations. It's also known as *“the conveyance strategy that the university receives to give the educational cost to its market in a way that meets, if not surpasses, understudy desires”* (Prabowo & Sriwidadi, 2019)

Alternative modalities of instruction have increased dramatically; students are no longer bound to the classroom and their lecturer to acquire the information they need to satisfy the course requirements. Access to lecture and support materials is becoming more widely available via virtual learning media such as Blackboard and Moodle.

Distance learning alternatives have also grown as a result of the postal service, email, the internet, video and teleconferencing, block release choices, and, more recently, pod-casts. (Ivy, 2008)

Promotion, in a market-driven higher education landscape, Gajić (2012) emphasizes a shift from passive information dissemination to actively informing and motivating

students as "consumers." Universities must tailor communication and marketing strategies to resonate with students' needs and aspirations. This involves highlighting unique offerings, fostering transparency, and guiding students through the decision-making journey – from initial awareness to enrollment. By embracing a consumer-centric approach, universities can effectively compete and attract students by showcasing their value proposition and becoming the preferred choice for their educational journey.. When considering the vast range of publics with whom a university must interact, relying just on the prospectus or the institution's website is unlikely to be productive. Different components are employed for various audiences. (Ivy, 2008).

People, this P includes professors, students, and non-teaching staff, for which universities must plan and implement the number of teaching and non-teaching staff, their qualifications, recruitment and selection procedures, training, and rewards, as well as conducting research on the needs and desires of students and professors, educating students about their role and responsibility, and communicating cultural values with students; number of students, their background, and their interest in and aptitude for the subject in which he is enrolled. (CHAWLA, 2013)

Process, educational services are personal and distinguished by extensive, intellectual, emotional, and/or physical engagement of students in a service process. (Gajić, 2012) This P includes the type of service provided (standardized or customized), the number of steps involved in the service process (simple or complex), teaching Conservation and Preservation of Library Materials methodologies, learning opportunities, practice sessions, evaluation processes, and the level of involvement of students, professors, and non-teaching staff in service delivery. This is the operational system that manages marketing within the organization. The accessibility of the service-faculty, office, classroom, study material; engagement within the service organization, interaction with admission, assessment, hostel wardens, and student welfare are components that go along with the fundamental service offer (CHAWLA, 2013).

Physical evidence, “is the tangible component of the service offering. A variety of tangible aspects are evaluated by a university’s target markets, ranging from the teaching materials to the appearance of the buildings and lecture facilities at the university” (Ivy, 2008).

Institutions implement modern forms of communication such as Web presentations and virtual display of environment through the internet, and that’s in order to make their services more tangible before and after purchase (Zeithaml, et al., 2006).

The physical environment can have a big impact on pupils' decisions. Modern educational institutions now offer virtual tours because choosing an educational institution to enroll in is one of the most important decisions that young people and their families will ever have to make. This is done to give potential students a better understanding of the environment before making such an important decision. (Gajić, 2012)

1.3 Branding higher education institutions:

Universities are facing increased competition for students, faculty, funding, and sponsors (Roskosa & Stukalina, 2021). This has led to a more market-driven approach in higher education, with branding becoming a strategic tool (Elken, 2019). Branding allows universities to build a strong reputation and image, giving them a competitive advantage (Mampaey & Huisman, 2016).

This shift towards branding is driven by several factors:

- The rise of high-performing institutions and private education sectors (Diaconu & Amalia, 2011).
- The need to attract top students and faculty (Bunzel, 2007).
- The desire to improve university rankings (Bunzel, 2007).

Effective branding requires a strategic and long-term approach, similar to managing other assets (Darabjerdi et al., 2016). Aaker's brand equity model (Aaker, 1991) provides a framework for universities to build strong brands. This model focuses on five key components: brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and other proprietary assets (Bui, 2009; Pradhan & Prasad Misra, 2014). By focusing on these areas, universities can create a strong brand that attracts students, faculty, and resources.

Projecting Aaker's Brand Equity Model onto the Higher Education Sector

David Aaker's brand equity model, which emphasizes brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Aaker, 1991), offers a valuable framework for universities navigating the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education. Let's explore how each dimension applies to universities and the strategies they can employ.

1. Brand Awareness: Recognition and Recall

Brand awareness refers to the extent to which students (and potential students) recognize and recall a university. Key metrics include unaided and aided recall surveys, website traffic data, and social media engagement (Keller, 2003). Universities can enhance brand awareness through strategic marketing campaigns, participation in educational fairs and conferences, partnerships with high schools and guidance counselors, and a strong online presence with a user-friendly website and active social media channels.

2. Brand Association: Building Positive Perceptions

Brand association delves into the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions students have about a university. Attributes like academic reputation, program offerings, campus life, faculty expertise, career support services, and alumni success stories all contribute to a university's brand association (Keller, 2003). Universities can cultivate positive associations by highlighting their strengths in these areas, showcasing faculty achievements through awards and publications, promoting student success stories through alumni testimonials and career outcomes, and fostering a vibrant and inclusive campus community through virtual tours and social media content.

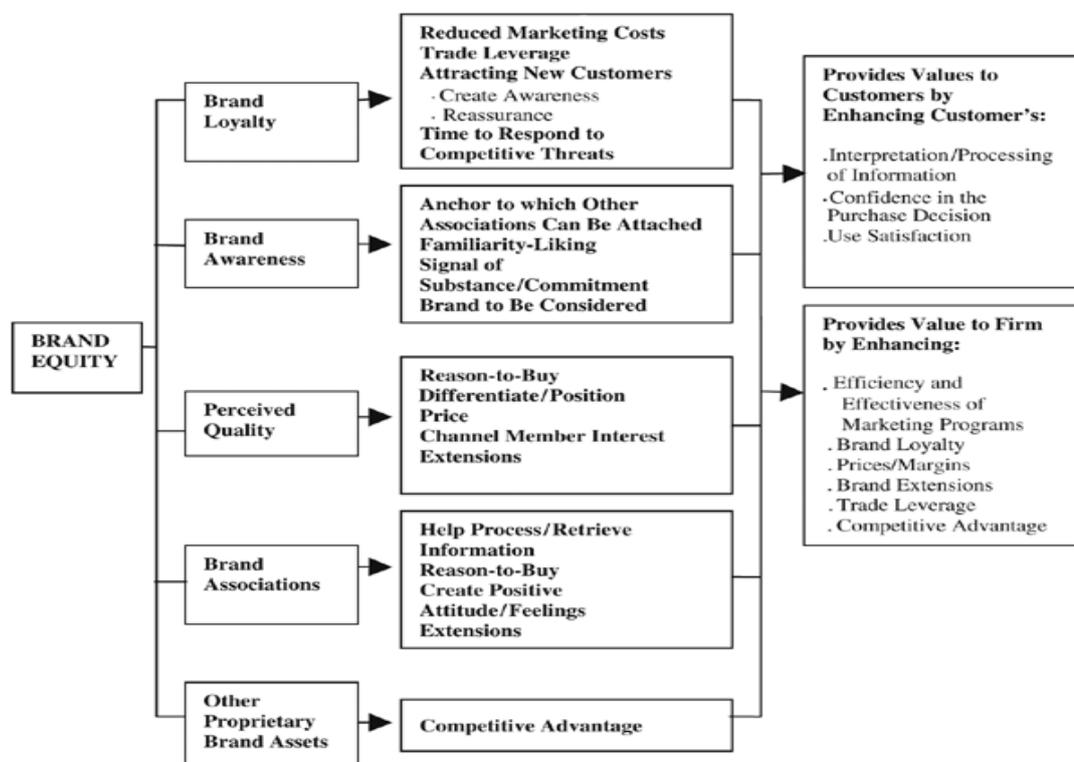
3. Perceived Quality: Value Proposition and Excellence

Perceived quality reflects a student's assessment of the overall value and excellence a university offers compared to its competitors. Rankings, accreditation, student satisfaction surveys, alumni success rates, and employer reputation all contribute to a university's perceived quality (Aaker, 2016).

4. Brand Loyalty: Fostering Emotional Attachment

Brand loyalty reflects a student's emotional attachment to a university and the likelihood of recommending it to others. Alumni giving rates, student retention rates, and positive online reviews can serve as potential measures of brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Figure01: brand equity model by Aaker



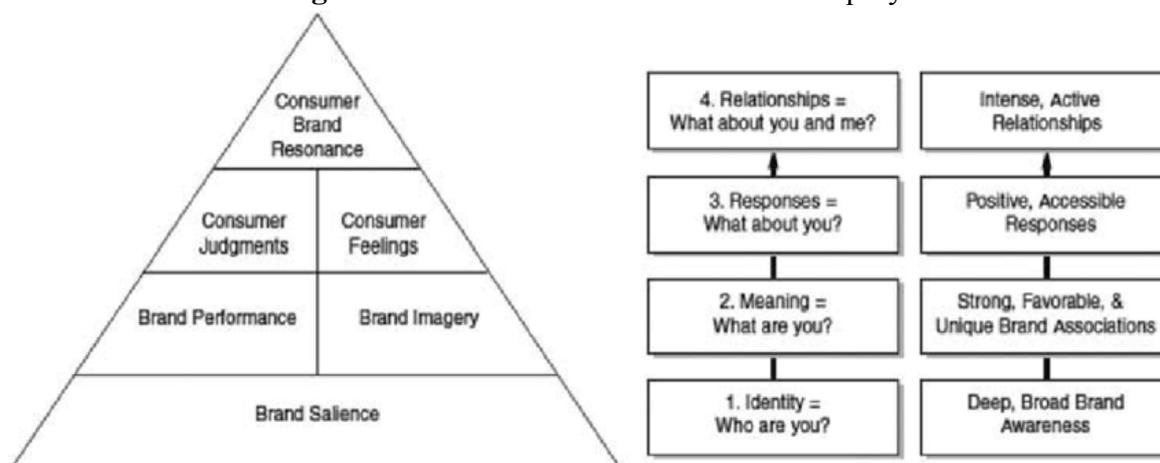
Source: (Steenkamp, Herbst, & Villiers, 2012)

Keller's customer based brand equity, this model was defined by Keller as “*the deferential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand*”. The benefit of approaching brand equity from the perspective of the brand effects on the individual consumer, is that it allows managers to analyze how their marketing program particularly improves the value of their brands. (Keller, 1993)

Building a strong brand involves four steps, according to the model: (1) establishing the proper brand identity, that is, increasing the breadth and depth of brand awareness; (2) creating the appropriate brand meaning through strong, favorable, and unique brand associations; (3) eliciting positive, accessible brand responses; and (4) forging brand relationships with customers that are characterized by intense, active loyalty. (Ondang, 2001).

Keller thought that when people link specific brands with positive equity, it indicates that they respond to marketing activities when the brand is mentioned. He stated that customer positive equity can lead to more income, lower costs, and higher profits, all of which directly imply the company's ability to gain a higher price, customers' tendency and eagerness to seek out distribution channels, the effectiveness of marketing communications, and the achievement of brand generalizations and licensing. (Darabjerdi, Arabi, & Haghighikhah, 2016).

Figure02: Keller’s customer based brand equity model



Source: (Cottan-Nir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2018)

A firm or brand with a strong brand equity will be superior of its competitors. Currently, brand equity is seen as a measure of a company's success (Tasci 2021). A university's brand carries with it a guarantee of a certain quality of service and student results. In the case of education, the service is more than just a collection of tangible features; it is a complicated bundle of advantages that meet the needs of the consumer (Ivy (2008); Dermol et al. (2013)

A potential student's perception of a brand is influenced by its reputation and image. For university students to develop consumer loyalty, image and reputation are essential (Nguyen and LeBlanc 2001).

The combination of the two models in HE:

Universities face unique challenges in building brand loyalty, but both Aaker's and Keller's brand equity models offer valuable frameworks. Aaker's model helps with core aspects like brand awareness and perceived quality. Universities can differentiate themselves through unique programs, renowned faculty, and exceptional student support. While traditional loyalty might be difficult, fostering a strong sense of community and positive student experiences can lead to alumni advocacy and positive word-of-mouth.

Keller's model adds depth by exploring student perceptions. Universities can define their brand meaning by catering to specific student segments, like research-focused or career-oriented programs. Understanding student judgments and emotional connections (brand response and resonance) is crucial. Positive feelings of pride and belonging can lead to students actively defending the university's values.

By using both models and considering stakeholder perceptions, universities can create a comprehensive branding strategy. This includes a strong online presence and communication that resonates with students, parents, employers, and other stakeholders. While there are limitations in applying these models directly, they offer valuable insights for universities to build a strong brand and compete effectively in the dynamic higher education landscape.

There is a significant gap in empirical research on the factors of brand equity in the HE market (Mourad, Ennew, and Kortam 2010, 2011). An empirical model created and evaluated in the HE market by Mourad et al. (2011). The framework was created by combining Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) models, and it synthesizes the HE service elements that determine BE with the theorized dual dimensions of BE: brand awareness and brand image.

- **The knowledge about the brand** that is accessible via advertising efforts and word of mouth determines the awareness component of BE in HE (Aaker 1991; Keller 1993; Simon and Sullivan; Pinar et al. 2014).

- **Brand image**, the second component of BE, is determined by a sizable number of factors. According to BE literature, factors influencing brand image include brand personality, social image, and market position. (Aaker 1991)

1.3 Marketing performance

According to (Clark, 1999), marketing performance measures have gradually changed from financial to non-financial, the non-financial marketing performance measures are Customer satisfaction, Customer Loyalty and Brand Equity. Because brand image has a positive and considerable impact on trust, a good image of a private institution can improve student trust. Similarly, trust has a positive and substantial influence on marketing performance, indicating that the more trust students have in a private university, the better their marketing success. However, brand image has no

direct influence on marketing performance but does have an indirect effect on marketing performance via trust. (Propheto et al.2020).

1.4 digital tools in service of higher education marketing

Internet has become part of daily life. Due to industry 4.0 technical developments, which is the reason many tasks are being completed using internet technology in today's modern culture. And digital marketing is one application of internet technology that has been used in the business world. (Sawhani & Susilo, 2020)

Digital marketing or internet was defined by multiple authors, for (Chaffey.D, 2013) it's simply '*achieving marketing objectives through applying digital technologies*', or

"The use of technologies to help marketing activities in order to improve customer knowledge by matching their needs". For Tarigan & Sanjaya 2010, it's a type of marketing that makes use of numerous web-based platforms such blogs, websites, emails, AdWords, and social media. The advancement of digital marketing via the web, mobile phones, and gaming gadgets provides a highly influential access to advertising. (Heidrick & Struggless, 2009).

Social media networks have changed the interaction path between customers and institutions since everyone now has a platform to engage with others and readily provide feedback because access to goods and services information and the final purchase choice is easier. (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012)

Marketers used social media to build brand image and interact with customers about brand-related issues. It has a greater influence than traditional broadcast or message because consumers prefer to read customized content on social media platforms over traditional platforms. (Schulze, Schöler, & Skiera, 2015). Colleges and universities nowadays as they're considered as businesses, have the problem of remaining relevant among students who are more reliant on technology as a means of communication. (KUSUMAWATI, 2019).

Graduate students have been proven to be particularly susceptible to influence from digital marketing, which is now reaching even older persons looking for training. It is also regarded as one of the most effective strategies a public university may employ to advertise academic offerings, draw in students, and, by doing so, compete well with other domestic colleges of a comparable caliber. (MAKRYDAKIS, 2021).

The top 25 universities and colleges in Asia and Africa use well-known social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and Linked In, according to Paladan's (2018) analysis of the popular social media networks used by these institutions. The purpose of using social media networks for colleges and universities is to promote their undergraduate and postgraduate programs and provide information about all scientific events and other activities. (SALEM, 2020). According to Hossain and Sakib (2016), if the social media material is relevant to the brand, it has a high positive effect on student brand loyalty to the university. Furthermore, popular content appears to be an effective sort of university student brand loyalty.

2. Higher education services market in Algeria

Algeria has seen a rise in higher education since its independence, with 2500 students in 1963¹. During the period 1999-2018, the number of students increased by 270%, from 407 995 in 2000 to 1 501 941 in 2023, with more than 69 thousand teachers-researchers, in a network of 115 higher education institutions spread across all 58 districts, 54 universities, 9 university centers, 39 higher national schools, 13 higher normal schools, 2 annexes, and 22 private institutions. (Lassassi, Lounici, Sami, Tidjani, & Benguerna, 2020) (MESRS, 2024).

The private sector of Algerian higher education was established by the legislation on the direction of private higher education in 2009. This legislation was updated in 2008 to provide a list of conditions to follow². However, it was not until 2014 that a panel for investigating and approving private schools of higher learning was constituted.

Private higher education in Algeria, is a complicated process that is still finding its feet. The first private HEI was formed in 1991 under the name "FORM CONSULT," in the subject of business management, and gave rise to three schools that were eventually approved (MDI, EFTG and INSAG). Today, the industry has more than 18 certified institutions among numerous candidates in subjects other than management sciences and economics. (BEDAIDA, BENGUERNA, & MEYER, 2022).

3. Research method :

In order to conduct the study, and due to the nature of the research, which recommends priority and attention on the study of the ways in which representatives of higher education institution in Algeria view and interpret the function of higher education marketing and branding, the choice of qualitative methodology was decided. With this methodology we seek to investigate the specificity of the phenomenon due to the particularity of the sector being originally a public and free service.

In order to gather all the necessary data, case study approach including interviews has been used. As opposed to the quantitative method, where the variables used are conceptually predetermined, while the results are a priori predictable from the framework of the theory, I considered that the qualitative method with interviews is more appropriate for the interviewees to approach a topic without having preconceived notions about the important variables, gradually leading to the formulation of an approach for explaining and interpreting research data.

Research sampling method:

In order to try and answer the research question we went for purposive sampling method, "it refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which units are selected because they have characteristics that you need in your sample. In other words, units are selected "on purpose" in purposive sampling. Also called judgmental sampling, this sampling method relies on the researcher's judgment

¹ UNESCO, Paris, 5–9 October 1998.

² Law No. 08-06 of 23 February 2008 amending and supplementing Law No. 99-05 of 4 April 1999 on the orientation law on higher education and the decree on specifications.

when identifying and selecting the individuals, cases, or events that can provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives" (Nikolopoulou, 2022).

We have selected two of the leading private higher education institutions in Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, and conducted interviews with the managers in order to answer our research question.

Case study N°1:

The International Institute of Management 'INSIM of Tizi-Ouzou' is a subsidiary of the INSIM group, created in 1994 in Hydra-Algiers by a group of teachers and researchers. At the beginning of its 21st year of existence, the institution has capitalized on its experience and pedagogical engineering, which has proven itself and earned us the trust of a large population of students who make us proud and the pride of the largest national and multinational companies where they contribute to their management and development dynamics. During this period, the institution has expanded throughout the national territory to reach out to the populations in the interior of the country, where it is represented in several provinces with its 12 subsidiaries. Due to its national scope and new configuration, it has established itself as the INSIM Group and is currently considered the leader in private education in Algeria. INSIM Tizi-Ouzou, the first subsidiary to be established, was created in February 2004. As a worthy representative of the group it originates from and enriched by the common experience, it currently occupies a prominent position in the landscape of education and teaching in the province of Tizi-Ouzou."

Case study N°2:

The school for the elite in technical and scientific professions in Tizi-Ouzou. Since 2009, the Technical School has been training students in technical and scientific fields with the main objective of preparing them for future careers. Located near the university hubs of Bastos and Hasnaoua, the Technical School attracts over 200 students each year from technical and scientific disciplines.

4. Results :

The study will focus on two private schools, representing different types of institutions in Algeria's higher education sector. By examining the branding strategies employed by these schools and assessing their marketing performance, the research aims to shed light on the relationship between branding efforts and desired marketing outcomes, such as student enrollment, reputation, and stakeholder engagement.

The research will employ a qualitative data collection method. Qualitative interviews and observations will provide insights into the branding strategies, messaging, and communication channels employed by the schools. Additionally, we will measure stakeholders' perceptions of the institutions' brand image, reputation, and marketing effectiveness.

Interview results and analysis:

Part01 of the interview: marketing function in a higher education institution

Interview question	Manager 01	Manager 02
1) Can you give us a brief description of your institution?	- We're "école technique" exists since 2009, we have improved over	-We have 19 professional branches, we also offer international diplomas

<p>2) How would you describe the higher education and professional training (private) sector at the national and regional (Tizi Ouzou) level, and especially its evolution over the past few years?</p> <p>3) What are your thoughts on the idea of "university/school as a business"?</p> <p>4) In your opinion, how important is the role of marketing in your field, and how much importance does your institution place on this function?</p> <p>5) Can you provide us with the percentage of your institution's revenue that is reinvested in marketing?</p> <p>6) In your view (as a manager/marketing manager), what are the key elements that a higher education/professional training institution should consider in order to establish its presence in the market?</p> <p>7) Given that education/training is a service, do you believe that service marketing can be applied to this market, or do you think that this market requires its own marketing adapted to the context of education and training?</p> <p>8) Can you mention some particularities of this market that a manager or marketing manager should consider when developing their marketing strategy?</p> <p>9) How do you measure and</p>	<p>time, we always work on improving our services.</p> <p>- unfortunately it's not organized, we face unfair competition from schools offering low quality trainings, and who are working illegally</p> <p>-Yes we try to satisfy our students by adapting our services to our clients/students' needs, for example unlike public universities we work on Fridays.</p> <p>-it is very important, even if we're well-known we have to keep on improving our image, and be unique on the market (get out of the box).</p> <p>-There isn't a specific percentage, it depends on the different periods of the year but we invest as much as it takes (no budget limits).</p> <p>-The key is to be different and stand out</p> <p>-Yes because after all it's a business too</p> <p>-We try to work with middle class students</p>	<p>and professional trainings for companies</p> <p>-there are many schools in Tizi Ouzou but competition is not really harsh, and we're the only private university in here</p> <p>-we were the first school to have an approval and start in the private sector</p> <p>-we give marketing a big importance within our institution, but the word of mouth takes 99.99% of the work since we exist for more than 20years</p> <p>-There isn't a specific percentage</p> <p>-Respecting the structure of the courses, the quality of the service (including the teachers) and the environment</p> <p>-Yes, but not all the concept because we can't be creative and every proposition has to be approved by the ministry of higher education</p> <p>-We work on improving the service quality, and adapt our prices</p> <p>-By the satisfaction of our students, and the fact that they come back or bring in other students</p>
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<p>evaluate the performance of your marketing strategy, and what are the areas you focus on to improve it?</p> <p>10) In your opinion, what role does a successful marketing strategy play in improving the overall performance of the institution?</p> <p>11) Tell us a bit about your products in relation to the following elements: their nature, quality, pricing, teachers, administration...</p>	<p>-unfortunately we have a lack when it comes to our marketing performance, we lack of employees especially the community manager, and we highly value advertising</p> <p>- We make sure we filter our clients (we don't sell diplomas), in order to keep our image and values and avoid bad word of mouth.</p> <p>-we always try to improve the quality But we lack of human resources currently, and we have improved the environment.</p>	<p>- It has a very important role, as I said in our case its mainly word of mouth but we also organize a lot of events and use digital tools</p> <p>-We keep on improving our service quality, pricing and communication</p>
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The two managers agree that marketing is important for private higher education and professional training institutions. Manager 01 focuses on differentiating their institution from the competition, while Manager 02 focuses on providing high-quality services. Both managers believe that a successful marketing strategy can be very beneficial for their institutions.

Manager 01:

Focuses on differentiating their institution from the competition.

Emphasizes the importance of filtering clients and avoiding bad word-of-mouth.

Uses digital tools and organizes events to reach their target audience.

Manager 02:

Focuses on providing high-quality services.

Emphasizes the importance of the quality of the service and pricing.

Uses word-of-mouth marketing and social media to reach their target audience.

Both managers believe that a successful marketing strategy can help to attract new students, increase enrollment, and improve the reputation of their institutions. However, they agree that it is not the only factor that contributes to the success of an institution.

Overall, the interview questions and answers provide some insights into the marketing strategies of two private higher education and professional training institutions in Algeria. The two managers have different approaches to marketing, but they both agree that marketing is important for their institutions.

Part02 of the interview: The role and importance of branding for a higher education institution

Interview question	Manager 01	Manager 02
12) Discuss the importance of branding (name + reputation) in your sector.	-Branding is important for us, we're engaged ecologically, and in our	-Our school is one of the first schools in Algeria we're present

<p>13) What are the key elements on which you base your branding strategy (the foundation of the student/institution relationship)?</p>	<p>recruitment criteria we choose carefully the people who will represent us.</p>	<p>almost everywhere in the country, we always try to work on our name and reputation</p>
<p>14) As you know, communication is the means by which we build brand capital through communication with customers. What is the element on which you base your communication messages? And what kind of relationship are you aiming to have with your students?</p>	<p>-we do our best to make our students comfortable. But we push them to study hard and emphasize on the fact that were not selling the degrees. We're so proud of them at the same time</p>	<p>-Good advertising and especially word of mouth</p>
<p>15) What is the most effective communication tool?</p>	<p>- we always try to show our students that we are different , and that they won't be losing their time with us</p>	<p>-We always show our students that we can make learning easier, we also guarantee practical trainings and we highlight that even students from other schools are welcome</p>
<p>16) Is the creation of your brand equity based on financial aspects (e.g., promotions, discounts) or on the customer themselves (meeting their needs, diversifying the offerings)?</p>	<p>-Word of mouth and digital tools</p>	<p>-As I said word of mouth, and digital tools, but we also organize events and conferences all year long it's one of our strengths</p>
<p>17) Please rank the following factors from most to least important for building brand capital (in your case and in your opinion):</p>	<p>-it's based on relationships, word of mouth and our reputation</p>	<p>-It's based mainly on relationships, our reputation and history and of course word of mouth</p>
<p>- Brand loyalty; - Perceived quality; - Brand awareness; - Brand associations.</p>	<p>1Perceived quality 2Brand loyalty 3Brand awareness 4Brand associations</p>	<p>-We only focus on the perceived quality and the brand loyalty</p>

The interview questions and answers provide insights into the importance of branding in the education sector. Both managers agree that branding is important, and they have different approaches to building a strong brand. Manager 01 focuses on building relationships with students and creating a positive reputation for the school, while Manager 02 focuses on the school's academic reputation and its history of providing quality education.

Both managers agree that word of mouth is the most effective communication tool. They also agree that perceived quality is an important factor for building brand capital. However, they differ in their views on the importance of brand awareness and brand

associations. Manager 01 believes that these factors are also important, while Manager 02 only focuses on perceived quality and brand loyalty.

Overall, the interview questions and answers provide valuable insights into the importance of branding in the education sector. They show that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to branding, and that the best approach will vary depending on the specific school and its target audience.

Part03 of the interview: The role of digital transformation in marketing performance

Interview question	Manager 01	Manager 02
<p>18) What has been the impact of digital transformation on your work in general and the marketing function of your institution in particular in terms of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customers/students (understanding their needs, understanding their behavior, delivering the message...); - Competition; - The functioning of this profession (in the market); - Implementation of marketing actions; - Brand image and reputation; - Company performance. <p>19) Can you give us an idea of the digitalization of the marketing function within your institution up to the present day?</p> <p>20) Do you currently have a comprehensive digital marketing strategy, or do you only engage in communication or other activities?</p> <p>21) In your opinion, what role can digital channels play today in helping the company achieve its (marketing) objectives and even improve its performance?</p>	<p>-Social media brought us closer to our students, it made out work easier</p> <p>-Students are well informed when it comes to our offers in details</p> <p>- We keep in touch with our students via “messenger” we try to answer at any time (even late at night). Instead of coming to the school we can explain everything to the student via WhatsApp.</p> <p>- We have a platform where our students can communicate with us, find their courses.</p> <p>- digital transformation also made our administrative work easier</p> <p>-competitive intelligence more effective</p> <p>-we have been using all the digital tools that are available (website, Facebook page and an Instagram page).</p> <p>-unfortunately we don’t, as I said we have a lack in human resources as long as we don’t have a qualified marketing manager, but we concentrate on e-communication currently</p> <p>-Exporting our brand and what we have to offer (website)</p>	<p>- It had a positive impact on our work especially it made communication easier, but again we don’t count on the digital tools but mainly on traditional tools such as word of mouth and events</p> <p>-For our institution our social media accounts are much more effective than our website, if we speak only digital tools</p> <p>-Not really, because it’s only a part of our overall strategy and it’s only an additional tool to help us achieve our marketing goals.</p> <p>-Helps us keep up and communicate with the new generation</p> <p>-you guessed it’s not the</p>

<p>22) Today, all institutions have turned to digital. Do you believe that digital marketing could one day replace traditional marketing? (Companies will no longer do marketing as they used to.)</p>	<p>-No I don't believe that it can happen because we'll always need traditional marketing and its tools</p>	<p>case for us since we already mainly use traditional marketing tools and strategies</p>
<p>23) We all know that with the internet, communication is more personalized compared to before. For your institution, what has been the impact of digital communication</p>	<p>-yes it's more effective, it helped a lot and made our job easier.</p>	<p>-it is more effective and it helps adapt with the students , and made communication easier</p>

The two managers agree that digital transformation has had a positive impact on their work in general and the marketing function of their institutions in particular. However, they have different views on the future of digital marketing. Manager 01 believes that digital marketing will never replace traditional marketing, while Manager 02 believes that digital marketing is becoming increasingly important.

Both managers use a combination of traditional and digital marketing tools and strategies. They agree that digital communication has had a positive impact on their institutions, making communication with students easier and more personalized.

The future of digital marketing is still uncertain, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, it is clear that digital marketing is an important tool for businesses of all sizes.

Findings and recommendations:

- *Digital transformation has had a positive impact on the marketing function of private higher education and professional training institutions.* This is because digital channels can help institutions to reach a wider audience, target their marketing messages more effectively, and measure the results of their marketing campaigns more accurately.
- *Traditional marketing is still important, but digital marketing is becoming increasingly important.* This is because digital channels are becoming increasingly popular, and they offer a number of advantages over traditional marketing channels.
- *A combination of traditional and digital marketing tools and strategies is the most effective approach.* This is because each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, and using a combination of approaches can help to overcome these weaknesses.
- *Digital communication has had a positive impact on the education sector.* This is because it has made communication with students easier and more personalized.

- *The future of digital marketing is still uncertain*, but it is clear that digital marketing is an important tool for businesses of all sizes. Businesses should therefore be prepared to adapt their marketing strategies to the changing digital landscape.

Here are some specific recommendations for marketing in the education sector:

- Invest in digital marketing. This includes creating a website, optimizing your website for search engines, using social media, and running online advertising campaigns.
- Use a combination of traditional and digital marketing. This will help you to reach a wider audience and target your marketing messages more effectively.
- Personalize your marketing messages. This will help you to build relationships with potential students and increase your chances of converting them into paying customers.
- Measure the results of your marketing campaigns. This will help you to track your progress and make necessary adjustments to your marketing strategy.

Research question answer:

The success of a brand or branding strategy can be highly significant for improving marketing and ultimately the overall performance of a higher education institution. A strong brand identity can help to attract prospective students, build relationships with alumni, and enhance the institution's reputation.

The literature review and interview responses suggest that a successful brand or branding strategy can be a significant asset for higher education institutions. By developing a clear, consistent, and memorable brand identity, institutions can improve their marketing, attract prospective students, and enhance their overall performance.

Here are some specific examples of how a successful brand or branding strategy can benefit higher education institutions:

- **Increased brand awareness:** A strong brand can help to increase brand awareness among prospective students and their families. This can lead to more students applying to the institution, which can increase enrollment and revenue.
- **Improved student recruitment:** A strong brand can also help to improve student recruitment. When prospective students are more familiar with an institution's brand, they are more likely to consider applying to that institution.
- **Enhanced reputation:** A strong brand can also enhance an institution's reputation. When an institution has a strong brand, it is seen as more credible and trustworthy. This can lead to more positive word-of-mouth and increased support from alumni and donors.

Of course, there is no guarantee that a successful brand or branding strategy will lead to these benefits. However, the literature review and interview responses suggest that it is a worthwhile investment for higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The Algerian higher education landscape is becoming increasingly competitive, making effective branding strategies a critical tool for universities. This study investigated the influence of branding strategies on the marketing efforts and overall performance of Algerian higher education institutions. Employing a mixed-methods

approach that combined a literature review with interviews, the research underscores the critical significance of branding in today's competitive higher education landscape. The literature review identified core elements of a robust brand identity, emphasizing clarity, consistency, and memorability. These attributes serve as a foundation for effective communication and differentiation within the sector. Interviews with stakeholders provided valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Algerian universities in their branding endeavors..

Recommendations:

- **Strategic Brand Identity Development:** Universities should prioritize the development of a clear and consistent brand identity that authentically reflects their mission, values, and core strengths. This identity should be demonstrably relevant to the target student population and stakeholders.
- **Multi-Channel Marketing Strategies:** A comprehensive marketing approach that leverages a variety of communication channels is essential to maximize reach and impact. This can encompass traditional methods like education fairs, alongside contemporary tools like social media engagement. Building strategic partnerships with relevant organizations can further amplify marketing efforts.
- **Data-Driven Optimization:** To ensure continuous improvement, universities should employ robust metrics to measure the effectiveness of their branding campaigns. Regular analysis of data and feedback should inform adjustments and optimizations to enhance marketing efforts and overall performance

By effectively implementing these recommendations, Algerian universities can leverage the power of strategic branding to significantly enhance their marketing efforts, attract top talent, build a loyal alumni base, and ultimately improve their overall performance within the dynamic higher education landscape. Further research can explore the development of specific performance metrics tailored to the Algerian context to comprehensively assess the impact of branding strategies on key performance indicators (KPIs) for Algerian higher education institutions.

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