

Building a brand name for universities: A case study of Ho Chi Minh City Open University

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ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization and internationalization, students have many choices when pursuing their educational paths. Students today are more mobile and willing to leave their homes to study at their desired university. Building a brand name in this increasingly competitive landscape can be the primary tool for higher education institutions, particularly universities, to differentiate themselves and gain a competitive advantage. However, research on university branding is scarce, and the concept of university branding remains largely unexplored in the Vietnamese context. This study explores how a university can use branding strategies to build its brand name. The analysis utilizes an organizational perspective to gather valuable information and insights into a university's activities to build and enhance its brand name. Ho Chi Minh City Open University (OU), a top-tiered public university with its main campuses and learning precincts in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, is selected to conduct this study. The nature of the study is qualitative, and data is collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with current leaders and staff at the University. The sample utilized in this study includes staff from various departments within the university and current and former executives to gain a comprehensive understanding and capture diverse perspectives. The key findings can be summarized as follows. First, primary stakeholders such as students, parents, staff, and others targeted by the University require different branding strategies. Second, OU can build its brand name through its students and alumni who have studied at the university. Third, OU needs a comprehensive strategy concerning brand name-building and enhancing activities with a focus on students' affairs and communication. Recommendations have emerged based on these findings for building and enhancing the brand name of Ho Chi Minh City Open University, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

A brand serves valuable functions for an organization (Bisani, Daye, & Mortimer, 2022). To some extent, a reputable and trustworthy brand contributes to customer satisfaction, facilitating product choices or fostering greater customer loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2020). Furthermore, competitors may replicate production processes and product designs. However,

they cannot easily achieve the long-lasting impressions left in the minds of individuals and organizations over many years of product experience and marketing activities (Kuriakose, 2023). This underscores that a brand can effectively ensure a competitive advantage (Kotler & Keller, 2020). Building upon these insights, when applied to an organization such as a university, we recognize that universities should prioritize investments in their institutional brand.

An analysis of the political economy of higher education indicates that the deregulation of fee structures has been a significant factor driving students' behaviour toward college degrees since the early 21st century (Durkin, McKenna, & Cummins, 2012; Kuriakose, 2023). For instance, Ackerman, Moriuchi, and Gross (2022) argue that choosing a prestigious higher education institution can be likened to selecting a luxury brand. Conversely, research has demonstrated that students choose universities based on the holistic university experience, encompassing opportunities, networks, and post-graduation impact (Spry, Foster, Pich, & Peart, 2020). Modern universities increasingly leverage factors such as industry and community engagement, work placements, and transnational education to maintain competitiveness (Subraamanniam, Hancock, & Birt, 2022). Without a well-defined and distinctive university brand concept and effective communication, students and prospective customers of higher education form their perceptions of the university brand based on perceived value propositions. It is becoming increasingly evident that universities cannot continue to operate as undifferentiated institutions offering educational services (Kuriakose, 2023). The traditional notion that universities and colleges are challenged to develop their brand names in a corporate-style manner persists due to various factors, including a lack of communication strategies, suitable brand-building initiatives, partnerships, and infrastructure (Chapleo, 2015; Subbarayalu, 2022). Without effective branding, negative consumer-brand relationships may persist among students based on their actual experiences or perceived ideological discrepancies (Gois, Moura, Gonçalves Filho, & Chinelato, 2023).

Ho Chi Minh City Open University was established in 1990 and has undergone over 30 years of brand name development within the realm of education. Upon examining the university's strategic plans from 2013 to the present, the strategic plan for the 2013 - 2023 period does not mention any brand name development for the university. The only reference within the strategy pertains to enhancing the university's image through improving internal processes. According to the assessment report on the implementation of the university's communication plan for the 2021 - 2025 period, issued in 2023, the current weaknesses include a lack of unified focus among university units regarding communication efforts and image-building, as well as the absence of a specific plan for developing and sustaining the university's brand value.

Previous research has stated the advantages of university branding (Dean, Arroy-Gamez, Punjaisri, & Pich, 2016; Sujchaphong, Nguyen, & Melewar, 2014; Whisman, 2009). However, our literature review highlights a notable gap in the university branding literature, particularly in the detailed examination of the impact of university branding on students and stakeholders, even though it is essential to gain their support for the brand (Clark, Chapleo, & Suomi, 2020). Consequently, this study significantly contributes to theoretical and practical aspects by concentrating on students and stakeholders to investigate the university's branding process. This study, therefore, addresses the following research objectives: *First*, we assess the significance of university branding by examining its role among students and other stakeholders and within the university's strategic framework. *Second*, this paper seeks to analyze the current strategies employed by the university for building brand value and to identify the components of the university's brand value chain. *Third*, we aim to propose potential strategies for enhancing the university's brand value.

Following this introduction, the structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 comprehensively reviews the relevant literature on building a brand name. Research methodology and data collection are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 presents and discusses the research findings, followed by the concluding remarks and policy implications in Section 5.

2. Literature review

Over the past 30 years, various dimensions of branding have evolved, including brand image (Balmer, 1998; Boulding, 1956), brand positioning (Ries & Trout, 1982), and brand personality (Kapferer, 1997). These clarifications underscore reactions to developments in the business environment and deeper insights into the nature and influence of companies as intangible marketing mix elements (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). To comprehend the critical components for successful university branding, it is essential first to grasp the foundational concept of branding. According to Nandan (2005), in the context of consumer relationships, a brand is an intangible asset capable of creating value for shareholders, or as defined by Doyle (2001), a brand is a specific name, symbol, or design - or more commonly a combination of these - used to differentiate the products of a specific seller. Therefore, a brand serves as the foundation upon which consumers can categorize and build relationships with products or services (Weilbacher, 1995). Moreover, a brand is a limited ownership right of a company that customers encounter, connect with, and form relationships to perceive its value (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). The term "consumer brand knowledge" can be described as the unique meaning a brand holds in the minds of consumers (Keller, 2003). Consumers connect and understand various sources and stages of knowledge, such as awareness, benefits, attributes, thoughts, emotions, images, attitudes, and experiences related to the brand (Murphy, 1998). However, the theories and research discussed are primarily applicable to corporations and businesses, and not all of them can be directly applied to university branding. Revisiting Doyle's (2001) previously mentioned definition, the impact of a brand in higher education institutions is characterized by every perception, image, experience, thought, and emotion that develops into a relationship with the brand, in the trust of the customer (Harsha & Shah, 2011). Judson, Aurand, Gorchels, and Gordon (2008) emphasize that the term consumer/customer can be replaced with students. Similar to how an effective commercial brand attracts valuable consumers, a strong university brand can impact a higher education institution's competitive ability to attract the most talented students (Judson et al., 2008).

The escalating competition in academia has underscored the growing significance of branding. Universities, for instance, seek to augment both the quantity and caliber of students (Suomi, 2014), enhance student loyalty (Helgesen & Nettet, 2007), fortify alumni connections (Ressler & Abratt, 2009), attract talented faculty and staff (Whisman, 2009), garner support from the corporate sector (Baker, Faircloth, & Simental, 2005), and distinguish themselves further from other higher education institutions (Clark et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the university exhibits unique complexity within its stakeholder environment, setting it apart from many other contexts (Chapleo & Simms, 2010). Dean et al. (2016, p. 3041) mentioned that "the intricate nature of higher education underscores the role of marketing and the internal market in shaping brand identity, posing a challenge in establishing a shared brand meaning." Indeed, the intricacies of higher education as a service have been previously discussed regarding its distinctive market characteristics, such as high perceived risks and long-term consequences for students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Ng & Forbes, 2009). Consequently, conventional branding approaches are not entirely applicable in the university setting (Whisman, 2009). To achieve success, universities must place particular emphasis on factors like internal brand management (Chapleo, 2010). For instance, higher education presents challenges to branding efforts due to significant

internal resistance (Whisman, 2009). Furthermore, the presence of multiple sub-brands and a complex brand architecture can impede effective internal branding efforts (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007), especially for multi-campus universities with regional centers (Suomi, Kuoppakangas, Hytti, Hampden-Turner, & Kangaslahti, 2013) and during university mergers aimed at enhancing efficiency (Kallio & Kallio, 2014; Suomi, 2014). Notably, challenges arise concerning internal branding within higher education organizations due to distinct departments, units, and manifold identities (Wæraas & Solbakk, 2009). Therefore, the role of branding among students and stakeholders remains inadequately understood within higher education, particularly in an emerging market like Vietnam.

This study is conducted based on the PCDL model. The PCDL model is a theoretical model for building brands in a competitive market, proposed by Ghodeswar in 2008. It includes four elements: Positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging the brand equity (Ghodeswar, 2008).

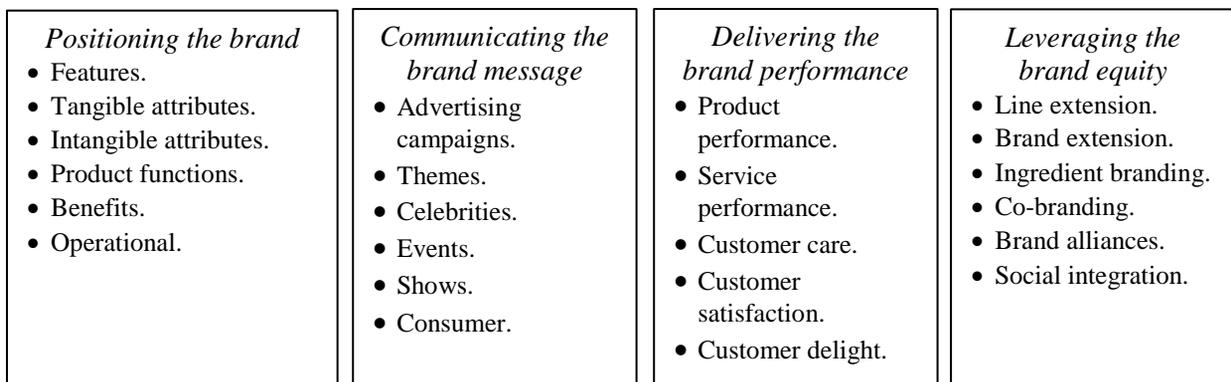


Figure 1. PCDL model

Source: Ghodeswar (2008)

The PCDL model provides a structured framework for universities to understand and manage their brand (Omar & Heywood, 2010). By carefully managing perception, cognition, differentiation, and loyalty, universities can build a strong and positive brand name that resonates with students, faculty, alumni, and the broader community. This, in turn, can contribute to a university's long-term success and reputation in a competitive higher education landscape. Universities need to carefully manage their image and reputation. In this stage, the PCDL model suggests that universities should focus on creating a positive and appealing perception among their targeted audiences. These audiences include prospective students, parents, faculty, and the broader community. Marketing efforts, campus facilities, and the quality of education all contribute to shaping the perception of the university (Ghodeswar, 2008). Once prospective students become aware of a university, they start gathering information about it. This stage is crucial in higher education, as students and their families invest significant time and resources in making informed decisions. Universities should provide clear and comprehensive information about their programs, faculty, research, and campus life (Chiou, 2020). This information should align with the university's brand identity and values. In a competitive higher education landscape, universities must differentiate themselves from other institutions. The PCDL model suggests that universities should identify their Unique Selling Points (USPs). These might include specialized programs, distinguished faculty, research opportunities, or a strong commitment to specific values or causes. Effective differentiation can attract students who resonate with these unique qualities. In addition, building loyalty in higher education often involves nurturing a sense of belonging and engagement. Students who feel connected to their

university are more likely to become loyal alumni. This stage encompasses the overall student experience, including academic support, extracurricular activities, and career services. Universities can also cultivate loyalty by maintaining strong alumni networks encouraging active participation and giving back to the institution (Xiao & You, 2023).

3. Methodology and data

3.1. Research method

To address the research question, we adopted a survey design. A survey design is applicable when the research objective is to provide new insights and illuminate a selected phenomenon (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). As this typical study aims to contribute profound insights into how a university can build its brand, its essence is exploratory. Therefore, selecting a survey design is appropriate as the author observes the current situation from an unexplored perspective (Bisani et al., 2022).

In this paper, we have opted for a qualitative research method. The concept of university branding from the standpoint of students and relevant stakeholders in Vietnam remains unexplored to date, and the choice of the research method is supported by Saunders et al. (2012) assertion that the inductive approach is suitable for relatively new and underdeveloped research. Considering the limited existing literature within the Vietnamese context, it would be contradictory to develop a hypothesis. This aligns with the exploratory nature of this study (Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, existing studies primarily focus on the strategic perspective of universities, whereas our research centers on the perspectives of students and relevant stakeholders. Therefore, reviewing literature and theory primarily guides the initial data collection stage, which involves constructing the interview question set.

Based on the theoretical foundations laid out in Section 2, we invite various experts to provide input by conducting interviews with them. The interview question set for experts is presented in Appendix 1 (online version).

3.2. Data collection

Ho Chi Minh City Open University (OU) was selected for this research through convenience sampling, as the authors are currently employed there. In conducting this case study, a non-probability sampling method is employed. Non-probability sampling allows researchers to purposefully select interview subjects most likely to provide the most relevant information (Kuriakose, 2023). Moreover, non-probability sampling is recommended when conducting case studies with small samples (Saunders et al., 2012), which is the approach adopted in this study. In this research, the authors deliberately chose to interview employees and managers at OU with job responsibilities related to marketing activities at the university and individuals working for various departments within OU. However, due to the university's organisational structure, departments do not have dedicated marketing personnel. There is a separation between the marketing department of OU and individuals working in various departments. For these reasons, individuals working in relevant positions in different departments were interviewed to gather a comprehensive dataset. Snowball sampling involves requesting initial subjects to suggest additional feasible subjects who also meet the research criteria, and these subjects, in turn, identify subsequent subjects (Saunders et al., 2012).

This research employs semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow us greater flexibility with follow-up questions while also providing the opportunity to elicit additional responses and explore the influence of values and beliefs on answers, thereby potentially leading to deeper insights (Ghorbanzadeh, 2022). The list of interview participants is presented in Appendix 2 (online version). In addition, we also derive data from the university's website and social media

platforms, along with printed materials, OU magazines, and advertising materials published by OU. In addition to interviews, secondary data aids in gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomena that may go beyond the individual insights of various interviewees. This type of secondary data has a textual nature (Saunders et al., 2012). By utilizing secondary data, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the context under investigation.

3.3. Data analysis

We utilize content analysis to analyze the collected qualitative data. Through content analysis, we can identify relationships and develop deeper insights (Saunders et al., 2012). The interviews are recorded to ensure that no important aspects mentioned by the interviewees are overlooked. These recorded conversations facilitate the analysis and coding process.

The chosen technique to conduct the analysis is coding. Codes are assigned to any content that appears significant and would aid in addressing the research questions (Kuriakose, 2023). These codes then facilitated data organization and helped structure and manage the data in a more manageable format (Ghorbanzadeh, 2022). After all codes are established, they are documented on a whiteboard to achieve an overall view to identify differences and establish relationships among them. Subsequently, similar codes could be grouped into categories. This is accomplished by pinpointing commonalities and significance across categories. Our analysis compares the developed codes with previously discussed theories and the selected framework (Saunders et al., 2012). Table 1 below shows an example of how to code data and create categories.

Table 1

The examples of coding and creating categories

Respondent	Quote from Interview	Sample of used codes	Identified Sub-category
E1	I believe that students are well-suited to serve as brand ambassadors for the university.	Brand Ambassador	Brand Ambassador
E2	Information is more persuasive when conveyed by current students at the university rather than through the school's communication channels.	Contributions from students	
E4	Students and alumni are crucial individuals in conveying information to both students and parents.	Communicators are extremely important	
E3	The communication activities are not systematic and lack professionalism.	Communication is not professional	Communication strategy
E5	The university's communication department engages in self-directed learning and is self-reliant but lacks professionalism.	Spontaneous communication	
E6	The communication activities are loosely coordinated, with many disconnected efforts, and some activities are poorly executed.	Lack of communication strategy	

4. Empirical results and discussions

4.1. Engaging with students

Based on the content of the interviews, we have drawn the first result that OU needs to engage with students and includes various tools that the university uses when reaching out to potential students. Three types have been identified from the interviews, as shown below.

First, OU can use social media to advertise and promote its brand. Social media introduces various social media platforms that OU uses to raise brand awareness and create opportunities for individuals to ask questions or voice concerns about anything related to OU. Platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, and YouTube are used as social media outlets. This was explained by some interviewees, one of whom said, “We have our own channels on social media, such as Facebook, to promote OU and its programs” (Experts 2, 8, 9). The second identified category is Online News, including advertising documents and electronic magazines. When discussing online news, experts focused more on targeting specific groups to identify potential students. “We promote training programs and student services to target students through internal news pages and online news pages that target students’ interests” (Experts 3 & 9). When talking about print newspapers, many interviewees mentioned the digitization issue. OU is leaning more towards digital goals. “I think currently we are also focusing on online communication, and the content of newspapers is becoming more limited” (Expert 7).

Second, human capital is the primary asset, with sub-categories including students, alumni, and staff being mentioned as crucial representatives for reaching out to students and promoting the brand. All interviewees agreed that students play a vital role as brand ambassadors for OU, especially when representing the university at public events. “It’s much more convincing when they (current students or alumni) talk to prospective students than when it comes from me” (Expert 5). Even after students graduate, they still represent the university, and maintaining relationships with them is important for the brand’s benefit. Therefore, the university manages relationships with alumni through an alumni database and groups on Facebook and Zalo where alumni can connect. Regarding this group, one expert explained, “The alumni movement has developed strongly in all faculties of OU” (Expert 4). Interviewees also emphasized that alumni can become significant brand ambassadors like current students.

The third main category is titled “Interaction” and addresses how OU is interacting and addressing issues, providing support for students. It includes two sub-categories: “one-stop-shop service” and free student services. These are solutions that OU departments implement to quickly address feedback student issues and provide entirely free support, thereby actively and reliably promoting their brand. “Some departments have come up with a ‘one-stop, one-point way of working to handle procedures for students quickly” and “OU’s student support services are entirely free and very effective” (Experts 2 & 8). One expert explained, “Issues related to administrative procedures are resolved very quickly” and “Through social media, student questions and concerns are supported and answered very quickly and promptly” (Expert 4).

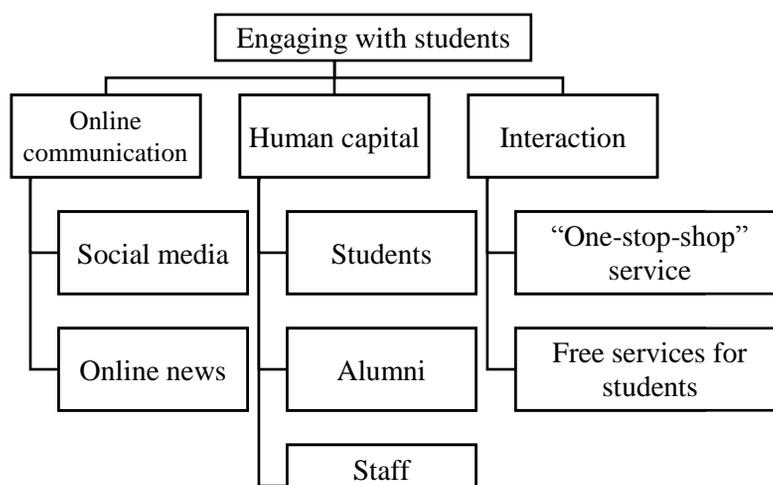


Figure 2. Engaging with students

In the process of constructing a university brand, it is crucial to consider the roles of students, alumni, and staff for several compelling reasons from an academic perspective. Firstly, students represent the current and future face of the university. They are both the recipients of the institution's educational services and potential ambassadors of its brand (Khoshtaria, Datuashvili, & Matin, 2020). A university's reputation often hinges on the experiences and successes of its students. Positive interactions and experiences during their academic journey can lead to a strong sense of loyalty and advocacy (Clemes, Gan, & Kao, 2008). Students who are satisfied with their education are more likely to speak positively about the university, attracting prospective students and contributing to its brand image (Kethuda, 2022). Secondly, alumni play a significant role in brand building. They continue to be associated with the university even after graduation and can become valuable brand advocates. Their career and personal achievements are a testament to the quality of education the institution provides (Fitzgibbon & Prior, 2010). Engaging alumni in various ways, such as involving them in mentoring programs, alumni associations, or networking events, can strengthen their connection to the university and encourage them to promote its brand. Their success stories can inspire current students and enhance the university's reputation (Elsharnouby, 2016). Lastly, university staff, including faculty and administrative personnel, are instrumental in upholding and enhancing the institution's brand. They are responsible for delivering quality education, fostering a positive learning environment, and providing support services (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). Their dedication, expertise, and commitment contribute significantly to the overall student experience. When staff members are aligned with the university's brand values and goals, they can deliver a consistent and high-quality educational experience that reflects positively on the institution (Jillapalli & Jillapalli, 2014).

4.2. *Engaging with stakeholders*

Engaging with stakeholders is the second main category identified. Similar to the previous main category, it addresses how OU communicates its brand and describes how OU interacts with external partners such as businesses, regulatory agencies, and collaborators.

The first sub-category is "Online Communication." Online communication includes advertising activities on Facebook and television channels as a promotional tool for partners and businesses that OU wants to collaborate with. This category encompasses advertising materials and content that explain all the benefits of a collaborative relationship with OU. "Facebook is an effective communication channel", and "We use self-introduction programs on television to introduce OU and its training programs" (Expert 6).

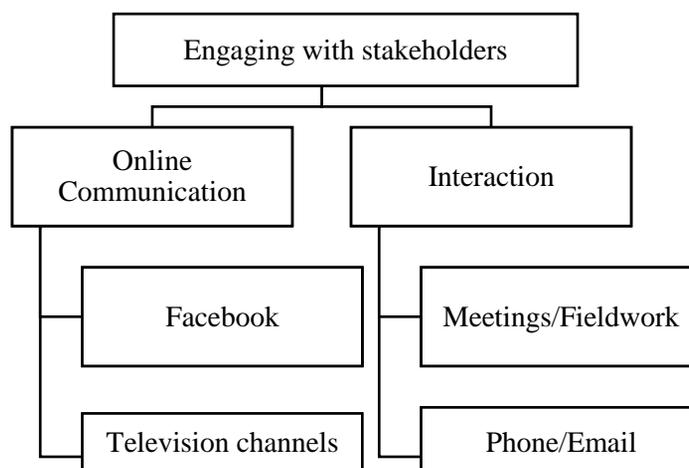


Figure 3. Engaging with stakeholders

The second sub-category is “Interaction.” OU enhances the promotion of collaboration with businesses through fieldwork and business contacts to capture needs and research orders that also come to OU. Expert 1 asserts, “Through meetings during fieldwork, localities propose research orders to OU.”

The focus on the intellectual identity of the university organization in university branding is both essential and profound. Establishing and managing relationships with various stakeholders, including students, alumni, businesses, regulatory authorities, and other partners, can assist the university in maximizing its existing resources and capabilities for effective brand building (Clark et al., 2020). As mentioned in this study and corroborated by the research conducted by Bisani et al. (2022), universities often face resource and capability constraints. Therefore, the creation and sustenance of positive relationships with stakeholders can aid the university in leveraging external resources to enhance its brand and meet its strategic objectives. In the context of intense competition in education, the development and maintenance of strong relationships with partners and the surrounding community can determine a university’s success and sustainability (Salameh, Kolokotroni, & Constantinou, 2022). Managing information, fostering interaction, and capitalizing on specialized knowledge from stakeholders can help the university most effectively meet the needs of students, businesses, and society. Thus, examining and enhancing stakeholder relationships are integral to university brand building and development (Pinar, Girard, & Basfirinci, 2020).

4.3. Challenges

The final main category is “Challenges,” which includes strategy and personnel challenges. The first code is about the challenge of lacking a strategy. According to the interviewees, completing tasks from the communications department sometimes takes longer due to organizational issues, and they do tasks themselves. This arises because OU does not yet have a specific branding and brand-building strategy. Expert 6 states, “Meetings all touch on brand building, but there hasn’t been a specific meeting to discuss branding and brand-building.” Additionally, experts agree that branding is clearly recognized but lacks a strategy, specific processes, and seamless coordination among departments and units in brand building. “All university presidents prioritize brand building” or “In my personal opinion, OU does not have a specific branding strategy” (Expert 3), or “The system of activities is not well-connected. There are many activities, but they are not interconnected, some activities are poorly executed, ... but sometimes those are branding activities” (Expert 2).

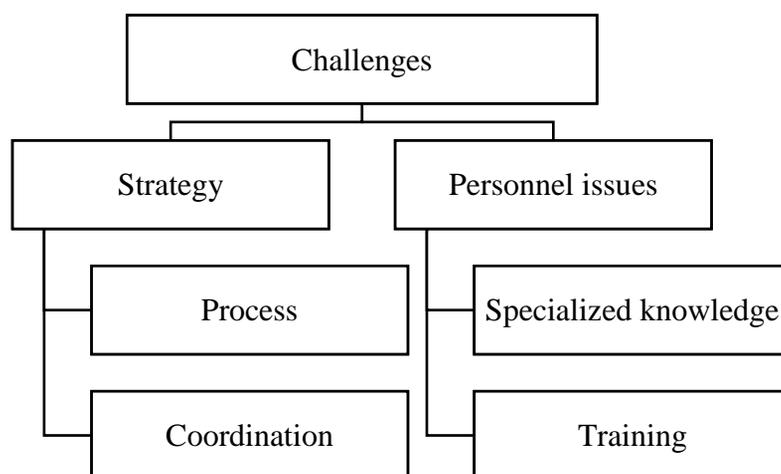


Figure 4. Challenges

The second code pertains to personnel issues. Specifically, it concerns the staff of OU's Communications Department, who still lack specialized knowledge and formal training. The current staff of OU's Communications Department is enthusiastic, but they have not received in-depth expertise in brand building. "The head of the Communications Department is enthusiastic, so they seek knowledge themselves, sometimes even travelling abroad for learning and applying to OU" (Expert 5). The personnel in the Communications Department have not been formally trained in brand building. Expert 4 emphasizes that "The staff in charge of communications are very active in their work, but they lack in-depth specialized knowledge and need formal training," or "The Communications Department has made many efforts in training and specialization, but it still cannot compare to other universities" (Expert 2).

One major challenge is the absence of a well-defined brand strategy. While there may be a clear recognition of the importance of branding, many universities struggle to establish concrete branding strategies. This lack of strategic direction can result in inefficiencies, inconsistencies, and missed opportunities. Without a clear plan, resources may be misallocated, and the brand may lack coherence (Pinar et al., 2020). In addition, the complexity of university structures, with multiple faculties, departments, and administrative units, can hinder effective brand coordination. Often, these entities operate somewhat independently, which can lead to fragmented branding efforts. Ensuring that all parts of the university align with the brand strategy and communicate a consistent message can be a significant challenge (Khoshtaria et al., 2020). Building a strong university brand requires a team with academic knowledge and branding expertise. However, many universities struggle to provide their personnel with adequate training and professional development opportunities in branding. This results in a workforce that may be enthusiastic but lacks the necessary skills to execute branding initiatives effectively (Kethuda, 2022).

5. Concluding remarks and policy recommendations

The role of branding is immensely crucial in the sustainable development of any organization (Ghorbanzadeh, 2022). Various concepts, theoretical frameworks, and different ideas have been brought to light, resulting in various perspectives on how a brand name should be managed (Kuriakose, 2023). However, previous studies have overlooked examining university brand building from the perspective of students and stakeholders, especially in Vietnam (Clark et al., 2020). As such, this paper is conducted to effectively examine the current standing and major issues regarding the brand name of Ho Chi Minh City Open University. Indeed, studies have shown that branding is one of the powerful tools for organizations to compete in today's competitive market (Clark et al., 2020). Hence, organizations use branding to gain a competitive advantage and achieve sustainable growth in the market. Building the university's brand can help attract high-quality faculty members and a plentiful pool of prospective students (Dean et al., 2016).

This study provides valuable managerial implications for university administrators. *First*, a positioning strategy for Ho Chi Minh City Open University based on the following attributes should be considered and implemented to enhance the university's brand name development. The first attribute that should be widely promoted when mentioning the university's brand name is the affordable tuition fees paired with high-quality services for students. Setting tuition fees at a reasonable level while delivering excellent service quality helps attract attention and trust from parents and prospective students. The second attribute is related to free student services and a one-stop-shop approach. One of the university's strengths is to provide free student services and easy accessibility through a "one-stop-shop" approach. The third attribute that needs to be emphasized is an "open" environment that is friendly, fosters student confidence, and encourages

them to confront workplace challenges upon graduation. An “open” environment is essential as it creates favourable conditions for students to explore, develop, and harness their potential. Students can engage in extracurricular activities, think freely, and become self-assured in their learning and work processes through support and encouragement. Additionally, an “open” educational environment also provides opportunities for students to develop important soft skills such as communication, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving. These skills are necessary for success in today’s job market. *Second*, the university’s management should establish a professional communication team. Professional communication efforts help define the university’s image and reputation within the educational and social communities. By creating effective communication activities, the university can convey messages about the value and quality of education it provides to the public. This helps build trust and attract interest from industry partners, parents, and prospective students. *Third*, the university will need organize the structured brand name-based ambassador and communication ambassador programs. The university’s brand ambassadors should be previous and current students. Selecting students as ambassadors can significantly contribute to the university’s brand development strategy because students can authentically promote and spread the university’s brand name to the community.

The main limitation of this study is the choice of methodology. Due to the constraints of time and the author’s desire to explore the topic in-depth, a single case study is selected, which restricts the ability to draw generalized conclusions applicable to all universities. To address this limitation, we conducted as many interviews as possible. In this study, a single typical case study, namely Ho Chi Minh City Open University (OU), a public, financially autonomous university was selected. As such, the results may not be applicable to all universities in Vietnam. In addition, the authors face several inherent challenges in conducting the interviews. Since the author only interviewed faculty members of OU, the sample size was significantly limited. To mitigate this, the author approached some of the interviewees directly to clarify the research purpose. The participants suggested other staff members to provide a broader pool of potential interviewees. In addition, our interview participants include managers and employees currently working at OU. Future research endeavors could potentially expand the survey respondents to include students, thereby offering a more diverse perspective on university branding.

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