

ВОПРОСЫ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ЭКОНОМИКИ

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UNIVERSITY BRAND: INTERPRETATION, STRUCTURE, FUNCTIONS¹⁰

The article systematizes and analyzes approaches to defining a university brand. The author reveals the distinctive features, advantages and disadvantages of the existing approaches to defining the university brand, and also proposes the author's interpretation of the university brand, clarifying the already existing interpretations of the university brand and based on the types of university products.

The main components of the university brand are determined, their characteristics are given. The functions of the university brand are highlighted, their detailed description is presented, taking into account the peculiarities of the university as a subject of market relations.

The structure of the university brand is presented, which takes into account the peculiarities of the target audience of the university, the features of the products provided by the university and the markets for which the products of the university are intended: the labor market, the market of educational services and the market of scientific and technical products and services.

Keywords: *definition of the university brand, university brand functions, university brand structure, university brand, higher education*

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БРЕНД УНИВЕРСИТЕТА: ТРАКТОВКА, СТРУКТУРА, ФУНКЦИИ

В статье систематизированы и проанализированы подходы к определению понятия бренда университета. Выявлены отличительные особенности, преимущества и недостатки существующих подходов к определению бренда университета, а также предложена авторская трактовка понятия бренда университета, основанная на видах продуктов университета. Определены основные составляющие бренда университета, дана их характеристика. Выделены функции бренда университета как субъекта рыночных отношений. Представлена структура бренда университета, которая учитывает особенности целевой аудитории университета, особенности предоставляемых университетом продуктов и рынков, для которых предназначены продукты универ-

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ситета: рынок труда, рынок образовательных услуг и рынок научно-технической продукции и услуг.

Ключевые слова: трактовка бренда университета, функции бренда университета, структура бренда университета, бренд университета, высшее образование.

Introduction. The digitalization of the economy leads to a reduction in barriers to entry to the market and, thereby, creates prerequisites for market relations to penetrate into business segments where they have not traditionally been dominant. This process leads to the transformation of higher education. Digitalization has an impact on the labor market, forming new professions and requirements for the competencies of graduates and university teaching staff. In the market of scientific and technical products, digitalization leads to the emergence of new areas of scientific research, forms new requirements for the organization of scientific research at universities. Digitalization in the educational services market leads to the emergence of new forms of education, new requirements for educational products and new types of competitors-providers of educational services in the form of training centers, separate educational platforms (Coursera, Stepik) offering short-term training courses. Thus, digitalization opens up opportunities and creates threats for universities. With the penetration of market relations into the traditional spheres of university activities, the creation and management of a brand responsible for their positioning in the minds of target audiences becomes an increasingly urgent task.

The problems of brand creation and management are widely presented in scientific publications. Most of the developments can be successfully applied to universities, as they have a universal character. However, universities, in comparison with other economic agents, which in most cases act as an object of research, have significant features, which make research on university brand issues relevant.

Research methods and objects. In general, a brand is a commodity (trade) brand, whose products have been accompanied by success for a long time, a high reputation, and which guarantees an increased quality of goods nowadays and in the future [1]. The university brands are explored in the works of Nechaeva E. S., Turkin V. A., Pashkus N. S., Ligidov R. M., Tappaskhanova E.O., Dotdaev A. Yu., Groshev I. V., Yuriev V. M., Vazhnova O. G., Vo-

lotovskaya A. A., Kvochkina I. A., Prokhorov A.V., Kraeva I. A., Anisimova I. A.

Unlike product or service brands, the university brand has a number of distinctive features, which are pointed out by a number of researchers.

In most publications, the «university brand» concept is defined as an educational institution with all its characteristics, and a set of characteristics, expectations, associations perceived by the consumer and attributed to the educational institution, information about the consumer and its characteristics; promises of any advantages given by an university to consumers.

A comparative analysis of definitions of educational organizations enables to identify several key components in the definition of university brand that reflect the specifics of this object of research (Table 1). The functional component is based on the provision of educational services that have certain characteristics (quality, form, training duration and conditions, qualification of specialists, level of teaching, etc.) [2, 3, 4, 5, 6].

Identification component is based on the individuality, unique and distinctive features of university that form its competitive advantages and allow potential consumers to distinguish it from other universities [3, 6].

Social component implies the ability and desire of the target audience to identify themselves with a group of students, graduates, employees or partners of the university [7].

Semiotic component is based on signs and symbols that are reflected in the name, corporate identity elements, marketing communications of the university, architecture of administrative and academic buildings and dormitories [2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10].

Perceptual approach assumes university image, expectations form learning and associations that arise in minds of the target audience when mentioning the university [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11]. Perceptual component is present in most definitions, because any brand is a mental construct that includes a set of images and characteristics that exists only in minds of consumers. «Brands are not created at a production site, they

are formed and exist in minds of consumers, providing an emotional connection between their perception and the functionality of the product» [12].

Ideological component implies defining and broadcasting university mission, goals and objectives to target audience and a certain set of corporate ideas and values [2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11].

Economic component shows how subjective values and brand ideas of the university lead to the formation of a real added value of educational services and contribute to attracting investments to the university for the development of educational and scientific activities [13]. Brand value is also considered as part of the economic component of the university brand.

Communicative component is a set of messages, means and channels of communication, through which interaction with the target audience is carried out and the university brand image is formed. It plays a key role in defining the university's brand, as it is the basis for implementation of the rest of the university's brand components, forms the brand image of the university and promotes the establishment of long-term relations between the university and its target audience.

The author, when interpreting the «university brand» concept, focuses on various components

in relation to research tasks. Often, a number of components are excluded from analysis. In general, such an approach can be considered effective for solving applied problems, however its effectiveness is limited if the theory of issue is explored, and the university concept of formation and management of the university brand is formed. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no unified interpretation of this concept, which is also explained by differences in higher education systems in different countries and forms of competition in national educational services markets.

Interpretation proposed by the author considers the university brand as a system of representations, opinions, associations and expectations towards the university, formed in minds of its target audience based on its name, mission, corporate identity, promises and products created by the university with all their characteristics in the competitive environment of educational services market, labor market and the market of scientific and technical products as a result of messages transmitted from the university to its target audience for the purpose of positioning and promotion using means and channels of marketing communications, that allows you to use the tools developed in marketing researches.

Table 1. – Main components of the university brand

Main components of the university brand	Essence
Functional	To provide educational services, train specialists, conduct scientific researches, their usefulness for consumers
Identification	Form of identity, distinctive features, advantages
Social	Ability to identify itself with a group of students, graduates, employees of the university
Semiotic	Name, architecture of administrative and educational buildings and dormitories, corporate identity (logo, corporate colors, font, sound, smell, tagline, etc.), advertising texts and images, etc.
Perceptual	The image, associations that arise in the minds of the target audience at the mention of the university
Ideological	Mission, purpose, tasks, a set of values that the university broadcasts for its target audience, compliance of the values broadcast by the university with the values of society
Economic	The cost of educational services, attraction of budgetary and extra-budgetary funds, the cost of the brand of the university
Communicative	Information, channels and means of communication

Note: own development based on [14]

At the same time, the premise is that the brand components are considered as subsystems

with the identification of their properties within the system and the connections between them.

The proposed interpretation, in contrast to the existing definitions, specifies that the university brand is formed not only in minds of its target audience in the market of educational services, but also in the markets of labor and scientific and technical products. Thus, prerequisites are set for their mutual impact on each other to study, taking into account the products created by the university. It should also be noted that the brand is formed due to the communicative component of this concept, which is responsible for the purposeful positioning and promotion of the university brand using the means and channels of marketing communications.

On the substantive focus, university brand in the author's interpretation is a corporate brand that performs many functions in economic, social, political and spiritual spheres of society. The main functions of the university brand presented in the figure reflect the specific features of the research object (Figure 1).

In economic sphere, the functions of the university brand are: identifying, differentiating, guaranteeing and the function of increasing the brand capital. The identifying function allows the target audience to understand the geographical and industry affiliation of the university brand. The differentiating function makes it possible to distinguish a university from others based on brand positioning, which includes the unique characteristics, features and competitive

advantages of the university. The guarantee function is responsible for the quality of educational services provided, because university brand provides certain promises and guarantees of the quality of educational services provided, evokes the trust of the target audience. The function of increasing the brand capital is responsible for creating assets associated with the university brand and capable of creating added value to university products.

In social sphere, the university brand performs the following functions: socio-practical, motivating, consolidating, regulatory, interactive, unifying and the function of cultural identification. Socio-practical function of the university involves solving social problems faced by enterprises and society by training specialists with necessary and sufficient knowledge and skills.

Scientific researches conducted at the university and the resulting inventions, useful models, industrial designs, copyright objects are also aimed at meeting needs of the target audience, and solving problems of enterprises and society.

Motivating function of the university is based on its mission, reflecting main meaning of the university's existence and its role in the life of the whole society. University mission includes educational activities, provision of multidisciplinary education and scientific research.

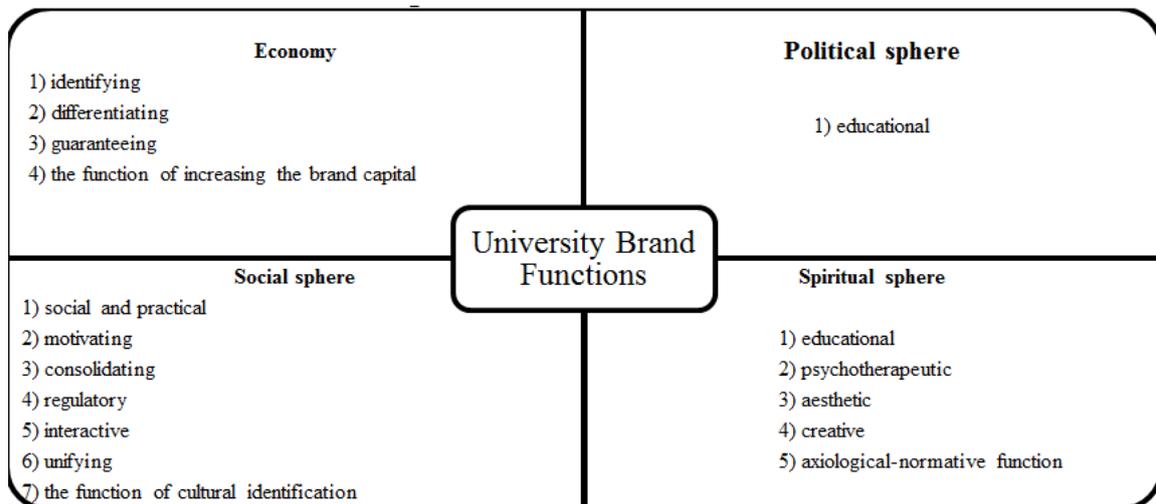


Figure 1. – University functions

Note: own development based on [14, 16]

Educational activity of the university leads to acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities, formation of professional competencies, con-

tributes to the formation of spiritual, moral and emotional value sphere of a student's personality, the development of its intellectual and crea-

tive abilities. The result of research activities carried out at the university is creation of inventions, utility models, industrial designs, objects of copyright. Motivating function of the brand reflects good intentions and motives aimed at positive changes in modern society through positive changes in the lives of students thanks to knowledge gained and research conducted.

Consolidating function of the university brand is to unite students at the place of their study and to create certain social groups – students, graduates, university teachers. At the same time, unifying function of the university brand manifests itself in demonstrating equal opportunities for students, and the regulatory function manifests itself through the formation of a separate category of people – specialists with higher education who have successfully completed their studies at the university and occupy a higher place in social hierarchy due to wide employment opportunities and higher wages. Interactive function of the university brand involves communication based on interaction and building trust relations between the university and its target audience. Socializing function of the university brand is closely related to education and is realized through the assimilation of certain values, rules of behavior and social norms. The function of cultural identification creates a certain image of a consumer of university's educational services in the public's eyes, showing a cultural group, which he/she belongs to [14]. A university graduate has certain knowledge, skills, and abilities, and his/her behavior corresponds to behavioral norms and expectations of society. As a result, graduates of a particular university may receive higher-paid and prestigious positions compared to graduates of other universities.

In spiritual sphere, university brand performs an educational, psychotherapeutic, aesthetic, creative and axiological-normative function. Educational function of the university brand is directly related to self-development of students. According to A. Maslow's pyramid, the

knowledge and skills acquired at the university contribute to meeting the need for self-development and the need for recognition. The psychotherapeutic function of the brand manifests itself due to stability, calmness and confidence feelings that arise among students as a result of quality guaranty of educational services received and promises of the university regarding employment and salary. Aesthetic function of the university brand is to form an attractive image of the university with the help of corporate identity, advertising texts and images used in the promotion of the university. Architecture of administrative and academic buildings, dormitories, design and decor of the interior and exterior of the university also form an attractive image of the university in minds of its target audience. Creative function of the university brand is to use non-standard brand promotion tools that contribute to improving its performance indicators.

An axiological-normative function of the university brand is directly related to translation of certain values and solution of social tasks – education and upbringing in accordance with established social norms.

In political sphere, the main function of the brand is ideological. Ideological function of the university brand involves the promotion of a certain system and ideas. As a rule, this system of positions and ideas is based on norms and values established by the society.

University brand image, which is developed in minds of its potential consumers, consists of a huge number of different associations. The optimal approach to classifying associations that form the brand image is the BrandMatics approach proposed by the consulting company McKinsey & Company, which includes four categories: associations caused by tangible and intangible characteristics and associations caused by rational and emotional advantages [15].

University brand structure is shown in Figure 2.

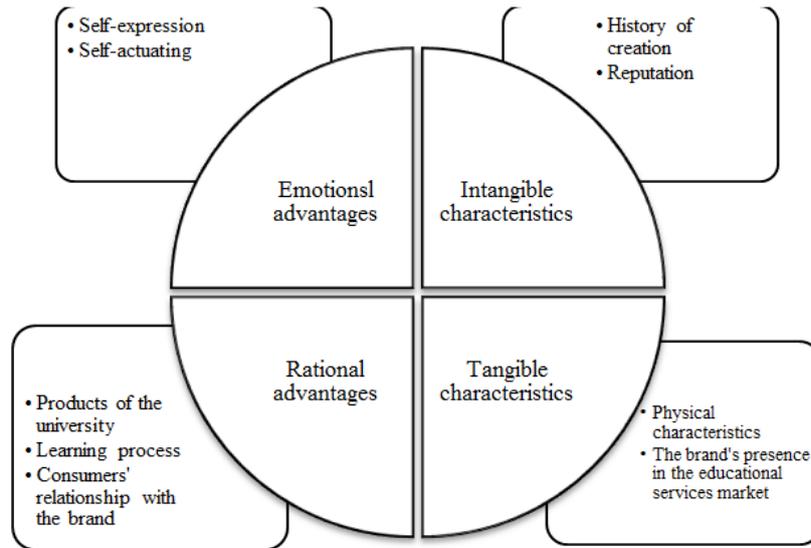


Figure 2. – University brand structure

Note: own development based on [15]

Tangible characteristics of the brand include physical characteristics of the university: architecture, interior and exterior decor of academic buildings and dormitories, the material and technical resources of the university, reliable advertising. Intangible characteristics of the university include its image, consisting of associations and opinions formed on the university history and traditions, achievements and feedback from students and graduates, the demand for graduates in the labor market, the popularity and demand for educational programs offered by the university.

Rational advantages of the university include: the quality of offered bachelor's, master's, post-graduate, retraining and additional training educational programs; forms, methods and means of training, level of training of the teaching staff, relationships with the brand during training and after graduation from the university, the university's position in international and national university rankings. Emotional advantages of the university brand include the opportunities created by the university for comprehensive development and self-realization of students.

The university operates simultaneously in three markets – in the market of educational services (derived from the labor market), in the labor market and in the market of scientific and technical products and services, providing three types of products: an educational product for the

market of educational services, an university graduate as a product for the labor market, scientific and technical products and services as a product for the market of scientific and technical products and services (figure 3).

The peculiarity of the educational services market in which universities operate is that the real quality of educational products offered by the university cannot be evaluated by the consumer upon admission, therefore the educational product of the university is a trusted product. University brand allows you to form a positive opinion, associations and expectations about the university and its educational products in the minds of its target audience.

Communication function of the university brand manifests itself through transfer of information about benefits, features and advantages of the learning process and opportunities for self-development and self-realization to the target audience. The stronger the university's brand, the higher its competitiveness in the educational services market.

Universities with a strong brand attract a large number of applicants with high scores every year. The university's brand manifests itself through a competition for specialties: the stronger its brand, the higher the competition for the university's specialties.

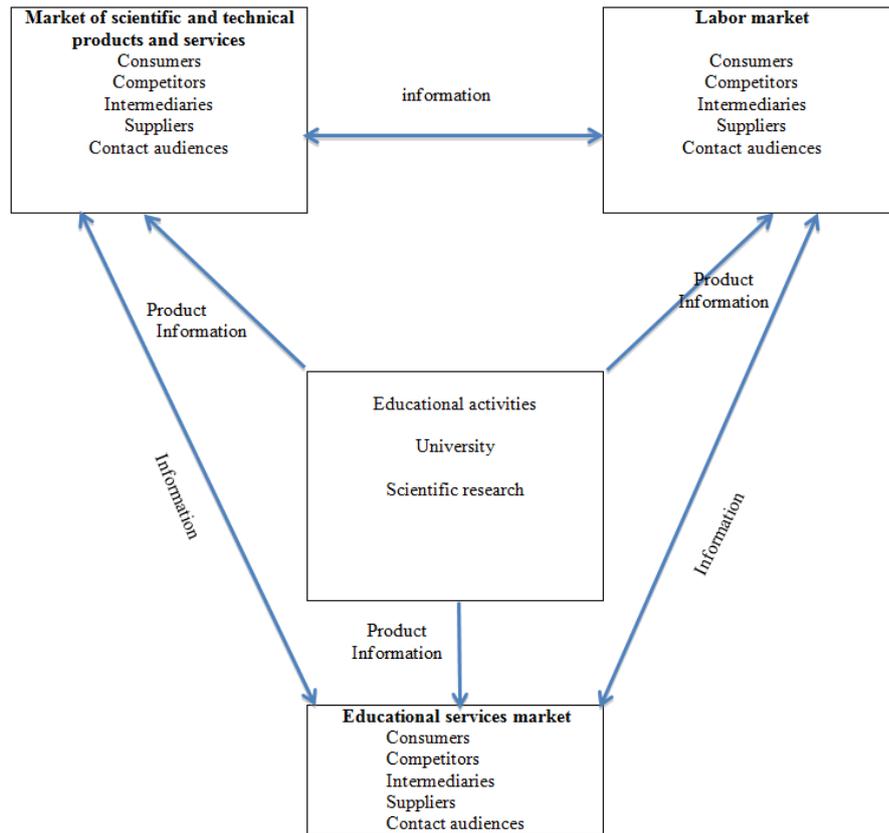


Figure 3. – University as a subject of market relations

Note: own development based on [14, 16]

University brand manifests itself in the labor market through the demand for its graduates. A. Braverman defines a university graduate as a specific product intended for enterprises hiring graduates to meet their need for personnel of necessary qualification [17].

The product «graduate» must meet the needs of enterprises and the requirements of scientific and technological progress. Despite the fact that the formation of «graduate» product is influenced by its socio-demographic and psychographic characteristics, the university plays a major role in the education of a graduate and the formation of its knowledge and skills. Communicative function of the university brand transmits information about the knowledge, skills, abilities and advantages of graduates training to its target audience in the labor market, promotes the establishment of long-term relationships with enterprises. Positive university brand creates an increased demand for the 'graduate' product, contributes to a higher salary of graduates. In turn, the image and quality of a 'graduate' product affects both the university brand and long-

term relationships with employers. Negative image and poor quality of graduate training leads to unwillingness to attract university graduates for internships and internships, reduces the demand for them in the labor market.

The interpretation of the educational services market as a derivative of the labor market makes it possible to adequately describe the interrelationships between the subsystems of its components when forming a university brand.

In addition to the market of educational services and the labor market, the university is a part of the market of scientific and technical products due to research activities. In the market of scientific and technical products, the brand is formed by the characteristics of scientific and technical products: their quality, innovation degree, types, industry affiliation, revenue and profit from its sale. University brand influences negotiations with customers, business partners, research organizations and competitors, and also contributes to increasing university investment attractiveness.

Conclusion. Due to mutual influence of information passing between the educational services market, the labor market and the market of scientific and technical products, the university brand contributes to achieving the goals and objectives of the university, increasing the volume of sales of university products and increasing its competitiveness in the international and national market.

Thus, the interpretation of the brand as a system, taking into account the distinctive features of the university, allows us to develop a concept for the formation and management of university brand based on the role of brand components as interconnected subsystems in a special way and taking into account the positioning of the educational services market as a derivative of the labor market.

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