

REVIEW

By the official opponent,

Doctor of Economic Sciences, Professor Olena Bilovodska,

on the dissertation of Liang Rui

"Research on the Implementation Path of University Brand Strategy"

submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the field of

Specialty 073 "Management."

The Relevance Of The Chosen Topic And Its Connection To Scientific Programs, Plans, And Themes

Research on the Implementation Path of University Brand Strategy is underscored by the contemporary dynamics and challenges within the higher education landscape. In the era of globalization, universities are compelled to adopt strategic approaches to enhance their visibility, attract talent, and secure funding. The intensifying competition among academic institutions necessitates a nuanced understanding of brand strategy implementation. As universities evolve into multifaceted entities, encompassing education, research, and community engagement, the need for an effective brand strategy becomes paramount. The transformative impact of digital technologies on communication and information dissemination further accentuates the relevance of this research. With prospective students, faculty, and stakeholders increasingly engaging with universities through online platforms, crafting and implementing a cohesive brand strategy in the digital realm is crucial. The study addresses the contemporary challenges and opportunities posed by the digital landscape in the context of university brand strategies. Moreover, the ongoing societal shifts and expectations regarding the role of higher education institutions heighten the significance of this research. Universities are not only seen as providers of education but also as contributors to societal development and drivers of innovation. Therefore, understanding how a brand strategy aligns with these evolving expectations is pivotal for the sustained success of higher education institutions. Additionally, the economic aspects of university operations are essential considerations. The ability to attract funding, partnerships, and investments relies heavily on the perceived value and distinctiveness of a university's brand. Investigating the pathways for effective implementation of a university brand strategy contributes to the overall economic sustainability and growth of academic institutions. In conclusion, the chosen dissertation topic is highly pertinent in navigating the complexities of the modern

higher education landscape. By delving into the implementation path of university brand strategies, the research aims to offer insights that are not only academically enriching but also practically beneficial for universities striving to thrive in a competitive, dynamic, and digitally driven environment.

The relevance of the dissertation topic by Liang Rui is defined by its significant theoretical and practical importance, contributing to the development of theoretical and methodological principles, as well as practical recommendations for the formulation of theoretical and applied foundations for the formation and selection of strategies in the implementation and development of the brand of higher education institutions. The execution of the dissertation aligns with the research focus of the Marketing and Logistics Department at Sumy National Agrarian University, specifically within the theme "Management of Competitiveness of Enterprises on the Principles of Innovative Marketing" (state registration number 0119U100250, 2019-2022). Part of the research has been carried out within the framework of scientific projects commissioned by the Henan Province (People's Republic of China), including the Social Science Planning Project No. 2021BZZ004; Research Project of Humanities and Social Sciences of Henan University No. 2022-ZDJH-0099; Research Project of Humanities and Social Sciences of Henan University No. 2022-ZZJH-158. The author has identified fundamental principles and priorities that should be considered in the management of the branding policy of higher education institutions in China.

The Degree Of Reliability And Justification Of Scientific Propositions, Conclusions, And Recommendations Formulated In The Dissertation.

A thorough study of the content of the dissertation, the data presented, calculations made, and conclusions formulated therein demonstrates the justification and reliability of the scientific positions, conclusions, and recommendations.

In the process of writing the dissertation, the author utilized a variety of scientific methods, including grouping and systematization, analysis and synthesis, modeling, statistical analysis, expert surveys, graphical method, and morphological analysis. Their application confirms the substantiation of scientific positions and the results obtained in Liang Rui's research. The goal of the dissertation research, which involves the justification and development of theoretical foundations, methodological principles, and practical recommendations for strategic brand management in higher education institutions, aligns with the chosen topic of the scientific work. The object and subject of the research are correctly defined. The scientific tasks are logically and

systematically formulated, and their quantity allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research theme by the dissertation author.

In the first chapter, the main concept of the research is defined, the current state of the study is analyzed, the foundations of theories and methods are explored, and the research direction is clarified. The work delves into concepts and types of brand management as part of marketing science, with a focus on defining and developing university brands. A systematic review is conducted, relevant literature and data are collected, contemporary theories of brand management in higher education are summarized, and the research direction is identified. Additionally, the work presents the basics of relevant theories and methods. The author orients towards classical theoretical models closely related to this research, such as marketing and brand management theories. This chapter provides the necessary theoretical and methodological support for the research.

In the second chapter, the current situation of building the brand of Henan Institute of Science and Technology is analyzed from four dimensions of analytical structure, revealing certain objective problems in its brand construction. The work proposes to emphasize four aspects: 1) the guiding effect of brand construction is too obvious, lacking long-term planning based on connotative development; 2) the quantity of brand components exceeds quality, so more attention should be paid to the implementation of high-level talent; 3) the construction of cultural brands based on the inheritance of infrastructure; 4) the construction of academic brands should be rooted in society, focusing on the development of innovative academic brands.

In the third chapter, the work proposes ways to improve brand management in higher education institutions. The implementation of a brand strategy in traditional undergraduate universities is undoubtedly the most effective way to enhance their competitiveness. The realization of a brand strategy contributes to gaining a competitive advantage. The implementation of brand strategies in universities requires internal integration. The realization of a university's brand strategy contributes to the identification and selection of consumers.

As a summary of the research, conclusions are provided at the end of each chapter. All recommendations are formulated based on these conclusions, indicating their practical orientation. All scientific tasks, the obtained scientific novelty, and the conclusions of the dissertation are interconnected and personally derived by the author. Therefore, the scientific positions, conclusions, and recommendations presented in Liang Rui's dissertation are justified and reliable.

Scientific Novelty Of The Dissertation Research Results And The Reliability Of The Obtained Findings, Conclusions, And Recommendations.

All scientific positions formulated by Liang Rui are developed independently and reflect the researcher's personal contribution to the advancement of economic science. An analysis of the dissertation and the researcher's publications indicates the presence of elements of scientific novelty.

For the first time in the work, it has been established that a key factor influencing the consumer psychology of university students is the perception of the quality of university education as the primary goal of the brand, ensuring the identification of the university brand image and serving as a fundamental guarantee for its formation. The university brand reflects its educational quality and characteristics, mirrors its social reputation, and represents the employment prospects for graduates.

The concept has further evolved, defining brand strategy as the comprehensive planning and execution of brand building and future development by brand institutions under the guidance of strategic brand thinking. This process is based on their own conditions and analysis of the current situation and future trends in the external competitive environment. The essence of brand strategy lies in the formation of the company's key expertise, ensuring its long-term development. It involves creating a corporate strategy focused on building a strong brand. Elevating brand building to the level of the company's business strategy is rooted in the creation of a distinctive brand identity. Based on the analysis of the actual situation and future trends in the external competitive environment, the university, in accordance with its own conditions, undertakes comprehensive planning and implementation of future development under the guidance of strategic brand thinking.

The enhanced brand management system of Chinese higher education institutions deserves attention, based on a model correlating purchase intent with "national responsibility." This model takes into account the overall sentiment of Chinese prospective students, reflecting societal values and the need for unity and the elevation of national identity.

The refinement of identifying the university brand cannot be separated from the external environment of the location where the university is situated. For instance, the university pillar discussed in this newspaper is indistinguishable from the role of political, economic, and cultural external factors in the university's location. Certainly, in addition to the external environment, the creation of university brands also requires internal impetus. Developing a university brand strategy is a necessary choice for adapting to social development, and the essential demand is the construction of a

university brand in the rapidly developing environment of higher education in China. With the gradual expansion of higher education activities and their impact on market forces, which are emphasized in higher education, all aspects of society are gradually being evaluated.

The research results enable the improvement of the brand of higher education institution strategic management process and also facilitate the application of tools to enhance purchasing demand.

Literature Analysis Used in the Dissertation Research

The credibility of all scientific positions, conclusions, and recommendations is confirmed by the utilization of a broad informative base, which includes works of both domestic and foreign scholars in the field of marketing in higher education and on the topic of strategic management of enterprises. The sources also encompass domestic and international regulatory frameworks in the field of managing institutions of higher education at various levels, as well as achievements related to the "Sustainable Development Goals." Statistical data from the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, materials from the World Resource Forum, the Council of Europe, and others have been incorporated. The list of utilized sources in Liang Rui's dissertation research comprises 195 titles.

Analysis of the Author's Publications on the Topic of the Dissertation Research

Regarding the dissertation, the author has published 9 scientific works with a total volume of 3.6 printed sheets. This includes 5 articles in scientific specialized publications in Ukraine, 2 scientific works in journals indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, as well as 2 abstracts and conference proceedings based on participation in conferences.

The validation of the dissertation results took place at international and all-Ukrainian scientific-practical conferences.

Liang Rui's published scientific works entirely reflect the content of the dissertation. Based on the analysis of the dissertant's scientific publications, it can be asserted that the main scientific positions and results are fully presented in scientific sources.

Practical Value of Research Results

The practical significance of the obtained results lies in their further application by higher education institutions and educational management authorities at various

levels. Most of these results have been distilled into specific proposals and methodological recommendations for managing the system of marketing communications in higher education institutions. The proposed practical and methodological recommendations have been implemented in the activities of Sumy National Agrarian University (Ukraine) and Henan Institute of Science and Technology (People's Republic of China).

Discussion Points and Remarks on the Dissertation

Upon analyzing the statements, conclusions, and recommendations presented in the dissertation, the following remarks and discussion points have been formulated:

1. Examining the fundamental definitions of the brand concept on page 22 of the dissertation, the author critiques somewhat outdated approaches to understanding this term. In our opinion, it would be advisable to analyze the definition of the "University Brand" concept based on contemporary perspectives as reflected in international journals addressing higher education marketing issues.

2. In paragraph 2.2, it would be pertinent to analyze the current situation regarding the formation of the brand for leading universities worldwide, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Oxford, Sorbonne, and others. These universities are currently recognized as global leaders in education and science, and, consequently, their experiences could be valuable for Chinese universities in constructing their own brands.

3. In the thesis, the author provides a rather superficial analysis of the role of global rankings and their impact on the university's image. However, some Central Asian countries only grant permits for studying at foreign universities if they are listed in one of the world's leading rankings. Inclusion in a ranking serves as confirmation of educational quality and, consequently, shapes the brand in the awareness of potential students.

4. The pathway for implementing the brand of a Chinese university, as presented in Figure 2.1 (p.79), deserves attention. However, in the thesis itself, more emphasis should have been placed on describing the legislative framework for brand formation. Specifically, it would have been appropriate to describe the process of trademark registration, outline the key legislative acts ensuring brand protection in the People's Republic of China, and conduct a comparative analysis with other countries worldwide.

5. On page 133, the author notes that the high reputation of the university brand not only effectively enhances the character of the university and the spirit of the teachers but also makes the university's scientific research more clearly directed

towards specific goals and orientations. In our opinion, the authors should consider detailing the cause-and-effect relationships between scientific outcomes and the brand. Is the brand the primary cause of successful research outcomes? Conversely, does the effectiveness of scientific activities enhance the university's image and influence its brand?

6. The dissertation does not define the role of stakeholders in shaping the university brand. The author places greater emphasis on the internal university environment and government bodies. In our opinion, investigating the role of employers in brand formation would significantly enrich the dissertation research.

Conclusion on Compliance with Established Requirements

The dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Liang Rui is a completed, original scientific work dedicated to addressing the current scientific and practical task of developing theoretical and methodological provisions and practical recommendations for the formulation of theoretical and applied principles of strategic brand management for higher education institutions.

The dissertation work, titled "Research on the Implementation Path of University Brand Strategy," complies with the requirements of the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 40 dated January 12, 2017, "On Approval of the Requirements for the Dissertation," the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 44 dated January 12, 2022, "On the Procedure for Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy and Canceling the Decision of the One-time Specialized Academic Council of the Higher Education Institution, Research Institution on Awarding the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy," with amendments made according to the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 341 dated March 21, 2022. The author, Liang Rui, deserves the award of the academic degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the specialty 073 – Management (field of knowledge 07 – Management and Administration).

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