Rankings and Accreditations: Their Influence on Branding of Higher Education Institutions in Poland

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Introduction: Brand and the University

The brand as an important strategic element of higher education institutions (HEI) was introduced in the 20th century when managerial thinking began to be applied in their management. This article focuses on the fundamental tasks of a higher education institution and how branding can guide decisions while defining and promoting the institution.

A popular definition of a brand is: "the combination of a product, its name, and its advertisement and related activities." In the modern business setting, corporations and companies are strongly defined by their brands, which can be valued at up to 70% of the company's total worth. For example, the Coca-Cola brand was valued in 1997 at 48 billion USD (without considering the value of its infrastructure, capital, etc.). The brand of a higher education institution can be said to be the result of the perception of quality held by the primary stakeholders, quality of its educational programs, the quality of individual course design, the instructor quality, the level and type of undertaken research, and the institution's infrastructure and its organization.

This article presents a different definition, defining brand as "the sum of impressions, emotions, facts and experiences which a particular university has created in the public conscience." What is most important to the manager of a HEI is the fact that a brand is the sum of promises and trust. The role of HEI brand increases in importance as the level of competition increases within the education sector. Institutions keen to lead the national rankings (and the international ones) must focus on strengthening their brand. The process of globalization and ever-increasing internationalization of HEIs or their programs introduces new issues into brand management. Undoubtedly, a strong university brand contains within it a sizeable portion of information about the expected high quality of study programs offered by the School. Unfortunately, addressing brand and marketing management within traditional universities invariably encounters a great deal of opposition. Almost immediately, the notion of academic independence is brought up, coupled with statements about education being a mission. Universities must focus on the mission including research. This view holds that marketing or branding of the institution is pure sales. As a consequence, sizeable conflicts are created within the institution's management and its faculty members.

Yet, with the mass nature of higher education, emergence of for-profit universities, withdrawal of significant governmental support, and the effects of globalization on HEI, the introduction of managerial decision-making (of which marketing management is part) is unavoidable. Competition is increasing and the "winners" will be schools that address these current and future challenges and introduce branding concepts and practices. The winners of this competition will be those institutions that have already introduced these concepts (leading private universities) and those public universities, which will be the first to see the current and future challenges.

Before addressing the brand and its role in determining the quality of higher education institutions, it is beneficial to identify primary stakeholder groups:

1. Founders of the institution
2. Students and their families
3. University graduates (alumni)
4. Potential and real employees
5. University faculty members
6. Local environment
7. Institutional partners

An additional group that cannot be included in the above, and which is extremely interested in the quality of a higher education institution, is comprised of student candidates and their families.

The fundamental ways of reaching the stakeholders include various alternatives:

- Internal Public Relations (PR) (directed at students and faculty)
- External Public Relations (directed at external stakeholders)

By this we understand the wide variety of organizational types of schools offering tertiary education (universities, polytechnics, those with the right to award only BA type diplomas or those that can award MEds, etc.).
For higher education institutions, it is important to understand the various aspects of their ranking. Here are some key points:

1. Academic Programs
2. Faculty Quality
3. Research
4. Student Services
5. Group Actions
6. Intellectual Climate
7. Reputation of the university
8. Financial Resources
9. Social Engagement
10. Internationalization

Understanding these factors can help in improving the overall ranking of an institution.
led "academic institutions" and private institutions that have
the following advantages:
- Prepared by the Rector of School of Economics, Prof.
  Reck, and represents the views of the faculty.
- Criteria and weight (importance placed)
  - Ranking of academic HEIs: 20 categories divided into 3
    groups: prestige of the institution (1 category, 50%),
    scientific strength (3 categories, 30%), study conditions (12
    categories, 20%).
  - Ranking of private HEIs: that award MA's 28 cate-
    gories divided into 3 groups: prestige of the institution (4
categories, 30%), institutional potential (strength of the
    professor group, 30%), and study conditions (12 cate-
    gories, 20%).
- Ranking of private HEIs that award MA's 28 cate-
  gories divided into 3 groups: prestige of the institution (4
categories, 30%), institutional potential (strength of the
    professor group, 30%), and study conditions (12 cate-
    gories, 20%).

C. Pellitka Ranking
Prepared by the Economic Academy in Poznan community.
- No ranking of entire institution, just the comparison of
  the academic programs, degrees in social science (busi-
  ness, management, law, and computer science).-
  - 6 categories: academic position (6 indicators, toget-
    her: 25 points), faculty potential (strength 7 indicators,
    together: 20 points), focus on studies (7 indicators, toget-
    her: 20 points), relationships with the external environ-
    ment (2 indicators, together: 15 points), selectivity (5 in-
    dicators, together: 10 points), infrastructure (9 indicators,
    together: 10 points).

D. Newsweek Ranking
Prepared by "Praworocza Badan Spolecznyc" from So-
  pot, which queried over 600 companies about whom
  alumni are most interested in employing.
- Categorizes overall (2 indicators: percentage of total
  alumni population, example: alumni in 1995) and profes-
  sional post (4 indicators: directors, managers,
  specialists, total) and the number of companies in which
  alumni work.

Role of Accreditation and Rankings for Institution Managers
Accreditations and rankings play an important role in the
future opportunities of institutions, especially in those
forced to compete on the open market.
- State schools in certain countries (like Poland) face a much
different situation, as their role is vital in the education of
the nation.

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  alumni work.
Minister of Education are dependent on the school possessing 8 full professors. Everything else, including the proposed program, is of secondary importance. Many rankings of a professor-to-student ratio. On the other hand, in a school focused on quality, where alongside classical lectures many classes are conducted in small groups, which allows for deep interaction, the student spends considerably more time with adjunct professors (assistant) who hold a PhD, assistants and language instructors who hold a BA or MA title only.

This author is convinced that the quality of education is defined by the everyday work of adjunct professors and assistants, a reality illustrated in the table below, which offers data about the total number of hours a student spends during his/her studies with each of the four fundamental faculty groups.

Data comes from WSB-NUU programs in 2004-05.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Business Program</th>
<th>Political Science/ Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>13.13%</td>
<td>10.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD's</td>
<td>31.66%</td>
<td>38.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistants</td>
<td>18.15%</td>
<td>19.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Instructors</td>
<td>37.06%</td>
<td>31.82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, the role of the professors, their experience and role in the forming of younger staff, conducting of these seminars, etc. is very important to the school, but the quality of education is defined by the entire employed faculty and not just the professors.

Your admission requirements and prestige are defined by scientific research conducted in the institution.

The quality of scientific research conducted within the institution is only directly related to the quality of education in the case of doctoral studies, while there is a small or virtually no effect upon undergraduate programs. The importance of research is greater in the applied sciences (like physics, mathematics, etc), some technical sciences, while in the case of social sciences (like business or law) the importance is drastically reduced. In the case of mass-access higher education we can easily imagine an institution running an outstanding business program where there is no research being undertaken, the teaching staff has to follow world standards as rigorously as possible.

Myth II: A direct indicator of attractiveness and success of a given program is the number of candidates applying for each available place.

In the Polish reality, where state-funded institutions offer tuition-free programs, the majority of candidates submit no more than 3 applications to different universities, not necessarily for the same program, so that the chance of being accepted onto a tuition-free program is significantly increased. This financial factor is very important. So, the comparison of quality and attractiveness of a given degree would be possible only when all universities would offer programs at the same financial level (other tuition-free or tuition-based with similar fee-structures).

Myth IV: The selection of a university among candidates is strongly influenced by the presence of "big-name professor names" employed in the institution.

Only within the smallest percentage of the candidate, those most gifted with a clearly defined goal of pursuing an academic or scientific career, will the presence of recognizable names be a factor in the decision-making process.

The rest of the candidates are influenced more by the brand, reputation, good opinion among existing students about the degree itself, national conditions and the atmosphere.

Influence of Accreditations on the Quality of a Higher Education Institution and its International Position

The correct selection of an accreditation system undertaken by the school management is important in the long run management of processes, whether it is a small school with a focus on constant quality improvement of its programs or a large institution focuses on its faculty.

A good case of using accreditation procedures is WSB-NUU. Before winning the Wprost ranking in 1995-1996, the school was completely unknown in Polish academic circles. Its founder was someone from outside the community and the school did not employ well-known professors. As a result, the majority of future students are not aware of the academic circles. To justify its success, the WSB-NUU management applied with its business program to the newly created accreditation commission. The commission was a success. The next step, connected to the right for awarding American Baccalaureate diploma, was passing through the accreditation process. The commission was an appropriate institution for attracting international students from the North Central Association. This enlarged accreditation of the entire school and not just the programs. Currently, due to the growth in the international recruitment, WSB-NUU is preparing for CEE-MAN accreditation.

The experience of passing through two accreditation processes is positive. The most important factor is the preparation by the program design and implementation of an honest faculty peer review of the form requirements that must be fulfilled for the accreditation committee to be satisfied. Satisfaction is the key to a well-prepared program, which finds ways and improves finding quality. In essence, the process of accreditation is a process of a true self-discovery. An important part of the accreditation is the on-site visit by the evaluation committee, especially when the program is made up of experienced professors (this was the case with WSB-NUU's NCA accreditation where the team included professors from the University of American studies) and when the school management set out to further improve quality or institute policies aimed towards such a goal.

Another important factor in any accreditation or concession awarding is the analysis of a given program from the perspective of fulfilling existing predefined minimum program requirements. In this area, significant changes, while not always too considerable, are noticeable within the community. In Poland, the official bodies ("Rada Glosowna Szkoł Wyższych", the Central Council for Higher Education for the Ministry of Education and Culture, "State Accreditation Committee") set their own program minimum when such changes associations set their own. The minimum is set to assure that there is minimal, repeatable knowledge and certain skills possessed by each alumni of the program regardless of which institution they studied. Unfortunately, excessively detailed minimums make it very difficult for School management to create a flexible program that can be set apart from the competition.

To summarize, the role of the state accreditation systems is an important element in the undertaking of a particular program and ensuring that the institutions offering it realize a set of minimal program requirements and required techniques of its realization.

The role of the voluntary accreditation associations is the highlighting of high quality programs. Well-designed and recognized accreditations for the various programs offered and for the entire institution allows for further perfection of academic staff and the entire program.

Accreditations acquire special importance when the given institution enters the international market. The problem of proper evaluation of program quality becomes vital for people considering undertaking studies in other countries. Polish higher education institutions are opening to international registration all the state and private schools combined of a total of 500 000 places (in full-time and part-time programmes) whereas the number of foreign students who have completed high school is increasing to decline and will fall within a decade to 200 000 per annum.

WSB-NUU is operating an MBA in English program since 2004, but until recently that has been the dominant group. In 2002 the School decided to open a 5-year B.A+B.A Management and Marketing program in English. The first advantage at WSB-NUU is its focus on launching English programmes while the number of foreign students is growing considerably. The number of students pursuing English programmes of various levels at the University is 500. In 2001, WSB-NUU launched a new programme B.A Management in English offered by the School with the American Baccalaureate awarded by the American National-Louis University. Since 2003, together with DePaul University, WSB-NUU is also offering the prestigious 2-year M.B.A in Computer Science.

During the first years of the School's existence, the foreign students not only studied in English, but also were studying in Polish. This was a result of learning in Polish wasn't a large problem. Since 2004 the number of foreigner is growing as they undertake the increasing number of English programmes while the number of foreigner students is growing. Currently, there is a movement to increase the number of foreigner students studying programs in English. Currently, the number of foreigner students is 500. In 2011, 50% of students say that they would like to study in English.

The number of foreigner students is growing steadily. For the Chinese students alone, the NCA accreditation of the American programme and double diplomas have been the main reasons for selecting WSB-NUU, signing agreements and sending Chinese students to WSB-NUU.

The case of WSB-NUU, created in 1992 (in cooperation with an American partner) has won or placed high in the ranking presented by the newspapers all across the country. This is a result of the school's efforts to attract foreign students and improve the quality of education.

CEUM is a key partner and implementer of the "Business Management Education in Ukraine" project funded by the United States Agency for International Development and a sub-grantee of the Joint Professional Exchanges and Training Program funded by the US State Department. Others actively cooperating with CEUM include the International Finance Corporation, the Embassy of the Netherlands, and the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and others.

CEUM has over five years of successful experience managing projects of international technical assistance and donor sponsored activities. Personnel are available to work with universities, businesses, NGOs and government representatives in writing projects, designing new programs, and implementing and monitoring their implementation. With its Management Education Training Center in Kyiv and network of representative offices in key Ukrainian cities, CEUM is ideally positioned to host and administer activities or provide evaluation services for other programs. CEUM is a key partner and implementer of the "Business Management Education in Ukraine" project funded by the United States Agency for International Development and a sub-grantee of the Joint Professional Exchanges and Training Program funded by the US State Department. Others actively cooperating with CEUM include the International Finance Corporation, the Embassy of the Netherlands, and the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science and others.

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