

# CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR ENGINEERING INSTITUTIONAL BRANDING: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED ENGINEERING COLLEGES IN KARNATAKA

Mrs. Roopa Karnam<sup>1\*1</sup>, Dr. Veena A<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of MBA, SJBIT, VTU, INDIA

<sup>2</sup> Department of Management Studies, PES University, INDIA

## Abstract:

**Branding, today, has become a need for survival of an organization. Organizations constantly update their branding strategies to stay ahead of their competitors. Academic institutions explore their brand elements to present themselves in front of their customers. Students are outrightly considered as their customers since they demand service they pay for as in any other service sector companies. The current research employs both qualitative as well as quantitative research methods to identify the brand success variables perceived by prospective customers, students. Factor analysis conducted reveals various factors such as, personal factors, financial, academic reputation as the major group of variables that influence student's choice of an institution.**

**Keywords: Brand, Branding, academic institution, students**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, Branding is considered to be one of the most important strategy designed for the sustainability of any institution particularly, service-based institutions. Moore stated that "Differentiating an institution depends on recognizing the core attributes of the category in which you operate, plus what makes you different from others in the category" (p. 59), and, "differentiation is the key to an institution's carving out its own niche in the marketplace" (p. 60). Branding obviously holds corporations and institutions, such as engineering and technical institutions, accountable for the worthiness of the product or the service they offer.

Branding is an intangible feature; an organization or institution upholds and delivers.

Branding for an educational institute is to create an image to attract the students. Branding began as a channel of choice for consumers and has grown to include what an organization represents in worth and values [1]. Everchanging technology and industry requirements act as catalyst for constantly strategizing the branding strategy of an institution. Above all, increasing awareness about higher education particularly technical education, has kept the institutions on toes to constantly update their tactics in attracting new customers. As quoted by Delucchi [2], student consumerism is growing up and leading to consumer-oriented student culture campuses which indicates that students demand all the facilities (good teaching, ambience, labs etc) since they have paid for the course.

The Introduction of globalization and liberalization has intensified the need for aggressive branding. Employers try to get better understanding of the expectations of the youth by their job search keywords. This would probably help them to fetch right talent. An employer's brand is a perceived integration of economical, psychological, functional benefits provided to the beneficiaries [3]. This makes the need to brand or capitalize the requirements for the customer and keep him aware of the products or services visible. Customer expectations are now considered as the new branding tactics. Unlike traditional marketing, contemporary marketing strategies include customer expectations as their brand strategy. Designing strategies for the existing customer and for previous and passed out students

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<sup>1</sup>Email: roopakarnam01@gmail.com

requires thorough knowledge about customer's expectations.

### 1.1. Branding in Higher Education

In India, education is a leading industry and plays a pivotal role in the development of the nation. The notion of Higher education is that of the education imparted after student's secondary education. It's also considered as tertiary education [4] with varied results. Branding in tertiary education defines varied marketing strategies developed by academic institutions to attract their valuable customers, students.

Higher Education in India has marked transformational growth post LPG. Massive changes in policy, restructuring the curriculum, political will for progressive growth have all contributed towards a world-class education system in India. Indian education in the field of engineering & technical has made tremendous progress. Exponential growth of IT industry & its contribution towards leveraging Indian economy has played a substantial role in enhancing the placements of engineering students, thus playing a vital role in Institutional branding. In today's cut-throat competitive world, educational institutions are constantly reforming their branding strategies to ensure their positions amongst their competitors.

In order to market the product and satisfy customers, it becomes necessary for an institution to identify who are their customers which further necessitates the segmentation of the market. In today's competitive world, student satisfaction has become a measure to marketing assessment tool to brand the institutions (Wilkins and Huisman, 2012).

## 2. Literature Review:

Keller has defined Brand image as a consistent set of associations which forms an impression. Branding for an institution is nothing but an instrument used to raise its market value. Everything that an institution encompasses such as, core values, logo, infrastructure, people etc., are branding elements. Kapferer [5] has mentioned that "brand is a sign which is external & whose function is to reveal the unknown qualities of the product which is inaccessible to contact".

Educational institutions, particularly higher education institutions have recognized the value of branding in terms of making their market positions strong enough among competitors.

"whom to consider as customers- students or employers" is the biggest confusion an engineering

institution encounters. Should they be considered as customers for institutions or as products for employers, as many oppose the notion of considering them as customers [6]. The attributes of marketing an institution depends upon the type of institution & the competitiveness in the of industry [7]. The branding of an engineering school is perceived in terms of the number of enrollments & number of placements that happen [8]. The paper also focusses on the aspect of how academic institutions lose the market if they don't imply contemporary marketing strategies to attract prospective customers. Students consider themselves to be treated as customers demanding service for the fee they have paid [2]. It's surprising to note that they demand the service like in any other service institutions irrespective of their performance. Kotler [9] are of the opinion that, higher educational institutions are better at operations rather than strategic planning. Their entire focus is either product/market centric.

An exploratory study conducted using Aaker's 5-scale model revealed that, that brand dimensions used for consumer products were employed for the MBA programs. They concluded that, institutional websites were the powerful tool used for branding B-school's brand personality to achieve positioning objectives among the students. Relationship. 10] have identified that the branding factors considerably vary with respect to the student's talent.

According to Maguire[11], financial aid, parent's choice, school size, campus location were the prominent factors that influenced the customer i.e., student's choice of institution. Murphy's [9] suggested that academic reputation was the prominent variable that resided in the minds of prospective students. This was probably due to the prospective employment opportunities the institution provided with its reputation/recognition. But there were other factors that branded the institution, those were, location of the campus, Cost which were lesser in rank. Core offerings are the focus of any branding college rather than augmented components. Profit maximization should not be the motive of running the organization [12]. Organizations should realize that, outcomes of educational institutions take considerable amount of time and the bonding with students is of considerable importance. Students play a multifaceted role in the success of the organization. They act as brand ambassadors and promoters of an institution. So, it's very much necessary to maintain a good relationship with them. At the same time, academic institutions face continuous threat of being running out of race and not as simple to run as stated by [13]. Constant changes in policies, ever demanding students and markets pressurize academic institutes to equip themselves with alternatives to satisfy their demands.

**Prominent Branding Factors (After LPG  
(research papers:1992-2018):**

- Location (National/International)
- Academic Reputation
- Placements
- Industry Attachments
- Academic Curriculum
- Institutional Status
- Intellectual Atmosphere
- Faculty Expertise
- Innovation
- Use of IT and technical support
- Financial Resources
- Strength of Alumni and market share

**Prominent Branding Factors: (Before LPG  
(research papers:1992-2018):**

- Location (Nearby)
- Religious and Ethical Values
- Faculty reputation
- Research Reputation
- Scholarship or Financial Aid offered

**2.1 Conceptualization of variable:**

The extensive review of available literature exposed the variables in different domains of academia like course availability, cost, location, promotion, social factors, type of life, professional requirement, financial support for education, chances for job or future employment, marketing efforts done by the institution to reach targeted customers, university reputation, educational facilities, research facilities, institutional achievements etc.

**2.2 Research Gap**

Literature review reveals that, research on professional institutional branding is still in a

primitive stage. "The reviews of the literature expose a gap in knowledge among the audience [5]. Branding studies from customer, student point of view is not done exhaustively. Also, most of the studies are from one-way perspective rather than evaluating the gap between student expectations about institution & institutional view of student expectation. Further it was identified that, teaching, social values, extracurricular activities were less considered in student's choice of institution.

**3. Methodology**

**3.1 Problem Statement:**

Though academic research into branding & brands has been extensive, very minimal studies on academic institutional(engineering) branding have been done. The researches that have addressed this aspect are that of [13], [14],[15]. These

authors have opined that, a brand is the one that consists of (i) brand benefits to the external world (ii)brand's inherent nature & reality (brand quiddity) (iii)brand's symbolic & external representations to the external communications. Here quiddity refers to institutes' infrastructure such as architecture, campus layout, safety features, city facilities in which the institution is located.

Branding helps the institution to determine their ability or competency in respective areas such as recruitment and enrollment, funding, merchandise, student involvement, and academic reputation. The notion that branding efficiency is viewed in terms of institutional reputation, placements, industry participation, financial support provided, location, faculty reputation etc. in engineering institutions needs to be evaluated.

**3.2 Research Objectives:**

- To identify the brand elements considered for branding by engineering institutions in Karnataka.
- To examine the impact of these elements on student's choice of an institution

**3.3 Hypotheses for the study:**

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant association between Financial Aids provided by the institution and student's choice of an institution

H<sub>2</sub>: Parent's income does not significantly influence student's choice of institution

**3.4 Limitations:**

The study was confined only to 10 colleges which had more than 20 years of existence in Karnataka, and further can be extended to other engineering colleges as well to assess the reality and would largely contribute to academia. It was assumed that the respondents would have minimum awareness about the colleges that they were to choose for their graduation.

### 3.5 Research Methodology:

Descriptive research was done to identify the variables & their behavior in various situations. For the purpose of this research, data was gathered qualitatively by conducting discussions with experts from prominent engineering institutions with their designations ranging from associate professors to academic deans, management personnel, marketing executives in academic institutions. Identifying the factors that critically analyse student satisfaction towards educational institutions is crucial for survival [16]. Opinion from industry personnel was also taken to get clarity on the concept of institutional branding & its relevance in academia. In-depth personal interviews with Principals, Dean-academics, HoD's were conducted to know their perception on student expectation & designing their prospectus or websites. 10 colleges were selected which were 20 plus years in terms of establishment & existence. As the universe consisted of Affiliated, Autonomous, Deemed, Government, private, aided, self-financing institutions, no such distinction was made while choosing the respondents. Students aspiring to take up Engineering courses were selected as they were perceived to have done some research in choosing the course. Respondents were interviewed personally and e-questionnaire was administered once their confidence was gained. Most of the questions of the survey instrument were designed as per the Likert

scale with responses ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 5- Strongly Agree and 1-extremely unimportant to 5- extremely important. Qualitative as well as Quantitative techniques were employed to analyze the data & achieve the objectives under study.

### 4. Findings:

The data so collected was analysed by both descriptive & multivariate techniques. After pilot survey, the number of constructs reduced significantly, probably due to perceived similarity. The variables selected under study were tested for their reliability and the Cronbach's Alpha was found to be more than 0.5 for the variables which was acceptable.

The analysis of the primary data has been carried out with the help of a statistical tool. SPSS 21.0 statistical package is used to analyse the primary data. Descriptive analysis has been used in analyzing the respondents' profile. A frequency distribution as indicated in Table:1 for the same is as follows:

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

VARIABLE	CATEGORY	N	%OF RESPONDENTS
GENDER	Male	51	68
	Female	24	32
Parent's profession	Working in IT industry	10	13
	Working in Non-IT industry	34	45
	working in Manufacturing industry	3	4
	Self-Employed	3	4
	Business	25	33
Parents' education level	Both parents have Engineering Degree	22	29
	Either of them have Engineering Degree	38	51
	Both are Non-Engineering Graduates	6	8
	Other...	9	12
FAMILY INCOME (monthly)	<100000	6	8
	100000-300000	34	45
	300000-600000	26	35
	600000-900000	5	6.66
	>900000	4	5.3
Information sources you relied upon for choosing	university prospectus	18	
	Course specific brochures	30	40
	Teachers' inputs at PU college	6	8

an Engineering Institution	Family, Friends	12	16
	Education Fairs	8	10.66
	Brothers/Sisters/Cousins already studying in the college	15	20
	Institutions' campus tour	4	5.3
My current selection of Engineering college is (please choose the one which you strongly feel)	my own choice	31	41.33
	due to my entrance test ranking	29	38.66
	parental advice	9	12
	peer suggestion	6	8
	Counsellor's influence	00	

#### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics:

Descriptive statistics as in Table 1 showed that, majority of the respondents were males (68%), who had attended the survey. 45% of the respondent's parents worked in Non-IT industry. Common perception among students is IT industry is the one where programming is done and managerial work such as administration, financial, business development etc are considered as Non-IT. Majority of the respondents had either of the parent with engineering degree, which probably influenced the student to opt engineering course. Lucrativeness of the engineering stream was that of the employment opportunities it provided and also the worldwide recognition it has. Middle class family respondents (45%) were the one to choose the engineering course because of the affordability. University brochures were the main and most reliable sources of information. Engineering was a chosen profession and their own decision for most of the respondents since their competitive test rankings might have influenced them to opt the course.

Objective 1: To identify the brand elements considered for branding by engineering institutions in Karnataka.

Main objective of the study is to identify the factors that customers(students) consider while selecting an engineering institution of their choice. The survey used a questionnaire that had included 16 prominent variables after initial focus group discussions and Literature survey. The responses were collected on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1(Not important at all) to 5(Most Important). Exploratory factor analysis is used for analysis. The output of factor analysis is obtained by principal component analysis & specifying rotation. The principal component analysis method is basically used to identify the number of factors that can be grouped or factored from the data. The factors with factor loading  $\geq .50$  were

considered as significant under each

The output of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy & Bartlett's test of sphericity statistic varies between 0 and 1. Any value of KMO greater than 0.5 is preferred. KMO value of 0.821 is

**Table2: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.821
Bartlett's Approx. Chi-Square	1048.244
df	105
Test of Sphericity	
	Sig. .000

greater than 0.5. So, it can be inferred that the obtained data is sufficiently adequate and factor Analysis is valid.

Table 3 explains the total variance by the factors extracted. A total of 4 factors were extracted which cumulatively account for 62% of the variance in the model. Individual factor variances explained are 22.120, 21.465, 21.055 and 10.382. The result of the explanatory analysis revealed 15 significant items as depicted in Table 3.

Factor analysis is a technique normally done in SPSS to reduce the number of variables that are irrelevant for the quantitative analysis. The outcome of the Factor Analysis is expressed in terms of factor loadings in the form Rotated component matrix indicating the loading of each factor.

Factor analysis tries to bring inter-correlated variables under one common variable, which generally represents the group of variables. These variables or number of variables indicate the total groups that simplify the variables under study.

**Table 3: Total Variance Explained**

Factor analysis was conducted to identify the

Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.181	34.539	34.539	5.181	34.539	34.539	3.318	22.120	22.120
2	2.589	17.260	51.799	2.589	17.260	51.799	3.220	21.465	43.585
3	2.248	14.987	66.787	2.248	14.987	66.787	3.158	21.055	64.640
4	1.235	8.235	75.022	1.235	8.235	75.022	1.557	10.382	75.022
5	.910	6.066	81.088						
6	.779	5.196	86.285						
7	.542	3.611	89.896						
8	.410	2.731	92.627						
9	.368	2.451	95.077						
10	.304	2.025	97.102						
11	.178	1.187	98.289						
12	.099	.660	98.949						
13	.084	.558	99.507						
14	.050	.331	99.838						
15	.024	.162	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

**Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix**

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Institutional academic reputation			.621	.536
Institutional culture				.545
Location				.659
Faculty reputation		.657		
Ethical values				.792
Financial Aids	.848			
National reputation		.868		
Placement	.848			
Intellectual Atmosphere		.691		
Infrastructure	.816			
Years of establishment			.870	
Admission process	.595		.658	
Industry attachments		.847		
Social reputation				.712
Rigid rules				

grouping of the factors, to form constructs of interest. Out of 15 variables, 13 variables with factor loading more than 0.5 were

considered for grouping. Following are the factors grouped under similarity:

Factor1: Institutional Benefit-Assistance factors

Factor2: Institutional Reputation factors

Factor3: Existence and recognition factors

Factor4: Socio-Demographical factors

These factors explained the highest variance among the items. We could arrive at the following:

Institutional Branding= (Institutional Benefit-Assistance) + (Institutional Reputation) + (Existence and recognition) + (Socio-Demographical)

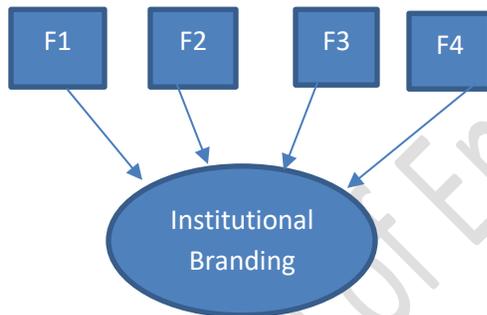
F1: Institutional Benefit-Assistance-Financial Support, Placements, Infrastructure, Employment opportunities

F2: Institutional Reputation- Faculty reputation, National Reputation, Intellectual Atmosphere, No. of Industry Attachments

F3: Existence and recognition factors- Institutional academic reputation, Student input quality, International programs/internships offered.

F4: Socio-Demographical- Institutional culture, Location, Ethical Values, Social Reputation

Proposed model in Fig1 indicated that institutional branding is the sum total of Institutional Benefit-Assistance, Institutional Reputation, Existence and recognition, Socio-Demographical factors. Study also shows that branding is a mechanism used to help the customers differentiate and identify the product or service.



**Fig1: Proposed Integrated model which establishes the relationship of factors on the choice of institutional branding**

**Table 5: Test Statistics**

		Financial Aids	Choice of institution
Chi-Square		23.600 <sup>a</sup>	26.649 <sup>b</sup>
df		4	3
Asymp. Sig.		.000	.000
Monte Carlo Sig.	Sig.	.000 <sup>c</sup>	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000
		Upper Bound	.000

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 5.0. b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 18.5. c. Based on 10000 sampled tables with starting seed 926214481

Objective2: To examine the impact of these elements on student's choice of an institution

Institutional Branding, when measured from student's perception, who is considered as customer for the current research, selects the institute based on the above defined factors. So accordingly, the hypothetical statement was defined as

H0<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant association between Financial Aids provided by the institution and student's choice of an institution

As Indicated in Table 5, At 99% confidence level, p-value is less than 0.01, which indicates to reject Null Hypothesis. It can be interpreted that, the financial aids provided by the institutions do make an impact on student's choice of institution. In today's economical world, education particularly higher education is a luxury for the middle-class people. An institution that supports with financial aids would probably be opted by the student. institution amongst its competitors on the same peer level. But, apart from this, every consumer has his own unique prismatic way of assessing the product.

H<sub>2</sub>: Parent's income does not significantly influence student's choice of institution

Table 6 reveals the outcome of One-Sample test p-value, which is less than 0.05 at 95% confidence level which further indicates to reject the null hypothesis. This reflects the impact of parent's income in decision making of a student, since the fee structure of private, autonomous, deemed universities is perceived high.

**5. Discussion & Conclusion:**

This exploratory study revealed that, though branding initiatives by the institution build awareness and shape the image of the institution, there are other intrinsic factors such as institutional performance, financial consideration, institutional infrastructure which play a vital role in disseminating the institutional branding. It is also further indicated that an institution has to regularly conduct a brand audit for all its stakeholders to assess their institutional brand's performance. Periodic evaluation of an institution will ensure that the branding strategy designed is contemporarily relevant. Student is the prime stakeholder and the institution has to ensure that their positioning strategies are properly aligned with their requirements. It has become a crucial consideration to consider the changes in consumer expectations in order to ensure that the institutional branding strategies are contemporary & effective in this highly competitive world. Conversely, some of the factors which were once relevant, were found insignificant under the current research.

**5.1 Managerial Implications & further scope of study:**

In the current scenario, technical institutions are facing severe threat in terms of admissions. This seems to be lacunae of the institutions to brand themselves among their competitors. This indicates the need for the institutions to move from their stereotypic branding methodology & offer innovative, market-oriented curriculum which leverages & also offers uniqueness to the institutions [6]. The technical institutions have to focus on building a strong relationship with the relevant industry, to know their requirements & align their outcomes accordingly. The model will be revised further by adding other variables or constructs based on outcomes of the empirical study. Determining the impact of stakeholders play the major role in branding the institution & also poses a research challenge. The findings offer managerial implications for technical institutions, articulating how institutions should use proactive institutional branding to attract students.

**Table 6: One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Choice of institution	24.389	73	.000	3.77027	3.4622	4.0784
Parent income	13.520	73	.000	2.16667	1.8452	2.4881

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