



Identifying and analyzing touchpoints for building a higher education brand

Monica Khanna, Isaac Jacob & Neha Yadav

To cite this article: Monica Khanna, Isaac Jacob & Neha Yadav (2014) Identifying and analyzing touchpoints for building a higher education brand, Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 24:1, 122-143, DOI: [10.1080/08841241.2014.920460](https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.920460)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.920460>



Published online: 27 Jun 2014.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 858



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 4 [View citing articles](#)

Identifying and analyzing touchpoints for building a higher education brand

Monica Khanna*, Isaac Jacob and Neha Yadav

K.J. Somaiya Institute of Management Studies & Research, Vidyavihar, Mumbai 400 077, India

In today's instantly interconnected world, sectors like higher education, which were once considered safe havens, are now being exposed to competitive forces. Education is an experiential service where the active involvement of both the service provider (higher education brand) and the consumer (student) is important. This research paper identifies 13 influencing touchpoints during the various stages of the educational journey – pre-admission stage, course stage and post-passing as alumnus stage.

Keywords: brand management; higher education brand; experiential service; Brand Touchpoint Wheel; brand touchpoints

1. Introduction

Experiential services are defined as services where the focus is on the experience of the consumer when interacting with the organization, rather than just the functional benefits following from the products and services delivered (Voss & Zomerdiijk, 2007). Education as a service is a special type of service due to the intensity of contact between the consumer (student) and service provider (higher education brand) and also the continuous nature of the contact between the consumer (student) and the service provider (higher education brand), along with the efforts that have to be put in by the service provider (higher education brand and faculty) and the consumer (student) for the successful outcome of the service encounter (being awarded a degree at the end of the period of education).

Education can be classified as an experiential service where, as stated by Voss and Zomerdiijk (2007, pp. 3–4),

the service is seen as a journey that spans a longer period of time and consists of multiple components and multiple touchpoints. These touchpoints need to be carefully designed and managed. The journey perspective implies that a customer

*Email: monicak@somaiya.edu

experience is built over an extended period of time, starting before and ending after the actual sales experience or transaction. The customer journey perspective clearly shows the central role of the customer in innovation and design. Innovation takes place in five distinct design areas that directly or indirectly influence the customer experience: the physical environment, the service employees, the service delivery process, fellow customers and back office support. However, one of the difficulties in innovation in experiential services is predicting the outcome in financial terms and in terms of common measures including footfall, dwell time, revenue growth, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

This is especially true in the field of higher education where, according to Voss and Zomerdijk (2007, p. 3), 'the scope of the journey perspective is much broader than traditional models, as it includes aspects such as building anticipation and facilitating transport to the core experience'. In the field of management education, the experiential service is the manner in which knowledge is gathered from various knowledge sources and imparted to the students (consumers) in order to enhance their knowledge base and employability, thereby helping to create a higher education brand.

However, one of the main criticisms that employers make of recent college graduates as new employees is that they tend to emerge from university with their heads full of theories, principles and information but are often ill-equipped to deal with aspects of the workplace such as problem-solving, decision-making, working in a team or learning for themselves (Candy & Crebert, 1991, quoted in Munter, 2002; Duderstadt, 1999, quoted in Munter, 2002). This instructor-centered strategy fails to engage learners in exercising their higher order thinking skills and reinforces the passive, dependent attitude of many students (Munter, 2002). In contrast, advocates of learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning claim that progressive pedagogies, built on active-learning strategies and experiential learning theory, are better suited to developing new 'habits of mind' (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996, quoted in Munter, 2002) and modes of thinking, because they build new relationships between students and instructors, as well as between the community and the college or university (Zlotkowski, 2001). As instructors guide learners to construct knowledge through actual experiences, they learn about relationships among and within the central themes of various disciplines and make connections between theory and practice (Munter, 2002).

There is thus a need to re-look at the workings of higher education institutes and research the factors that help to create and build their brands. The authors, having been academicians and researchers in business management schools for over two decades, decided to take this up as a topic of research. Though the research is restricted to business management schools in Mumbai, India, the outcomes of this research could be applied across other business schools and higher education institutes.

2. Literature review

Aaker (1991, p. 7, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) defined a brand as

a distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as logo, trademark, or package design) intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from competitors who would attempt to provide products that appear to be identical.

In the recent years, de Chernatony (2009, p. 104, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) defined a brand as ‘a cluster of values that enables a promise to be made about a unique and welcoming experience’. As can be observed, the concept of ‘experience’ has found a place in the revised definition of a brand, as can be observed from the definitions provided in the preceding quotations.

The concept of branding can be extended to any type of goods, services, experiences, destinations and even e-brands. In the current scenario of an instant interconnected environment, it is widely felt that it is becoming more and more intensely competitive even for industries like higher education, once considered safe from competitive forces, but now finding themselves subjected to competition for the resources they once took for granted (Richardson, Nwankwo, & Richardson, 1995). The concept of marketing has grown in importance for universities across the world from the 1990s onward (Kotler & Fox, 1995, quoted in Durkin & Mckenna, 2011). Competition among academic institutions for students, faculty and financial support is increasing (Karapetrovic, Rajamani, & Willborn, 1999).

It has been suggested that higher education institutions need to be managed more and more as corporate brands (Whelan & Wohlfeil, 2006, quoted in Chapleo, 2010), but despite the fact that there have been a number of studies that have examined image and reputation, the notion of branding has barely made its mark on higher education marketing literature (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006, quoted in Chapleo, 2010) and empirical papers that relate to higher education branding are scarce (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007, quoted in Chapleo, 2010), and more so in the Indian context. This seems strange when one considers that higher education and branding go back a long way and that practitioners have increasingly embraced branding in higher education (Temple, 2006, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011).

Keller (1993, quoted in Hopkins, Jones, Pickett, & Raymond, 2009) states that brand associations involve the perceptions and meanings of a brand that a customer remembers and favorable brand associations create valuable brand equity for an organization. Attributes, benefits and attitudes comprise brand associations and may affect purchase intentions. In the case of management education, this translates into the courses and curriculum, the degree awarded and the placements received, which helps in creating positive attitudes among the students (consumers) culminating in the total association and

assessment of a management education brand. Booth (2003, quoted in Hopkins et al., 2009), Fischer (2005), Johnston (2003, quoted in Hopkins, et al., 2009) and Lewis (2003) state that universities around the world face the challenge of marketing both a corporate-style image and numerous branded products affiliated with the university. Belch and Belch (1987, quoted in Hopkins et al., 2009), Keller and Aaker (1994, quoted in Hopkins et al., 2009) and Brown and Dacin (1997, quoted in Hopkins et al., 2009) indicate that research into the influence of corporate associations on product evaluations suggests that a favorable attitude toward a company should lead to positive affective evaluations of products and services associated with the company. Intuitively, this influence may be stronger in those contexts where the corporate name and related brands are closely tied.

Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009, pp. 85–86, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) have defined a university's brand as

a manifestation of the institution's features that distinguish it from others, reflect its capacity to satisfy students' needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education, and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions.

In a university environment, product becomes academic programs, price is tuition and financial aid, promotion is the communications program and place refers to the delivery system for academic programs (Lowry & Owens, 2001). The size of a school, class sizes and the student faculty ratio are important elements of the academic delivery system. The advertising, public relations, admissions materials and other promotions of the institution should be coordinated to make a unified brand positioning statement (Lowry & Owens, 2001). Besides these 4 P's of marketing, it is also critical to include the other 3 P's of service branding – the service process, the physical environment and ambience. However, Temple (2006, pp. 15–19, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) points out that universities are 'unusual organizations' as customers (students) do most of the work and at the end of the process should be different people from the ones who first came to the university.

Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) have suggested that the components of a university brand mainly consist of (1) a collection of promises presented to the outside world concerning the brand's benefits (that is, high caliber faculty, career prospects on graduation, opportunities for in-campus socialization, sports facilities and so on); (2) a set of distinctive features that define the brand's inherent nature and reality (that is, the university's matriculation requirements, student drop-out rates, whether the university is elite and exclusive rather than comprehensive and mass market, whether it places research above teaching and whether it offers desirable degree programs, campus safety, security and so on); and (3) an assortment

of aesthetic designations and external communications that describe the brand (that is, name, logo and advertisement designs).

Melewar and Akeel (2005) state that

in a market where students are recognized as customers, universities have to implement strategies to maintain and enhance their competitiveness. They need to develop a competitive advantage based on a set of unique characteristics. Furthermore, universities need to communicate these characteristics in an effective and consistent way to all of the relevant stakeholders. Under these circumstances, universities have finally realized the role of corporate identity as a powerful source of competitive advantage.

Baden-Fuller, Ravazzolo, and Schweizer (2000, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) state that rankings of organizations reflect and create reputations, and White, Miles, and Levernier (2009, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) indicate that the accreditation label The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is considered to be extremely prestigious for business schools.

According to Lowry and Owens (2001),

a university brand also must have a distinct position to convey to prospective students – what it is and what it stands for. By directing all of its marketing efforts toward a desired position, a university (brand) maintains a coherence and unity in its activities and establishes a specific image. Effective positioning focuses on what the target market perceives is important and not necessarily what university administrators believe is significant.

Pesch, Calhoun, Schneider, and Bristow (2008) state that adoption of a customer orientation in an educational setting means that the university looks at the educational experience from the perspective of a student. Bristow and Schneider (2005, quoted in Pesch et al., 2008, p. 102) developed the Collegiate Student Orientation Scale, an instrument designed to allow university officials to empirically measure the degree to which they are or are not perceived by students as being student oriented.

Providing information to assist students in choosing educational institutions requires the development of unique selling points, and the effective communication of these to potential students (Veloutsou, Lewis, & Paton, 2004). This arrival at unique selling points and neat communication of these through the brand is in itself not necessarily straightforward. Temple (2006, quoted in Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011) argues that

much of what is described as branding in higher education would be better labeled as reputation management or even public relations and the brand of a university emerges as a function of how well the institution performs in meeting client needs, and is therefore the result of being effective as an institution, rather than its basis.

It could also be argued that the motivation of branding is often to enhance reputation and to positively influence the university's rankings and that therefore market share is replaced with business school league table positions (Bunzel, 2007, quoted in Chapleo, 2010).

Moogan, Baron, and Harris (1999, quoted in Szekeres, 2010) state that

... what education providers are selling is a service which can't be 'sampled' and which students may be committed to for several years, having a high element of risk for the consumer. When services are being purchased, alternatives are often evaluated without the benefit of any direct experience of the 'product'. (Moogan *et al.*, 1999, p. 213, quoted in Szekeres, 2010)

Thus, the concept of successful brands in the higher education field needs some discussion. Kay (2006) suggests that there is little evidence of any work that establishes the precise advantages of successful brands in the university context.

While a number of attributes attract students to a particular institution, such as the attractiveness of the campus, recommendation of family, closeness to home, campus atmosphere and academic reputation, students 'appeared to be prepared to accept almost any level of the other attributes as long as they entered a course that they really wanted' (Soutar & Turner, 2002, quoted in Szekeres, 2010).

However, prospective students really know very little about the specific characteristics of courses and universities. There are numerous differences between segments, including particular disciplines – science applicants are influenced by the research reputation and opportunities for higher degree study, while commerce applicants are influenced more by the ability to achieve high graduate salaries and institutional prestige; rural – students coming from more than 30 km away consider the university's social life, parents' preference and friends (Binney & Martin, 1997).

The concept of service quality is equally important with respect to the education sector. Parsuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) emphasized five dimensions of service quality as follows: (1) reliability – the capability to perform the already promised service reliably and correctly; (2) responsiveness – the willingness to help the consumer and immediate service delivery; (3) assurance – meaning the knowledge and politeness of employees and their capability to deliver trust and confidence; (4) empathy – the capability to show empathy with the consumer; and (5) tangibles – meaning physical equipment of service, employees' manners, tools and equipment provided for service delivery. All of these parameters needed for judging service quality are relevant with respect to the higher education institute, especially a business management school.

Overall, nine factors seem to influence choice: availability of course, job outcomes, academic reputation, location, quality of instruction, quality of

faculty, costs, course reputation and financial considerations (Hoyt & Brown, 1999, quoted in Szekeres, 2010) and all of these elements, as well as ‘personal fit’, need to be taken into account when helping students decide on a particular course and institution (Hoyt & Brown, 1999, quoted in Szekeres, 2010). In today’s context where social media has resulted in consumer-to-consumer connections on a global level, Adjei, Noble, and Noble (2012) state that online brand communities can bring customers closer to the brand, generate ‘buzz’ and enhance brand loyalty. However, though the popularity of online brand communities as a means of gathering pre- and post-purchase information continues to grow, knowledge about how to effectively manage those conversations remains scant, as communication among online communities can enhance the timeliness of the information exchanged, enhance the relevance of the information posted, extend the conversation and increase the frequency of information exchanged (Adjei *et al.*, 2012). This is especially an area of inquiry with respect to an educational brand and needs to be researched in the future.

3. Research gap

The factors leading to the assessment and success of a higher education brand have been identified in various research papers and brought out in the literature review. The authors of this paper propose to look at the various factors that build a higher education brand against the backdrop of a conceptual framework provided by the Brand Touchpoint Wheel which has been developed by Davis and Dunn (2002, pp. 6–7).

The assumption being made while using the Brand Touchpoint Wheel is to look at higher education as an experiential service. In the case of an educational service, the contact between the consumer (student) and the service provider (higher education institute) is of very high intensity and occurs through multiple touchpoints throughout the journey of the consumer (student). Roth and Menor (2003, quoted in Bellos & Kavadias, 2011) state that each experiential service is represented as a journey during which the consumer satisfies his need(s) through distinct experiences created at consecutive stages, i.e. touchpoints, also termed service encounters. Ponsonby-McCabe and Boyle (2006) state that one of the reasons for the general lack of knowledge of the critical success factors for brand building is that the process is dependent not only on strategic marketers and brand managers, but also on consumers. Therefore, design of experiential service offerings presents unique challenges: customers interact with the provider during the service delivery process in complex and uncertain ways to co-produce the service outcome (Sasser, 1976, quoted in Bellos & Kavadias, 2011).

Williams (2012) looks at touchpoints in reference to the organization’s employee-based brand equity, the way employees perceive and live the

(higher education) organization brand, and defined ‘Brand Soul as the essence or fundamental nature – the authentic energy – of a brand’ (see Williams & Omar, 2012, p. 1; Williams, Osei, & Omar, 2012, p. 77).

Bellos and Kavadias (2011) state that ‘the optimal design decisions depend non-monotonically on two important parameters: i) the variability of the experiential outcome from touchpoint interactions and ii) the underlying interdependencies between the service tasks, which may give rise to correlated experiential outcomes across touchpoints’. Since education is an experiential service which spans a long period of time and consists of multiple components and multiple touchpoints, the authors of this research paper propose that adopting an internal focus which investigates the touchpoints for an educational brand would help the experiential aspect of an educational brand to assume paramount importance.

4. Approach to creating a higher education brand

According to Davis and Dunn (2002, p. 58), ‘brand touchpoints are all the different ways that an organization’s brand interacts with and makes an impression on customers, employees, and other stakeholders’. A touchpoint is represented by every action, tactic or strategy taken to reach a customer or stakeholder. Each of these touchpoints falls within the three stages of the customer experience: (1) pre-purchase, (2) purchase (or usage) and (3) post-purchase. The concept is illustrated in Figure 1.

According to Davis and Dunn (2002, p. 59), the three touchpoints are explained as follows:

- (1) the *pre-purchase experience touchpoints* represent ‘the various ways potential customers interact with your brand prior to deciding to do business with your company. Each pre-purchase touchpoint interaction should be designed to shape perceptions and expectations of the brand, heighten brand awareness and drive its relevance. They should also help prospects understand the brand’s benefits over competing brands and the value it brings in fulfilling their personal wants and needs’.
- (2) The *purchase or usage experience touchpoints* are ‘those that move a customer from considering your brand to actually “purchasing” it. The main objective of these points of interaction is to maximize the value that the prospects perceive and instil confidence that they have made the right decision in choosing your brand’.
- (3) The *post-purchase experience touchpoints* ‘come into play after the “sale” and should maximize the customer experience’.

Over and above these, Davis and Dunn (2002) have identified *influencing touchpoints* – ‘all of the brand touchpoints that indirectly help to make an

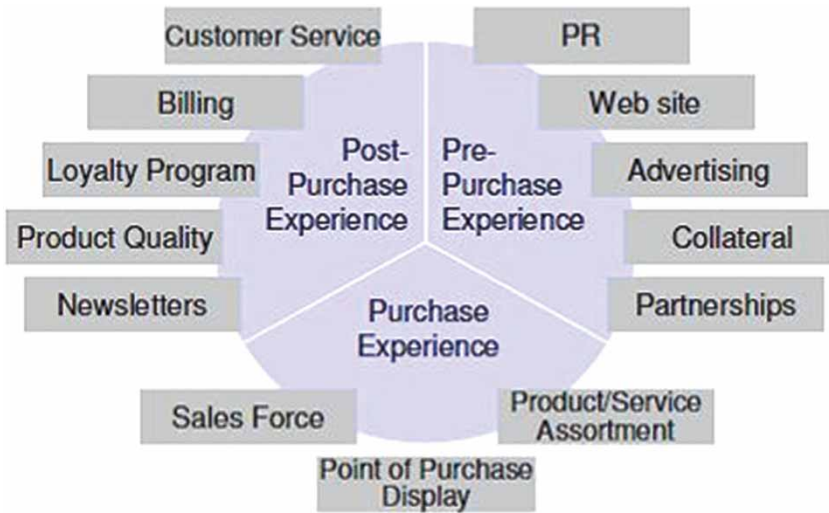


Figure 1. Brand Touchpoint Wheel (Davis & Dunn, 2002).

Source: Scott Davis, Michael Dunn and David Aaker. Building the Brand-Driven Business. Wiley & Sons: 2002; <http://www.strategyhub.net/2010/04/framework-of-week-38-brand-touchpoint.html>. Accessed March 19, 2014.

impression of the brand on its customers and various stakeholders such as annual reports, analysts' reports, current and past customers and recruiting materials'.

Davis and Dunn (2002) further state that

within the entire brand – customer relationship, the post-purchase experience remains one of the most under leveraged yet potentially powerful ways to drive sustainable, profitable and long term value back to the company and the goals of the post-purchase touchpoints are to exceed customer performance and usage expectations, and increase brand loyalty and advocacy.

Using the framework of the *Brand Touchpoint Wheel* for developing the higher education brand, the authors of this research paper have developed a *Touchpoint Wheel* for developing a higher education brand specifically for higher education institutes. The Touchpoint Wheel identifies the touchpoints for the potential students before they send their application for admission to a business management school, during the period of their study in the business management school, and after the completion of the business management course as an alumnus. The authors propose that these touchpoints form an important component of the customer experience due to the nature of education being classified as an experiential service (Figure 2).

The model comprises four distinct touchpoints involving a total of 13 factors, i.e. 'pre-admission' touchpoints (five factors), 'during the course' touchpoints (four factors), 'post-passing' touchpoints (two factors) – as

shown in the inner circle of Figure 2 – and the ‘influencing’ touchpoints (two factors) – as shown in the outer circle of Figure 2.

The *pre-admission touchpoints* consist of five factors: soft and hard infrastructure, alumni and student recommendations, media influence, placement opportunities, fees and location of the institute.

The *during the course touchpoints* comprise four factors: learning resources, co-curricular activities, industry interface and knowledge enhancement.

The *post-passing touchpoints* comprise two factors: career growth and alumni involvement.

The study also identifies overall *influencing touchpoints* which comprise two factors: innovativeness and resonance of the higher education institute, and stakeholder perception.

The quality of the student (consumer) information and experience prior to joining the course, during the course and post-passing as an alumnus, are important components in creating a higher education brand. Also, due to the nature of the education business as being an experiential service, the feedback given by the student (consumer) as an alumnus acts as an important input not only for the pre-admission process but also for the experience that the student has during the course. This is because feedback about the institute, faculty, course work and infrastructure percolates down from one batch of students to the next, creating

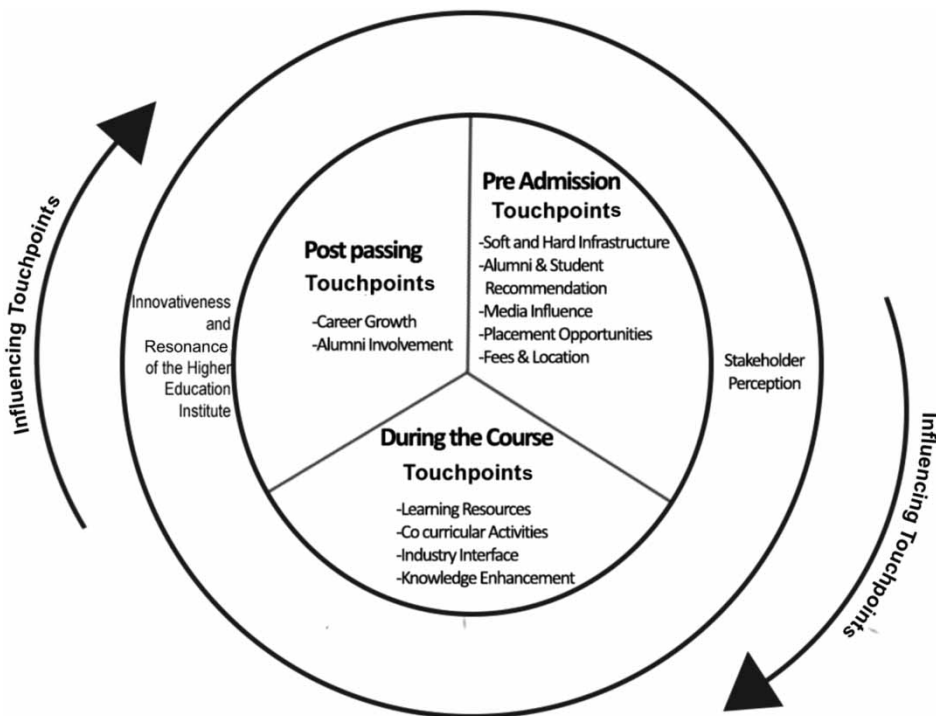


Figure 2. Proposed Brand Touchpoint Wheel model for building higher education brand.

a cycle of auto-correlation between the three stages of a student's journey and their relationship with the higher education institute.

A higher education institute must assess its brands' strengths and weaknesses keeping in mind the various touchpoints of the proposed Brand Touchpoint Wheel developed for a higher education institute. In order to develop a strong education brand, the higher education institute must be able to articulate its unique features and communicate them effectively through the various compelling touchpoints, at various points of time. These could be meeting the student community's need to achieve their career goals, the industry requirements of employable students, good research, stakeholder perception, etc.

5. Methods

5.1 *Sample and data collection*

The units of analysis in this study were the students of various management schools across Mumbai. Based on the inputs received during the in-depth interviews and the literature review carried out, the authors developed a questionnaire which was administered to the students and alumni of these management schools. The mode of data collection was online using qualtrics.com. A total of 276 surveys were usable out of 316 responses for the purpose of this research. The study was exploratory in nature and the sampling technique used for data collection was convenience sampling.

5.2 *Measurement development*

The authors developed the questionnaire to find out the various touchpoints that influence the strength of a higher education brand using the multiple-item scale, and each item was measured based on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was divided into four sections as follows:

Section I: Pre-admission knowledge sources (pre-admission touchpoints): This consisted of knowledge sources tapped into for information about the management institute, criteria looked for while short listing a management institute, trustworthy knowledge sources for management school rankings and criteria used for final selection of a management school.

Section II: Knowledge sources while pursuing the management course (during the course touchpoints): This consisted of the most important sources of knowledge assimilation during the management course, knowledge sources provided by the management institute and extent of usage of these knowledge sources by the student (consumer).

Section III: Experience of integration with the real world (industry and society) (post-passing touchpoints): This consisted of aspects that generated a feeling of pride and satisfaction after passing out from the management institute, the best possible ways in which an institute could remain in touch with

its alumni, and advantages gained in the corporate world and community because of these knowledge sources and the management school brand.

Section IV: Influencing touchpoints: Overall perceptions regarding what factors create an educational brand, constituting aspects such as innovative ways adopted by higher education institutes for executive education and stakeholder's perception of the business management school brand. These touchpoints indirectly help to make an impression of the brand on its consumers and various stakeholders (Davis & Dunn, 2002, p. 59).

6. Data analysis

6.1 *Validity and reliability of measurement instrument*

6.1.1 *Content validity*

Content validity defines how representative and comprehensive the items were in presenting the hypothesis. It is assessed by examining the process that was used in generating scale items (Straub, 1989, quoted in Park & Kim, 2003). The items measuring various constructs were selected based on current literature regarding branding of higher educational institutes.

6.1.2 *Construct validity and reliability*

According to Malhotra and Dash (2010), convergent validity is the extent to which the scale correlates positively with other measures of the same construct. For testing convergent validity, we evaluated the item-to-total correlation, i.e. the correlation of each item to the sum of the remaining items. Items whose item-to-total correlation scores were lower than .4 were dropped from further analysis.

Discriminant validity is the degree to which measures of different concepts are distinct. The discriminant validity of each construct was assessed by principal component factor analysis with VARIMAX rotation. According to Field (2009), significance of factor loading depends on the sample size. For a sample size of more than 200, a loading more than .364 is considered significant. According to Stevens (1992), factor loadings with an absolute value greater than .4 are recommended. Factor loadings for all the variables were greater than .4 with no cross loadings, indicating good discriminant validity. Together, the 13 observed factors in the pre-admission process, during the course, post-passing the course and influencing touchpoints accounted for more than 60% of the total variance shown in Table 1. Also, to validate the appropriateness of factor analysis, other measures such as the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (>.70) showed acceptable sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($p = .000$) indicated the statistical probability that the correlation matrix has significant correlations

Table 1. The Brand Touchpoint Wheel for higher education with their various components.

Construct	Components	Explanation
Pre-admission touchpoints	Soft and hard infrastructure	Includes infrastructure facilities and reputation of the faculty
	Alumni and student recommendations	Includes recommendations by friends who are already studying in a B School and alumni recommendations
	Media influence	Includes B school rankings in different media, general information of the B school in newspapers and magazines and B school website
	Placement opportunities	Includes the return on investment in terms of job opportunities
	Fees and location	Includes affordable fee structure and locational convenience
During the course touchpoints	Knowledge enhancement	Includes knowledge base of the faculty, teaching pedagogy, interaction with industry experts and conferences and workshops conducted by the B school
	Industry interface	Includes industry tie-ups for getting hands-on corporate work experience on periodic basis and mentorship programs by the alumni
	Co-curricular activities	Includes opportunity to organize and participate in college fests and events
	Learning resources	Consists of textbooks and reading material provided, online databases available and peer interaction
Post-passing touchpoints	Career growth	Consists of qualitative growth in career status, ability to get better jobs, improvement in managerial and decision-making skills and ability to perform better in the job function
	Alumni involvement	Involving the alumni in admission and academic processes
Influencing touchpoints	Innovativeness and resonance of the higher education institute	Includes accreditation by national and international bodies, facilities for research work done, strategic alliances with national and international B schools and executive and management development program
	Stakeholder perception	Community perception about the status of the institute, visibility of the institute in media and sense of belonging to a B school community

among at least some of the variables (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998, p. 99, quoted in Park & Kim, 2003).

Internal consistency reliability is a statement about the stability of individual measurement items across replications from the same source of information. The Cronbach's α coefficient was used to assess reliability of the measures (Straub, 1989, quoted in Park & Kim, 2003). As shown in Tables 2–5, reliability coefficients were acceptable for most of the constructs, ranging

from .923 for career growth to .528 for alumni involvement. While all the reliability figures were higher than .6, the lowest acceptable limit for Cronbach's α suggested by Hair *et al.* (1998, quoted in Park & Kim, 2003), variables with marginally lower values of Cronbach's α require further refinement in future.

Tables 2–5 show the reliability and factor loadings of the 13 extracted factors.

The five factors extracted with Cronbach's α .803, .675, .628, .754 and .657 have been named as soft and hard infrastructure, alumni and student recommendation, media influence, placement opportunities and fees and location of the higher education institute.

The four factors extracted with Cronbach's α .755, .780, .837 and .588 have been named as knowledge enhancement, industry interface, co-curricular activities and learning resources.

The two factors extracted with Cronbach's α .923 and .528 are named as career growth and alumni involvement, respectively.

The two factors extracted with Cronbach's α .788 and .594 are named as innovativeness and resonance of the higher education institute and stakeholder perception, respectively.

Table 2. Factors influencing *pre-admission* process (reliability statistics).

Cronbach's α	Number of items	Item codes	Item labels	Factor loadings
.803	5	SC 10	Reputation of the faculty	.706
		SC 11	Uniqueness of the course content	.795
		SC 12	Infrastructure facilities such as sports, hostel, etc.	.756
		SC 13	Academic infrastructure such as library, classrooms, etc.	.834
.675	5	FA 4	Infrastructure facilities	.514
		KS 3	Friends and acquaintances who are already studying in some B school	.422
		KS 5	Career counselors	.412
		KS 9	Alumni of the B school	.854
		KS 10	Current students of the B school	.830
.628	4	FA 6	Alumni recommendation	.508
		KS 4	Advertisements of B schools in different media	.609
		KS 6	General information about B schools from newspapers, magazines	.633
		KS 7	B school website	.706
.754	2	KS 8	B school rankings in various media	.728
		SC 14	Return on investment in terms of job placements	
		FA 7	Return on investment in terms of placement opportunities	
.657	2	FA 2	Location of the B school	
		FA 3	Fees of the program	

Table 3. Factors influencing *during the course* process (reliability statistics).

Cronbach's α	Number of items	Item codes	Item labels	Factor loadings
.755	5	KA 1	Knowledge base of the faculty	.796
		KA 2	Alumni interaction with the B school	.662
		KA 3	Teaching pedagogy which includes field assignments and case studies	.757
		KA 4	Interaction with industry experts	.661
		KA 5	Conferences and workshops	.613
.780	3	UK 1	Interaction/online contact facility with alumni	.600
		UK 4	Industry tie-ups for getting hands-on corporate work experience on periodic basis	.819
.837	2	UK 5	Mentorship programs provided by alumni	.892
		KA 9	Opportunity to take part in college fests and competitions	.884
		KA 10	Opportunity to organize college fests and events	.866
.588	3	KA 6	Textbooks and reading material	.815
		KA 7	Peer interaction	.730
		KA 8	Online databases (e.g. Ebsco, Proquest, etc.)	.533

6.1.3 Confirmatory factor analysis test for the measurement model

A hypothetical model was developed using confirmatory factor analysis to assess the fit of the data. It represents latent variables, namely pre-admission, during the course, post-passing the course and educational brand strength. Joreskog and Sorbom (1989, quoted in Hartman, Gehrt, & Watchravesringkan, 2004) suggest that measurement models can be used to confirm (or disprove) the data fit indicated by exploratory procedures.

Table 4. Factors influencing *post-passing the course* (as an alumnus) (reliability statistics).

Cronbach's α	Number of items	Item codes	Item labels	Factor loadings
.923	9	AD 1	Ability to continuously update one's knowledge base	.709
		AD 2	Reduce dependency on other employees	.771
		AD 3	Development of one's capability of gathering correct information	.786
		AD 4	Improvement in your managerial and decision-making skills	.860
		AD 5	Improves ability of constant learning by virtue of being part of a B school community	.774
		AD 6	Qualitative growth in career status	.799
		AD 7	Ability to get access to more creative ideas	.799
		AD 8	Helps to perform better in the job function	.825
		AD 9	Ability to get new job opportunities	.760
.528	2	LB 4	By involving senior alumni in the admission process	.812
		LB 5	By involving senior alumni in the academic process	.822

Table 5. *Influencing touchpoints* to develop higher education brand (reliability statistics).

Cronbach's α	Number of items	Item codes	Item labels	Factor loadings
.788	7	EB 2	Accreditation by national and international bodies	.578
		EB 4	Facilities provided and the output of research work done	.616
		EB 5	Consultancy services provided by the institute	.551
		EB 6	Strategic alliances with national and international B schools	.582
		EB 8	Executive and management development programs designed and conducted by the institute	.712
		EB 9	Qualification and status of the faculty	.674
		EB 10	Membership of professional bodies by the institute	.630
.594	3	EB 7	Community perception about the status of institute	.574
		EB 11	Visibility of the institute in media	.779
		EB 12	The sense of belonging to a B school community	.707

7. Results

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed using the AMOS 5.0 program to test the model. The results show a χ^2 value of 99.876 with 59 degrees of freedom at the $p = .01$ level for 1.69 χ^2 /degrees of freedom ratio. A ratio of less than 2 or 3 can be considered as an acceptable fit, according to Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, and Barlow (2006). Regarding the fit indices, values of comparative fit index (CFI) $\geq .95$ are considered for an acceptable fit, according to Schreiber *et al.* (2006). The CFI for the model was .86, which is a limitation of the study and needs to be addressed in future research studies.

GFI and adjusted goodness-of-fit statistic measures are largely affected by sample size, according to Sharma, Mukherjee, Kumar, and Dillon (2005, quoted in Kenny, 2014). The high goodness-of-fit indexes (GFI) (higher than .95) indicate a good fit (Im, Bayus, & Mason, 2003). The model estimates a GFI of .95, indicating a good fit. Higher values of GFI and AGFI indicate a better model data fit, according to Lei and Wu (2007). Our model estimates an AGFI of .925, within the acceptable limits.

PCLOSE measure provides a one-sided test of the null hypothesis which is that the root mean square error of approximation equals .05, what is called a close-fitting model. Such a model has specification error, but 'not very much' specification error. The alternative, one-sided hypothesis is that the RMSEA is greater than .05. So if the p is greater than .05 (i.e. not statistically significant), then it is concluded that the fit of the model is 'close'. If the p is less than .05, it is concluded that the model's fit is worse than close-fitting (i.e. the RMSEA is greater than .05) (Kenny, 2014). The estimated measurement model indicates acceptable limits of PCLOSE and RMSEA, the values being .472 and .05, respectively. According to Schreiber *et al.* (2006), for root mean square residual value of 0 indicates a perfect fit, the smaller the better. The RMR for the current study is .034, indicating an acceptable fit. The measurement model is illustrated

Table 6. Measurement model AMOS estimates for confirmatory factor analysis.

Standardized regression weights: (group number 1 – default model)			Estimate
Brand Strength	←	Pre-admission	-.068
Brand Strength	←	During	-.140
Brand Strength	←	Post-passing	.410
Fee_Location	←	Pre-admission	.238
Placement_Opportunity	←	Pre-admission	.302
Media_Influence	←	Pre-admission	.364
Alumni_Student_Recom	←	Pre-admission	.509
Soft_Hard_Infrastructure	←	Pre-admission	.545
Learning_resources	←	During	.460
Cocurricular_activities	←	During	.546
Industry_Interface	←	During	-.072
Knowledge_Enhancement	←	During	.801
Alumni_Involvement	←	Post-passing	.123
Career_Growth	←	Post-passing	.964
Innovatiness_Resonance	←	Influencing touchpoint	.794
Stakeholder_Perception	←	Influencing touchpoint	.454

in Figure 1. According to Schreiber *et al.* (2006), standardized factor loadings in measurement models should fall between 0 and 1 with higher values suggesting better indications of the observed variables for the latent variable. The loadings of the 13 variables on latent variables are indicated by standardized estimates summarized in Table 6.

It has been observed in the study that estimates, namely career growth, innovativeness and resonance and knowledge enhancement, are satisfactory indicators for the latent construct of ‘post-passing’ touchpoints, ‘brand strength’

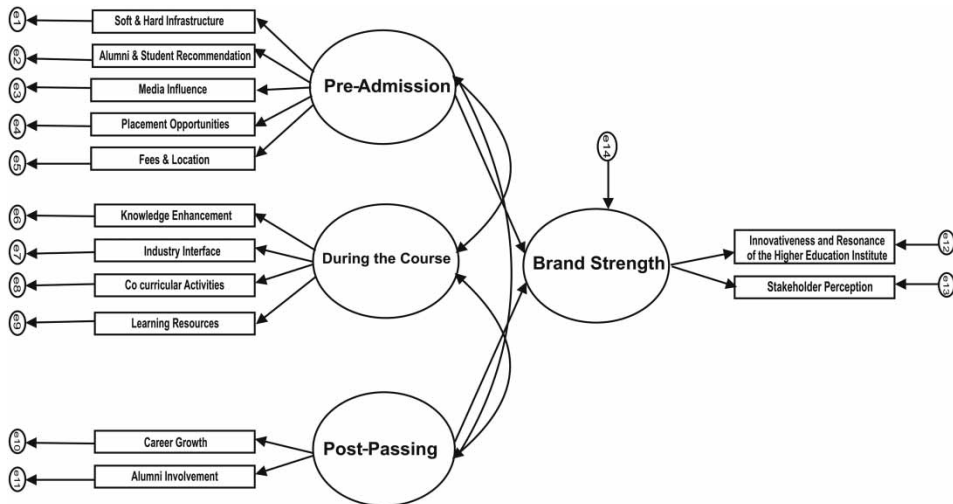


Figure 3. Confirmatory factor analysis of identifying and analyzing knowledge touchpoints for building a higher education brand.

and ‘during the course’ touchpoints, respectively, with high loadings above .7. It is also observed that alumni and student recommendations, soft and hard infrastructure, learning resources, co-curricular activities and stakeholder’s perception, may have a moderate impact on the latent variables, with low loadings (Figure 3).

8. Managerial implications

- (1) The Higher Education Brand Touchpoint Wheel is a strong conceptual model to build a compelling Higher Education Institute brand. The experiential service model transposed on this model gives directions to concretizing the actual educational service in the ‘during’ phase of the model. The experiential learning educational service delivery process is perhaps the best way to deliver active-learning to the educational service-seeking consumers. Creating consonance with consumers in the initial phase of the ‘during’ process through student orientation, counseling, strength of course delivery especially in the initial semesters, extra and co-curricular learning activities, industry–student interface, live industry-driven case study and projects will enhance this active-learning process, making the knowledge internalization more enduring and endearing to the consumers.
- (2) On observing the Brand Touchpoint Wheel for developing a higher education brand (Figure 2), there are five factors under the ‘pre-admission’ phase, four factors in the ‘during the course’ phase and two factors under the ‘post-passing’ phase. This could be interpreted that since education is an experiential service where the service cannot be sampled in advance, the pre-admission phase becomes important for an aspiring student (consumer). This is especially important in the case of business management schools that vie for international students. The pre-admission stage in such cases becomes a critical factor apart from the qualifying scores of the student. All things remaining equal, when the student is faced with making a final choice between business management schools, the pre-admission stage factors could play a major role in the final decision-making by the student (consumer).
- (3) Knowledge enhancement in the ‘during’ phase can be made more compelling and effective by co-creating the knowledge product between the Management Institute and consumers.
- (4) Pre-admission touchpoints need to be enhanced through effective communication at the media level – especially at the social media level, where use of alumni and students to propagate the brand value with major emphasis on placements and the campus infrastructure can build positive perceptions and expectations about the management education brand.

- (5) Post-passing touchpoints such as amplifying alumni achievements and involving alumni with the management education brand will develop a positive symbiotic relationship, thus building the brand strength of management education brand.
- (6) By positively and consistently influencing the various critical variables at the pre-, during and post-phases, the strength of the higher education institute can be enhanced, thus creating a virtuous cycle of brand strength.
- (7) Care should also be taken to manage the overall influencing touchpoints such as stakeholder perception of the brand, perceived innovativeness of the brand with activities like research, continued executive education and continuous quality enhancement through accreditation by various national and international bodies, etc.

9. Limitations of the study

- (1) The research was conducted using an online questionnaire, thus limiting the universe of the sample size, as the link for the questionnaire was put up on the Google groups of student bodies and on personal email IDs on the authors' social media.
- (2) The sample is mostly from students studying in one management education school in Mumbai city.
- (3) The value of CFI was .862 in the final confirmatory factor analysis model, indicating near to good fit.
- (4) The internal consistency in two factors for alumni involvement and stakeholder perception was .528 and .594, respectively. These factors were retained due to content validity. The internal consistency was low due to the lower number of items measuring the respective factors extracted.
- (5) The reputation and status of the Governing Council Members and the Leadership of the higher education brand as influencing touchpoint factors have not been taken into consideration in this study.
- (6) There could be other influencing touchpoints, such as industry perception of the higher education brand, impact of career progression of its alumni, etc.

10. Directions for future research

It is recommended that the cumulative impact of the various touchpoints on each other should be assessed using appropriate techniques and on a longitudinal basis. The strength and ranking in importance of the various touchpoints would also be strengthened through further analysis. Due to the growing importance and usage of social media especially by the student community, the impact of social media on developing higher education brands should also be researched. Research should also be conducted on the influence of alumni on the higher education brand.

References

- Aaker, D. (1991). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. New York: The Free Press.
- Adjei, M. T., Noble, C. H., & Noble, S. M. (2012). Enhancing relationships with customers through online brand communities. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 53(4), 22 (Reprint No. 53406). Retrieved from <http://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/enhancing-relationships-with-customers-through-online-brand-communities/>
- Baden-Fuller, C., Ravazzolo, F., & Schweizer, T. (2000). Making and measuring reputations: The research ranking of European business schools. *Long Range Planning*, 33(5), 621–650.
- Belch, G. E., & Belch, M. A. (1987). The application of an expectancy value operationalization of function theory to examine attitudes of boycotters and non boycotters consumer products. In M. Wallendorf & P. F. Anderson (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (Vol. 14, pp. 232–236). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Bello, I., & Kavadias, S. (2011). *The design challenges of experiential services*, 3. Retrieved March 14, 2014, from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1912166>
- Bennett, R., & Ali-Choudhury, R. (2009). Prospective students' perceptions of university brands: An empirical study. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19(1), 85–107.
- Binney, W., & Martin, C. (1997). How do rural students choose their higher education institutions? Two regional Australian cases. *Journal of Institutional Research in Australasia*, 6(2), 74–80.
- Booth, H. (2003). Consultancies line up for university branding jobs. *Design Week*, 18(13), 4. Retrieved from <http://www.designweek.co.uk/news/consultancies-line-up-for-university-branding-jobs/1103532.article>
- Bristow, D. N., & Schneider, K. (2005). The Collegiate Student Orientation Scale (CSOS): Application of the marketing concept to higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 12(2), 15–34.
- Brown, T. J., & Dacin, P. A. (1997). The company and the product: Corporate associations and consumer product responses. *Journal of Marketing*, 61(1), 68–84.
- Bunzel, D. (2007). Universities sell their brands. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 16(2), 152–153.
- Candy, P., & Crebert, R. (1991). Ivory tower to concrete jungle. *Journal of Higher Education*, 62(5), 570–592.
- Chapleo, C. (2010). What defines successful university brands? *The International Journal for Public Sector Management*, 23(2), 169–183.
- de Chernatony, L. (2009). Towards a holy grail of defining brand. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 101–105.
- Daloz, L., Keen, C., Keen, J., & Parks, S. (1996). *Common fire: Lives of commitment in a complex world*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Davis, S. M., & Dunn, M. (2002). *Building the brand driven business: Operationalize your brand to drive profitable growth*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Duderstadt, J. (1999). New roles for the twenty-first century university. *Issues Online in Science and Technology*. Retrieved April 29, 2014, from <http://www.nap.edu/issues/16.2/duderstadt.htm>
- Durkin, M., & McKenna, S. (2011). Informing the marketing of higher education to younger people. *Irish Marketing Review*, 21(1 & 2), 41. Retrieved from http://www.mii.ie/attachments/wysiwyg/6051/articles/IMR_2011_DurkinMcKenna.pdf
- Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using SPSS*. Singapore: SAGE Publications.
- Fischer, R. (2005). Marketing U, Session II. *Marketing Magazine*, 110.
- Hair, J. F., Anderson, R. E., Tatham, R. L., & Black, W. C. (1998). *Multivariate data analysis* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Hartman, J. B., Gehrt, K. C., & Watchravesringkan, K. (2004). Re-examination of concept of innovativeness in the context of adolescent segment. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, 12(4), 353–365.
- Hemsley-Brown, J., & Goonawardana, S. (2007). Brand harmonization in the international higher education market. *Journal of Business Research*, 60, 942–948.
- Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I. (2006). Universities in a competitive global marketplace: A systematic review of the literature on higher education marketing. *The International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 19(4), 316–338.

- Hopkins, C. D., Jones, S. A., Pickett, G., & Raymond, M. A. (2009). Influence of brand levels and associations on purchase intent. *Journal of General Management*, 35(1), 23–24.
- Hoyt, J. E., & Brown, A. B. (1999). *Marketing UVSC: How prospective students view the college*. Retrieved August 30, 2009, from <http://www.uvu.edu/iri/pdfs/research/marketinguvscspring2003/pdf>
- Im, S., Bayus, B. L., & Mason, C. H. (2003). An empirical study of innate consumer innovativeness, personal characteristics, and new-product adoption behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(1), 61–73.
- Johnston, A. D. (2003). The brand called 'U'. *Maclean's*, 116(22), 1–2.
- Joreskog, K., & Sorbom, D. (1989). *LISREL 7: A guide to the program and applications*. Chicago, IL: SPSS Inc.
- Karapetrovic, S., Rajamani, D., & Willborn, W. W. (1999). University, Inc. *Quality Progress*, 32(5), 87–95.
- Kay, M. J. (2006). Strong brands and corporate brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 742–760.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualising, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Keller, K. L., & Aaker, D. A. (1994). *Managing the corporate brand: The effects of corporate images and corporate brand extensions* (Research paper no. 1216). Stanford: Stanford University Graduate School of Business.
- Kenny, D. (2014). *Measuring model fit*. Retrieved April 29, 2014 from <http://davidakenny.net/cm/fit.htm>
- Kotler, P., & Fox, K. F. A. (1995). *Strategic marketing for educational institutes* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Lei, P. W., & Wu, Q. (2007). Introduction to structural equation modeling: Issue and practical considerations. *ITEMS*, 26, 33–43.
- Lewis, E. (2003, May 20–22). It's a university challenge. *Brand Strategy*.
- Lowry, J. R., & Owens, B. D. (2001). Developing a positioning strategy for a university. *Services Marketing Quarterly*, 22(4), 27–41.
- Malhotra, N., & Dash, S. (2010). *Marketing research* (5th ed.). New Delhi: Pearson Publication.
- Melewar, T. C., & Akel, S. (2005). The role of corporate identity in the higher education sector: A case study. *Corporate Communications an International Journal*, 10(1), 41–57.
- Moogan, Y. J., Baron, S., & Harris, K. (1999). Decision-making behaviour of potential higher education students. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 53(3), 211–228.
- Munter, J. (2002). Linking community and classroom in higher education: Service learning and student empowerment. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, 10(2), 152–153.
- Park, C.-H., & Kim, Y.-G. (2003). Identifying key factors affecting consumer purchase behavior in an online shopping context. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 31(1), 16–29. doi:10.1108/09590550310457818
- Parsuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), 23. Retrieved from <http://areas.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/Marketing/FacultyStaff/zeithaml/Selected%20Publications/SERVQUAL-%20A%20Multiple-Item%20Scale%20for%20Measuring%20Consumer%20Perceptions%20of%20Service%20Quality.pdf>
- Pesch, M., Calhoun, R., Schneider, K., & Bristow, D. (2008). The student orientation of a college of business: An empirical look from the students' perspective. *The Marketing Management Journal*, 18(1), 100–108.
- Ponsonby-McCabe, S., & Boyle, E. (2006). Understanding brands as experiential spaces: Axiological implications for marketing strategists. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 14(2), 175–189.
- Priporas, C.-V., & Kamenidou, I. (2011). Perceptions of potential postgraduate Greek business students towards UK universities, brand and brand reputation. *Brand Management*, 18(4/5), 264–273.
- Richardson, S., Nwankwo, S., & Richardson, B. (1995). Strategic issues for higher education strategists in the UK: A political contingency perspective. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 8(6), 7–16.

- Roth, A. V., & Menor, L. J. (2003). Insights into service operations management: A research agenda. *Production and Operations Management*, 12(2), 145–164.
- Sasser, W. E. (1976). Match supply and demand in service industries. *Harvard Business Review*, 54(6), 133–140.
- Schreiber, J. B., Stage, F. K., King, J., Nora, A., & Barlow, E. A. (2006). Reporting structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor analysis results: A review. *The Journal of Education Research*, 99(6), 323–337.
- Sharma, S., Mukherjee, S., Kumar, A., & Dillon, W. R. (2005). A simulation study to investigate the use of cutoff values for assessing model fit in covariance structure models. *Journal of Business Research*, 58, 935–943.
- Soutar, G. N., & Turner, J. P. (2002). Students' preferences for university: A conjoint analysis. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 1(16), 40–45.
- Stevens, J. P. (1992). *Applied multivariate statistics for the social sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Straub, D. W. (1989). Validating instruments in MIS research. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(2), 147–169.
- Szekeres, J. (2010). Sustaining student numbers in the competitive marketplace. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 32(5), 429–439. doi:10.1080/1360080X.2010.511116
- Temple, P. (2006). Branding higher education: Illusion or reality? *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 10(1), 15–19.
- Veloutsou, C., Lewis, J. W., & Paton, R. A. (2004). University selection: Information requirements and importance. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 18(2/3), 160–171.
- Voss, C., & Zomerdijk, L. (2007). Innovation in experiential services – An empirical view. In DTI (Ed.), *Innovation in services* (pp. 3–4). London: DTI. Retrieved February 25, 2014 from http://pure.au.dk/portal/files/45289415/Bilag_14_Innovation_in_Experiential_Services_Karl_Kalcher.pdf
- Whelan, S., & Wohlfeil, M. (2006). Communicating brands through engagement with 'lived' experiences. *Brand Management*, 13(4/5), 313–329.
- White, J. B., Miles, M. P., & Levernier, W. (2009). AACSB international and management of its brand: Implications for the future. *Journal of Management Development*, 28(5), 407–413.
- Williams, R. L. (2012). *Branding through renaming for strategic alignment in service organizations* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Edinburgh Napier University, Edinburgh, UK.
- Williams, R., & Omar, M. (2012). The brand flux model – The impact of disruption on the organization brand. *Academy of Marketing Annual Conference*, University of Southampton, UK.
- Williams, R., Osei, C., & Omar, M. (2012). Higher education institution branding as a component of country branding in Ghana: Renaming Kwame Nkrumah University of science and technology. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 22(1), 71–81.
- Zlotkowski, E. (2001). Mapping new terrain: Service-learning across disciplines. *Change*, 33(1), 25–33.