

UNIVERSITY BRAND MANAGEMENT IN THE CONDITIONS OF EDUCATION DIGITALIZATION

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Abstract

Digitalization of education being an integral part of digital transformation is also the process of adapting the educational system to the target audience of the “digital natives” generation. Transition to a digital university means introducing more flexible processes to manage the university's brand, changing the corporate culture and optimizing the processes. This will definitely increase the university competitiveness in the education market, create additional value and attract students. The purpose of the article is to identify the specific elements of the brand and look at the managerial aspects of university branding in the conditions of digitalization of education. The theoretical part of the article provides the literature review, clarifies the essence and directions of digitalization of education, focuses on the specifics of developing and managing the university brand. In the empirical part of the article, the authors summarize and compare the secondary data which illustrate how the elements of the brand affect the consumer perception. The article provides the results of the students opinion survey, as they are the main consumer group. These findings helped to identify the specific elements of the brand and the key areas of brand management, considering the digital knowledge and consumer preferences.

Key words: university brand management, digitalization of education, digital university, university competitiveness, brand elements.

JEL Code: I25, M31

Introduction

The gradual transition to industry 4.0 determined the need for digital transformation in individual sectors and areas of activity: manufacturing, trade, medicine, and finance.

Being one of the key modern trends, digitalization of education attracts the attention of many researchers studying its individual areas. These are changes in the teaching system, teacher's role, the impact on the emergence of specialists of a new format, the impact on the labor market needs and many others.

At the same time, the issues relating to the internal aspects of university management in the digital transformation of education are insufficiently described in scientific works. Taking into account the globalization of education, increasing competition and the growth of students'

mobility, the question requiring serious attention is brand management of an educational institution in terms of its digital specificity. In our opinion, the development and adjustment of a brand through digital elements and brand management based on digital communications will become an integral part of the marketing activities of a modern university in the near future. This determined the purpose of the study which is to identify the specific elements of the brand and management aspects of university branding in the context of digitalization of education. The main objectives are as follows:

- Studying the essence and main directions of digitalization of higher education;
- Identifying the specifics of brand management taking into account the specifics of the digital generation;
- Defining the impact of digital technologies on the perception of the university's brand by modern consumers of educational services.

1 Digitalization of education: new challenges for university brand management

Digitalization of education means restructuring the educational process: teaching methods and facilities, competency model, semantic model of the educational program, teacher evaluation, digital management of routine processes in the educational institution (Besshaposhnikov, Leonov & Prilipko, 2018). Thus within the training function we talk about the transformation of knowledge and skills acquired by students as well as teacher's role changing. The effectiveness of conducting research and working with big data is determined by modern digital technologies used.

The university's social function calls for changing approaches to the personality development of a digital generation student. Effective economic function means providing the regional and national economy with professionals who possess modern knowledge and skills required for industry 4.0.

Covering all the areas of educational institutions, digitalization exposed a problem. This problem is that the universities using face-to-face approach do not know how to respond to the opportunities offered by online technologies. They don't know whether to take them seriously, what strategic actions to take and what problems may arise from online technologies implementation (Ghemawat, 2017).

Digitalization of education is necessary to deal with the new generation of "the digital natives". Their features are largely determined by the development of modern technologies: the Internet, innovations in communication, various forms of information.

Since early childhood, they are surrounded by digital technologies and perceive them as an attribute of everyday life. Not surprisingly, their educational requirements are different. They are not interested in learning by memorizing and transmitting knowledge as they live in the conditions of free access to a huge amount of information.

The main function of modern education is to "teach to learn", to prepare for changes, to work with more complex projects, to broaden one's mind (Popova, 2018). According to Gorshkova (2018), the innovative potential and its use, as well as the sense of the new, are especially important for young people. Therefore, students positively perceive technological innovations at the university such as an electronic schedule and online courses. The modern generation's specificity determines the need for changing the university's marketing strategy.

Educational institutions realize the importance of student satisfaction in building a strong brand and shaping its value (Abina & Uthman, 2018). First, we talk about the development/adjustment of the university brand and communications, taking into account the students' digital preferences. Consumers nowadays have more opportunities to influence brand management. Their social behavior in the Internet increases their interaction with brands. The ease of messaging on different resources allows to create the most interesting content. (Salvador & Ikeda, 2018).

Universities need to use branding to show their distinctness and reputation (de Heer & Tandoh-Offin, 2015). A university brand is a complex multi-component construct, therefore different models presented in the brand management theory identify its elements and the connection between them. To develop a university brand, the most appropriate approach is to adapt classical branding models to the specifics of the university activities (Kapustina, Zhadko & Izakova, 2017).

The brand's functional parameters and benefits which consumers get from contacting the brand are its integral elements. The functional parameters may include faculty members, material and technical base, variety of specialties, applied educational technologies and many other.

The advantages of a university brand can refer to developing the student's abilities, enrichment of knowledge and experience, expanding the circle of acquaintances and others.

It is important to note that such elements of the brand as functional characteristics, benefits, emotions and values are not constant and they can vary with changing internal and external environment of the university. In modern conditions university brand management becomes especially important in terms of attracting talented teachers. In this regard the main elements of the brand may be reputation, organizational culture, strategic vision, organizational identity, intended image and perceived image. (Saurombe, Barkhuizen & Schutte, 2017).

Therefore, there is a need for adjusting the university brand parameters through digital elements. Thus, online management and educational operations form the environment of a modern digital institution, which is specularly reflected in the brand of an educational organization (Vanyushkina, 2016). At the same time, taking into account the specifics of the younger generation, universities are increasingly using digital channels in brand communications. This allows creating a single, complete image, close to and understandable for modern students.

2 Digital elements of the university brand in students' perception

Problem description: Today using digital technologies at a university is compulsory to train bachelors and masters. The main attributes of the brand are determined by the functional characteristics such as advantages: benefits the consumer gains from contacting the brand; values: emotions experienced by the consumer in contacting the brand. But digital technologies are not considered as a separate attribute. It is necessary to find out how important the availability of digital technologies at a university is for consumers and the university brand.

Research objectives:

1. Analyzing the importance and the need for using digital technologies in training bachelors and masters.
2. Identifying the influence of digital technologies on the consumer perception of the university brand.

Methods of research: To analyze the perception of the digital element as one of the required attributes of a university brand the authors conducted an on-line survey among the students of big Russian universities: Siberian Institute of Management (Novosibirsk), Ural Institute of Management, Branch of RANEPA (Ekaterinburg), Ural State University of Economics (Ekaterinburg), Institute of International Relations (Ekaterinburg), Ogarev Mordovia State University (Saransk), The Southwest State University (Kursk), Saint Petersburg State University of Economics, Omsk State Pedagogical University, Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Chelyabinsk State University, Moscow State Linguistic University

The survey was conducted using the survey service Simpoll from 18 to 30 of January 2019. The selection was random.

Sample size: 400 students. Among them 260 bachelor students, 140 master students. 200 full-time students, 100 correspondence students, 100 part-time students.

Justification of the sample size: the sample size is determined depending on the level of the confidence interval of the allowable error. According to V.I.Paniotto's calculations to obtain a

representative sample with the 5 percent error for the examined population of 100,000 and over the volume of a representative sample must be at least 400.

RESULTS

First, the research determined the importance for students to use digital technologies (Table 1).

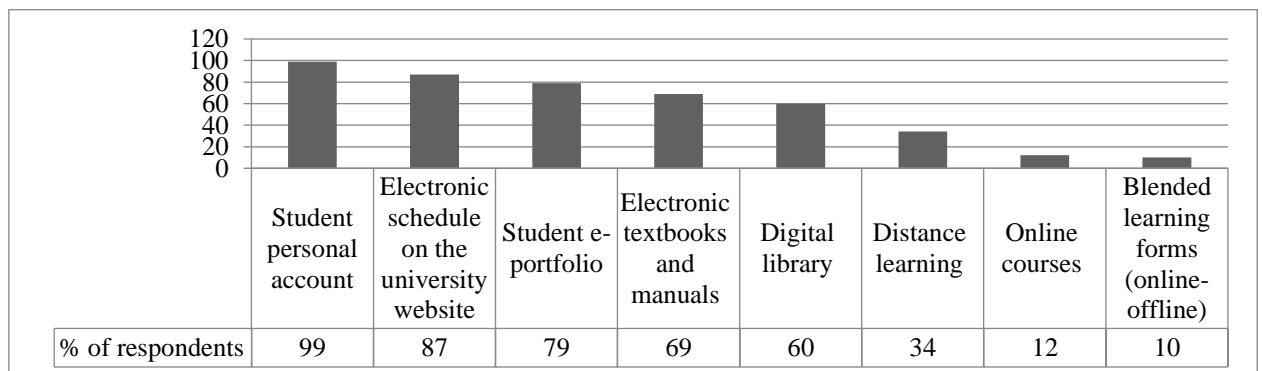
Tab. 1: What digital technologies, in your opinion, are the necessary attributes of a modern university (specify at least 5 of the proposed options)

№	Possible answer	% of respondents
1.	Student personal account	90
2.	Electronic textbooks and manuals	89
3.	Electronic schedule on the university website	88
4.	Digital library	60
5.	Distance learning	55
6.	Online courses	45
7.	Blended learning forms (online-offline)	38
8.	Student e-portfolio	34
9.	Digital campuses	15

Source: Исследования авторов

The most necessary digital elements in the university are as follows: student's personal accounts (90%), electronic textbooks and manuals (89%), electronic schedule on the university website (88%). The digital library (60%) is less significant if students have textbooks. Distance learning (55%) and online courses (45%) are more significant for correspondence and part-time students. Only 38% of respondents noted the importance of blended learning (online + offline) and the availability of an electronic student portfolio (34%). Only 15% of respondents need digital campuses. Digital technologies students already use in university are shown in figure 1.

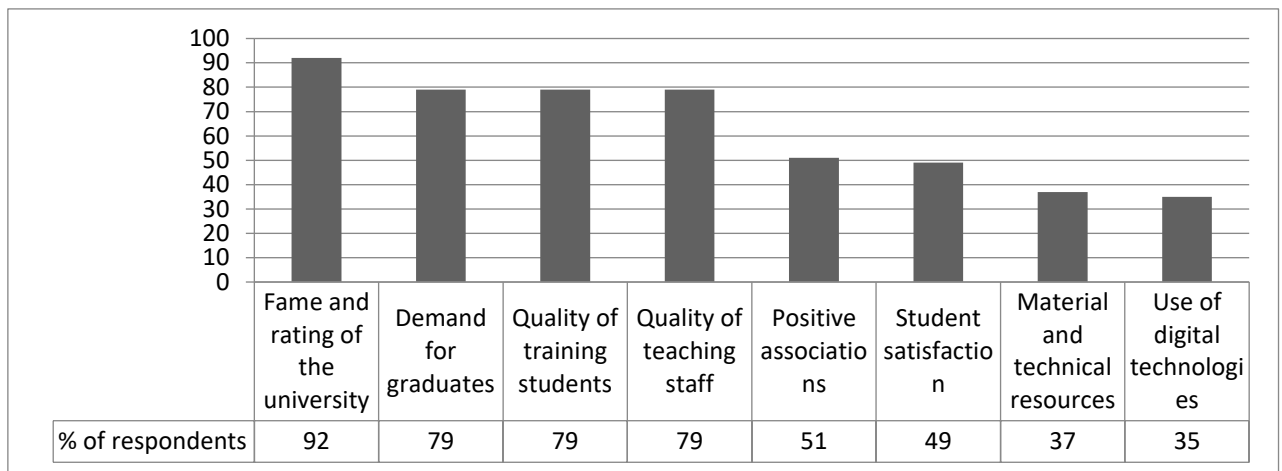
Fig. 1: What digital technologies are already used in your university?



Source: Исследования авторов

According to the survey results, 99% of students have a personal account, 87% - view the schedule on the university website, 79% - fill in the student's electronic portfolio. 69% of students use electronic textbooks and manuals to prepare for classes and midterm assessment, 60% of them use the digital library. Only 34% of students in a university use distance learning and 12% of students have online courses. Blended learning forms are used by 10% of respondents. There are no digital campuses.

Fig. 2: What do you understand by university brand? (Specify at least five of the proposed options)



Source: Исследования авторов

The main attribute of the brand for students is its fame (92%). Then follow functional characteristics of the brand: demand for graduates (79%), quality of training (79%) and quality of the teaching staff (79%). Half of the students consider positive associations (51%) and student satisfaction (49%) as the elements of the university brand. 37% of respondents believe that the material and technical base is also an element of the university's brand, as well as the use of digital technologies in the training process. (35%). What does the development of digital technologies in the university have impact on shown in table 2.

Tab. 2: What does the development of digital technologies in the university have impact on? (Specify at least five of the proposed options)

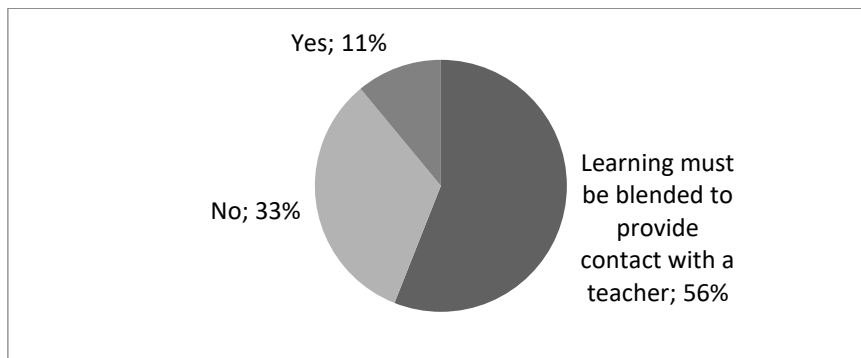
№	Possible answer	% of respondents
1.	Convenience of learning for the student	84
2.	Improving the quality of education	79
3.	Competitive advantages of the university	73
4.	Promotion of the university internationally	60

5.	University brand	54
6.	Choice of the university by applicants	50
7.	Opportunity for continuous learning	45
8.	Graduates' competitiveness in the labor market	41

Source: Исследования авторов

The main result of using digital technologies according to the students is convenience of learning (84%). 79% of respondents believe that the quality of education will improve, and the university will gain competitive advantages (73%). Digital technologies will help promote the university e internationally (60%). Using digital technologies will affect the university brand for the better (54%). Applicants will consider this when choosing a university (50%). Opportunity for continuous learning is noted by 45% of respondents. In addition, 41% of students believe that the development of digital technologies in the university will increase the competitiveness of graduates.

Fig. 3: Do you think your university has all the opportunities for transition to online training only?



Source: Исследования авторов

The question of the possible transition of the university to the full online training has revealed that students are not ready to refuse contact with the teacher. 56% of students believe that there should be blended online + offline training and are 33% of them are not at all ready to use online courses. Only 11% of students can do distance learning. These are mostly master students of part-time and correspondence students. The benefits students can get from using digital technologies are shown in Table 3.

Tab. 3: In your opinion, how can students benefit from digital technologies in the university? (choose not more than 3 benefits)

№	Possible answer	% of respondents
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1.	There will be an opportunity to listen to the lectures of the leading practitioners and scientists from other universities and countries	59
2.	It will allow to save time for learning and preparing	55
3.	It will make learning easier and more understandable	53
4.	It will provide an opportunity to study 24/7 anywhere in the world 51%	51
5.	It will help to gain the most updated knowledge	48
6.	It will provide an opportunity to revise lectures 24/7 anywhere in the world	45
7.	Studying will be much more interesting	41
8.	There will be an opportunity for continuous learning	38
9.	It will help to acquire the skills of a competitive specialist	25

Source: Исследования авторов

The main advantages of using digital technologies students consider the following opportunities: listen to lectures of leading practitioners and scientists from other universities and countries (59%), save time for learning and training (55%), make learning easier and understandable (53%), study 24/7 anywhere in the world (51%), get the latest knowledge (48%), repeat lectures 24/7 anywhere in the world (45%). They believe that learning will be much more interesting (41%) and continuous (38%). Only 25% of respondents believe that this will allow them to gain the skills of a competitive specialist.

Students consider the following main advantages of using digital technologies: listen to lectures by leading practitioners and scientists from other universities and countries (59%), save time for learning and training (55%), make learning easier and more understandable (53%), learn 24/7 anywhere in the world (51%), get the most relevant knowledge (48%), repeat lectures 24/7 anywhere in the world (45%). It is believed that learning will be much more interesting (41%) and continuously (38%). Only 25% of respondents believe that this will provide the skills of a competitive specialist.

Findings:

1. Students do not associate digital technologies with one of the obligatory elements of the university brand. They ranked the eighth in importance.
2. At the same time, if you correlate the answers to questions in 3 (brand elements) and 6 (what students can get from using digital technologies at a university), the conclusion is that there is definitely an impact on the university brand. Students expect digital technologies to implement the mandatory functional elements of the university: the quality training with an opportunity to listen to famous practitioners and scientists, getting the most updated knowledge, positive associations and satisfaction from the learning process through saving time for learning and preparing, an opportunity for

studying 24/7 anywhere in the world, and revising the lectures 24/7 anywhere in the world, study with interest and in a continuous way.

3. In our opinion, the most interesting is the result, which reflects rather low significance for students of those digital technologies that are most actively developing in Russia and the world: about half of the respondents noted the need for distance learning and online courses at the university but only a third are open to blended learning.

4. Obviously, the main reason for the low importance of distance, online and blended learning for students lies in the fact that these technologies are poorly developed in their universities. Therefore, we can expect that with the development of modern digital technologies in educational institutions, students will use them more actively, and, therefore, we can expect increasing importance of online and blended learning.

Conclusion

Based on the conducted research, we can assume that digital technologies unambiguously influence the university brand, and are one of the mandatory elements of the modern university branding. In our opinion, the administration and the faculty of the university should be the first to start considering this.

Adjusting a university brand through digital elements is necessary; but first, it should be done through the most "traditional" ones: student's personal account, electronic textbooks and manuals, an electronic schedule on the university website and a digital library.

Universities that are actively implementing digital technologies in their practices can increase the importance of distance, online and blended learning by focusing on them in brand communications.

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