EFFECT OF UNIVERSITY BRAND AMBIDEXTERITYON BRAND IMAGE OUTPUTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

HAMIDEH SHEKARI

Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Payame Noor University, Tehran, I. R. of Iran
E-mail: H.shekari@ymail.com

Abstract - Due to the decline in student populations and the growth of higher education institutions and the intense competition for student recruitment, the survival of universities depends on the students' commitment, love support and loyalty to pursue their studies in the same university. The main aim of this research is investigating effect of Brand ambidexterity on Brand Image Output in higher education with considering mediating role of brand performance. This study is an applied and descriptive-survey research. The statistical population of the research is the students of Payame Noor University in Yazd province. We selected a sample of 359 students using simple random sampling method. The statistical instruments consisted of four standard scales. Reliability of the scales was confirmed by Cronbach's Alfa and validity of the scales was confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis. Structural equation modeling was employed for statistical analysis. The results showed that exploratory and exploitative strategy both have direct, positive and significant impact on brand performance. Brand performance has direct, positive and significant impact on brand image. Brand image has direct, positive and significant impact on students' commitment.

Keywords - Brand Support, Brand Loyalty, Brand ambidexterity, Brand performance, Brand image, Students' Commitment.

I. INTRODUCTION

When students want to decide about their continuing education in postgraduate courses, they consider different universities. If they are satisfied with their previous university, one of the most striking options is to continue their studies at same university. Since various options are involved in this decision, from a managerial point of view, the selection and application of an effective strategy targeting this target group is necessary (Nguyen et al., 2016). The present study seeks to find a strategy that will enable students to continue their studies at their previous university and remain loyal, supportive and committed to their university. In other words, it seeks an entrepreneurial mindset that focuses on both types of exploration and exploitation opportunities in order to effectively confront the current competitive environment of the universities. Exploratory opportunities include pursuing and exploiting opportunities that are fundamentally new and have not yet been used by other rivals. While exploitation opportunities include opportunities to maintain and improve competitive advantage in the areas of current activities (Vorhieset al., 2011).

A lot of research has been done to study the factors of organizational ambidexterity, but these researches has mostly been done in the commercial and industrial spheres and is rarely related to academic teaching departments (Hsiao and Chen, 2013). So, in order to complete university studies, the question is, how can universities ensure their survival in a competitive environment with committed students? University executives seem to be able to move towards this goal by adopting strategic decisions about their brand ambidexterity development. Brand ambidexterity means the ability to pursue exploration and exploitation opportunities to promote the university's brand (Beverlandet al., 2015).

Due to the decline in student populations and the growth of institutes of higher education and the intense competition for student recruitment, the survival of universities depends on the students' commitment, love, support and loyalty to pursue their studies in the same university. In this competition in Yazd province, Payame Noor University also needs to adopt policies to raise the number of students in its centers if itdoes not want to be eliminated. Attracting a new student with advertising and marketing activities is possible.In other words, we are going to examine the effect of the university's brandambidexterity on the students' commitment, love, support, identity and loyaltyin Payam Noor University. In examining this effect, we also consider brand image and brand performance variables as mediating variables.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education can benefit from successful branding. Of course, branding has been successful in the field of production as well as in the private sector, and different researches have been done about it. While in the public sector and specially in the service sector, Branding is neglected and less attention has been paid. In universities, branding has also been neglected as a service area (Watkins and Gonzenbach, 2013).This gap is tangible in Payame Noor University as a governmental university. Therefore, in order to fill part of this research gap, in this research, we are going to discuss the brand ambidexterity of the university and examine its impact on brand performance, brand image, and students' commitment, love, support, identity and loyalty. This section explores the theoretical

foundations and backgrounds of the research variables, including Brand ambidexterity, Brand Performance, Brand Image, Commitment, love, support, identity and loyalty.

Ambidexterity: Ambidexterity means the ability of a person to use the skills of both hands equally. Which can be described as a metaphor for organizations, so that they can be capable in exploration and exploitation simultaneously. Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004) define ambidexterity as an organizational capability for convergence and efficiency in responding to market demands while simultaneously adapting to changes in the environment. In total, ambidextrousorganization is an organization that can focus on current responsibilities as well as future opportunities simultaneously as a key to the company's survival and competitive advantage for innovation, entrepreneurship and competitiveness.According to researchers, ambidexterityis divided into two dimensions of exploration and exploitation.Exploitationrefers to incremental innovations that are designed to meet the needs of existing customers and markets.Explorationrefers to seeking new options in order to be ready for future changes in the environment and to ensure long-term survival(PaliokaiteandPacesa, 2014).Organizations should be ambidextrousby designing features that allow individuals to decide on how to divide their time between exploration and exploitation activities. An organization must be able to dominate both to ensure its long-term success. Excessive concentration on exploitation often results in missing long-term vision of organization, while overemphasis on exploration means building future at the cost of losing current opportunities(Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004).

Brand Performance: The necessity of measuring the performance of the organization from various aspects has often been taken into account in the marketing literature and as a dependet variable. Therefore, there is a view for assessing performance through products and services provided by the organization, which is called brand performance. The brand's performance reflects the strength of a brand in the competition market. Brand performance reflects the extent to which the organization achieves its goals (Tuan, 2012). In this area, universities are expected to maintain their brand performance by carefully controlling costs, regulations, services, and monitoring the market share of the student. They have to make sure their short-term operations are satisfactory enough. This includes, for example, a continuous observation of the number of student and level of their satisfaction (Chapleo, 2004).

Brand Image: The brand image refers to the person's intrinsic connections and affiliations with brand. In our research, university brand image means a general assessment of overall performance of university by students (SyedAlwiand Kitchen, 2014). University brand image plays an important role in student decision making. Because in marketing, brand image can effectively increase marketing communication. A consumer that is well suited to a brand and has a favorable background to it tends to respond positively to advertisements, and in this case, less advertisementsis needed. Therefore, in the area of university brand, a student who has a good image of his university brand, is likely to choose the same university for the next periods (Nguyen et al., 2016).

Commitment: The most important indicator for staying in a relationship is "commitment." Student commitment to the university means that the student wants to maintain a long-term relationship with his/her university. Such an engagement reflects the student's motivation to continue the relationship with the university. Student-orientation and emphasis on innovation by the university can develop a brand image for the students. When these values are integrated into the brand image, students are likely to remain committed to university brand (Nguyen et al., 2016).

Brand Loyalty: Loyalty plays an important role for the organization to gain competitive advantage over competitors, as the loyal customer are less price sensitive and much quality time can be spent for competitive moves (Hameed and Kanwal, 2018).Loyalty basically consists of a repeated purchasing of a product from the same brand or company

Brand Love:brand love is an emotional and passionate relationship present between a satisfied consumer and a brand (Eshun, 2017).

Brand Identity: Brand identity is defined as consumers' perception of a brand and reflects a set of associations the consumers hold in their minds when thinking of a brand (Eshun, 2017).

Brand Support: Brand Support is the extent to which a customer advocates a brand and considers it as his/her belongings.

As the previous researches have shown, branding in higher education is not very much considered specially in Iran. In order to cover this gap, we are going to test the following hypotheses:

H_1: Exploration dimension of brand ambidexterity have significant influence on brand performance.

H_2: Exploitation dimension of brand ambidexterity have significant influence on brand performance.

H_3:Brand performance has positive and significant influence on brand image.

H_4:Brand image has positive and significant influence on students' commitment.

H_5:Brand image has positive and significant influence on students' loyalty.
H_6:Brand image has positive and significant influence on students' love.
H_7:Brand image has positive and significant influence on students' identity.
H_8:Brand image has positive and significant influence on students' support.

III. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of brand ambidexterity on students' commitment, love, support, identity and loyalty in Payam Noor University with considering the mediating role of brand performance and brand image. The target population of this study was the students of Yazd Payame Noor University. Of the 400 questionnaires that were distributed, 359 usable questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 90%.

Brand ambidexterity was measured by two-dimension approach proposed by Nguyen et. al. (2016). The twodimensions areexplorationand exploitation. Brand ambidexterity scale had 8 items. Brand performance was measured by 25-item scale proposed by Nguyen et. al. (2016) as well. Brand image was measured by 7-item scale proposed bySyedAlwi et. al. (2015) as well. Commitment was measured by 4-item scale proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1999). Information about the number of item of other variables is provided in table 1.
Reliability of constructs was evaluated by Cronbach's α. Table 1 lists the Cronbach's α of the constructs. As can be seen, all constructs have Cronbach's above 0.7, which indicates high reliability.Validity of constructs was confirmed via content validity. The questionnaires were investigated by 12 faculty members in management and their validity was confirmed.

Table 1- Cronbach's a of the constructs

Construct	Items	α	Construct	Items	α
Ambidexterity	8	0.853	Brand Loyalty	4	0.793
Exploration	4	0.846	Brand Love	6	0.782
Exploitation	4	0.832	Brand Support	2	0.721
Brand Performance	25	0.904	Commitment	4	0.876
Brand image	7	0.875	Brand Identity	4	0.812

Data Analysis

To test the hypotheses of paper, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS software. Figure 1 shows the path diagram of hypotheses in standard mode.

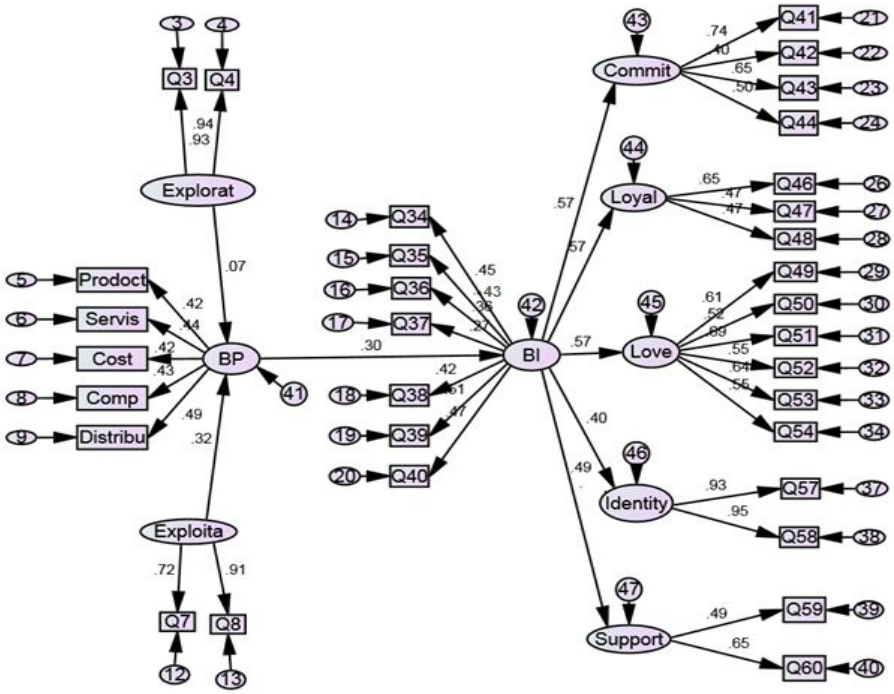


Figure 1-Path diagram of hypotheses

C.R. and P-Value of items and paths are shown in table 2. Among the items and paths in figure 1, those with C.R. above 1.96 and P-Value under 0/05 are significant.

Table 2- Results of confirmatory factor analysis

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
BP	<---	Explorat	.006	.003	1.982	.048	Q34	<--- BI	.742	.157	4.713	***
BP	<---	Exploita	.209	.050	4.147	***	Q41	<--- Commit	1.000			
BI	<---	BP	1.472	.275	5.349	***	Q42	<--- Commit	.562	.133	4.238	***
Commit	<---	BI	.676	.146	4.629	***	Q43	<--- Commit	.920	.150	6.115	***
Loyal	<---	BI	.425	.123	3.452	***	Q44	<--- Commit	.631	.123	5.139	***
Love	<---	BI	.628	.142	4.427	***	Q46	<--- Loyal	1.509	.393	3.843	***
Identity	<---	BI	.835	.204	4.090	***	Q47	<--- Loyal	.974	.274	3.552	***
Support	<---	BI	1.000				Q48	<--- Loyal	1.000			
Q8	<---	Exploita	1.000				Q49	<--- Love	1.000			
Distribu	<---	BP	1.000				Q50	<--- Love	.843	.160	5.264	***
Comp	<---	BP	.750	.107	7.043	***	Q51	<--- Love	1.011	.157	6.448	***
Cost	<---	BP	.744	.106	6.998	***	Q52	<--- Love	.928	.169	5.505	***
Servis	<---	BP	.743	.104	7.129	***	Q53	<--- Love	1.040	.169	6.166	***
Prodoct	<---	BP	.891	.128	6.987	***	Q54	<--- Love	.844	.153	5.533	***
Q40	<---	BI	1.000				Q57	<--- Identity	1.000			
Q39	<---	BI	.945	.185	5.101	***	Q58	<--- Identity	1.137	.115	9.882	***
Q38	<---	BI	.051	.119	.426	.670	Q59	<--- Support	1.000			
Q37	<---	BI	.424	.135	3.143	.002	Q60	<--- Support	5.497	.803	6.844	***
Q36	<---	BI	.609	.152	4.019	***	Q7	<--- Exploita	.902	.117	7.680	***
Q35	<---	BI	.500	.165	3.022	.003	Q3	<--- Explorat	1.000			
							Q4	<--- Explorat	1.122	.270	4.150	***

Table 3 summarizes the results of the research hypotheses testing

Table 3- Results of the research hypotheses testing

Paths/hypotheses	Path Coefficients	C.R.	Sig.	Hypothesized relationship	Result
Exploitation → Brand Performance	0.32	4.147	0.000	Positive	Supported
Exploration → Brand Performance	0.07	1.982	0.048	Positive	Supported
Brand Performance → Brand Image	0.30	5.349	0.000	Positive	Supported
Brand Image→ Commitment	0.18	4.629	0.000	Positive	Supported
Brand Image→Brand Loyalty	0.23	3.452	0.000	Positive	Supported
Brand Image→ Brand Love	0.31	4.427	0.000	Positive	Supported
Brand Image→Brand Identity	0.48	4.090	0.000	Positive	Supported
Brand Image →Brand Support	0.54	4.657	0.000	Positive	Supported

The model estimation results reveal that all the eight hypotheses are Supported. Because the C.R. of all of the paths are more than 1.96 and the P-value of all of the paths are all less than 0.05. The fit indexes of path model are shown in table 4. All the indexes are in acceptable range.

Table 4-Fit indexes of model

GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	IFI	RMSEA	χ^2/df	Fit Index
$\succ 0.9$	$\succ 0.9$	$\succ 0.9$	$\succ 0.9$	$\succ 0.9$	$\prec 0.08$	$\prec 3$	Acceptable Range
0/91	0/90	0/92	0/91	0/91	0/077	2/73	Exploration
0/98	0/91	0/96	0/96	0/97	0/062	2/94	Exploitation
0/92	0/94	0/92	0/91	0/91	0/075	2/97	Brand Performance
0/96	0/99	0/94	0/94	0/95	0/063	2/69	Brand image
0/91	0/92	0/98	0/99	0/99	0/075	2/14	Students' Commitment
0/94	0/91	0/99	0/92	0/94	0/043	2/82	Brand Loyalty
0/99	0/91	0/95	0/95	0/94	0/032	2/85	Brand Love

0/92	0/94	0/96	0/94	0/96	0/078	2/62	Brand Support
0/95	0/92	0/99	0/93	0/91	0/073	2/45	Brand Identity

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Students are the main customers of universities. Therefore, paying attention to this huge capital, as well as maintaining this huge capital and maintaining the relationship of students with the university, is very important from the University. Given the decline in student populations and the growth of the number of higher education institutions and the intense competition for accepting student, the survival of universities is dependent on the students' commitment, love support and loyalty to pursue their studies in the same university.In this competition, if a university does not want not to be eliminated, should design policies to increase the number of its students. Therefore, the main aim of this research is investigating effect of Brand ambidexterity on Brand Image Output in higher education with considering mediating role of brand performance inYazd Payame Noor University.

The result of the confirmatory factor analysis for the brand ambidexterity exploration dimension showed that the most important factor affecting this component is the provision of new and up-to-date services to the students by the university with a factor loading of 0.94. Therefore, it is recommended that university administrators pay attention to this point. The result of confirmatory factor analysis for the brand image showed that the main item affecting this component, the focus of the university on satisfying the student's need with factor loading of 0.61. Therefore, it is recommended that university administrators pay attention to this point. The result of confirmatory factor analysis for brand performance showed that the most important item affecting this component is the fairness of university tuition with factor loading of 0.49. Therefore, it is recommended that university administrators continue to maintain this advantage by not increasing the fees unreasonable and financing from other ways than increasing tuition.

The results of the first hypothesis test showed that the brand ambidexterity exploration dimension has positive and significant effect on brand performance. In this sense, strengthening this dimension can improve the brand performance. Junniet al. (2013)achieved same result. In order to strengthen brand performance through this dimension, the following indicators are recommended:

- Providing new and up-to-date services to college students
- Providing varied services to college students
- Entering the university in new areas of education and technology

The result of the third hypothesis test showed that brand performance has a positive and significant effect on brand image. In this sense, by improving the brand performance, brand image can be improved. Nguyen et al. (2016)achieved same result. In order to strengthen the brand performance and ultimately improve brand image through brand performance, the following indicators are suggested:

- University determines what services will provide for the students in advance.
- The University employs skilled and expert staff to serve students to help students when needed.
- University officials and staff feel responsible for student problems.

Another result of the research showed that brand image has positive and significant effect on students' commitment. In this sense, by reinforcing the university brand image, students' commitment can be improved. Chung et al. (2016)achieved same result. In order to strengthen students' commitment through the brand image, the following indicators are recommended:

- The focus of university should be on providing better services for student
- The focus of university should be on student satisfaction
- The university should use advanced educational technology and modern educational methods such as electronic classes, production of educational content and more.

REFERENCES

[1] Beverland, M. B.; Wilner, S. J. S. &Micheli, P. (2015). Reconciling the tension between consistency and relevance: Design thinking as a mechanism for brand ambidexterity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(5), 589–609.

[2] Chung, K. H.; Yu, J. E.; Kim, W. & Shin, J. I. (2016). The Antecedent and Consequences of Brand Image in a Low-Priced Cosmetic Brand of South Korea: The Moderating Effect of Gender. *International Journal of u- and e- Service, Science and Technology*, 9(2), 175-184.

[3] Chapleo, C. (2004). Interpretation and implementation of reputation/brand management by UK university leaders. *International Journal of Educational Advancement*, 5(1), 7–23.

[4] Eshun, A. (2017). *Effects of brand love on consumers' purchasing behaviour: case study of Vodafone Ghana Limited*. Dissertation for fulfilment for the award of Master's in Business Administration, University of Education, Winneba.

[5] Gibson, C. B. &Birkinshaw, J. (2004). The antecedents, consequences andmediating role of organisational ambidexterity. *Academy Man. J.* 47, 209-226.

[6] Hameed, S. &Kanwal, M. (2018). Effect of Brand Loyalty on Purchase Intention in Cosmetics Industry. *Research in Business and Management*, 5(1), 25-35.

[7] Hsiao, Y. C. & Chen, C. J. (2013). Branding vs contract manufacturing: Capability, strategy, and performance. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 28, 317–334.

[8] Junni, P.; Sarala, R.; Taras, V. &Tarba, S. (2013). Organizational ambidexterity and performance: A meta-analysis. *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, amp-2012. Published online before print July 9, 2013.

[9] Morgan, R. M. & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment–trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(3), 20–38.

[10] Nguyen, B.;Yu, X.; Melewar, T. C. & Hemsley-Brown, J. (2016). Brand ambidexterity and commitment in higher education: An exploratory study. *Journal of Business Research*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.026

[11] Paliokaite, A. &Pacesa, N. (2014). The relationship between organizational foresight and organizational ambidexterity. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2014.03.004

[12] SyedAlwi, S. F. & Kitchen, P. (2014). Business schools brand image: A design perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(11), 2324–2336.

[13] SyedAlwi, S. F.; Nguyen, B.; Gupta, S. & Melewar, T. C. (2015). Explicating industrial buyer commitment: Integrating brand trust, brand performance and industrial brand image in the HVAC industry. working paper.

[14] Tuan, L., (2012). Behind brand performance. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business Administration*, 4(1), 42-57.

[15] Vorhies, D. W.; Orr, L. M. & Bush, V. D. (2011). Improving customer-focused marketing capabilities and firm financial performance via marketing exploration and exploitation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39, 736–756.

[16] Watkins, B. A. &Gonzenbach, W. J. (2013). Assessing university brand personality through logos: An analysis of the use of academics and athletics in university branding. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 23, 15–33.

★★★