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PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS OF RESEARCH ON BRAND BUILDING AND COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL UNIVERSITIES IN CHINA

МАРКЕТИНГ

Summary. *In order to strengthen the brand building of universities, especially local universities, and promote the improvement of their brand communication effect, this paper composes and summarizes the literature related to the brand construction and communication effect of local universities at home and abroad, outlines the current research progress in three aspects: brand building of universities, brand communication of universities, brand building and communication of local universities, evaluates the existing research results and points out the future research directions. The study concludes that the current research results of scholars at home and abroad in the field of university brand building and communication are abundant, but at the same time there are shortcomings such as insufficient systematization, poor empirical evidence and weak operability.*

Key words: *local universities, branding, brand communication.*

Introduction. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) proposed to “build a strong education country and realize the connotative development of higher education”, which has put forward new requirements and made new arrangements for the high-quality development of higher education. However, based on the current new development stage, the international and domestic situation facing Chinese higher education is rather severe. With the rapid development of the internationalization of education, the global higher education market has undergone drastic changes, and universities in various countries, especially some famous foreign universities, are vigorously developing overseas markets and actively competing for quality students and teachers. At the same time, with the continuous deepening of China’s domestic higher education reform, universities have been upgraded, private universities and co-operative universities have gradually diversified, and universities have launched all-round competition in terms of teachers, students, subjects and funding, making the competition among Chinese domestic universities more and more intense. Under this circumstance, finding the right positioning, highlighting the characteristics

and creating a brand becomes the most urgent task for universities to gain competitive advantages and promote development.

If universities, especially local universities, want to stand out in the current fierce competition in higher education, fight for resources and gain development, they must pay attention to their own brand construction and the improvement of brand communication effect. However, at present, many universities in China lack the awareness of improving brand value and do not have a brand strategy for overall development, which has put them in a difficult situation in terms of obtaining resources and survival and development. Therefore, paying attention to and strengthening the brand building and communication of universities, studying and exploring how to improve the visibility, reputation and social influence of local universities through establishing brand image, strengthening brand communication and enhancing communication effects, as well as enhancing attractiveness and competitiveness, are urgent needs to meet the development of local universities in China, and are crucial to the high-quality development of local higher education and even the rapid development of local economy and society.

Literature review

1. Research on brand construction of colleges and universities

After sorting out, we found that the current research on university brand construction mainly focuses on four aspects of university brand connotation, brand value, brand competitiveness and brand construction path.

1.1. Research on the connotation of university branding. Volkwein J F argues that the connotation of brand is not only the name of the university, but should also include the image of the university and various evaluations and descriptions of the university, and that the university brand is actually a reflection of the essence of the intrinsic value that the university can provide at this stage [1]. Jiang Xiaohong suggests that the core of university brand connotation is university spirit, which is the unique value concept and code of conduct of the university based on the comprehensive cognition of the university's overall operation characteristics, internal system and external environment, etc. It is the source of nutrients on which the university brand lives, and the guiding force shown by university spirit can directly influence the direction and prospect of university brand construction [2]. According to Wang Wenpeng, university branding contains university traits, which are both explicit and implicit, so university branding is more a manifestation of the brand's intrinsic value and spirituality, including the university's ability to pass on and continue the brand effect [3].

1.2. Research on the brand value of colleges and universities. Michael E. Porte pointed out that the brand value of universities is the form in which the benefits received by the government, enterprises and individuals in the process of competition among the three are expressed in monetization, through which the value of intangible assets is brought to the university and society [4]. Wang Guoping states that the value of a university brand is a combination of intrinsic value and external market effects, which reflects the degree of social recognition and consumer recognition that has been gradually accumulated in the process of a university's creation, development and knowledge production across time and space [5]. Liang Hong stated that in order to enhance the comprehensive competitiveness of universities, it is necessary to strengthen the creation of university brand characteristics and enhance the value of university brand, which has a crucial impact on its comprehensive competitiveness enhancement. It is necessary to take the path of specialised branding of universities based on characteristics; to inherit and retain historical connotations to build the historical brand of universities; to strengthen the cooperation

between universities and enterprises to achieve the growth of university brand assets; to try to register trademarks to enhance the awareness of university brand protection; and to strengthen the training of teachers and improve their level, so as to enhance the intrinsic brand value [6].

1.3. Research on brand competitiveness of colleges and universities. Huang Hai and Xiong Wei pointed out that Chinese universities must improve brand awareness and implement brand strategy planning if they want to get space for development in the competition, the core of which is to strengthen the cultivation of brand core competitiveness from faculty construction, discipline construction, student quality management and campus culture construction, because the status of universities in the market is determined by the strength or weakness of brand core competitiveness [7]. Li Qin pointed out that the competition of brand is the current development trend of higher education, and in order to win in the competition, universities must be good at managing the brand image of universities and creating competitive advantages, the key of which lies in the cultivation of brand core competitiveness [8]. Li Jian-gling points out that in order to seek victory through misaligned competition, that is, private colleges and universities need to correctly deal with the contradictory relationship between our university and other colleges and universities (including public colleges and universities and private colleges and universities) in the process of creating the brand of schooling, avoid the same development direction and development path as strong schools and strong specialties in the setting and construction contents of disciplines and specialties, form their own advantages and characteristics, shape their own brand of schooling [9].

1.4. Research on the path of brand construction of colleges and universities. Yan Qiuju discussed the path of brand construction of Henan universities from three perspectives of brand positioning, brand construction and brand communication, namely, creating Henan university brand with brand characteristics, promoting Henan university brand with quality construction and enriching the connotation of Henan university brand with campus culture construction [10]. Xia Tian proposed the path of college brand construction from the aspects of student quality, campus culture, teachers' team, publicity and maintenance of brand, social evaluation and school running characteristics [11]. Shi Peihua and Lu Mingming put forward the path of "five forging" of university brand, one is to forge the university spirit of the times and brand gene, the second is to forge the advantageous discipline group and discipline brand gene, the third is to forge the

brand of first-class teachers and students of first-class universities, the fourth is to forge the brand of first-class scientific research results of universities, and the fifth is to forge the quality and gene of innovation [12].

2. Research on brand communication in universities

Research on university brand communication mainly focuses on three aspects: communication strategies, communication channels and factors influencing communication effects.

2.1. Research on communication strategies of universities. Lin Hui pointed out that Chinese universities should take the communication theory in brand marketing as a guide to design the communication elements and communication channels of university brands, and in the process of planning future brand marketing strategies, the different impacts brought by the advantages of different communication tools should be fully considered to bring into play the greatest advantages to enhance the brand value of universities [13]. Xiang Ling points out that the brand communication system should be built by drawing on the modern enterprise management system to segment the market, find the right target customers and carry out targeted publicity work, taking into account the specific situation of XJ University [14]. Chen Sihan proposed the communication strategy of raising the overall brand image communication awareness of universities, improving the communication organization structure, perfecting the brand image communication chain, effectively organizing the communication content, and focusing on tapping the brand image elements [15].

2.2. Research on the communication channels of universities. Zhai Honglei emphasized the use of social activities, historical events, academic conferences, public welfare activities and other event marketing strategies, etc. to enhance the image of universities and expand brand influence [16]. Yao Jianhui pointed out that colleges and universities should seize all potential brand contact points, especially the four basic types of key contact points for college branding, such as interpersonal communication, active search, enrollment promotion and urban environment, to do a good job of college brand communication effectively [17]. Jing Chaoping pointed out that each university should use the official WeChat public platform as an opportunity and platform to show itself to the outside society, strengthen the construction in terms of system, personnel, content, layout, speed and audience, spread the brand image of our university and improve the influence of the university [18].

2.3. Research on the factors influencing the communication effect of universities. Yang Minggang et

al. and others pointed out that new media has a role for universities to strengthen university brand identity, expand communication subjects and influence, etc. The influencing factors of new media on university brand communication include the extensiveness of new media participants and the openness of information dissemination, the virtual and interactive nature of new media, openness, timeliness, etc. [19]. Cui Lijuan analyzed the influencing factors of university brand formation from the perspectives of real consumers, potential consumers and other stakeholders, emphasizing that schools should strengthen the publicity and education for school students, promote universities through communication media, and use alumni resources to promote their brands to government enterprises and other units [20]. Liu Shanqing pointed out that the influencing factors of university brand communication should include communication content, communication channels, influence strength, communication scope and communication timing, and gave corresponding solution strategies for each influencing factor [21].

3. Research on brand construction and communication effect of local universities

There are relatively few studies on brand construction of local universities, mainly focusing on theoretical discussions. Zheng Lu pointed out that brand construction is an objective need for the sustainable development of local universities, and the problems of brand construction in local universities mainly include: lack of accurate positioning, neglect of brand connotation development, lack of perfect image identification system and lack of long-term mechanism [22]. Zhang Zongwei believes that the long-term planning for the brand development of local universities is all-rounded and cannot be separated from the accurate positioning of the brand, focusing on creating special disciplines, shaping a good campus culture and guaranteeing the creation of a famous president in order to achieve all-round improvement and thus have a place in many places of higher education [23]. Zhang Yuanbao and Song Jingyu believe that the culture of local colleges and universities has the characteristics of application-oriented, local and open, and is closely related to the regional economy, promoting each other and co-prosperity, and the culture of local colleges and universities should adhere to the value orientation of diversified interaction, mutual benefit and win-win and characteristic development, enhance the interaction goal with the guarantee of mechanism innovation, update the interaction concept with the guidance of cultural inheritance and innovation, and promote the sustainable development of regional economy [24]. Xu

Yi analyzed and outlined the policy background and development history of brand construction of local key universities, and put forward the path to improve the brand construction of local key universities in four aspects: meeting the demand of government projects, focusing on talent brand mode, inheriting university culture brand and building scientific research and academic brand [25].

Conclusion and prospect. To sum up, the research results of scholars at home and abroad in the field of university brand construction and communication are abundant and have provided valuable theoretical and practical experience for this study. However, there are some shortcomings at the same time, mainly in the following aspects.

1. Not systematic enough. Many researchers have experience in the management of colleges and universities, and their research is more a kind of practical perception, lacking in overall care and grasping the breadth and depth of the topic of college brand from an overall and multidisciplinary perspective.

2. The empirical evidence is not deep. There is not enough depth of empirical investigation and research

on the current situation of college brand, core elements of college brand, college brand positioning and evaluation of college brand assets, with more description of phenomena and less exploration of essence, more experience summary and less theoretical refinement.

3. Not strong operability. There is a lack of systematic discussion on the scientific, rational and effective development of university brands by using the current mature brand management tools, and there are few specific countermeasure suggestions to enhance the communication effect and operable tools to measure the communication effect, which are difficult to guide and apply in practice.

Based on this, based on the existing research, local universities are taken as the research object, relevant concepts are clarified, empirical research is conducted, the characteristics of brand construction and communication of international and domestic famous universities are summarized, and targeted and operable enhancement strategies are proposed, which provide reference for the brand construction and communication of local universities and are worthy of further in-depth discussion in future research.

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