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Original Article

Human Capital as a Branding Driver: An Empirical Analysis of Faculty Attributes in HEIs

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Abstract

In the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education, institutional branding has become a crucial differentiator that influences student choice, institutional reputation, and stakeholder trust. This study investigates the role of human capital, specifically faculty attributes, as drivers of brand perception in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Drawing on the assurance dimension of the SERVQUAL model, this study examined the impact of faculty teaching experience (A3) and academic qualifications (A4) on HEI branding (B6). Data were collected from 412 respondents and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson and Spearman correlations, and multiple regression analysis. Findings reveal that both teaching experience and qualifications are perceived positively, with mean scores of 4.39 and 4.30, respectively. Correlation analysis showed statistically significant, yet moderate, positive associations between these faculty attributes and institutional branding. Regression results indicate that both variables significantly predict brand perception, with teaching experience having a slightly stronger impact ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = .004$) than academic qualifications ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = .041$). The combined model explains 5.6% of the variance in branding ($R^2 = 0.056$), suggesting that, while faculty characteristics contribute to branding, they are part of a broader set of brand influencers. These findings underscore the strategic importance of human capital in shaping institutional identities and credibility. HEIs are encouraged to invest in faculty recruitment, development, and visibility as part of their branding strategy, especially in markets in which educational quality and institutional trust are closely tied to faculty excellence.

Keywords: *Higher education branding, human capital, faculty qualifications, teaching experience, SERVQUAL, institutional identity, assurance dimension, brand perception*

Introduction

In today's competitive educational landscape, branding in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has emerged as a critical determinant of institutional success, influencing student enrollment, stakeholder trust, and institutional ranking. With the proliferation of academic institutions, especially in developing countries such as India, the need for HEIs to differentiate themselves has intensified. Effective branding extends beyond promotional campaigns and encompasses the perceived value and quality delivered by the institution. Among the various dimensions contributing to this perception, service quality factors, particularly assurance-related aspects such as faculty teaching experience and academic qualifications, play a pivotal role. The assurance dimension, as outlined in the SERVQUAL model, pertains to the knowledge, courtesy, and competence of employees, and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. In the context of higher education, faculty members are the most visible and consistent representatives of an institution's quality of academic integrity and service. Their teaching experience and academic credentials are key indicators shaping students' and stakeholders' perceptions of the institution.When students perceive that the faculty is experienced and well-qualified, they are more likely to associate the institution with academic excellence, credibility, and long-term value, which are essential attributes of a strong institutional brand.Despite widespread acknowledgment of faculty's importance, empirical evidence linking faculty-related assurance factors to institutional branding remains limited.

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This research seeks to address this gap by investigating the influence of two key assurance components—teaching experience (A3) and faculty academic qualifications (A4) —on the branding of HEIs (B6). Using statistical tools, such as correlation and regression analysis, this study explores whether these human capital attributes significantly contribute to brand perception among students and other stakeholders. Understanding these relationships can offer valuable insights for academic administrators, policymakers, and educational marketers. By identifying the extent to which faculty characteristics affect institutional branding, HEIs can better align their recruitment, development, and promotion strategies to enhance their competitive positioning. This study is particularly relevant in an era where students are not only consumers of education but also brand ambassadors and influencers, whose perceptions can shape public opinion and institutional reputation. Thus, the primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of faculty's teaching experience and qualifications on HEI branding, providing both theoretical and practical insights into how human capital acts as a strategic asset in the higher education sector.

Review of Literature

Branding in higher education has become increasingly significant, as institutions face heightened global competition, greater accountability, and evolving student expectations. A strong institutional brand can influence student enrollment decisions, partnerships, and overall reputation (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). According to Ivy (2001), institutional image and perceived academic quality play a vital role in students' choice of university, highlighting the importance of the factors that shape that image. The **faculty** of an institution, often seen as intellectual capital and front-line representatives, is integral in shaping brand perception. Faculty credentials, including **teaching experience** and **academic qualifications**, are considered assurance dimensions under the SERVQUAL model, which represents service providers' ability to instill trust and confidence (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). These assurance-related factors are central to student trust and are often used as cues to assess the quality of academic delivery.

Schulz and Lucido (2011) emphasize that qualified faculty members enhance institutional credibility and legitimacy. The **academic qualifications** of faculty, especially doctoral degrees, not only reflect academic depth but also influence research output and institutional prestige (Altbach, 2005). Meanwhile, **teaching experience** contributes to classroom effectiveness, student engagement, and retention, all of which indirectly strengthen brand image (Devlin & Samarawickrema, 2010). Moreover, faculty experience contributes to shaping student outcomes and satisfaction, both of which are critical to brand loyalty and word-of-mouth promotions (Chen, 2017). A faculty with long-standing teaching experience is more adept at managing diverse learning needs and delivering consistent quality, further contributing to a positive institutional identity. The linkage between **faculty excellence** and **institutional branding** has also been supported by organizational behavior theories, which suggest that internal competencies are reflected externally as a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Therefore, an institution's ability to attract, retain, and showcase experienced and highly qualified faculty members can serve as a strategic brand asset.

In developing nations, where many private HEIs struggle to differentiate themselves, branding through faculty competence becomes even more crucial. According to Kaushik and Bansal (2012), prospective students and parents in India weigh faculty qualifications and experience heavily when selecting institutions, associating them with credibility and future success.

Methodology:

This study employed a **quantitative, cross-sectional research design** to assess the impact of faculty attributes on HEI branding. Data were collected using a **structured questionnaire** distributed to a purposive sample of 412 respondents, comprising students and academic stakeholders from various higher education institutions. The research model was based on the **assurance dimension** of the SERVQUAL framework, focusing on two independent variables: **faculty teaching experience (A3)** and **academic qualifications (A4)**. The dependent variable was **HEI branding (B6)**.

Data analysis included:

- **Descriptive statistics** to understand respondent perceptions,
- **Pearson and Spearman correlation** to assess relationships between variables,
- **Multiple regression analysis** to determine predictive influence.

The results were statistically tested using **SPSS software**, ensuring validity through checks for multicollinearity, residual normality, and homoscedasticity. The significance of the regression model was confirmed using **ANOVA**, with a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.832 indicating no autocorrelation.

This rigorous methodology enables us to quantify and interpret the relationship between human capital and institutional branding effectively.

Objective:

To analyze the impact of faculty teaching experience and academic qualifications on the branding of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Analysis:

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
A3	4.39	.722	412
A4	4.30	.835	412
A5	3.88	.944	412
B6	4.06	1.047	412

Descriptive Statistics Table:

The descriptive statistics indicated that item A3 had the highest mean score (M = 4.39), followed by A4 (M = 4.30), while A5 had a slightly lower average (M = 3.88). The dependent variable, B6, had a mean of 4.06. This suggests that the respondents rated the aspects represented by A3 and A4 more positively. The standard deviations were moderate to high, indicating some variability in the responses. The sample size (N = 412) across all variables provided strong statistical power.

Correlations

		A3	A4	A5	B6
A3	Pearson Correlation	1	.479**	.334**	.214**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	214.301	118.636	93.660	66.563
	Covariance	.521	.289	.228	.162
	N	412	412	412	412
A4	Pearson Correlation	.479**	1	.346**	.189**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	118.636	286.279	111.927	67.835
	Covariance	.289	.697	.272	.165
	N	412	412	412	412
A5	Pearson Correlation	.334**	.346**	1	.160**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.001
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	93.660	111.927	365.932	64.913
	Covariance	.228	.272	.890	.158
	N	412	412	412	412
B6	Pearson Correlation	.214**	.189**	.160**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	66.563	67.835	64.913	450.602
	Covariance	.162	.165	.158	1.096
	N	412	412	412	412

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation matrix reveals significant positive relationships among all variables at the 0.01 level. A3 and A4 exhibited a moderately strong correlation (r = .479), indicating a strong linear association. The correlations between B6 and the independent variables (A3 = .214, A4 = .189, A5 = .160) are positive but relatively weak, suggesting that while there is a relationship, it is not very strong. Nonetheless, all associations are statistically significant ($p < .01$), indicating that these variables move together meaningfully.

Correlations

			A3	A4	A5	B6
Spearman's rho	A3	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.502**	.365**	.263**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	412	412	412	412
	A4	Correlation Coefficient	.502**	1.000	.368**	.231**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	412	412	412	412
	A5	Correlation Coefficient	.365**	.368**	1.000	.182**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	412	412	412	412
	B6	Correlation Coefficient	.263**	.231**	.182**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	412	412	412	412

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Spearman's rho results confirmed the findings of Pearson's correlation, with slightly stronger coefficients. A3 and A4 showed a high correlation ($\rho = .502$), and A3 was positively associated with B6 ($\rho = .263$). This implies that even in the presence of nonlinear

or ordinal data, the rankings of the variables maintain consistent relationships. These findings further validate the robustness of the linear relationships between variables.

orrelations					
		B6	A3	A4	A5
Pearson Correlation	B6	1.000	.214	.189	.160
	A3	.214	1.000	.479	.334
	A4	.189	.479	1.000	.346
	A5	.160	.334	.346	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	B6	.	.000	.000	.001
	A3	.000	.	.000	.000
	A4	.000	.000	.	.000
	A5	.001	.000	.000	.
N	B6	412	412	412	412
	A3	412	412	412	412
	A4	412	412	412	412
	A5	412	412	412	412

This table reiterates the Pearson correlations but is now interpreted with 1-tailed significance values. The correlations between B6 and A3 (.214), A4 (.189), and A5 (.160) are all statistically significant at the $p < .05$, level (1-tailed), indicating that directional hypotheses can be supported. This confirmed the potential of A3 and A4 to predict B6 in a regression context.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.214[a]	0.046	0.044	1.024	0.046	19.717	1	410	0	
2	.236[b]	0.056	0.051	1.02	0.01	4.183	1	409	0.041	1.832

a. Predictors: (Constant), A3
b. Predictors: (Constant), A3, A4
c. Dependent Variable: B6

The **Model Summary** table provides insights into the strength and explanatory power of the regression models. In Model 1, which includes only predictor A3, the correlation coefficient (R) is 0.214, indicating a weak positive linear relationship with the dependent variable B6. The R Square value of 0.046 suggests that only 4.6% of the variance in B6 is explained by A3. When A4 is added in Model 2, R increases to 0.236, and R Square rises to 0.056, showing a slight improvement, with the model now explaining 5.6% of the variance. The change in R Square (0.010) is statistically significant ($p = 0.041$), indicating that A4 contributes meaningfully to the model. The standard error of the estimate decreases slightly from 1.024 to 1.020, showing improved prediction accuracy. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.832 suggests that there is no serious autocorrelation in the residuals, indicating independence of errors and thereby supporting the model's validity.

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.675	1	20.675	19.717	.000[b]
	Residual	429.927	410	1.049		
	Total	450.602	411			
2	Regression	25.027	2	12.514	12.026	.000[c]
	Residual	425.575	409	1.041		
	Total	450.602	411			

a. Dependent Variable: B6
b. Predictors: (Constant), A3
c. Predictors: (Constant), A3, A4

The ANOVA results support the regression models' significance. For Model 1, $F(1, 410) = 19.717$, $p < .001$, and for Model 2, $F(2, 409) = 12.026$, $p < .001$. This means that both regression models significantly predict the dependent variable B6, and the inclusion of A4 improves the model fit compared to Model 1.

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.694	.311		8.650	.000
	A3	.311	.070	.214	4.440	.000
2	(Constant)	2.432	.336		7.244	.000
	A3	.233	.079	.161	2.933	.004
	A4	.140	.069	.112	2.045	.041

a. Dependent Variable: B6

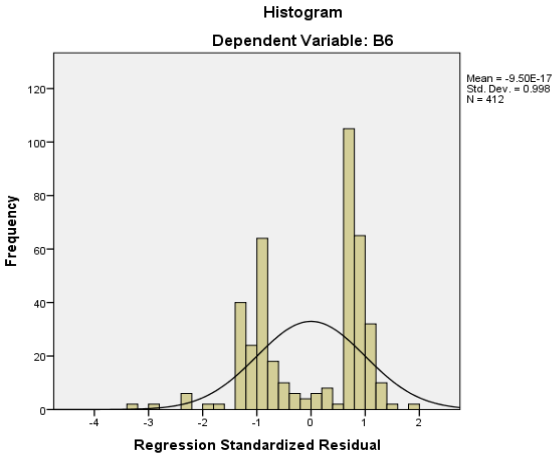
The coefficients table shows that in Model 1, A3 significantly predicts B6 (B = 0.311, p < .001). In Model 2, both A3 (B = 0.233, p = .004) and A4 (B = 0.140, p = .041) remain significant, though the standardized coefficients suggest A3 is a stronger predictor than A4. These results indicate that higher values of A3 and A4 are associated with increases in B6, supporting their roles as positive influencers.

Residuals Statistics					
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	3.09	4.30	4.06	.247	412
Residual	-3.298	1.914	.000	1.018	412
Std. Predicted Value	-3.941	.972	.000	1.000	412
Std. Residual	-3.233	1.877	.000	.998	412

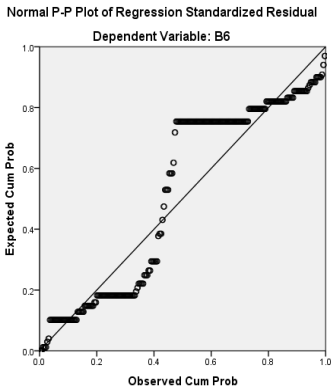
a. Dependent Variable: B6

The residuals statistics reveal that the residuals are roughly symmetrically distributed around a mean of zero with a standard deviation of 1.018, supporting model adequacy. Predicted values range from 3.09 to 4.30, suggesting that the model provides plausible estimates within a reasonable range of the observed B6 values. No extreme outliers or major violations of normality are evident.

Charts:



The histogram displays the distribution of the standardized residuals for dependent variable B6. The residuals are roughly centered around zero, which is ideal. However, the distribution appears slightly skewed and not perfectly normal, as is evident from the asymmetry and uneven peaks. Although the normal curve is superimposed, the data do not align perfectly, suggesting some deviation from normality. However, there are no extreme outliers, and most residuals fall within the -3 to +2 range, which indicates that the model residuals are relatively controlled and do not show major violations.



The P-P plot assesses the normality of the residuals. The points in this plot mostly follow a diagonal reference line, indicating that the residuals are **approximately normally distributed**. However, there is some **deviation at the tails** (especially at the lower end), which suggests slight non-normality. However, the plot supports the assumption of **normality to a reasonable extent**, and the model can still be considered statistically acceptable for linear regression.

Findings and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the influence of assurance-related factors, specifically, the **teaching experience (A3)** and **academic qualifications (A4)** of faculty, on the **branding of Higher Education Institutions (B6)**. Descriptive statistics revealed high mean values for both A3 (M = 4.39) and A4 (M = 4.30), indicating that students or stakeholders positively perceived

faculty experience and qualifications. Correlation analysis showed significant positive relationships between A3, A4, and B6, suggesting that these factors were moderately associated with institutional branding.

Regression analysis confirmed that both A3 ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = .004$) and A4 ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = .041$) significantly predicted B6, although the explained variance was modest ($R^2 = 0.056$). Teaching experience had a slightly stronger impact, highlighting its importance in shaping brand perception. Diagnostic plots, including the histogram and P–P plot of residuals, confirmed that the regression assumptions were largely satisfied, indicating a valid and reliable model. In conclusion, this study establishes that **faculty-related assurance factors significantly influence the branding of HEIs**. Although the variance explained is limited, the statistical significance reinforces the strategic role of human capital in higher-education branding. Institutions seeking to build or strengthen their brand image must invest in enhancing faculty credentials and leveraging their experiences as key branding assets.

Managerial Implications:

1. **Recruitment Strategy Focused on Experience and Qualifications**: HEIs should prioritize hiring faculty with strong academic backgrounds and substantial teaching experience to strengthen their institutional brand.
2. **Faculty Development and Retention**: Invest in continuous professional development and higher qualifications (e.g., PhDs and certifications), which reinforce brand credibility.
3. **Marketing & Communication**: Institutions should prominently feature faculty credentials and teaching achievements in branding campaigns, showcasing them as assurance signals to prospective students and stakeholders.
4. **Accreditation and Rankings Impact**: Since faculty qualifications and experience influence branding, these metrics should be aligned with national and international accreditation standards to boost institutional reputation.
5. **Strategic Differentiation**: Institutions can differentiate themselves in competitive educational markets by positioning themselves as centers of faculty excellence, reinforcing trust, and academic quality.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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