

Advertorial

Why does the student's social brand engagement become crucial for universities to position themselves in the competition?

- Insights from a quantitative research study -

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are being driven toward commercial competition imposed by economic forces resulting from the development of the global education market. The requirement to build a strongly favored brand image among the institutes is necessitated by the rising level of competition among the HEIs.

The HEIs in emerging countries are striving to attract students to expand their higher education sectors while being competitive in the market space. However, the similarities among the HEIs and the identical nature of the educational degrees diminish the potential to be a differentiator while leaving students in a confusion to compare and select the HEIs in a clustered market space. Thus, HEIs in emerging countries are left with no choice other than to embrace the brand positioning strategies to compete in the Higher Education sector.

Brand positioning is important for HEIs since it is not only allocating a unique place in the minds of the prospective students but also retaining the existing students with them. As with other market services, the commercial challenge of HEIs is to attract students from their competitors.

Successfully managing students' perceptions is thus essential for effective HEIs' brand positioning. However, these conceptualisations are frequently used to describe the products rather than services, and few studies have examined how national HEI brands are built by fusing distinct representations of prospective students with distinct representations of a nation and the Higher Education sectors, which together form the brand positioning of HEIs.

Over the past ten years, the emergence of social media has significantly altered how people and organizations communicate with each other. Knowledge exchange and application are now encouraged on a scale that has never been seen before.

Social media enables both individuals and businesses to freely and simply express their views,



Dr. Charitha Harshani Perera
Northumbria University
United Kingdom



Dr. Long Thang Van Nguyen
RMIT University
Vietnam



Prof. Rajkishor Nayak
RMIT University
Vietnam

opinions, experiences, information and knowledge because of its distinctive properties, such as openness, two-way contact, and open-ended feedback. Similar to this, the increasing use of social media has given students a place to meet, explore, and share their knowledge, experiences, and preferences while choosing HEIs. In light of the exponential growth of social network sites and their integral role in branding, social media platforms play a prominent and vital role in encouraging students to engage with HEIs' related branding activities. At the same time, students are also becoming more involved in social media brand communities to find more information about HEIs.

Similar to this, HEIs also publish a wide range of content on their official social networking pages to improve student involvement with the Institution and facilitate social engagement with HEI brands. Therefore, Social Brand Engagement opens up new opportunities for prospective students to gather HEIs' brand information from existing and potential students.

Engagement occurs when a student interacts with other students refers to as the HEIs, which in turn builds a strong connection

between the student and the HEI.

This study was conducted to identify the impact of students' social brand engagement on brand positioning in emerging countries, and it has provided compelling evidence by explaining the role of social brand engagement and its impact on brand positioning, answering the call for empirical research into the drivers and outcomes of customers' brand engagement.

This is an important phenomenon for HEIs to understand, as the complex and varied interactions from student-to-student, as well as student-to-HEI across various touchpoints, all manifest in overall student engagement toward the HEI brands.

The population of this study was undergraduates who are currently studying in private HEIs in Sri Lanka. We crafted the survey questionnaire, and a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed among the undergraduates based on purposive sampling. Out of the 400 questionnaires, 390 were returned and 384 were considered valid for subsequent quantitative analysis as 6 were unusable due to the missing responses.

Respondents answered several questions that proved their engagement in the use of social

media. Based on their responses, this study provided some interesting findings, which can be applied to Sri Lanka and countries with similar cultural heritage.

What is the extent to which social brand engagement influences the brand positioning of HEIs? The findings of the study provided compelling evidence that brand co-creation and brand trust are vital factors to position a particular HEI among the other competitive institutions. This realization echoes that students' interaction with other students in social media settings fosters

stronger and more frequent brand-related behaviours and attitudes. Students' social media groups have a central role in providing brand-related information, thus increasing brand co-creation activities. Through social brand engagement, one's level of brand co-creation is triggered and enhanced.

Although social brand engagement in social media cannot rely heavily on individual predispositions, it can emerge if brand trust exists among the online brand communities. A higher level of trust in an HEI may reduce the level of perceived risks associated and ultimately allow students to be more comfortable with making their enrolment decision.

This study identified that if students are involved emotionally, cognitively, and behaviourally with other students, identical forms of engagement with the HEI brand are more likely to be ensured.

This echoes existing brand engagement research showing that by being more exposed to brand-related information and gaining increased brand-related experiences and practice through brand engagement, one's level of brand trust is triggered and enhanced. Further, this research has shown that developing brand trust among the students in the Higher Education sectors, and their commitment to brand co-creation is indispensable if the HEI brand wants to create a distinctive position among prospective students. These findings further reinforce the central role of brand trust and brand co-creation in building brand positioning through brand engagement in social media within the context of higher education.

Additionally, these results emphasize that brand trust and brand co-creation are key outcomes of social brand engagement in social media, which is aligned with the conceptualization of trust and co-creation process as the accumulation of experiences in producing a mutually valued outcome by the given customer to a specific social media

brand.

More significantly, this study has identified how the students' brand usage experience is becoming important for the students' engagement with HEI brands. Concerning brand usage experience, the findings indicate juniors and seniors are exerting different effects based on their participation in social brand engagement activities when their motivation is associated with brand positioning.

This finding contributes to the socio-cultural perspective of student engagement, shedding light on why students engage with HEI brands via social media platforms.

What HEIs can do to foster engagement between students and the HEI brand?

The managers should encourage the stakeholders of HEIs to share their positive personal experiences when interacting with HEI brands through various available means of social media so that they can depict their level of trust relating to HEI brands. Besides, HEIs should design task characteristics that enhance stakeholders' perceived competence.

The higher the perceived competence the stakeholders feel about their capabilities, the more likely they fully engage in their co-creator role. So, the managers should facilitate an individual's perceived competence, which results in HEI brand co-creation. Moreover, the findings of this study provide valuable resources for HEIs' marketers to plan their branding and marketing strategies on social media for the retention of existing students and the enrolment of new students.

This insight is based on a recently published article: *Social brand engagement and brand positioning for Higher Educational Institutions: an empirical study in Sri Lanka in the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, by Charitha Harshani Perera, Long Thang Van Nguyen, and Rajkishor Nayak. Please visit below for the full version of the research article. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/08841241.2020.1841068>



The Do's and Don'ts of 360-degree Video Advertising

-Insights from an Experimental Research Study-

This article will share, recent PhD findings of a study conducted on consumer visual memory and digital video advertising strategies submitted to Griffith University, Australia. This study consists of two experiments which investigated the consumer visual memory for 360-degree video advertisements based on the theoretical assumptions of two social psychology theories which are elaboration likelihood model and social information processing theory by Wyer 2003.

What is 3D or 360-degree video advertising?

In 2020, it was reported that 92% of marketers predicted 'videos' as an important marketing strategy. The marketing industry is continuously changing due to technological innovations and the dynamic business environment. The flexibility of the online media has led to a wide range of advertising format choices for advertisers, such as static images (e.g., GIF and JPG formats), video formats (e.g., 3D vs 360-degree video formats) comprising interactive features. Viewing online videos has become increasingly common. The largest individual site for online videos is 'YouTube' which has 10 billion views.

The evolutionary advancements in technology such as 360-degree video technology, augmented reality and virtual reality, mixed reality, artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, high-definition video (HD), Dolby surround sound and 3D have become an innovative approach in the marketing field. In the modern era, marketers focus more on digital channels, but interest in online marketing efforts is a popular topic. 360-degree videos

are considered as immersive or spherical videos, in which the video records a view in every direction.

These photo shoots are accompanied by using an omnidirectional camera or a collection of cameras. During playback in normal flat display, the viewer has control of the viewing direction, such as a panoramic view. One of the special features of the 360-degree video is that it allows the user to enter a totally immersive, three-dimensional (3D) experience anywhere in the world by simply using a smart phone and a virtual reality headset or by using other tools designed to view 360-degree video content.

In 2017, around 86% of businesses had used 360-degree videos as part of their respective marketing campaigns.

Furthermore, 360-degree video formats can reveal the stories more interactively as more audience engagement is possible. One major reason for 360-degree videos proving to be an effective storytelling tool is the ability to provide the full picture and full context of what is going on around a scene. For example, Google, partnering with Columbia Sportswear created a marketing campaign around two U.S. Olympic skiers enjoying an epic season in Chile using both a 360-degree video advertisement and a standard video advertisement to determine whether spherical video advertisements drive more viewer engagement than standard video advertisements.

Even though, the 360-degree video advertisement had a lower retention rate than the standard advertisement, it had a higher click-through rate, meaning that viewers were more interested in checking out the full-length version of the video. This experiment proved that 360-degree videos have more user engagement than standard videos.



Dr. Sara Quach
Senior Lecturer at Griffith University, Australia



Dr. Mitchell Ross
Senior Lecturer at Griffith University, Australia



Dr. Nirma Sadamali Jayawardena
Assistant Professor at O P Jindal Global University, India

The 360-degree technology encourages viewers to get involved in the action by controlling their perspective with a simple tilt angle of a smartphone or through their mouse pointing device.

In the next section, we discuss the findings of our study. Several practical implications have been suggested when arranging visuals for 360-degree video advertisements. Firstly, to promote products for women, enhancing color detection in visuals by demonstrating product details is important.

Further, 360-degree view could improve the eye movements, when advertising products by adding actions within the visuals for products unable to female. To promote products for men, it is highly recommended to add some facial expressions in the visuals to get the attention of the audience. Usage of different locations to advertise

products arouse curiosity among consumers.

However, a comparatively small number of locations were noticed in 360-degree videos due to interaction boundaries. It is also recommended for advertisement designers to arrange the visuals considering the order of the story and to use interaction techniques such as rich imagery and spatial sound design systems.

Further, it was identified that when arranging object-based visuals for 360-degree video advertisements, the 360-degree video technology encourages viewers to get into the action by controlling their perspective with a simple angle of a smartphone or through their mouse point. Therefore, advertising designers arrange interactive objects (such as flying logos) in the video advertisement to improve the visual memory of the viewers.

Further, 360-degree videos were

group, through 360-degree and 3D technology were found to be effective in demonstrating cultural symbols effectively. When considering the behavioural engagement, arranging the visuals using narrative immersion was found to be effective for 360-degree video advertisements.

Videos using the 360-degree format were found to be successful in demonstrating the visuals based on the product details due to the exposure of virtual reality during the viewing of the 360-degree video advertisements, as this activates the strategic memory at a much faster rate than a standard format video advertisement.

Strategic memory can be activated by adding visual details of previously viewed objects; for example, repetition of product information in more than one or two scenes of the advertisement.

Advertisements created with 360-degree video have a higher eye movement rate than conventional video advertisements, as they activate the cognitive processes in the human brain including memory capacity. Studies have shown that adding more actions can enhance viewers' eye movements.

The visual memory for brand details can be further enhanced by visual branding strategies such as product or brand placement or by mitigating VR-related side effects. When considering the product benefits, it is important for 360-degree video advertisements to demonstrate product benefits through various visual arrangement strategies such as narratives and metaphor.

In conclusion, this study revealed the importance of applying a social psychology theory to advertising research, to correctly understand the visual arrangement strategies when designing a 3D or a 360-degree video advertisement.