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Abstract

Demand for international K-12 schools in India is growing, and this is causing competition between them. The purpose of this paper was to explore the branding strategies that private international school leaders in India use to enhance the school brand. Case study method was used where fifteen participants were interviewed from an international school in Southern part of India. Interviews were conducted with five school leaders, five teachers, and five parents using a semi-structured interview method with open-ended questions related to branding strategies. Brand-oriented organizations have internal approaches to developing their brand based on vision, mission, and values. As education is an intangible product, both internal branding and external branding are required to win the trust of parents. Various information technology tools including social media can help to devise personalized communication channels to tell the school's story to the stakeholders. The inherent limitation with a case study method is that it is not generalizable. Branding as a process has been discussed for higher education institutions but not the K-12 sector, especially from the Indian perspective. The empirical evidence presented in this paper may help K-12 schools, especially in India to understand how to enhance the school brand.

Keywords

Branding, Schools, Administration, Social Media, Case Study Method

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Branding Strategies of a Private International School

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Demand for international K-12 schools in India is growing, and this is causing competition between them. The purpose of this paper was to explore the branding strategies that private international school leaders in India use to enhance the school brand. Case study method was used where fifteen participants were interviewed from an international school in Southern part of India. Interviews were conducted with five school leaders, five teachers, and five parents using a semi-structured interview method with open-ended questions related to branding strategies. Brand-oriented organizations have internal approaches to developing their brand based on vision, mission, and values. As education is an intangible product, both internal branding and external branding are required to win the trust of parents. Various information technology tools including social media can help to devise personalized communication channels to tell the school's story to the stakeholders. The inherent limitation with a case study method is that it is not generalizable. Branding as a process has been discussed for higher education institutions but not the K-12 sector, especially from the Indian perspective. The empirical evidence presented in this paper may help K-12 schools, especially in India to understand how to enhance the school brand. *Keywords: Branding, Schools, Administration, Social Media, Case Study Method*

Brands serve several valuable functions. For firms, brands serve as markers of their product and service offerings. For consumers, brands can signify a certain quality level, reduce perceived risk, engender trust, and simplify choice for customers (Tybout & Calkins, 2005). Consumers develop perceptions of brands based on their experiences with a firm's products and services (Tybout & Calkins, 2005). Brands also play a significant role in marketing activities like advertising (DiMartino & Jessen, 2016). In the financial sense, brands are an asset. The advantages of branding available to physical goods are also available to services. Fulfilling the brand promise can help a service organization create customer loyalty (Nyffenegger, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Malaer, 2015).

Because of globalization, rising income, and a keenness for education, Indian parents are increasingly turning to international schools based in India for the education of their children (Prasad, 2013). These are schools in India that do not impart any of the Indian state or national curricula but instead impart international curricula like International Baccalaureate (IB) or the Cambridge International Examinations. In the first decade of the 21st century, the number of private international kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) schools in India doubled, and India ranks sixth in the IB statistics for the number of IB schools (Prasad, 2013). This growth has led to increased competition among these international schools in India.

In a study in Malaysia, 84% of parents chose branded schools as opposed to non-branded schools (Dahari & Ya, 2011). In another study by Malik, Mushtaq, Jaswal, and Malik (2015), they found that parents preferred a branded K-12 school instead of opting for an unknown or new school. Thus, branding can help K-12 schools to differentiate themselves from their competitors Customers' perceptions of the brand promise influence customer expectations. Visual imagery can be an effective means to brand differentiation (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Based on the review of the literature, we found that research has not been done from an Indian perspective on how private international K-12 school leaders can use branding strategies to enhance school brand. We aimed to explore how a private international school in India uses branding strategy to enhance its school brand thus leading to better enrollment and increased revenues.

Research Questions

Central Question

What branding strategies do private international school leaders in India use to enhance the school brand?

Sub-questions

- How is the branding strategy aligned to the vision, mission, values, and culture of the organization?
- What market research did the school conduct before deciding a brand strategy?
- How does the school promote internal branding?
- What strategies does the school use to enhance the functional capability of their brand?
- What are the functional benefits that the school brand delivers to its customers?
- What are the emotional benefits that the school brand delivers to its customers?
- How does the brand promise match with the customer's perception of the school brand?
- What digital and social media resources does the school use for brand communication?

Conceptual Framework

De Chernatony and Riley (1998) conceptualized the "double vortex brand model." De Chernatony and Riley revised the nine elements that formed the earlier brand model known as "atomic model" to conceptualize the double vortex brand model based on interviews with 20 brand consultants in the United Kingdom. The researchers explored and verified the effectiveness of the model and developed a new model based on the fundamentals of branding. Functional capabilities relating to hardcore product performance and intangibles relating to brand personality emerged as the most important characteristics of brands. The next commonly identified feature was company ownership behind the brand. Most brand consultants acknowledged the atomic model was not comprehensive and suggested the addition of the vision, mission and values into a dynamic framework (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998).

The reasons behind choosing this model for this study include: It is a detailed and holistic model that includes all stakeholders (i.e., internal and external) in the branding process. This revised branding model is more dynamic when compared to other branding models and recognizes that consumer perceptions of the brand can be different from a brand image as portrayed by the firm. The conceptual framework supports the identification of important elements of the branding process that we can use for analysis and interpretation. The visual elements of name, logo and product design are brand components that affect the brand image (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). The intangible and symbolic elements relate to the emotional and representational aspects of beliefs created in the minds of consumers. The different elements vary in importance depending on the audience such as staff, firm's agencies or consumers. In this model, the vortex on one side depicts how managers build brands, and the vortex on the other side depicts the brand perceptions of the consumers. In the revised model, De Chernatony and Riley (1998) incorporated I elements vision, mission, values, culture and heritage along with seven resourcing elements (i.e., naming policy, functional capability, service, risk reducer, personality, legal device and crisp communicator). The rational and emotional dimensions describing the price-performance and the psycho-social benefits characterize the consumer's confidence in the brand. The revised model indicates sustained relationships between an organization and its customers.

To map various brands on a two-dimensional functional and representational matrix, De Chernatony and Riley (1998) described the eight stages of brand evolution from an input to output perspective. The eight stages are differentiation, a sign of ownership, functional, service, legal, shorthand, risk reduction and symbolic stages. Brands evolve from manufacturer-centric to becoming consumer-centric. At the differentiation stage, the marketer focuses on the distinctive nature and name of the brand along with eye-catching packaging. At the ownership stage, the consumer starts associating the brand with the brand owner leading to the functional stage wherein the benefit becomes strongly associated with the brand. The service stage is reached when consumers receive the service they expect. The service stage causes brand entrenchment in consumer's perception. The next step is to take legal action to protect the brand from adulteration and copycats. Consumers slowly develop clearer perceptions and cognitive abilities to recall the brand benefits (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998).

Literature Review

Positive brand attitude generates positive word of mouth and brand loyalty when employees deliver service quality in alignment with the brand promise (King & Grace, 2005). The role of trust in branding is to help build effective brands and relationships with the consumer as emphasized by Andrei and Zait (2014). Brand development is conducted by the realignment of the vision, mission and values (Hirvonen, Laukkanen, & Reijonen, 2013). When based on a historical approach or design, the brand gains a heritage, but brand buy-in depends on authenticity and leadership (Miller, 2014). Several studies show that low performance of branding is synonymous with ineffective leadership skills, poor infrastructure and resources, less attraction and poor promotion (Oei, 2015). Leadership capabilities for strategic branding depend on emotional intelligence, dynamism, support to create goals, shared vision, teamwork and the capability to manage change proactively.

As per Ho (2014), a uniformly standardized approach cannot be applied to marketing strategies of a school as every school has a unique environment. Thus, a targeted approach is required to formulate and implement each school's brand strategies (Ho, 2014). Quite often resource limitations such as lack of budget, expertise or lack of time prevent organizations from developing their branding strategies. Various touchpoints influence brand management. The influencing touchpoints are those that indirectly create an impression on the consumer. Davis and Dunn (2002) identified various touchpoints and influencing factors wherein learning resources, knowledge enhancement, innovativeness and stakeholder perception help to enhance a school brand. Parents prefer private schools over government schools whether in a developing country or a developed country (Gouda, Chandra Das, Goli, & Maikho Apollo Pou, 2013). The reasons are a lack of attention to the student learning outcomes and the below par quality of academia in government schools.

In the case of a private international school, brand acceptance is possible through the strengthening of teaching and offering course content that can attract and retain parents' interest

(Chen & Lin, 2013). School leaders need to concentrate on the quality of teaching. Poor teaching quality can produce negative word of mouth which lead to poor enrollment. Positive community perception of a school brand may result from learning and teaching activities, professional development and an enhanced school environment (Oei, 2015). Developing a unique selling proposition may enhance the brand positioning of private international schools (Urde & Koch, 2014). Building brand image and brand identity require strategic marketing. Quite often segmentation of students is required to ensure student enrollment by creating a brand identity for the school (Bock, Poole, & Joseph, 2014). Consumers (i.e., parents) benefit from brands as they signify quality, reduced search costs and reduced risks. A relationship exists between branding and a school's internal culture (Joseph, Mullen, & Spake, 2012). Potential brand ambassadors come from faculty, staff and school administrators. Positive brand reputation, ranking and accreditation lead to enhancement of parents' and students' perceptions.

Researcher Context

This research was of particular interest to the primary author, and he did this case study as part of his Doctor of Business Administration course. He has been working in the education industry in India from 1996 as the Director of an organization which operates multiple K-12 schools and colleges. The primary author has also been successfully operating a K-12 private international school in India from 2006. He was therefore interested in investigating how branding can help K-12 international schools in India. The secondary author has more than 30 years of practical sales and marketing experience and teaches graduate-level brand marketing classes. He has provided marketing and sales training consulting services to a variety of companies since 1992. From this case study, the authors expected to learn best practices and branding strategies as applicable to a K-12 school.

Research Method

Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods are the three approaches that can be used in a research study. Formulation and testing of hypotheses using numerical data are the crux of quantitative research (Hoare & Hoe, 2012, 2013). Quantitative research involves the measurement of specific variables (Allwood, 2012). Quantitative deductive approach lacks capturing characteristics of real-life events (Staggers & Blaz, 2013; Yin, 2014). The appropriateness of the mixed method approach is valid when either quantitative or qualitative approach is not sufficient to tackle the research topic. Quantitative data is an essential component of the mixed method (Wisdom, Cavaleri, Onwuegbuzie, & Green, 2012). Qualitative researchers explore the behavior of an individual descriptively to obtain insights into the individual's experience (Kramer-Kile, 2012). Researchers collect data regarding respondent's perspectives through participants' dialogue to focus on the meaning qualitatively (Wisdom et al., 2012). The viewpoint of the respondent is the aim of data collection in qualitative research projected through observations, dialogs and interviews (Borrego, Foster, & Froyd, 2014). Our objective was to understand the branding strategies used at private international schools in India. Thus, for this research, we chose the qualitative method.

Assumptions

Assumptions are things considered as true for research (Leedy & Omrad, 2010). An assumption for this study was that school leaders of private international schools would be sincere in sharing information about their branding initiatives with us. School leaders from the study site would willingly share their branding strategies and other insights to enable us to come to correct conclusions about the brand issues that this school may be facing. We believe that the school chosen as the case study was adequate. We chose a private international school as a unit of analysis based on its ranking given by a credible educational magazine. There was no selection bias because of such an approach. By using techniques such as member checking, and triangulation, we could minimize bias during data collection.

Research Design

The five qualitative research designs include phenomenology, grounded theory and ethnographic design apart from narrative and case study (Hunt, 2014). The research question shapes the research design (Moustakas, 1994). The primary research question of this study was "what branding strategies do private international school leaders in India use to enhance their school brand?" The interview sub-questions were of "what" and "how" type. These "what" and "how" questions were of an exploratory nature. Since there was no prior research done about the use of branding strategies for a K-12 private international school in India, our research was exploratory in nature. As per Yin (2014), a case study method is best suited for exploratory research. To select the participants for this study, we identified top 10 ranking schools in the Southern part of India from a leading Indian education magazine, and we contacted these schools. Out of these ten schools that we approached, only one school agreed to participate in the study. Thus, for this research, we chose a single case study method.

Sample

We used purposive sampling technique for this research. Purposive sampling is a nonrandom method of making certain that researchers select a particular category of participants for the research study (Hunt, 2014). As per the double vortex brand model, there is involvement in the branding process by both internal and external stakeholders. School leaders and faculty as internal stakeholders create and implement brand strategies. Parents were interviewed as external stakeholders to explore how they develop brand perceptions through brand experiences. We conducted interviews with five school leaders, five parents and five faculty members of a private international school in Southern India. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) advised that qualitative single case studies should contain at least 15 interviews. Also, Marshall et al. (2013) observed that focus should be more on achieving data saturation than worrying about the sample size. Thus, the primary author continued with interviewing the 15 participants until he reached data saturation.

Ethical Considerations

Once participants agree to the interview, to minimize the risks, informed consent is a necessary step. According to the Nuremberg Code, participants must be free to participate voluntarily in the research (Seidman, 2013). Participants must be informed about the research to be able to consent willingly and proceed meaningfully (Seidman, 2013). The logic behind informed consent is meeting the ethical principles mentioned by the Nuremberg Code (Seidman, 2013). The primary author approached the people willing to participate by obtaining their informed consent regarding their understanding of the detail and intent of the study through such an informed consent form. The informed consent form was used to assure the participants about confidentiality. The primary author did not face any language barriers in getting the informed consent form signed by the participants. All participants were very well versed in English.

The primary author conveyed to the participants they could withdraw from the research process at any time without any fear of penalty because the participation was voluntary. Thus, participants could have withdrawn at any time by informing the primary author in person, over the phone, or via email. If any participant had withdrawn, we would not have used the data collected from them, and we would have also destroyed the data that we would have collected from them. None of the participants in this study chose to withdraw from the research process. We did not offer any incentive to the participants who took part in the study.

Integrity and trustworthiness of research depend on the ethical nature of research practices. It is necessary to assure participants about the ethics of the research in a qualitative study so that they cooperate and collaborate more easily (Allen, 2015; Nind, Wiles, Bengry-Howell, & Crow, 2013). As this research was part of the primary author's doctoral dissertation, he received approval from the Institutional Review Board of his university before beginning the data collection process. The school from where the primary author collected data did not have an Institutional Review Board. For confidentiality reasons, we have designated this school as school A. The primary author sought approval from the school's senior management before starting data collection. After getting their permission, the primary author obtained the composition of the sample for the research from the main school leader. The sample included a list of probable participants in school leader category, parents, and faculty members, all connected with School A. Barnhill and Barnhill (2015) stated that to maintain data security and participant confidentiality researchers must avoid the use of personal identifiers. We applied alphanumeric codes to represent the three groups as SL1- SL5 (School Leader), P1- P5 (Parent), and F1- F5 (Faculty). To keep the confidentiality of the participants, we have not published their names, their demographic information like age and gender in this study. During our research study, we adhered to the Belmont report principle of autonomy and protection of the research participants. We will adhere to the Belmont report principle of autonomy and protection of the research participants even after our research study (Greaney et al., 2012)

Research Tools

The data collection technique most widely used for qualitative research is face-to-face interviews (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Semi-structured interview methods rely on the development of dialogue between interviewer and participant (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Semi-structured interview method is also suited for exploration and opinions of participants regarding a given subject (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Thus, the primary tool used to collect the data was face-to-face semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The primary author used a digital audio recorder to record the interviews with the permission of the participants. The interviewees chose the time and place for conducting the interviews. Most of the interviews with the participants took place at the school itself. Each interview lasted for around 40 to 50 minutes.

Description of Analysis of Findings

To enhance the validity of our research, the primary author collected data from multiple sources. Besides school leaders, the primary author also conducted interviews with faculty and parents. Methodological triangulation refers to the procedure of collecting data from multiple sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). Besides the face-to-face interview, the primary author also collected secondary data from the participating school and their school website. After reviewing the interview data and secondary data, we found that the data collected using interviews contained all the key information present in the secondary data relevant for our doctoral study. Thus, secondary data was not part of the final data analysis.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is a procedure for detecting, analyzing and interpreting patterned meanings or *themes* in qualitative data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). The theoretical inductive approach of thematic analysis method was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a method that specifies analytical procedures centered on coding and theme development (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Data analysis is a creative process in which analysis is a result of engagement between the dataset and the researcher's interpretative and analytical skills. When studies relating to the phenomenon do not exist a priori, thematic analysis is used to derive coded categories from textual data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). We used the theoretical inductive approach of TA for this study. Please see Appendix A for the protocol we used for analyzing the data collected.

The importance of a theme depends on whether it conveys the feature of the research question (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). While analyzing data, the themes we focused on were the components of the double vortex brand model. Borrego et al. (2014) noted that the conceptual framework is the link which connects the literature, the research method and results of the study. We did the reading and re-reading in stage one, keeping in mind the components of the conceptual framework (i.e., key themes) chosen for this study. The articulation that we did in stage two also happened to keep the components of the conceptual framework in mind. The components of the conceptual framework were also the focus of the work done in stage three and four. The important themes developed in stage seven were about our conceptual framework. Having chosen the primary research question, the literature review around it led us to the identification of a suitable and relevant conceptual framework. We then framed the sub-questions for data collection based on the components of the conceptual framework. The participants' responses to these sub-questions formed the data for analysis from which the core elements of the conceptual framework emerged.

Improving the Rigor of the Study

Despite the advantages of the case study method, validity and reliability always remain doubtful. Methodological triangulation and member checking were implemented to improve the credibility of this study. Besides interviewing school leaders, the primary researcher also collected data from school faculty and parents. It was important to collect the lived experiences of faculty and parents besides the school leaders. The tendency of the researcher to see what he or she anticipates is known as the *pink elephant* bias in qualitative research (Morse, 2015). To eliminate this bias, we entered the research setting in a *neutral stance.* To determine transferability, one must adequately describe the original context of the research so that judgments can be made (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). We have reinforced the transferability of this study through the use of rich and thick descriptions.

Findings

Following components of the conceptual framework emerged from the data analysis: (a) brand vision, (b) brand mission, (c) brand values, (d) corporate culture, (e) brand name, (f) functional capability, (g) brand communications, (h) emotional benefits.

Brand Vision and Mission

Brand vision is important to business leadership as it underpins business strategy and has a significant impact on customer and employee satisfaction. Brand strategists express brand vision in the form of a vision statement which is concise and clear providing a future orientation stating the challenges and having an ability to inspire. A powerful vision is associated with strong organizational performance and must be aligned in the minds of the leaders and employees (Kantabutra & Avery, 2010). Brand mission is also expressed in the form of a clear and concise statement defining corporate purpose (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010). Business leaders use vision and mission statements to communicate the essential values and norms to the relevant target group of stakeholders. Brand vision and mission are one of the first things to develop as part of a branding strategy (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Brand vision indicates the brand's purpose. The brand mission should indicate what the senior management and employees need to do to achieve the brand vision.

"When we started this school, we wanted to first decide what was our brand's (school's) purpose, where we hoped to see it in the future, and what roadmap internal stakeholders will take to reach that future. For this we drafted the vision, mission statements and also defined the school's values. These were expressed collectively by the faculty and the school leaders based on a 3-day brainstorming exercise where the wishes of management and teaching staff were aligned. We wanted to reach a common understanding with the faculty and hence they were also involved in drafting the vision, mission and values for the school," SL1 told the primary author.

The vision and mission of the school studied emphasized the need for creating change makers by giving freedom to children to learn and faculty to teach in an inclusive atmosphere. As mentioned in the double vortex brand model, school A also drafted its brand vision, mission and values as one of the foremost things as part of the brand strategy. School A drafted its brand vision and mission in the form of statements and to keep it aligned in the minds of the employees included the faculty while drafting these.

Corporate Culture

Corporate culture governs the management methodology and philosophy which guides the employees' behavior (Yang, 2010). Corporate culture helps improve the brand's reputation and also improve consumers' loyalty to it. Corporate culture helps to improve interpersonal relationships and also to create a harmonious environment.

"Quite often we hear that parents feel schools are overcharging fees and schools are unwilling to allow their financial accounts to be scrutinized by public. However, at our school we have a very transparent approach and very recently we shared our books of accounts with one of our school's parents who is a financial consultant as we wanted suggestions on how to reduce costs. We believe that our teachers, students, school management and parents are like one family and this approach has helped us provide a caring atmosphere. We have an open door policy and parents can walk in anytime to approach the school principal if they have any grievance. At other schools parents cannot meet the principal without taking prior appointment," SL4 informed the primary author. "The school has a family-oriented culture and my child looks forward to going to school. The teachers are very approachable and very empathetic towards students," parent P4 said this to the primary author.

The culture at school A matches with their vision statement of providing a caring atmosphere. The faculty has also aligned itself with the school culture of providing a caring atmosphere to students. There is harmonious relationship between the internal stakeholders (i.e., the management and the staff) and external stakeholders (i.e., the parents) because of the school culture.

Brand Name

Brand name is a descriptive meaning which persuasively suggests attributes and benefits in the consumer's mind facilitating recall of the product or service (Keller, Heckler &

Houston, 1998). Brand name can help a firm to establish initial brand positioning and to build brand equity (Keller et al., 1998). Brand strategists should choose brand name such that it can lead to better brand recall (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Following is what school leader SL3 had to tell the primary author about the name for the school:

> Until 2004, our school was operating up to a pre-primary level only (i.e., KG1 and KG2) and had gained a positive reputation in the marketplace. In 2004, we expanded from a pre-primary school to a full-fledged international curriculum K-12 day school. We conducted a market research to understand what should be the name of the new school. What we learnt from the research findings was that there was a very good brand recall for our old school name. The reputation of the old school name was very high in the minds of the parents. To capitalize on this advantage we decided to retain the old school name and just added the word "international" in front of it to denote that the new school was going to provide international curriculum. When we started getting admissions for the new school we asked the parents why they were seeking admissions at our school and not any other school, parents informed that they had lot of trust in the school name and they were sure their children will get very good education at the new school.

Thus, it can be seen that the new school benefitted by retaining the old brand name. Had the new school name been different from the old school name parents may not have readily agreed to seek admission in the new school. Conducting the research before finalising the name of the new brand helped the management realise the brand equity that existed for the old brand name. To capitalize on this existing brand equity the school management rightly chose to retain the old brand name in the new brand name and this helped them increase their revenue. Retaining the old brand name helped the new brand position itself as a trustworthy brand in the minds of the consumers.

Functional Capability

Functional capability shown in the double vortex brand model refers to the product performance or services provided by a firm (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Functional capability refers to the extent to which brands satisfy basic or rational needs of the consumers. Brands that offer high functional value result in high brand loyalty (Yeh, Wang, & Yieh, 2016). As brand functionality increases it leads to improved brand equity (Mohan, Jiménez, Brown, & Cantrell, 2017).

"At school A, three teachers are available in each pre-primary (nursery, lower and upper kindergarten) and primary (grade 1 to grade 5) class. Most international schools here have a maximum of two teachers until the primary class. Two teachers are not sufficient if you have special needs children and thus school A has the third teacher to take care of special needs children. To reduce high teacher costs most international schools here shy away from recruiting the third teacher or they avoid giving admission to special needs children. School A is an inclusive school and they welcome children of all types with open arms and take good care," parent P1 informed the primary author. "We regularly send our teachers for training. Every year during the summer vacations we organize leadership-training programs for our teachers and they all look forward to it. With a clear focus on being an inclusive school, we have started a research center. Through this research center we help our teachers and also teachers from other schools to become inclusive," school leader SL1 informed. "We regularly conduct programs whereby students are sensitized to environmental issues. Recently our school students made 3000 paper bags and sold these bags for free at one of the local malls requesting customers not to use plastic bags as it is harmful for nature. We conduct many such programs to build empathy and leadership skills in our students. We have a program whereby senior students mentor junior students. Our last annual day function was completely organized by the students themselves," school leader SL3 told this to the primary author. "Word of mouth has been the most powerful marketing tool for us in the past two decades," SL4 confirmed.

Besides providing holistic development to students, school leaders at school A make special efforts to make it an inclusive school. School A also lays special emphasis on building empathy in students. At many schools in India teachers only pay lip service to providing inclusive education to students with disabilities (Tiwari, Das, & Sharma, 2015). One of the brand promises of school A is that it is an inclusive school and towards this they have made special efforts to provide a third teacher (special education teacher) in each class until the primary section. At many schools in India, students with disabilities spend their school time in a pullout classroom which is separate from general education classrooms (Tiwari et al., 2015). Teachers generally lack the skills to implement inclusion (Tiwari et al., 2015).

At school A, students with disabilities spend their time in main classrooms with other students until the primary section. At school A, special education teachers and general education teachers work together. To ensure special education teachers fully understand the meaning of inclusion, they are trained at the research center at school A built for this purpose. School A also facilitates training of special education teachers from other schools at school A's research center. All these efforts indicate that school A is truly an inclusive school. School A offers high functional value to students and this has resulted in high brand loyalty for the school. School A has gained wide recognition for their efforts in building an inclusive school and word of mouth has resulted in good enrollments leading to increase in its brand equity.

Crisp Communicator

Crisp communicator component in the double vortex brand model refers to brand communications that are crisp (i.e., have clarity of purpose, are clear, succinct, and polished). Brand communicators should also think about what mode they will use for communication. To influence consumer behavior, firms can use brand communications (De Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Brand communications can be internal, to communicate with employees, or external, to communicate with customers. Brand communications can be of controlled nature (i.e., advertising, billboards, and firm-generated social media content) or of uncontrolled nature (i.e., word of mouth, user generated social media content).

A powerful exercise in brand building adopted by school leaders at school A was to use social media to gain parent and community attention while informing these audiences about the innovative student-led curricular and co-curricular activities at school. "We use Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to connect with parents and other stakeholders of the school," SL1 told the primary author. School leaders at the study site used social media to highlight the work of students, spread awareness of the school's philosophy, and build social capital with stakeholders. In the *all in a day* initiative, teachers photographed classroom activities to share through the school leaders' WhatsApp group. School leaders then reposted the pictures on Facebook to highlight the innovative practices of the school. "We have regular meetings with parents. We talk about the philosophy of the school, our attitude towards students, and what we expect parents to do for the school," SL4 confirmed. "School uses email to communicate with teachers. To discuss new policies we have internal meetings once a month," faculty F4 informed the primary author.

For internal brand communications the school leaders use email and hold regular meetings to communicate the brand philosophy to employees. For external brand communications the school leaders conduct meetings with parents and also use firm-generated social media content. School leader SL1 informed primary author that school also uses advertising through a billboard at the entrance of the city to communicate with external stakeholders. Word of mouth communication between existing parents and prospective parents also exists and has helped school A.

Emotional Benefits

Emotional benefits are the positive feelings that customers have because of owning and using a brand (Ghodeswar, 2008). Besides functional benefits, emotional benefits can help increase the value of a brand (Ghodeswar, 2008). "My child feels so happy coming to the school that one day she wanted to go to school even on a Sunday. We managed to calm her down only after calling the school and requesting them to talk to her and let her know that school is closed, and thus she cannot go to school on that day," parent P3 told the primary author. "My child does not have fear of teachers or fear of the school. My child enjoys coming to the school," parent P1 informed the primary author. Thus, on an emotional level parents at school A felt very secure that their children were in safe hands at school A. Parents are very sure that school A leaders provide a caring atmosphere and good quality education. This feeling of emotional well-being has led to word of mouth praise for school A.

Discussion

This case study revealed the convergence of various brand elements identified in the double vortex brand model. The initiatives by the school leaders delineate the mechanism of brand implementation. Further, the school leaders have integrated brand vision, mission and values. Developing and co-creating branding with internal stakeholders like academic administrators and faculty members generated high buy-in from them. An effective branding process must focus on relationship building between the various stakeholders. For this, conducive corporate culture is important as seen in the case of school studied. Choosing a suitable brand name has helped the school management. The functional capability element was evident through numerous initiatives adopted by the school to improve pedagogy, development of holistic growth of students and ensuring school A is an inclusive school.

One unique selling point of the school was the atmosphere of academic freedom enjoyed by the teachers. Multiple mechanisms of brand communication through face-to-face meetings, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter assisted school leaders in gaining greater buy-in from parents regarding the school's philosophy. The effective creation of social capital with the community was the result of sharing learning and teaching experiences via Facebook, YouTube and Twitter with the community. A critical finding from the case study is that school leaders should use social media and other technology tools more effectively to tell their brand's (i.e., school's) story on a daily basis. Parental emotional benefits have resulted in top of the mind recall for the brand. As parents identified with the school's brand, word of mouth communication has resulted in more school enrollments.

Brand strategists can simplify brand complexity by viewing it as a double vortex brand model with numerous smaller parts. In this paper, we have used the metaphor of a double vortex brand model to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the various elements that constitute a good branding strategy. We see the tangible and visual elements in the left vortex and rational and emotional dimensions in the right vortex linked by consumer perceptions. The supportive relationship between the functional and service elements in the two vortices shows how consumers relate to a brand as a whole, though the individual parts have to be defined and worked together which is seen here as brand vision, mission, corporate culture and brand name.

As the individual parts are related the strength of the brand depends on the strength of the relationship between the individual parts enabled by crisp communication between the school leaders, teachers, and the parents all contributing towards the brand building process.

Once brand strategists complete the brand plans by focusing on the left-hand vortex we then see the right vortex which establishes confidence and trust through perceptions and experiences of the parents. It cannot be gainsaid that brand is a perception in the consumer's mind, and hence the conceptual framework which highlights the tangible and intangible elements by spelling out rational performance and emotional benefits is the best-balanced approach to branding. The case study of the school delineated in this paper shows through the data analysis that brand strategists can adopt branding as a strategy by the sequential implementation of the various elements such as vision, mission, culture and brand name.

The major limiting factor of this research is that we have taken only one school for our case study. Future studies could include a larger sample. The main question addressed in this exploratory research is the role of brand building from a strategic point of view by international schools in India. The highlight is the conceptual framework which ties up numerous factors in the brand building exercise with special emphasis on relevant consumer perceptions. The findings showed the effectiveness with which school leaders did branding and effectively conveyed the brand promise to the stakeholders. Other international schools can use the findings of this research to incorporate branding as a strategy. It corroborates and affirms the view that implementation of the various brand elements as discussed in this paper can lead to appropriate experiences in the realm of branding as it provides a foundation for a strategic approach to branding.

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Appendix A: Protocol for Analyzing Data

For our research, data analysis consisted of two parts (a) a thorough preparation of the coding process and (b) the actual coding process using NVivo 11 software. The first part of the coding process was done using paper and pencil (Casterle, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012).

Stage 1: Thorough (re)reading of the interviews.

The data collected was thoroughly read multiple times to become familiar with the data and to get a sense of the interviews as a whole. During this reading process, we underlined key phrases. In this stage, a rudimentary type of analysis began.

Stage 2: Narrative interview report.

In this stage, we tried to articulate the interviewee's feedback in answer to the central research question. We wrote a brief abstract of the key information including a summary of the characteristics of the interview.

Stage 3: Conceptual interview scheme.

Here we filtered the most important data and clustered them in concepts. This stage facilitated the transition from raw data to manageable concepts. The concepts were further developed and refined as we got more insight into the research phenomenon. Every interview had its conceptual interview scheme.

Stage 4: Fitting-test of the conceptual interview scheme.

We reread the interview with the conceptual interview scheme in mind.

Stage 5: Constant comparison process.

The conceptual interview schemes from one interview were compared with the schemes from other interviews. This process allowed us to find common themes. This stage also allowed us to get increasing conceptual understanding of the research data as a whole.

Part 2: The actual coding process (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Stage 6: Preliminary coding.

Based on the conceptual interview schemes a list of concepts was drawn up. This list was introduced as preliminary codes in Nvivo. Assigning a descriptive or conceptual label to excerpts of raw data is known as Code (Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, & Casey, 2015).

Stage 7: Searching for themes.

In this stage, codes were collated into potential themes. We gathered all data relevant to each potential theme. A theme identifies a broader level of meaning than code.

Stage 8: Reviewing themes.

In stage 8, a thematic map was generated to check if themes work about the coded extracts and the overall data.

Stage 9: Defining and naming themes.

In this stage, we carried out a detailed analysis of data for each theme. We also defined each theme at this stage.

Stage 10: Description of the results.

Here we described the essential findings in answer to the central research question. To manage and organize the data for coding process and theme creation we used NVivo 11. We imported interview data in NVivo. In NVivo, coding is done with the help of structures known as *nodes* (Houghton et al., 2015). Nodes provide a location for gathering all related data in one place to look for emerging patterns and ideas. Common codes were grouped in NVivo to form a parent node. In NVivo, child nodes are all the nodes related to this parent node.

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