

Building a University Department Brand through Brand Association Network Technology [†]

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Abstract: Taiwan's birthrate has been declining for nearly a decade, with the newborn population falling from 305,312 in 2000 to 153,820 in 2021. Education has been adversely affected by the low birthrates but also by other industries. Schools must therefore review their brand positioning and develop their brand value. Brand influence, from products to retail stores, from people to organizations, was regarded as the most valuable intangible asset in the past. Schools need to establish brand symbols so that relevant briefings, publicity, stationery, posters, and packaging convey a consistent image of the school. For example, the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the Chaoyang University of Technology have used this method to build a series of brand identities. Of course, the department inherits the brand spirit of the school but is full of its characteristics and positioning. Despite this, few departments establish their brand symbols to achieve consistent brand communication, which is an important research gap in the present study. In this research, the faculty and students of the department were invited to extract the brand knowledge of the Department of Marketing and Logistics Management of Chaoyang University of Science and Technology through the idea of free associations. A total of 7 questionnaires for faculties and 50 questionnaires for students were collected; the questionnaire was composed of five dimensions. As a result, 23 symbols were obtained to represent the Department of Marketing and Logistics Management. The Department of Design's brand symbols can be used for related cultural product design, event posters, and other applications to create a specific brand association and improve brand equity, brand reputation, and memory. These symbols can also be used in related cultural products, event posters, and other applications.

Keywords: department brand symbol; free-association method; networking technology

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1. Introduction

Aaker pointed out that the benefit of a brand is to provide the company's value proposition to consumers or to maintain the relationship between the organization and its customers, thereby enhancing consumers' trust in the company's other brand products, brand trustworthiness, expertise, and consumer confidence preference. The same applies to the education industry as well [1].

Pinar, Girard, and Basfirinci pointed out that the management of higher education brands and strengthening brand equity through brand-related links is also an important issue for universities [2]. Of course, when managers want to manage brands but fail to build their knowledge sets, brand knowledge cannot be accumulated and transmitted, and consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards brands are unclear. One of the most important aspects of brand knowledge is its identification system. Consumers' cognition

can be established through the transmission of identification systems and symbols and is influenced to support a brand. Therefore, a brand manager needs to think about how to transmit the core of brand knowledge through the identification system to make brand management more efficient [3].

When a department’s brand wants to convey its vision and spirit through the brand symbol, it is essential to understand the function and role of the university and then set the vision and goals. A university is not only limited to academic research and teaching inheritance but also shoulders the role of social function and student achievement development. Boyer pointed out that the university has four functions: discovery, teaching, application, and integration [4]. Therefore, for the department to convey a brand spirit and core through its brand symbol, we focus on the brand symbol of the design department through academic, positioning characteristics, teaching, and societal aspects.

We employed the interview method to find the most common keywords associated with the department’s brand from the previous department’s chairman, teachers, and students to design a symbol set for the production of educational materials to shape the department’s brand value. At the same time, the symbol provides the stakeholders of society with a stronger sense of identity by using the brand power of the department.

2. Literature Review

A study by Iftach and Orly indicates that schools possess five characteristics [5]: (1) academic characteristics that reduce social inequality by promoting knowledge, research, learning, and achieving excellence; (2) traditional characteristics, which share a common sense of history and reputation accumulation, and respect for religious beliefs; (3) national characteristics, which are attachment, love, and commitment and care for the community; (4) organizational characteristics, reflecting innovation, efficiency, positivity, and development that enable students and teachers to achieve their potential; and (5) social and moral characteristics, emphasizing mutual respect and fairness. A complete brand symbol for a school must be created based on its vision and performance characteristics so that the students can feel the brand’s entire value. However, the department continues to maintain the school’s values, so brand symbols were also designed in this study aligned with the five characteristics as shown in Figure 1.

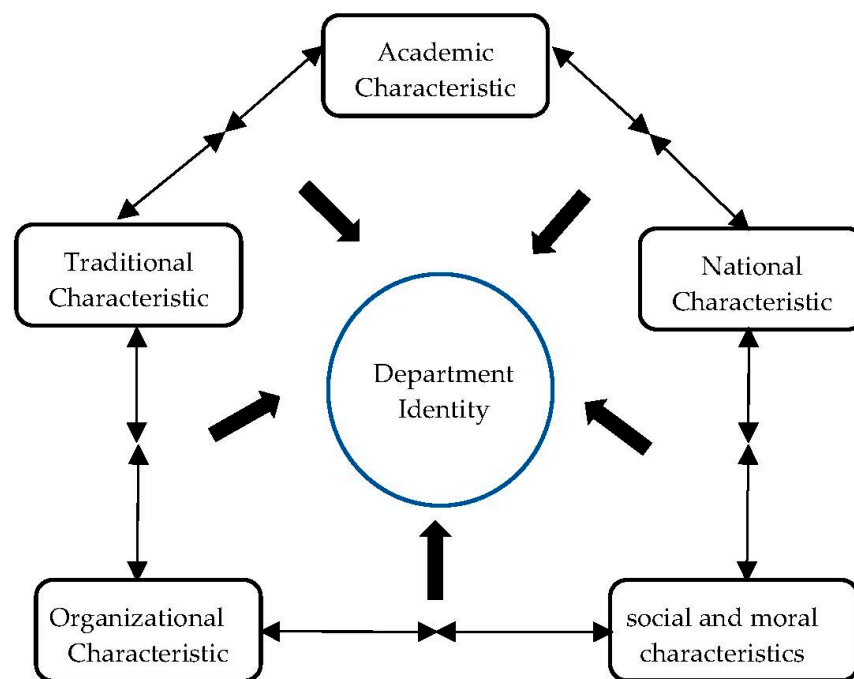


Figure 1. Department identity.

3. Research Methods

This research takes the Department of Marketing and Logistics Management of Chaoyang University of Science and Technology in Taiwan as its object. The department contains students from both the day department and the research institute. It consists of 16 teachers, 4 of whom have served as department heads. Faculty and students were invited to participate in the brand association activity to find a brand vocabulary that matches the department's brand to create a symbol that represents the department.

Faculties and students of the department could use the idea of free association to take the department's brand as the object of the association, collect vocabulary related to the department from five aspects, and associate them with the department's brand. The idea of free association is the simplest and easiest way to describe brand association. By asking consumers "If you think of a certain brand, what will you think?", a brand mental map was created to outline the brand image. Researchers can use free associativity to measure the strength of the initial association based on the order in which the words appear. Furthermore, brand preference can also be assessed based on consumers' associations.

In five dimensions, academic, traditional, national, organizational, and social and moral characteristics, our study examines the following question, "When you think of this department, what do you think of?" We used teachers' free time, an association meeting, and five free student meetings to study the association vocabulary of the department's members to create a brand for the department.

4. Research Results

Eight teachers from the Department of Marketing and Logistics Management at the Chaoyang University of Science and Technology filled out the questionnaires for this study. On average, the teachers had worked in the department for nine years and actively contributed to its development. Therefore, they represented brand vocabulary ideas. In addition, 105 students filled out the questionnaire. During the department's training process, students were divided into freshmen and seniors to understand the associated terminology of the department's brand. As a result of the relatively high integrity of third-year students' participation in department activities, a total of 40 samples were collected, with 28 samples of second-year students and 20 samples of first-year students.

The free-association principle was used to sort 46 words into 5 aspects. There were seven nouns and five adjectives in the traditional, eight nouns and four adjectives in the academic aspect, five nouns and four adjectives in the organizational aspect, four nouns and four adjectives in the social morality aspect, and three nouns and two adjectives in the country-oriented aspect. The words associated with the subjects [6] were reserved for the second-stage questionnaire test when they reached 4% of the total words. Despite not reaching 4% of the total, the data were still discussed and added to the relevant associations, since "organization" was repositioned and strengthened (Table 1).

Table 1. Vocabulary representing the five dimensions of the department.

Characteristics	Noun Vocabulary	Adjective Vocabulary
Traditional orientation	Mark Ting, orientation, chorus competition, purple, early morning activity, competition, departmental society	Lively, teamwork, innovation, enthusiasm, passionate
Academic orientation	Internships, competitions, licenses, multi-disciplinary learning, special topics, five-year consistency, micro-courses, graduate students	Serious, professional, innovative, and resourceful
Organizing	Competitions, off-campus visits, innovative curriculum design, special topics, industry–university cooperation	Teamwork, innovation, positive, professional
Social morality	Exchange of foreign students, special businessmen, achievements of friends, international exchanges	Love, respect, diverse communication, fairness
Country orientation	Public welfare activities, USR local marketing, industry–university cooperation	Caring, loving

5. Conclusions

Based on organizational vision design, this study adopts brand identification and symbolic meaning in brand equity construction and creates the logo of the department. Using the existing department's logo, a consistent image of the department and improve visibility and memory are constructed. Five aspects are used to help facilitate the application of positive word associations to literature and publicity materials. Icons need to be combined with the nature of the activity in each application. To create a stronger relationship between the map and the event theme, the icon combination is used to learn about the link map and the marketing relationship and gain a sense of uniqueness.

Additionally, it is suggested that the designed icon combination be used primarily in the promotion of the department in the future, including the arrangement of related activities, related information documents for freshmen, admission promotional videos, and so on. Icons can be matched in different combinations so that the department icon has become an identification combination with high exposure. Therefore, the students in the department have a greater sense of the importance of the icon combination. In the future, we can also take this opportunity to train marketing students to design their icon combination.

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