

POTENTIAL ASSOCIATION OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITY BRANDING EFFORTS WITH PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS: A STUDY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract:

Branding is a key factor that is receiving attention by the private universities in marketing their educational products. It is evident that the perceptions and attitudes of the prospective students could play a vital role in attracting them by these institutions. This study focuses on the prospective students of private universities in Sri Lanka, and it aims to conceptualize such branding efforts and students' perceptions & attitudes regarding private universities, and to investigate if there could be any potential associations between them. Responses were gathered via an online survey questionnaire, and the results indicate that there are significant positive relationships between branding efforts and students' attitudes; students' perceptions and attitudes; and between branding effort and perceptions. Further, students' perceptions showed a full mediating effect between branding efforts and students' perceptions.

Keywords: Marketing, branding, perception, attitudes, selection intention, mediating relationship

INTRODUCTION

A number of private universities have come up in Sri Lanka, as a result of economic liberalization policies introduced decades back.

Unlike the state universities in Sri Lanka which provide free education at undergraduate level, the private universities need to levy a fee and

compete and attract prospective students. Therefore, the private universities see the prospective students as their potential clients or customers. University branding takes a central role in such efforts. There are many studies conducted and published internationally. However, such studies have not been conducted in Sri Lanka.

In order to understand the size of the potential market, it would be prudent to look at the youth profile of Sri Lanka which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1**Distribution of Youth by Age and Gender, Sri Lanka, 2012**

Age Group	Males	Females	Total
15-19	819,927	824,322	1,664,249
20-24	742,316	790,567	1,532,883
All Ages	9,856,634	10,502,805	20,359,439

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2014

According to UNFPA- Sri Lanka, 2014, the Labor Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for the 15-19 year age group has declined dramatically during the 1981-2012 period from 30.3% to 20%, which amounts to over 150,000 in number of persons. This suggests that increasing numbers are seeking to complete their secondary and perhaps also seek tertiary education.

There is also clear disparity by gender among youth in terms of educational attainment among the 15-24 year age group. Among those who have studied up to GCE (A/L) examination, 60% are girls and the same proportion applies for higher education

qualifications such as degrees and above (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka, 2014). Despite free University Education, males have shown a tendency to either opt for employment or seek professional qualifications. Low male participation higher education could be due to more financial pressure on males to enter the job market early, and higher education is seen as favorable for employment prospects in the state system (UNFPA, 2014).

University Grants Commission statistics indicate that for year 2013 only 10.2% of the students sitting the GCE (AL) examination secure placements with state universities, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2**Details of Students' Intake into Sri Lankan Universities, 2013**

Detail	No. of Students
No. sat GCE (AL) Examination	246,665
No. satisfying minimum requirements for state university admission	143,740
No. applied for state university admission	55,991
No. selected for state universities	25,200 (10.2%)

Source: University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka, 2015.

It is reported that there are 10 more public degree awarding institutions which enrolled 4,269 students in the 2010/2011 academic year (Gamage & Wijesinghe, 2012). The above quoted LIRN Asia report states there were 46 private universities operating in Sri Lanka, mainly affiliated with British Universities. However, only 14 of them were enrolling more than 100 students for the 2010/2011 academic year, and their total annual enrollment was 2,733 which is quite a significant number at that time.

This overall scenario amply illustrates the potential market for private higher education in Sri Lanka. There is already a private medical college set up in Sri Lanka and a number of private universities offering UGC approved or foreign affiliated degree programs including engineering, architecture, law, information technology, management, logistics, fashion design etc.

Accordingly, the following study objectives were formulated;

1. To investigate whether branding efforts of private universities have an effect on the perceptions of prospective students.

2. To explore the relationship between the perceptions of the prospective students about private universities and their attitudes regarding university selection intention.

3. To examine the association among branding efforts of private universities, perceptions of prospective students about private universities, and their attitudes regarding university selection intention.

Past Studies

In a study on attitude and purchase intention with Indian consumers, Punyatowa (2015) has successfully tested the relationships shown in Figure 1.

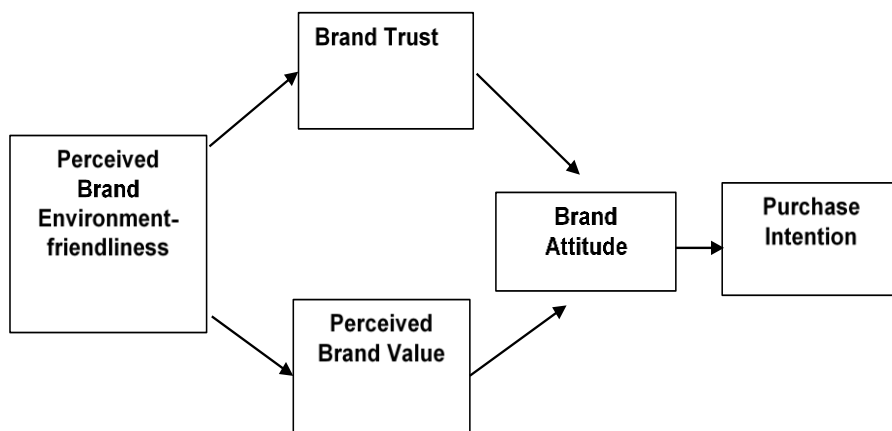


Figure 1: Model of Punyatowa (2015)

Further, Schwartz et al. (2009) say that in general attitudes can be defined as a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable

manner with respect to a given object, and observe that attitudes are relatively less stable than personality traits and can be changed both across time and

across situations in virtue of the individual's interaction with the environment. They state that attitudes may be influenced by educators and practitioners.

There are numerous past studies carried out on branding efforts related to private universities, which are presented below.

Moreover, Jain et al. (2013) observe there is empirical evidence that input quality, curriculum, academic facilities, industry interaction, interaction quality, support facilities, and non-academic processes influence students' perceptions on service quality in higher education.

Oldfield & Baron (2000) has carried out studies on student perception using an adaptation of the SERVQUAL research instrument developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988,1991) and find that student's perceived service quality has three dimensions; (1) The requisite elements (which are essential to enable students to fulfill their study obligations, (2) The acceptable elements (which are desirable but not essential to students), (3) The functional elements (which are of a practical or utilitarian value).

The concept of university branding is quite new even in the U.K, consequent to Government demands on universities to attract and enroll greater number of students, rising tuition fees, the proliferation of courses on offer, the growing internationalization of the universities, escalating advertising costs, financial pressures, and in many universities the reliance on the income made from foreign students. It has also been suggested that branding is particularly important for the more recently created universities such as the polytechnics that became universities in 1992 and the former institutes of higher education that were converted into universities in 2005-2006. A university's

brand is a manifestation of its features that distinguish it from the others, reflect its capacity to satisfy students' needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education and help students to make wise enrolment decisions (Bennet & Ali-Choudhury, 2009).

Pampaloni (2010) states that universities rely on their image, which is an attribute of branding to attract prospective students, and observes the importance of personal visits to universities as they are often unable to articulate the specific qualities that appeal to them.

Bennet & Ali-Choudhury (2009) has done pioneering work on the prospective students' perceptions of university brands. This study forms a key pillar of the present study, in developing the conceptual framework and the questionnaire. Quoting de Chernatony & Dall'Olmo Riley (1998), Balmer & Sorenson (1999), Pringle & Thompson (1999), Alessandri (2001), Melewar & Jenkins (2002), and Stern (2006), they put forward the following three components of a university brand;

- A collection of promises presented to the outside world concerning the brand's benefits

- A set of distinctive features that defines the brand's inherent nature and reality (the brand's quiddity)

- An assortment of aesthetic designations and external communications that describe the brand (the brand's symbolic and external representation).

Gray et al. (2003) discuss the potential of attracting international students through successful branding of private universities and suggest that a common media mix can be utilized in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Medina and Duffy (1998) propose a four-level classification of international

branding strategies; (1) Standardized brand (core and augmented components tailored to domestic market, but have global appeal), (2) Adapted brand (core components standardized, but augmented components adapted to local legal and market conditions), (3) Customized brand (core and augmented components tailored to international markets), (4) Globalized brand (compromise brand incorporating attributes of previous varieties, with standardized core and attributes added on to meet unique country or regional requirements and expectations). The questionnaire used by them was directly adopted for the present study to capture the university branding efforts.

Bennet & Ali-Choudhury (2009), quoting Balmer & Gray (2003), and Fan (2005), state that a corporate brand can be treated as a covenant, and it involves a collection of promises concerning the brand's physical and emotional benefits to buyers, and clarify that these benefits are constructed around a brand's core values such as trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity. They further claim that the characteristics of a brand as a covenant is particularly appropriate for services because of their intangibility and heterogeneity. This study investigates the perceptions of the brands of three universities in London, expressed by a sample of prospective students. Accordingly, a conceptual framework was developed for the study as presented in Figure 2.

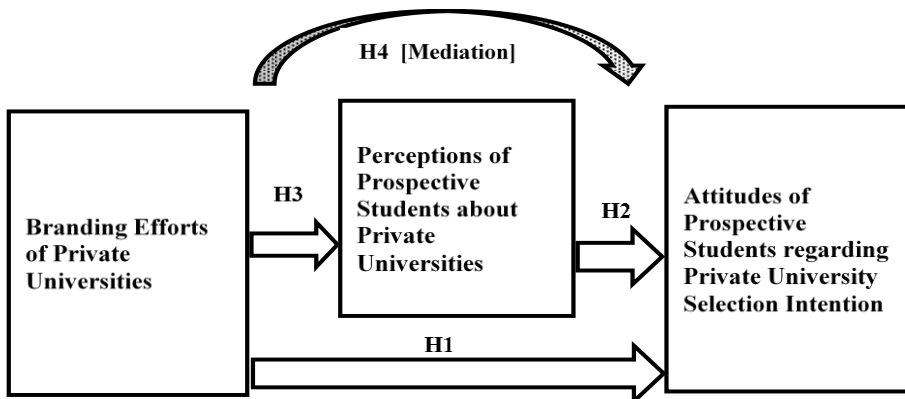


Figure 2: The Conceptual Framework for this study

Hypotheses

Arising from the Conceptual Framework, the following hypotheses will be tested;

H1: There is a positive relationship between the branding efforts of private universities and the prospective students' attitudes about private university selection intention.

H2: There is a positive relationship between the perceptions of prospective students about the private universities and their attitudes about private university selection decision.

H3: There is a positive relationship between branding efforts of private universities and the perceptions of the prospective students about private universities.

H4: Prospective students' perception about private universities is mediating the relationship between branding efforts of private universities and their attitudes about private university selection intention.

METHODOLOGY

The three study constructs were operationalized using past literature as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Operationalization of Study Constructs

Variables/ Constructs	Dimensions
Branding Efforts of Private Universities (Source: Grey at al., 2003)	Communication, Learning environment, Reputation of private university, Graduate career prospects, Image of the locality, Cultural integration
Perceptions of Prospective Students about private universities (Source: Bennet & Ali-Choudhuri, 2009)	Graduation prospects, Mission & vision, Learning environment, Social environment, Practicability, Academic position, Internal values, Composition of student body, Physical actualities, Name & logo, Marketing communications
Attitudes of Prospective Students regarding private university selection intention (Source: Bennet & Ali-Choudhuri, 2009)	Cognitive responses, Affective responses, Conative responses, Reputational consequences

The above three constructs involved the following number of indicators, taken from the sources quoted;

Branding Efforts of Private Universities – 31 indicators

Perceptions of Prospective Students about private universities – 31 indicators

Attitudes of Prospective Students regarding private university selection intention – 12 indicators

These indicators were measured on a five-point Likert scale based on a questionnaire (1=Disagree and 5=Agree).

Sampling and Data Collection

The questionnaire was only prepared in English, as attempts to translate it into either Sinhala or Tamil would have been a tedious exercise, even leading to inaccurate interpretations based on the background of the translators. The questionnaire was delivered to prospective university students through 12 carefully selected coordinators. The coordinators represented all nine provinces of Sri Lanka, and two coordinators each were selected from Colombo, Kandy, and Galle as they represented higher populations. This was done with the view

of ensuring variability of responses, though it may not be a strictly valid statistical technique.

The questionnaire was targeted to students older than 16 years of age who have sat for GCE (A/L) examination at least once, including those who are already in private education institutions following certificate, foundation, and diploma level programs.

After testing out a printed questionnaire, it was decided to adopt a self-administered online survey, which was found to be more comfortable to the age group concerned. It was decided to inform the study coordinators to conclude their efforts after receiving 102 satisfactory responses, mainly due to time and other resource constraints. This was deemed adequate as the 20

main variables or study dimensions give us a ratio of 5.1:1 between the sample size and the variables. It is noted that Sekaran (2003) recommends a ratio of 10:1 for multivariate research. However, she also states that where samples are broken down to subsamples (male/female, juniors/seniors etc.), a minimum sample size of 30 for each category is necessary.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS **Descriptive Analysis on** **Demographic & Lifestyle Profiles**

The demographic profile of the sample showed that 80% were above 19 years of age. Comparison of the other demographic characteristics of the respondents with that of the total population of Sri Lanka. This is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Selected Demographic Factors of the Sample

Demographic Factor	Sample	Sri Lanka
% Females	57%	60.2% with GCE(AL)
Ethnicity:		
- Sinhalese	75%	74.91%
- Tamil	11%	15.26%
- Moor	12%	9.30%
- Other	2%	0.53%

It is observed that the demographic profile of the sample generally follows the pattern of the country.

Reliability Analysis

In order to test the reliability of dimensions by excluding any indicators that are not correlated within dimensions, the widely accepted Cronbach's Alpha method was employed. It is a measure of internal consistency that tests how closely

related the items are of a group. The closer the figure reaches 1, the better the reliability. If Cronbach's Alpha is below 0.6 reliability is considered poor, 0.6 - 0.8 is acceptable and above 0.8 is good (Sekaran, 2003).

Thus, the Cronbach's Alpha figure of each dimension inclusive of all indicators was tested against the Cronbach's Alpha of the dimension if an indicator was deleted. As a higher

Cronbach's Alpha indicates higher reliability, if the figure increases with the exclusion of an indicator, this demonstrates that the dimension is more reliable without the respective indicator variable. Therefore, such indicators were deleted from the model.

For example, Cronbach's Alpha for the Communication Dimension improved from 0.855 to 0.864 when the indicator 'Clergy' was deleted. Similarly, this process was followed for the indicators of each dimension. The final Cronbach's Alpha figures of the three constructs Branding, Perception and Attitudes after exclusion of uncorrelated indicators were 0.824, 0.896 and 0.890

respectively. Thus the constructs indicate high reliability.

Validity

The face validity of the variables was assured on priori basis through past literature. An exploratory factor analysis was conducted to test the validity of the dimensions, following the procedure recommended by Churchill (1979). As such, for each of the three constructs, the indicator variables were broken down to the number of dimensions within the construct through factor analysis by that many of the indicators gathered under the dimensions identified based on literature review. The summary of the selected indicators is given in Table 5.

Table 5

Indicators Selected after Reliability and Factor Analysis

Branding of Efforts of Private Universities: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.824

Communication: Open Day, Education Fair, Websites, Family Member, Friend, School Counselor, University Interview, Material Requested, Unsolicited Material, Student Recruiters, School Teachers, Newspaper Ads

Learning Environment: External Teaching Staff, Excellent Research Resources, Student Support Services, Reasonable Tuition Fees, Excellent Physical Facilities, Safety within Institutions

Reputation: Brand Name, Institution Achievement, High Education Standard, Course Quality, Institution Experience

Graduate Career Prospects: Graduates' Employer Views, Employment Prospects, International Recognition

Image of Locality: Stable Political Environment, Student Safety, Hospitality

Cultural Integration: Valuing Cultural Diversity, Multi-Cultural Environment

Perceptions of Prospective Students: Cronbach's Alpha = 0.896

Graduation Prospects: Excellent Career Prospects, Outside World Degree Status

Mission & Vision: Top University in Sector, Improving Position

Learning Environment: Excellent Learning Facilities, Excellent Student Support Services, Caring Academic Staff, Accessible Staff

Social Environment: Lively Social Environment, Many Clubs and Societies, Excellent Leisure & Sports

Practicability: Wide Range of Programs, Affordable, Convenient Location, Appropriate Entry requirements

<u>Academic Position:</u>	Appropriate Difficulty Level, Staff Research/ Publications, Appropriate Theoretical Level, Acceptable Failure Rate
<u>Internal Values:</u>	Desirable Academic Values, Values Research on Teaching, Academic Traditions
<u>Student Composition:</u>	Ethnic Minority Proportion, Allocation for Disadvantaged Groups
<u>Physical Actualities:</u>	Attractive University, Safe Area, Location with Attractions
<u>Name & Logo:</u>	Name tells a lot, Memorable logo, Logo tells a lot

Attitudes of Prospective Students:	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.890
<u>Cognitive Responses:</u>	Good University, Deserves to be Admired, Offers Value for Money
<u>Affective Responses:</u>	Positive Feelings, Like to be Seen Attending, Feel good to Attend, Appealing University
<u>Conative Responses:</u>	Seriously Consider Applying, Will Say Positive Things, Intend to Apply
<u>Reputational Consequences:</u>	Well Respected University, Successful University

Checking for Collinearity and Assumptions for Regression

The standard statistical tests were carried out to check collinearity of the independent variables and the assumptions for regression. VIF Factor of the two independent variables was checked to ascertain collinearity, and they showed a value of 1.602. Since the VIF factors of the two independent variables are less than 5, it can be observed that there is no collinearity between the two variables branding and perception. Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was used to assess normality; since it was significant under 5% level of significance, the data can be considered to be normally distributed. Linearity was tested through normal probability plots. As the expected value of dependent variable was a straight-line function of each independent variable, linearity was assured. Independence of the error term was tested through the Durbin Watson test. The Durbin Watson test statistic could range from 0 to 4. As it was between 1.5 and 3, independence of the error term was assured.

Summary Statistics of Dimensions under Each Construct

The summarized measures at Construct and Dimension level are presented in Table 6. It should be noted that mean scores above reflect positive presence and those less than 3 are interpreted as poor presence.

As such, the study sample demonstrates a positive relationship between the Branding construct and each of its dimensions. Reputation of the private university is observed to exhibit the highest positive relationship with branding of private universities. This indicates that the reputation built over the years maybe the strongest branding asset for a private university. As such, any branding efforts of a private university should be focused on emphasizing on its Brand Name, Institution Achievement, High Education Standard, Course Quality and Institution Experience which are the indicator variables of the Reputation dimension.

From the dimensions under the Perception construct, Graduation Prospects display the strongest positive relationship with perception indicating

that in the minds of prospective students, a positive perception of the private university will mainly be built through the graduation prospects that are likely to be available such as the respective indicator variables of Career Prospects and Degree Status perceived by the outside world.

The responses have relatively high positive relationships between the attitudes construct and each of its dimensions, in which Reputational Consequences has delivered the highest positive impact towards attitudes

of students on the selection decision of a private university. As such, the key deciding factor would be the indicator variable of Reputational Consequences which is whether the university is well respected or not.

The above statistics illustrate that if the private university's Branding and students' Perception of the university are perceived to be positive, the Attitudes of students towards selecting the university will be positive.

Table 6

Summary Statistics of Study Constructs & Dimensions

Dimensions listed under each Construct	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Construct: Branding Efforts of Universities [Mean= 3.9593, SD=0.66442]			
Communication	100	3.7483	0.72091
Learning Environment	96	4.1687	0.82105
Reputation	98	4.4092	0.68018
Graduate Career Prospects	96	4.2813	0.86562
Image of Locality	96	3.8403	0.89831
Cultural Integration	96	3.3594	1.28699
Construct: Perceptions of Prospective Students [Mean= 3.8936, SD=0.65165]			
Graduation Prospects	94	4.2606	0.92087
Mission & Vision	94	4.2447	0.84161
Student Learning Environment	94	4.2314	0.84341
Social Environment	94	3.8369	0.99910
Practicability	90	4.0185	0.77066
Academic Position	90	3.5472	0.91450
Internal Values	90	3.8704	0.83231
Student Composition	94	3.5426	1.02564
Physical Actualities	94	3.8227	0.87914
Name & Logo	94	3.5496	1.06504
Construct: Attitudes of Prospective Students [Mean= 4.0960, SD=0.72322]			
Cognitive Responses	92	3.9891	0.89286
Affective Responses	92	4.1069	0.73953
Conative Responses	92	4.1087	0.90056
Reputational Consequences	92	4.1793	0.79345

Testing of the Four Study Hypotheses

Inferential statistical analysis in the study was mainly focused on hypothesis testing, where the hypotheses H1, H2

and H3 models took a simple linear model approach and H4 which tested the prevalence of a mediating factor, took a multiple linear regression approach.

Table 7

Hypothesis Testing: H1, H2, & H3

	HYPOTHESIS H1	HYPOTHESIS H2	HYPOTHESIS H3
Independent Variable	Branding Efforts of Private Universities	Perception of Prospective Students about Private Universities	Branding Efforts of Private Universities
Dependent Variable	Attitudes of Prospective Students regarding Private University Selection Intention	Attitudes of Prospective Students regarding Private University Selection Intention	Perception of Prospective Students about Private Universities
Study Hypothesis	Branding → Attitudes	Perceptions → Attitudes	Branding → Perceptions
R Square	0.196	0.492	0.386
Beta	0.482	0.780	0.610
Significance	0.000 [<0.05]	0.000 [<0.05]	0.000 [<0.05]
Outcome	Hypothesis H1 accepted	Hypothesis H2 accepted	Hypothesis H3 accepted

Hypothesis H1: The coefficient of determination R Squared which indicates the goodness of fit of the model is 19.6 %. This implies that only 19.6 % of the variability of Attitudes on the selection decision is explained by Branding and hence the remaining variance is described by other factors. Beta, the gradient of the model is 0.482 which is positive and significant at the 5 % level. Therefore, H1 is accepted at 5 % level of significance indicating that branding efforts of private universities has a positive relationship with the attitudes of the prospective students regarding private university selection intention.

Hypothesis H2: The R Squared value indicates that the model explains 49.2 % of the variability of the response

data around its mean. Beta, the gradient of the model is 0.780 which is positive and significant at 5 % level. It indicates that there is a positive relationship between the perceptions of prospective students on private universities and their attitudes regarding the selection intention.

Hypothesis H3: This model has a goodness of fit of 38.6 %. Beta, the slope of the model is 0.610 which is positive and significant at 5 % level of significance. It indicates that there is a positive relationship between branding efforts of private universities and the perceptions of prospective students about private universities.

Hypothesis H4: The mediating relationship of H4 was tested as illustrated below. The following three

paths are tested in order to identify the prevalence of a potential mediator effect (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

Path 1 (H1): Regress dependent variable (Attitudes) on the independent variable (Branding).

Path 2 (H3): Regress mediator variable (Perceptions) on the independent variable (Branding).

Path 3 (H4): Regress the dependent variable Attitudes (Att) on both the mediator variable Perception (Per) and independent variable Branding (Bra). The results of the above analysis is presented in Table 8.

Table 8

Hypothesis Testing: H4 (Mediating Relationship)

Path 1 & Path 2	Tested by H1 and H3
<u>Path 3:</u>	
R Square Adjusted	0.481 (Adjusted R Square used in multiple regression)
Beta [Per]	0.766
Significance [Per]	0.000 [<0.005] → Significant
Beta [Bra]	$0.023 < 0.482$ {Beta in H1} → Mediation by P
Significance [Bra]	$0.828 > 0.05$ not significant → Full Mediation
Outcome	Per fully mediates between Bra and Att

Adjusted 'R Square' is considered as the appropriate measure for multiple linear regression, (Sweet & Grace-Martin, 2003). As such, 48.1 % of the variability of the response data around its means is explained from the above multiple linear regression model, which is quite good in terms of empirical studies of this nature.

As the gradient of Branding in H4 (0.023) < Gradient of Branding in H1 (0.482), the previously significant path between the independent and dependent variables (H1) is now greatly reduced due to the mediating factor. This is further established as the slope of the mediator Perception is significant in the model. Thus, the mediator Perception is a significant predictor of

the dependent variable Attitudes, while controlling for the independent variable Branding.

If the independent variable Branding remains significant in the model when the mediator is controlled, there is partial mediation and if it is no longer significant, the findings support full mediation. It can be observed that Branding is no longer significant in the model at 5 % level in H4 when the mediator is controlled.

As such, the Perception of prospective students on private universities has a full mediating effect in the relationship between Branding of private universities and the Attitudes regarding private university selection intention.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Appropriateness of Questionnaire:
The study outcomes suggest that the questionnaire seem to represent adequate operationalization of the conceptual framework. The online questionnaire, which was a suggestion of a respondent himself proved to be more effective than the printed form. Moreover, the feedback received from

the respondents and the coordinators suggest that the online versions seem to be more user-friendly and less time consuming too.
However, 12 indicators were screened out from statistical analysis, based on reliability testing employing Cronbach's Alpha method, and further research might be needed to conclude their exclusion from future questionnaires. The rejected indicators are given in Table 9.

Table 9

Overall Summary of Rejected Indicators

Dimensions	Indicators Deleted
Construct 1: Branding efforts of private universities	
Communication	Clergy
Learning environment	Flexible courses
Graduate career prospects	Expected Income
Image of the locality	Natural beauty of locality
Cultural integration	Avenues for religious practices
Construct 2: Perceptions of prospective students about private universities	
Graduation prospects	Usefulness through life
Mission & vision	Clear & desirable mission
Learning environment	Longer teaching time
Internal values	Student mix of different backgrounds
Composition of student body	Foreign students proportion
Name & logo	Memorable name
Construct 3: Attitudes of prospective students regarding private university selection intention	
Reputational consequences	Can trust to deliver appropriate education

Implications associated with demographic & lifestyle indicators: The respondent sample consisted of 57 % females, which has no significance about the male: female ratio, though it could signal higher level of females in higher studies above GCE (A/L) as gender was not a criterion for exclusion from the sample survey. However, the fact that national parameters from the

Census- 2012 show that out of the 15-24 year old population with GCE (A/L) or above, 60.2 % are females is proof of this scenario. Further, the students have shown high involvement in extra-curricular activities at secondary school level, which implies that they could have more positive perceptions about the private universities which provide such facilities.

Branding efforts of private universities: Reputation of the private university is observed to exhibit the highest positive relationship with branding of private universities. This indicates that the reputation built over the years may be the strongest branding asset for a private university. As such, any branding efforts of a private university should be focused on emphasizing on its Brand Name, Institution Achievement, High Education Standard, Course Quality and Institution Experience which are the indicator variables of the Reputation dimension.

Perception of prospective students about private universities: Graduation Prospects display the strongest positive relationship with perception indicating that in the minds of prospective students, a positive perception of the private university will mainly be built through the graduation prospects that are likely to be available such as the respective indicator variables of Career Prospects and Degree Status perceived by the outside world.

Attitudes of prospective students about private university selection intension: The student responses have shown high positive relationships between the attitudes construct and each of its dimensions, in which Reputational Consequences delivering the highest mean score. As such, the key deciding factor would be the indicator variable of Reputational Consequences which is whether the private university is well respected or not.

Mediating Relationship: The key finding of the study comes out from H4, indicating that any branding efforts

adopted by a private university should be specifically targeted towards addressing the perceptions of prospective students in order to positively influence their attitudes towards the selection intention. This illustrates the need for private universities to ensure that appropriate resources and branding strategies with potential to actively impact the perception of prospective students are in place prior to implementing any branding decisions. When this is done, it would be vital to address the demographic and lifestyle factors of the target population as well.

Future Study Opportunities: The present study theoretically contributes to the existing body of literature through the conceptualization, analysis, and the findings. It adds novelty to private university branding and marketing literature, as the study provides perspectives to the marketing professionals to plan and implement innovative marketing initiatives. The study also opens out many opportunities for future studies. It is recommended to replicate the study on a larger sample, preferably based on random sampling techniques. The goodness of fit of the models adopted for the four study hypotheses could be judged by their R^2 values which were 19.6 %, 48.6 %, 38.0 %, and 48.1 % respectively, which suggest there are other variables that could contribute to these phenomena, as each of them only represent less than 50 % of the variability. As such, there is potential to try out such new additional variables in the future studies.

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