

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING**

**HO CHI MINH NATIONAL
ACADEMY OF POLITICS**

ACADEMY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

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**THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON BRAND EQUITY OF
VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

Major: Public Relations

Code: 9320108

SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

HANOI- 2025

Works are completed at
ACADEMY OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATION

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Reviewer 1:
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The thesis was defended before the Academy-level Thesis Assessment Committee,
meeting at the Academy of Journalism and Communication.

Hanoi,2025

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INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale for choosing the topic

In the past 30 years, communication and brand equity (BE) have become popular topics in many fields, including higher education (HE). The brand is increasingly regarded as one of the most valuable intangible assets of an organization, and communication plays a crucial role in enhancing brand equity, helping organizations build a strong and sustainable brand.

The HE is an academic and non-profit sector, but the increasing competition has prompted schools to start focusing on communication activities to build and develop brands, create reputation, differentiate themselves to attract talented students and lecturers and promote cooperation with organizations, businesses and other stakeholders.

In Vietnam, increasing competition has driven higher education institutions (HEIs) to innovate their management thinking and reform the ways they maintain relationships with customers. However, for the majority of HEIs in Vietnam, building a brand has only stopped at advertising campaigns, public relations (PR) during enrollment periods or on a temporary short-term basis. Brand building needs to be carried out on a solid strategic foundation, and communication is an especially important tool for establishing the brand of HEIs.

In terms of academics, domestic and international researchers such as Netemeyer et al. (2004), Pinar et al. (2014), Ng. & Forbes (2009), Perera, Nayak, & Van Nguyen (2020; Mourad et al. (2020); Alam and Saeed (2016); Vukasovič (2015), Hoang Anh Vien (2017), Vo Thi Thu Ha (2019), Nguyen Tien Dung (2018), ... have conducted studies on communication and branding in higher education. However, there are still many gaps in research aspects and the number of studies conducted in the context of HE in Vietnam is limited. In order to provide a scientific basis for communication in building and developing brands of Vietnamese HEIs, the author has chosen the research topic "The impact of communication on brand equity of Vietnamese higher education institutions" for the doctoral thesis in Public Relations .

2. Objectives and Research Tasks

2.1. Objectives

Based on the research and analysis of theories on communication and customer-based brand equity, the author surveys and evaluates the current state of the impact of communication on brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam. From this, the author proposes solutions to enhance the impact of communication on brand equity of these institutions.

2.2. Research Tasks

To achieve the above research objectives, specific research tasks are set forth as follows:

- The literature review synthesizes the results achieved by relevant studies on the topic and identifies research gaps;

- Systematize theories and concepts related to the topic; propose theoretical framework, research model and build a scale system with research concepts;
- Conduct surveys and test research hypotheses to understand brand communication activities and clarify the impact of communication on brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam;
- Identify issues and propose communication solutions to influence and promote the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam.

3. Subjects and Scope of the Study

3.1. Subjects

The research subject of the study is the impact of communication on brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam.

3.2. Scope of the Study

In terms of time, the thesis focuses on studying brand communication activities over a period of three years, from 2022 to 2024. Primary data was collected from May to September 2024, during which an online survey conducted via Google Forms was administered in two phases: Phase 1 from July 27, 2024, to September 2, 2024, and a follow-up phase from May 18, 2025, to May 23, 2025.

Regarding the spatial scope, the survey concentrates on two research areas:

- Survey on the impact of communication on brand equity (using questionnaires) conducted across public and private Vietnamese HEIs, mainly in Hanoi.
- In-depth survey on specific communication activities (including process analysis, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions) to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of communication on brand equity at four multidisciplinary HEIs in Hanoi: Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Thuyloi University, Phenikaa University, and the International School - Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

4. Theoretical Foundation and Research Methods

4.1. Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of the study includes theories on communication, IMC, the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) theories, and theoretical models regarding the impact of communication on brand equity as proposed by Berry (2000) and Ray et al. (2021). It also encompasses the policies and directives of the Party and State regarding HE, emphasizing the necessity of enhancing university autonomy; Planning the network of HE and pedagogical institutions for the period 2021–2030, with a vision towards 2050.

4.2. Research Methods

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques, with a design that includes multiple specific methods:

- Desk research and content analysis: This involves analyzing websites, Facebook fan pages,

strategic communication documents, and communication content from four HEIs included in the in-depth survey.

- Interview method: Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted with administrators, communication specialists, students, alumni, faculty, and communication experts.

- Statistical analysis and synthesis method: This method was used to process and analyze the data, identifying communication factors and their degree of influence on the brand equity of HEIs. Based on the research results, the author synthesizes the analysis and proposes solutions.

- Survey method using questionnaires: This aims to assess the impact of communication on brand equity from the perspectives of students and alumni. This method was conducted concurrently with the interview method. The questionnaire was designed on Google Forms based on a research model examining the impact of communication on brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam.

+) Sampling method and sample size: For students, the author located cluster sampling of public and private HEIs mainly in Hanoi. The questionnaire was posted on student fan pages of these institutions and disseminated through the influence of academic advisors, communication specialists, and student management staff. For alumni, a probability sampling method was utilized through the Vietnam Trade Union network, combined with the snowball sampling technique, encouraging participants to share the survey with their network members. The sample size was determined based on the number of observed variables in the model, with a minimum requirement of 10 observations per variable as suggested by Dinh Phi Ho (2022): $41 \times 10 = 410$.

+) Data collection results: There were 763 valid student responses and 430 valid alumni responses.

+) Data processing method: After data cleaning, the valid responses were input into SPSS 25 for analysis using techniques such as frequency analysis and descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, etc.), Cronbach's Alpha testing, CFA analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM) in AMOS 23 to test research hypotheses. ANOVA was also conducted to determine whether there are differences in brand equity between public and private HEIs in Vietnam.

5. Research Questions

- RQ1. Which communication factors put impact on the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam?
- RQ2. How does communication impact the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam?
- RQ3. What solutions can enhance the positive impact of communication on the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam?

6. Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Topic

The study expands knowledge on communication, brand communication, and CBBE of HEIs in Vietnam, providing a theoretical foundation for similar future research. The findings clarify the

role of communication in influencing brand equity, offering an overview of brand health and communication activities, which can assist HEIs in adjusting their branding strategies accordingly. Additionally, the research establishes a set of customer-based indicators for measuring brand equity, providing a basis for institutions to conduct periodic self-assessments and effective communication processes and solutions for brand development.

7. Contributions of the Thesis

Firstly, the thesis is a systematic study based on the synthesis of existing theories and research models, while also conducted practical surveys on the current state of communication activities and their impact on brand equity of HEIs. The data collected, analyzed conducted, and conclusions drawn in this thesis are entirely novel and have not been previously undertaken.

Secondly, the research provides a theoretical framework that integrates two theories typically examined in isolation: the theory of integrated marketing communications and the CBBE theory, applied to the branding of HEIs in the Vietnamese context.

Thirdly, the study reveals the relationship between communication from various sources and brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam. The level of impact of different communication factors found is also a novel aspect, providing HEIs with a basis for their management decisions.

8. Structure of the Thesis

In addition to the introduction, conclusion, references, and appendices, the thesis is structured into four chapters:

Chapter 1 : Overview of research on the impact of communication on the brand equity of higher education institutions.

Chapter 2 : Theoretical and practical foundations regarding the impact of communication on the brand equity of higher education institutions in Vietnam.

Chapter 3 : The current situation of the impact of communication on the brand equity of higher education institutions in Vietnam.

Chapter 4 : Evaluation and solutions for communication to enhance the brand equity of higher education institutions in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON BRAND EQUITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1.1. Communication in higher education

Research on communication in general is broad and has been conducted by many authors, but research related to the topic of communication in HE is still limited both in quantity and content. In Vietnam, the topic of communication in HE has begun to receive research attention from many scholars in recent years. Studies tend to lean towards policy communication. The second research trend focuses on examining the current state of communication at a HEIs.

1.2. Branding and brand equity of higher education institutions

Some prominent studies on the branding of HEIs include the studies of Xiao Yaping et al. (2023), Bulotaite (2003), Bennett, R. & Ali-Choudhury, R. (2009) , Beneke J. (2011), Sujchaphong et al. (2017), Sheninger & Rubin (2017)... In Vietnam, in the past 10 years, the topic of branding of HEIs has begun to receive attention of researchers. However, similar to communication studies, this is a new research area with a limited number of studies and not yet highly generalized, mostly case studies.

Regarding the brand equity of HEIs, there are prominent studies by Davcik et al. (2015), Ivy (2008), Pinar et al. (2011, 2014 and 2020), Mourad et al. (2011, 2019), Khanna et al. (2019), Raj and Gobinath (2019), Perera et al. (2022)... In researches of HEIs' brand, most Vietnamese authors use CBBE model. In recent years, the number of studies on this topic has been increasing. Some authors have conducted studies examining the relationship between factors affecting the brand of HEIs. These studies mainly examine the impact of students' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors on the overall brand equity or between aspects of brand equity with each other.

1.3. Impact of communication on the brand equity of higher education institutions

Directly related to the topic of the impact of communication on the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam, the author found three notable studies, including Berry's (2000) study in the service sector in general, Madhavaram et al.'s (2005) study on the relationship between communication and branding, and Ray et al.'s (2021) study on the branding of specific training programs. In Vietnam, the authors are interested in studying communication or brand equity of higher education, but research on the impact of communication on the brand equity of HEIs is almost absent.

1.4. Summary of researched content and research gaps

In Vietnam, research is often interdisciplinary between communication and marketing and brand management. Some studies examine the impact of communication on students' perceptions and behaviors in choosing an university. Communication is considered an important part of brand strategy, conveying values to the target audience. Studies apply qualitative, quantitative or mixed

methods, mainly surveying students. CBBE related research models are used to assess the impact of communication on brand equity.

There are three main research directions: i) CBBE is a separate, comprehensive concept and is measured directly; ii) CBBE is also a comprehensive brand equity but studies only identify factors affecting CBBE as factors related to customers' awareness, attitudes and behaviors; iii) CBBE is considered a multidimensional concept, measured indirectly through aspects/components of the CBBE model (brand awareness, brand association and loyalty, ...). This research topic follows the third approach and identifies communication factors affecting CBBE.

Although there are studies on university communication and branding, there is hardly any comprehensive research on the impact of communication on the CBBE of higher education institutions. Current studies mainly focus on the CBBE model, without much consideration of communication factors. Some authors analyze communication strategies but lack clear data on the relationship with CBBE. Research mainly focuses on students, ignoring other stakeholders such as lecturers and alumni. Brand experience in higher education has also not been studied much. Finally, there is no comparative study between the communication of public and private higher education institutions. These gaps create opportunities for research to determine the impact of communication on the CBBE of higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 2. PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON BRAND EQUITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

2.1. Main concepts of the topic

2.1.1. Communication

Communication is the process of transmitting information, ideas, emotions between two or more people in different forms such as language, images, sounds... directly or indirectly to enhance mutual understanding, change awareness, attitudes and adjust behavior in accordance with the purpose of individuals, groups, communities or society. Communication has specific short-term or long-term goals to build and develop brands.

2.1.2. Brand and brand equity

Brand

Brands include personal brands, product and service brands, and organizational brands. This research focuses on the research on organizational brand, concretely the brand of HEIs. HEI brand is all the impressions, associations, and emotions about the identity or recognition of a HEI in the minds of the internal and external target audience.

Brand equity (customer-based brand equity – CBBE)

The brand equity of a HEI is the value and strength of the HEI's brand, expressed in the positive feelings, assessments, attitudes, emotions and behaviors of students, alumni, faculty, staff, community and other stakeholders towards the brand.

2.1.3. Higher education institutions

HEIs are educational institutions belonging to the national education system, performing the functions of training at HE levels, scientific and technological activities, and serving the community (Clause 1, Article 4, Law on Higher Education). HEIs have legal status, including universities, colleges, and higher education institutions with other names in accordance with the provisions of law (Clause 1, Article 7). There are 2 types of higher education institutions including public HEIs and private HEIs (Clause 2, Article 7).

2.1.4. The impact of communication on the brand equity of higher education institutions

The impact of communication on the brand of a HEI is the influence of communication factors that change or positively or negatively impact the awareness, attitudes and behaviors of the target audience towards the HEI's brand.

2.2. Factors related to the brand of higher education institutions

2.2.1. Characteristics

The brand of higher education institutions is an organizational brand, with the characteristics of a service brand because universities provide training and research services. Higher education is a type of service that is intangible, holistic, unstable and simultaneous.

2.2.2. Role

The role of a HEI's brand is to i) ensure quality and meet the expectations of students and stakeholders, helping to send a strong signal of prestige and quality ; ii) raise awareness among potential students and parents, serving the recruitment process; iii) attract highly qualified lecturers and managers, creating motivation to work and develop their abilities; iv) contribute to creating personal value for students and alumni, helping them increase their value thanks to the reputation of the institution; and v) differentiate from competitors and gain market share.

2.2.3. Constituent elements

The basic components present in a brand include intangible (promise, brand identity) and tangible (brand identity elements such as logo, brand name, slogan, ...) elements (Melewar & Jenkins, 2002; Stern, 2006 and Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009)

2.3. Practical basis related to the impact of communication on brand equity of Vietnamese HEIs

2.3.1. Point of views of the Party and State on higher education

Taking care of education and training development is always a top priority. The 13th National Congress documents affirmed that education is the top national policy, emphasizing "promoting university autonomy". The 2012 Law on Higher Education and Decree 99/2019 have defined autonomy for HEIs, encouraging brand communication activities. The Government has also issued programs to apply technology, including AI, in HE, creating opportunities for brand development through modern technology. The planning of the HE network for the period 2021 - 2030 aims to develop modern facilities that meet quality standards, and a vision to 2050 to meet regional and international standards, with the proportion of university students from 45% to 50%.

2.3.2. Policies of higher education institutions on communication and branding

HEIs are beginning to focus on building communication and branding policies to enhance their reputation and attract students, faculty, and partners. While many private HEIs have implemented strategic communication activities, some large public schools have also begun to shift towards long-term brand building. However, the number of HEIs with dedicated communication departments is still limited, leading to unprofessional brand communication. Schools are moving to digital platforms. Most communication activities still focus on enrollment without a long-term strategy. Top schools have tried to enhance their reputation through international rankings in recent years.

2.4. Related theories, analytical framework and proposed research model on the impact of communication on brand equity

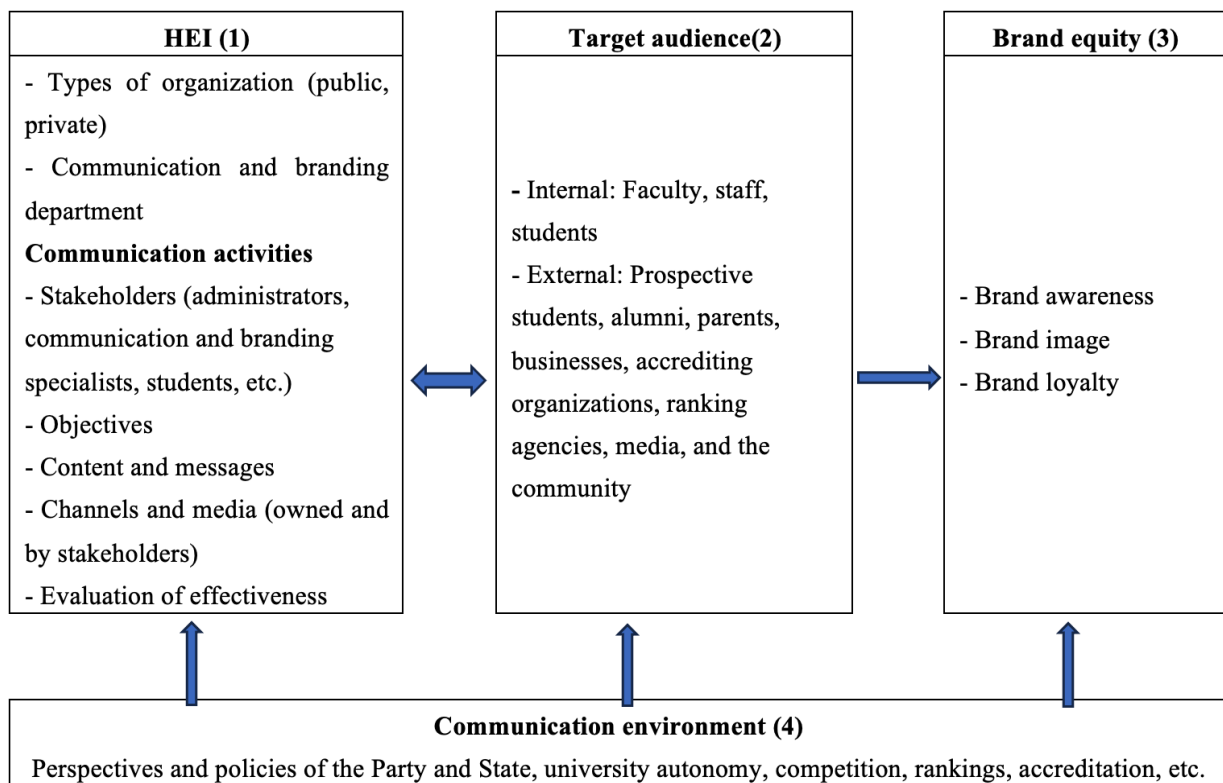
2.4.1. Related theories

- Communication theory: The 7-element communication model by Nguyen Van Dung and Do Thi Thu Hang (2012).

- IMC theory : This is an important approach in modern communication, helping organizations integrate communication efforts to achieve short-term marketing and long-term branding goals. IMC focuses on internal and external customer interaction with the brand through diverse channels, creating a consistent experience and improving customer relationships.

- Aaker and Keller's brand equity theory (CBBE) emphasizes the importance of building strong brand equity through customer awareness, attitude, and behavior. Aaker (1991) identified five dimensions of brand equity, including brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and loyalty, while Keller (1993) measures brand equity through brand awareness and image, leading to loyalty.

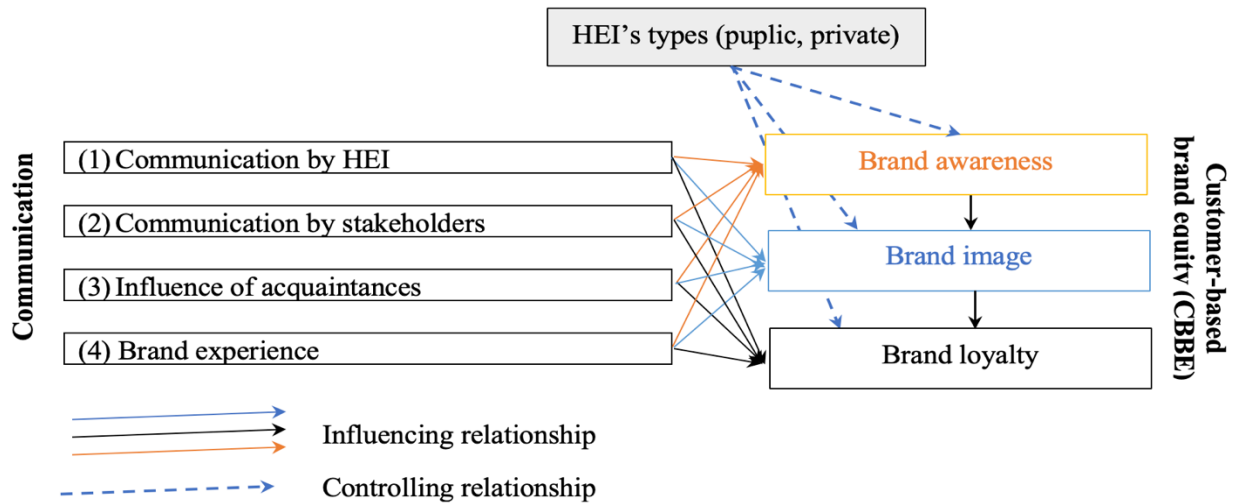
2.4.2. Analytical framework and proposed research model



Source: Proposed by the author

Figure 1. Analytical framework of the communication in HEIs

Measuring the impact of communication on a brand equity requires considering short-term and long-term communication objectives. In this study, the author only studies the aspects of brand equity from the customer's perspective including brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty (*Figure 1*). The proposed research model further examines these aspects, and also studies the factors of communication that put impact on CBBE (*Figure 2*).



Source: Proposed by the author

Figure 02. Research model of the impact of communication on CBBE in HEIs

Here are five hypotheses to answer the question about the impact of communication on brand equity, including:

H2a. Communication has a positive impact on brand awareness of HEIs in Vietnam.

H2b. Communication has a positive impact on brand image of HEIs in Vietnam.

H2c. Communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty of HEIs in Vietnam.

H2d. Brand awareness has a positive impact on brand image of HEIs in Vietnam.

H2e. Brand image has a positive impact on brand loyalty of HEIs in Vietnam.

2.5. Evaluation criteria and related scales for the Impact of Communication on Brand Equity of Higher Education Institutions

2.5.1. Evaluation Criteria and Scales for Communication Factors

2.5.1.1. Communication by Higher Education Institutions

This includes the content, identity, and brand essence that institutions proactively create and promote in an integrated and consistent manner across communication channels to help the public recognize and understand the brand's value. Communication content may include information about courses, scholarship programs, as well as vision, mission, and core values. Brand identity elements such as the institution's name, logo, colors, and symbols are also effectively used in communication activities to help the public understand the brand's message and value.

Authors including Berry (2000), So and King (2010), Ray et al. (2021), and Buil et al. (2023) have studied and demonstrated the impact of organizational communication on brand image, brand awareness, and brand equity in general. Pinar et al. (2014) also indicate that brand equity perception in HE is determined by available information from advertising activities.

2.5.1.2. Communication from Stakeholders

Communication from stakeholders includes activities not created or controlled by HEI, such as positive endorsements from scholars, organizations, businesses, press, and other stakeholders. These activities play a crucial role in influencing public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.

2.5.1.3. Influence of Acquaintances

The influence of acquaintances refers to the impact from friends, influencers, and individuals within social networks on public perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward the brand.

2.5.1.4. Brand Experience

The brand experience of a HEI encompasses the feelings, perceptions, and behavioral responses of the public toward the institution's brand, generated through direct interaction with the HEI's brand, faculty, staff, and other support services. The importance of customer experience in forming and developing brand equity has been widely recognized by researchers worldwide such as Aaker (1991), Keller (2013), Brakus et al. (2009), Berry (2000), and Girard & Pinar (2021).

2.5.2. Evaluation criteria and scales for brand equity factors

2.5.2.1. Brand awareness

Brand awareness regarding a HEI refers to the extent to which customers and stakeholders can recall or recognize the institution's brand. Brand awareness is determined by available information about the institution from advertising, word-of-mouth, or brand experiences.

2.5.2.2. Brand image

The brand image of a HEI is how the public perceives and associates with the HEI's brand. Brand image is formed from associations, emotions, and beliefs customers have about the brand. A positive brand image is created through favorable, strong, and unique brand associations in customers' minds. Brand identity elements like the institution's name, logo, primary colors, slogan, and brand culture are often used to create unique, recognizable brand associations and convey the institution's mission and core values.

2.5.2.3. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to the support and attachment of customers to the brand of a HEI through attitudes (like, pride, protection, etc.) and behaviors (such as enrolling in higher programs, spreading information, sponsoring, recruiting students, and collaborating) during or after experiencing the training services and other services provided by the institution.

CHAPTER 3. THE CURRENT STATE OF THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON BRAND EQUITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN VIETNAM

3.1. Overview of the Higher Education System in Vietnam and Selected Institutions for In-Depth Study

3.1.1. Higher Education Institutions in Vietnam

The Vietnamese higher education system consists of 240 institutions, including 7 universities, 216 colleges, and 17 academies, excluding universities and academies under the Ministry of Public Security and Defense. 72.5% of these institutions are public, while 27.5% are private. In terms of training fields, Vietnamese higher education institutions offer 367 different undergraduate programs across 23 major groups, which are diverse and comprehensive.

3.1.2. Selected Higher Education Institutions for In-Depth Study

Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Thuyloi University, Phenikaa University, and International School.

3.2. Survey of Communication Activities of Selected Higher Education Institutions for In-Depth Study

3.2.1. Communication Subjects

Communication subjects include higher education institutions whose communication activities largely depend on the school's development strategy. Resource organization typically follows two approaches: i) Centralized: A dedicated department coordinates and implements activities among units (Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Phenikaa University); ii) Decentralized: Utilizing existing resources such as faculty, students, and various departments responsible for communications (Thuyloi University, International School).

3.2.2. Communication Objectives

According to administrators, the university's brand encompasses not only its name and image but also its identity, reputation, and the impression it leaves on students, partners, and the community. Communication is seen as a tool not only for recruitment but also for reflecting training and research activities. By aligning the brand with development strategies, higher education institutions aim for long-term brand objectives alongside performance targets, such as enrollment numbers and tuition revenue. This requires a systematic communication strategy with consistent content and brand identity that clearly and distinctly represents the institution's essence.

3.2.3. Target Audience

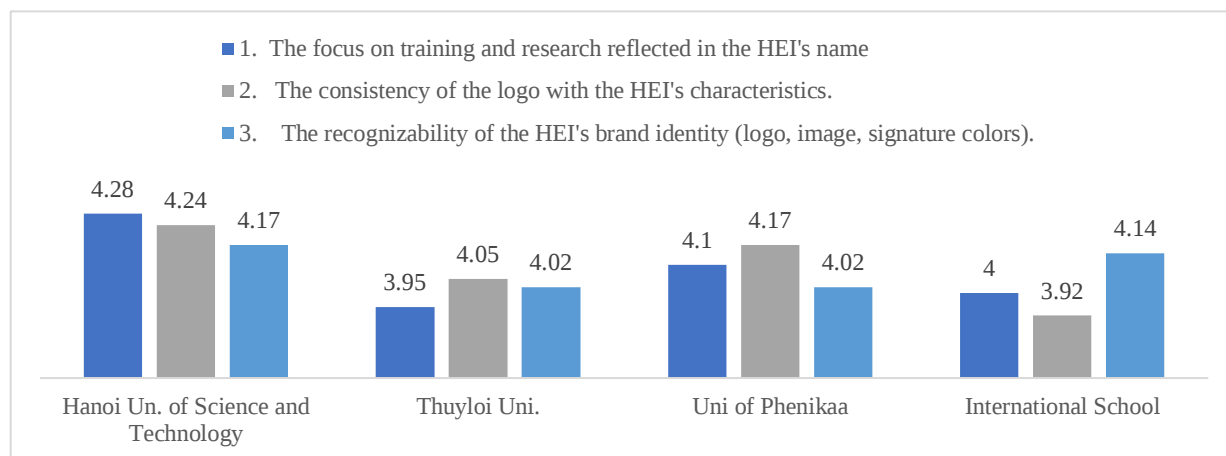
The target audience includes not only students but also various other stakeholders. Interview results indicate that students and faculty are essential in communication activities and should be prioritized in the communication strategy. They experience the brand daily and play a crucial role in creating brand value. The higher education environment in Vietnam, especially in the North, shows

strong family ties, making parents an important audience. Alumni, particularly successful ones, are also emphasized by institutions in building networks. While other stakeholders (the community and businesses) are important, they are given lower priority.

3.2.4. Content and Communication Messages

3.2.4.1. Brand Identity

Survey results from the four higher education institutions indicate varying levels of consistency in their brand identities.



Source: Author's research results

Chart 1. Brand awareness of 4 HEIs

3.2.4.2. Communication content

The survey results of official communication channels (website and YouTube) show that communication content is very diverse, mainly revolving around school introduction, enrollment and image promotion. Hanoi University of Science and Technology implements many contents related to training, research and international cooperation, while other schools focus more on enrollment information. Training quality is considered an important factor in brand building, demonstrated through facilities, training programs, teaching staff, and student success.

Administrators agree that promoting research results is necessary to affirm training quality, while emphasizing educational philosophy and values brought to society. Phenikaa University focuses on student experience and achievements in international rankings. In addition to enrollment promotion, schools also focus on image through cultural and sports activities. HEIs are also bold in sharing news from outside, using positive reviews from the press and stakeholders as “leverage” to enhance their brands.

3.2.5. Channels and media

3.2.5.1. Owned media channels of higher education institutions

Hanoi University of Science and Technology is a pioneer in applying integrated communication (IMC) methods. Phenikaa University also effectively implements IMC. Although social networks make it easy for schools to create multiple communication channels, only a few have

a clear strategy. Thuyloi University has difficulty managing communication channels due to the lack of unified regulations.

HEIs use multiple channels such as websites, Facebook fanpages, and other platforms for communication. The Youth Union - Student Association plays an important role in spreading information and creating a learning movement. Bach Khoa University has developed an internal communication strategy, encouraging lecturers and students to become brand ambassadors. Phenikaa University emphasizes the value of pride, while Thuyloi University creates a forum to connect students and alumni.

Internal communication helps to strengthen the spirit of solidarity and attachment between students, lecturers and staff, leading to active participation in communication activities. Administrators find that information from lecturers and staff is often trustworthy, and the spirit of solidarity will promote the HE community to actively participate in communication activities.

3.2.5.2. Communication channels of stakeholders

External communication channels implemented by stakeholders include press agencies, accreditation organizations, businesses, and online public opinion. The survey shows that Hanoi University of Science and Technology has a specialized department to effectively manage information and image in the media. The Center for Communication and Digital Knowledge coordinates with the Ministry of Education and Training to organize annual press conferences, using mass media to reach a wide audience, with many articles published from 2020 to 2023.

Phenikaa University also focuses on media relations through a dedicated PR department and the “Press Talks About Us” column on the website. Thuyloi University values press relations as a tool for promoting its image, while the International School maintains good relations with the media and divides responsibilities between departments related to enrollment and non-enrollment.

3.2.5.3. Events and brand experience activities

Career guidance activities for high school students started in 2017, with Hanoi University of Science and Technology taking the lead. The school organized a "One day as a student" tour and a lab tour, while Thuyloi University held an Open Day. Phenikaa University focused on modern facilities and organized virtual tours as well as Campus Tours led by students, in order to create positive reactions from the public and effectively introduce the school's image.

3.2.5.4. Comparing the perspectives of administrators, students and alumni on communication channels

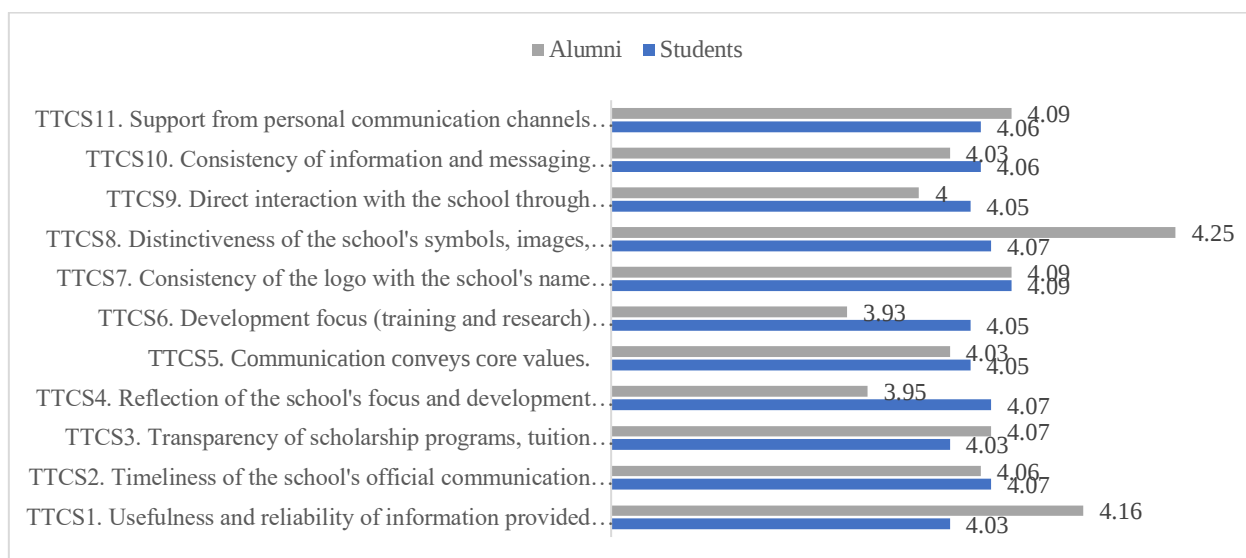
Administrators had different assessments of the most important communication channel. Administrators of Hanoi University of Science and Technology emphasized Facebook for its popularity and interactivity, while the International School considered the website as the most trusted platform. At Thuyloi University, the choice of channels changes every year, often divided into social networks and official channels, along with information from acquaintances. The survey results show that Facebook Fanpage is the most popular channel with 63,2% of students and 57% of alumni using

it. Website is followed by 59% of students, while Zalo, teachers and friends account for 55,3%, 53,7%, and 53,3% respectively. Email is the least popular channel with 47,3%, and newspapers and television only reach 18,2%. For alumni, friends are second after Facebook Fanpage with 52,6%.

3.3. Survey of the impact of communication on brand equity of Vietnamese higher education institutions

3.3.1. Evaluation of the communication factors

3.3.1.1. Communication by higher education institution

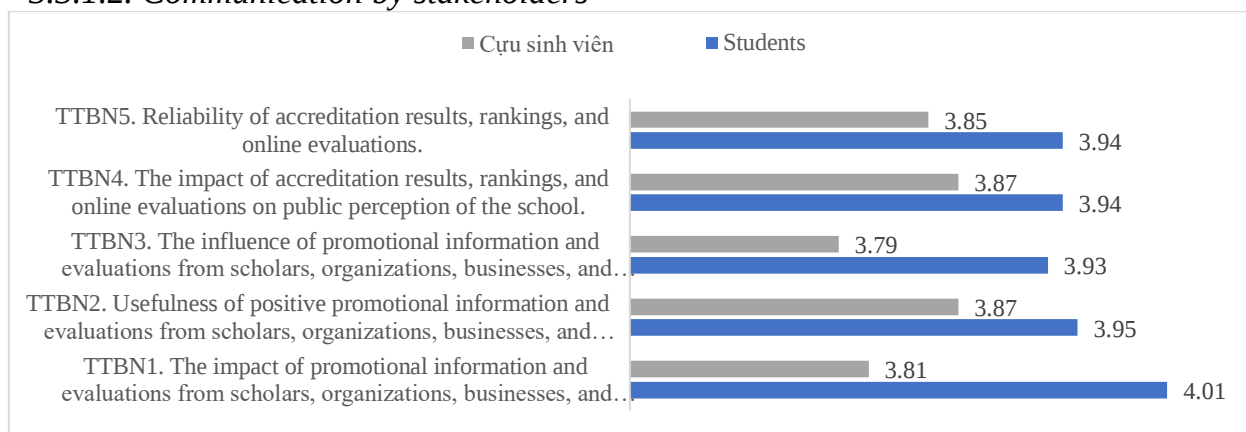


Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 2 Communication by higher education institutions

3.3.1.2. Communication by stakeholders

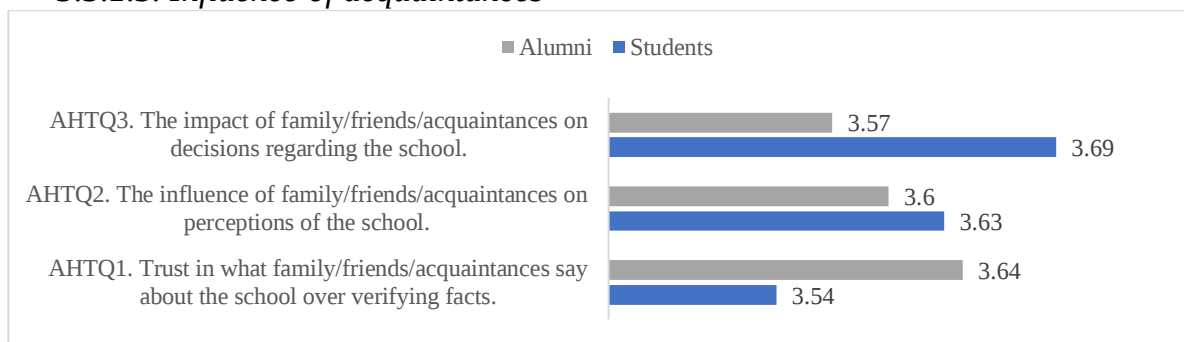


Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 3. Communication by stakeholders

3.3.1.3. Influence of acquaintances

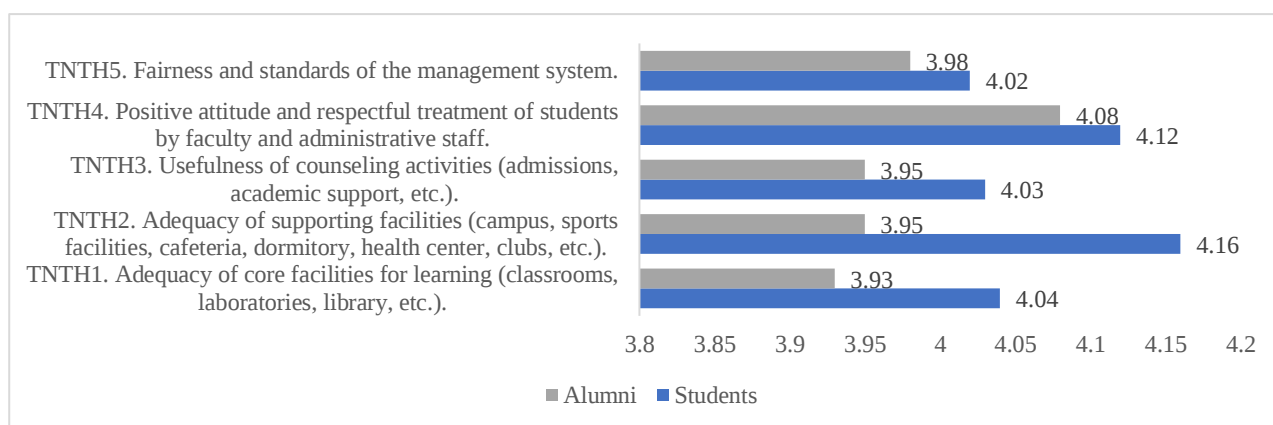


Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 4. Influence of acquaintances

3.3.1.4. Brand experience



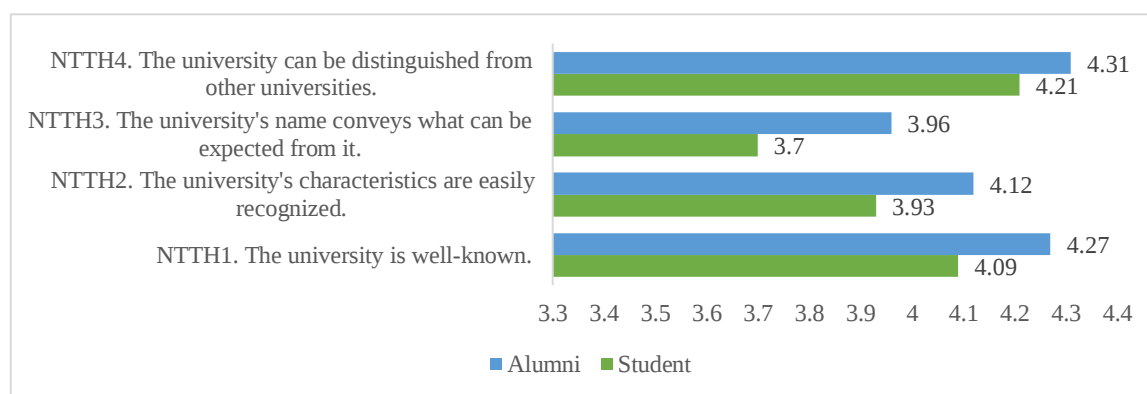
Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 5. Brand experience

3.3.2. Assessment of brand equity factors

3.3.2.1. Brand awareness

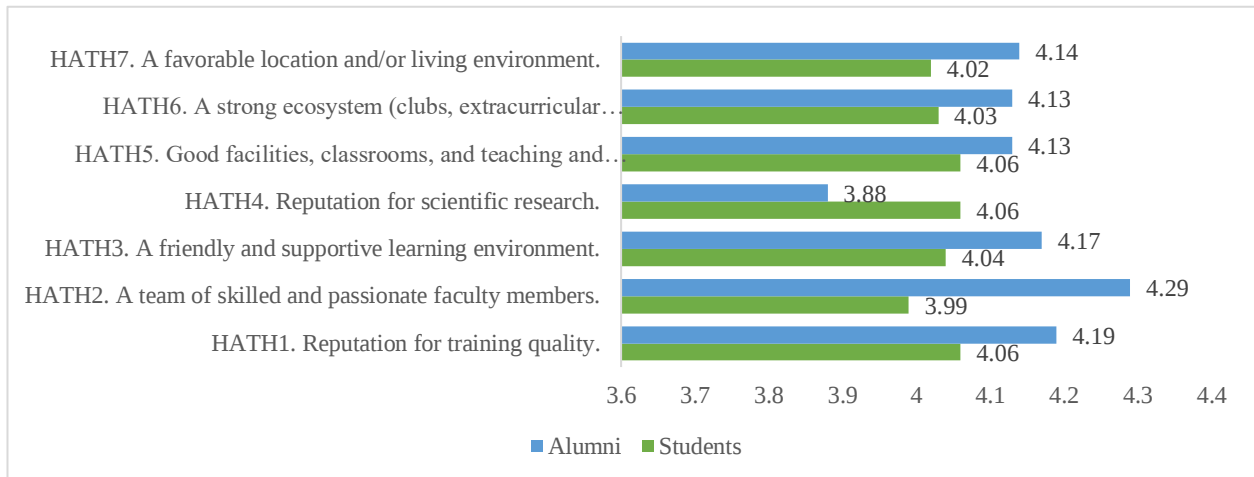


Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 7. Brand awareness

3.3.2.2. Brand image

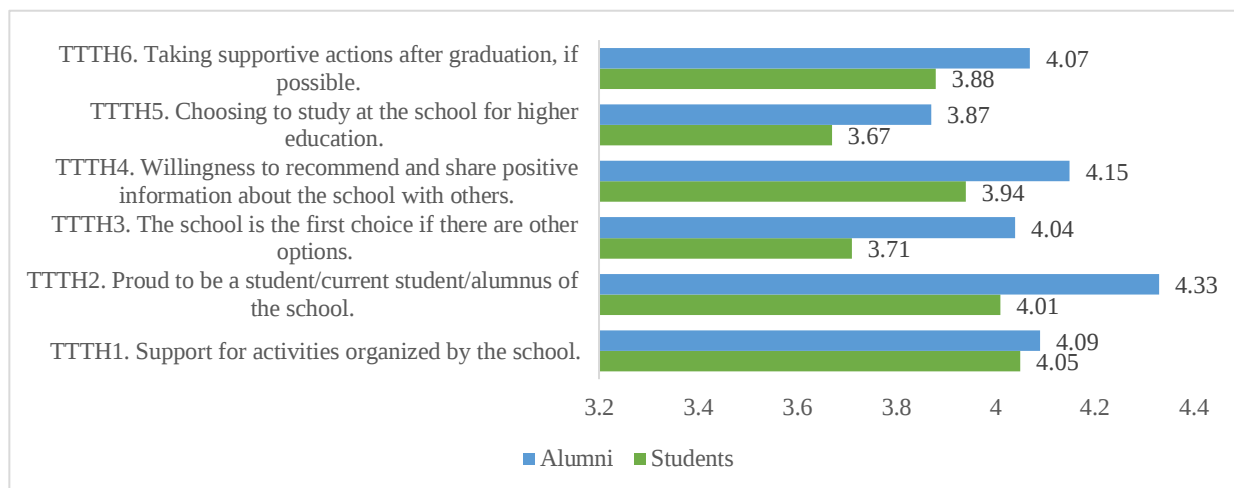


Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 8. Brand image

3.3.2.3. Brand loyalty



Note: 1. Totally disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Totally agree.

Source: Author's research results

Chart 9. Brand loyalty

3.3.3. The impact of communication on brand equity

3.3.3.1. Reliability test by Cronbach Alpha coefficient

All scales have three or more questions, which are eligible for calculating the Cronbach α coefficient, with values ranging from 0,814 to 0,940, indicating that the scale is reliable according to Nunally (1978) and Hair et al. (2010). The item-total correlation coefficient is also greater than 0,7, indicating that there is no need to remove any observed variables, allowing the scales to be used in official research.

3.3.3.2. Confirmatory factor analysis CFA

Table 1. Testing the Model Fit in CFA

Test	Thresholds	Value
PCLOSE (p-value for close fit)	≥ 0.05 is acceptable, the model has the ability to fit the data well.	1,000
CMIN/df	≤ 3 is good	2,064
CFI	≥ 0.8 is acceptable	0,959
RMSEA	$\leq 0,08$ is good	0,037

Source: Author's analysis using AMOS, compared to the thresholds set by Hair et al. (2010)

3.3.3.3. Results of Convergent and Discriminant Validity Testing of the Scale

Table 2. Model Validity Measures

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	TTCS	HATH	TTBN	TNTH	TTTH	NTTH	AHTQ
TTCS	0.920	0.510	0.501	0.922	0.714						
HATH	0.878	0.508	0.492	0.879	0.663***	0.712					
TTBN	0.880	0.595	0.549	0.881	0.705***	0.676***	0.771				
TNTH	0.940	0.758	0.501	0.944	0.708***	0.702***	0.686***	0.871			
TTTH	0.884	0.564	0.549	0.897	0.668***	0.672***	0.741***	0.657***	0.751		
NTTH	0.814	0.523	0.495	0.815	0.643***	0.683***	0.703***	0.669***	0.684***	0.723	
AHTQ	0.897	0.745	0.322	0.937	0.445***	0.512***	0.548***	0.436***	0.567***	0.554***	0.863

Note : *** $p < 0.001$ (0.1%)

Source: Author's analysis using AMOS.

Table 2 shows that all scales have CR values > 0.7 and average variance extracted (AVE) values > 0.5 , demonstrating convergence. Maximum shared variance (MSV) $<$ AVE, ensuring the discriminant validity of the scale. According to Hu and Bentler (1999), it can be concluded that the scales in the study are reliable, convergent and discriminant, suitable for further analysis.

3.3.3.4. Results of analyzing the impact of communication on brand equity of Vietnamese higher education institutions

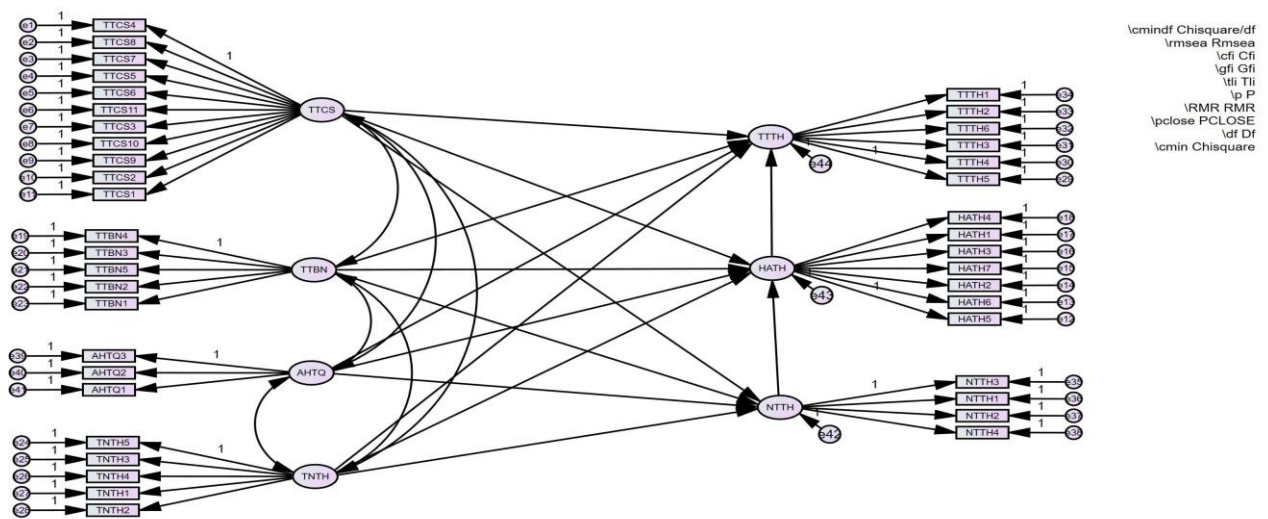
Table 3. Results of analyzing the impact of communication on CBBE using SEM model

Standardized Regression Weights				
			Estimate	P
Brand awareness	<---	Communication by HEI	0, 147	0.005
	<---	Communication by stakeholders	0,314	≤ 0.001
	<---	Influence of acquaintances	0, 203	≤ 0.001
	<---	Brand Experience	0, 262	≤ 0.001
Brand Image	<---	Communication by HEI	0, 164	≤ 0.001
	<---	Communication by stakeholders	0, 143	0,009
	<---	Influence of acquaintances	0, 111	0.002
	<---	Brand Experience	0, 290	≤ 0.001
	<---	Brand awareness	0, 223	≤ 0.001

Brand loyalty	<---	Communication by HEI	0, 151	0.001
	<---	Communication by stakeholders	0,347	≤ 0.001
	<---	Influence of acquaintances	0, 173	≤ 0.001
	<---	Brand Experience	0, 121	0,009
	<---	Brand Image	0, 165	≤ 0.001

Source: Author's analysis on AMOS

With a sig level of 99%, the communication variables impact the TSTH variables at a level expressed by the standardized regression weights. The relationship between the impact of communication on TSTH and the relationship between awareness on brand image and brand image on brand loyalty is illustrated in *Figure 3*.



Source: Author's analysis on AMOS

Figure 3. Model of Communication impact on CBBE of HEIs in Vietnam

The results of the research hypothesis testing showed that the hypotheses were accepted.

Table 4. Results of testing research hypothesis 2

Hypothesis	Content	Result
<i>Hypothesis 2a</i>	Brand communication has a positive impact on brand awareness of Vietnamese HEIs.	Accepted
<i>Hypothesis 2b</i>	Brand communication has a positive impact on brand image of Vietnamese HEIs.	Accepted
<i>Hypothesis 2c</i>	Brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty of Vietnamese HEIs.	Accepted
<i>2d Hypothesis</i>	Brand awareness has a positive impact on brand image of HEIs.	Accepted
<i>Hypothesis 2e</i>	Brand image has a positive impact on brand loyalty of HEIs	Accepted

Source: Author's research results

The research results on the impact of brand awareness on brand image and brand loyalty are consistent with the CBBE foundational theory of Aaker (1991) and Keller (2009, 2003, 2013), as well

as studies on the impact of CBBE aspects.

The impact of communication on brand awareness

According to the research results presented in Table 3, brand communication has a positive impact on brand awareness of Vietnamese HEIs at different levels. Among the factors, communication by stakeholders has the strongest impact (0.314) on forming students' awareness. This is followed by brand experience (0.262), influence of acquaintances (0.203) and communication by HEI (0.147). This demonstrates the important role of press, media, rankings, word of mouth, etc. in promoting the reputation of the school and highlighting the difference of HEIs in a highly competitive context of Vietnamese HE. Besides, maintaining the quality of training and quality of service is undeniable.

The impact of communication on brand image

Brand communication has been shown to have a positive impact on the brand image of Vietnamese HEIs at different levels, in which brand experience and communication by HEI have the strongest impact (0.290). Brand image is specific associations about facilities, perceptions about the quality of training, research and teaching staff. To be able to help the brand image be positive in the minds of students, daily quality experiences and official information of the school are the most important. Communication by HEI, communication by stakeholders and influence of acquaintances have a moderate (0.147; 0.143) and weak (0.111) impact on the brand image of Vietnamese HEIs.

The impact of communication on brand loyalty

Brand communication has a positive impact on brand loyalty of Vietnamese HEIs at different levels, in which communication by stakeholders has the strongest impact (0.347) on student loyalty towards the brand of Vietnamese HEIs. The influence of acquaintances has a significant impact (0.173). In practice, when observing Hanoi University of Science and Technology and Thuyloi University developing alumni networks, emphasizing pride and the tradition of many people in the family studying at the same university has positive impacts, with strong spillover effects. Communication by HEI and brand experience have a moderate impact (0.151) and a weak impact (0.121) on student loyalty towards the brand of Vietnamese HEIs.

Differences in CBBE between two types of higher education institutions

One way ANOVA test was conducted to test the hypothesis of equality of two overall means of brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty based on two samples of students from public higher education institutions and a sample of students from private higher education institutions. The test results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of testing the differences between public and private HEIs (ANOVA test)

Relationship with HEI's type	Homogeneity of Variance	Conclusion	ANOVA value	Conclusion	Trend
Brand awareness	Sig 0,035 ($<0,05$)	A difference in variance between the	Sig 0,315	No difference between brand	Brand awareness in public HEIs is

		two groups of HEIs → the Welch test results in the Robust Tests of Equality of Means table.		awareness of public or private HEIs	3.9965; brand awareness in private HEIs is 3.9340
Brand image	Sig 0,046 (<0,05)	A difference in variance between the two groups of HEIs → the Welch test results in the Robust Tests of Equality of Means table.	Sig 0,912	No difference between brand image of public or private HEIs	Brand image in public HEIs is 4.0386; Brand image in private HEIs is 4.0326
Brand Loyalty	Sig 0,533 (>0,05)	No difference in variance between school groups → the F test results in the ANOVA table.	Sig 0,536	No difference between brand loyalty of public or private HEIs	Brand loyalty in public HEIs is 3.8672; Brand loyalty in private HEIs is 3.9036

Source: Author's research results

The results showed that there was no difference in CBBE between the two groups of public and private HEIs. In all HEIs, regardless of the type of institution, public or private, HEI communication activities had an impact on CBBE.

CHAPTER 4. EVALUATION AND SOLUTIONS PROPOSED TO PROMOTE THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON BRAND EQUITY OF THE VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

4.1. Evaluation of the impact of communication on brand equity of Vietnamese higher education institutions

4.1.1. Advantages and causes

The survey results show that many schools have made positive progress in the context of digital transformation and university autonomy policies. They have changed their management thinking by issuing communication regulations, building brand strategies and developing new brand identities. Many schools have identified information sources from owned channels such as websites and fanpages, and applied a two-step communication model. Brand experience activities, such as Open Days and virtual tours, have also been enhanced. HEIS have taken advantage of social networks to build diverse communication channels, expanding the target audience beyond students. Finally, the application of new technology has helped improve the feedback process and create strong interactions, while providing indicators to evaluate communication effectiveness in the context of modernization.

4.1.2. Limitations and causes

Communications at Vietnamese HEIS have made great progress, but still face diverse difficulties. Many schools have not linked communications with branding, mainly focusing on enrollment without a clear strategy. Not all HEIs have a dedicated communications department, leading to difficulties in brand image management. Internal communications activities have not been focused on, affecting the pride of staff and students. Many institutions still do communications out of habit. The brand identity elements at some HEIs are still inconsistent, while the strength of the alumni network has not been exploited. Finally, communication goals are often unclear and there are no effective metrics.

4.2. Issues for communication of Vietnamese higher education institutions

To compete and contribute to the Education Development Strategy to 2030, schools need to implement many solutions, especially in brand communication. First, it is necessary to clearly define short-term communication goals for enrollment and long-term communication goals for brand building; optimize human resources and establish a specialized department; exploit internal resources; need to strengthen integrated communication, diversify communication channels to reach target audiences; exploit the potential of alumni to build a support network; position and identify the brand; develop long-term relationships with public groups; identify clear metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of communication activities; and need to manage the communication process consistently and build a specific governance process to improve efficiency and positively impact the brand equity.

4.3. Solutions to promote the impact of communication on the brand equity of Vietnamese higher education institutions

4.3.1. Linking communication with brand strategy

The brand of a HEI is an important intangible asset that needs to be systematically built and developed, closely linked to the development of the HEI. Brand communication needs to be closely integrated into the overall development strategy, ensuring that all activities are directed towards common goals, enhancing the brand equity and reputation of the school. This connection creates a synergy, helping to identify appropriate messages, building trust and loyalty from students, lecturers, and stakeholders.

4.3.2. Build a specialized department for communications and branding

Institutions need to establish a dedicated communications department to ensure a consistent voice across all channels and platforms. Communications not only provides information but also builds and reinforces institutional culture, develops relationships with students, alumni and stakeholders, as well as resolves issues and builds brand image. Therefore, this communications department will advise and support the board of directors in related activities.

4.3.3. Develop internal communications and create effective brand touchpoints

HEIs need to develop internal communications to create unity and synergy between faculty, staff and students, and to build organizational culture and brand identity. To create a consistent brand image, all members need to clearly understand the brand identity and actively participate in communication activities. When they are aware of and proud of the brand, they will become brand ambassadors, contributing to protecting and developing the positive image of the HEI.

4.3.4. Apply an integrated brand communication approach

Schools need to adopt an integrated brand communications approach to effectively coordinate across departments to achieve common goals. Brand reviews should be conducted periodically, with clear rules for communications governance, including identity and communication channels, to create consistency. In the context of social media and AI technology, schools need to adopt a multi-channel strategy that is appropriate for each audience's demographic characteristics. Building a brand community will promote positive information and create engagement. Finally, creating a friendly and empowering environment for students through support activities will strengthen loyalty and a clear brand image.

4.3.5. Building a consistent brand identity

A set of unified brand identity elements, including the brand name, logo, colors, slogan, and facilities, should be developed to reflect the brand identity. This identity should incorporate tangible and intangible elements such as vision, mission, and behavioral culture. The brand name should be memorable and evoke positive associations, while the logo should convey a lasting and compelling message. The slogan should be concise, reflecting the educational philosophy, and the jingle should create a unique identity. The main color and typeface should also be standardized to ensure consistency. The design process should seek input from faculty, students, and alumni to suit a wide range of audiences. Guidelines for using the identity should be developed to ensure consistency in internal communications and effective message dissemination.

4.3.6. Enhance positive relationships with stakeholders and strengthen brand loyalty

Each stakeholder, such as students, faculty, staff, alumni... has a role to play. Students are not only customers but also internal members, future alumni, so building relationships with them needs

to be continuous from the moment they come into contact with the brand. Faculty and staff are the ones who directly provide services and need to be created a friendly and professional working environment. Relations with the press and alumni help expand the press network and support the school's activities. Alumni, especially successful ones, can create a support network and be an effective communication channel through word of mouth and sponsorship of HEI's activities.

4.3.7. Building indicators to measure communication effectiveness

To measure communication effectiveness in the digital age, HEIs can use metrics such as followers, engagement, and reputation ratings. However, assessing the impact of communication on HEI's brand equity is often difficult and requires patience. Each audience has its own communication goals, so measuring effectiveness needs to focus on CBBE aspects and use metrics appropriate to each specific goal.

4.3.8. Building and applying a communication process to build brand equity



Source: Author

Figure 4. Communication process to build brand equity in HE

CONCLUSION

The research topic on the impact of communication on the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam with a mixed qualitative and quantitative research method. The research has built a comprehensive picture of brand communication activities at HEIs through studying the Vietnamese context and answering three research questions: Which communication factors put impact on the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam? How does communication impact the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam? What solutions can enhance the positive impact of communication on the brand equity of HEIs in Vietnam?

An in-depth survey of communication activities at four HEIs provides a diverse picture of communication models and the richness in implementing communication activities aimed at brand goals. The survey results by questionnaire show that communication affects the CBBE of HEIs at different levels. Communication by HEIs, communication by stakeholders, influence of acquaintances and brand experience have positive impacts on brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty. The study also shows that regardless of whether the school is public or private, communication has a positive impact on CBBE. In addition, the comparison results between brand awareness, brand image and brand loyalty between students and alumni show that alumni perceive and act towards the brand of HEIs more positively in almost all aspects. This suggests that HEIs should build long-term strategic relationships with alumni.

From the research results, the author evaluates the advantages, disadvantages and causes of communication results, thereby identifying the problems that HEIs are facing. Proposed solutions to solve the problems include integrating communication strategy into brand strategy, development strategy; building a specialized department for communication and branding; developing internal communication and creating effective brand touchpoints; applying an integrated brand communication approach; building a consistent brand identity; enhancing positive relationships with stakeholders and strengthening brand loyalty; building indicators to measure communication effectiveness; and finally building and applying a communication process to build CBBE.

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions, there are still some limitations in the scope of research and survey subjects. However, these limitations also suggest new research directions, such as expanding the scope of research to HEIs in other regions, international HEIs; surveying other subjects such as potential students, researchers, and businesses with a scale adjusted accordingly to have a more comprehensive perspective.

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