

Barriers To Branding: A Study On The Obstacles Faced By Self-Financing Arts And Science Colleges In Calicut District, Kerala

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Abstract

The higher education landscape in Kerala has witnessed a tremendous increase in the number of self-financing arts and science colleges, particularly in Malabar region, Kerala. These institutions are privately managed and operating with the minimal Government financial support. While these institutions play a vital role in higher education system, Kerala, they face an intense competition to establish a distinct identity in the educational landscape in Kerala. This study explore the major challenges faced by Self-financing arts and science colleges in formulating and implementing branding strategies .Through a qualitative approach involving interview and questionnaire with college management and students ,study contribute to a deep understanding of the challenges of self-financing arts and science colleges.

Keywords: Branding strategies, Self-financing colleges, Arts and science college, Higher Education, Brand Identity, Challenges in Branding, Malabar region

INTRODUCTION

The higher education landscape in India has changed significantly. There has been a notable increase in self-financing institutions (SFIs) alongside traditional government-funded colleges. This growth aims to meet the rising demand for higher education, especially in fields like Arts and Science. However, the large number of these institutions has created fierce competition, pushing colleges to develop strategic methods to attract and keep students. In this competitive setting, strong branding has become essential, helping institutions create a unique identity, convey their value, and gain trust from stakeholders. Recognized for its rich educational history, has also seen a rise in self-financing Arts and Science colleges. While these institutions help improve access to education in the region, many struggle to build a strong brand presence. Unlike established government colleges that benefit from a long-standing reputation, public funding, and perceived stability, self-financing institutions usually operate with limited funds and face doubts about their quality and long-term success. This gap highlights the urgent need to understand the specific challenges that hinder branding efforts in these colleges. This study intends to explore these issues, contributing to a better understanding of the unique dynamics of higher education branding in Calicut District.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To find out various obstacles faced by self-financing arts and science colleges while branding their institutions
- To analyses the influence of these barriers on students enrollment
- To give recommendations for self-financing Arts and Science colleges in Calicut district to overcome branding challenges and improve their competitive position

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Branding, typically associated with commercial products and services, has become increasingly important in higher education. Universities and colleges are starting to recognize the need to create a distinct brand identity to draw in students, faculty, and funding (Chapleo, 2011; Naidoo, 2010).

Branding in Higher Education: Branding in higher education is more than just logos and slogans. It includes an institution's reputation, values, academic programs, student experience, and graduate outcomes (Ivy, 2008).

A strong brand can improve an institution's visibility, set it apart from competitors, nurture a sense of community, and attract key stakeholders. Important aspects of a solid educational brand include academic reputation, faculty expertise, infrastructure, student support services, and an alumni network (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

CHALLENGES FOR SELF-FINANCING INSTITUTIONS:

Research on self-financing institutions in developing countries shows common challenges like funding shortages, quality assurance concerns, and lack of accreditation (Mohanty & Panda, 2010). These institutions often depend largely on student fees, which limits their ability to invest in marketing and infrastructure. The rapid rise of SFIs has also led to worries about quality control and the appearance of unreliable operations, negatively affecting the entire self-financing sector.

Specific Barriers to Branding: Several studies have pinpointed specific barriers to effective branding in various contexts:

Financial Constraints: Limited marketing budgets often restrict the scope and reach of branding campaigns (Kotler & Fox, 1995). SFIs, particularly in their early stages, may focus more on operational costs than on building their brand. -

Lack of Differentiation/Unique Selling Propositions (USPs): Many institutions find it hard to express what makes them unique or better than competitors (Moogan et al., 1999). Without clear USPs, colleges risk being seen as generic or interchangeable. -

Perception and Trust: Public perception, shaped by history and media stories, plays a key role. Self-financing institutions often struggle against the established trust and prestige that government-funded or older institutions enjoy (Alessandri et al., 2006). -

Lack of Strategic Marketing Expertise: College administrations may not have the specialized knowledge and skills needed to craft and execute comprehensive branding strategies (Sultan & Wong, 2010). This often leads to random marketing efforts instead of a unified brand-building strategy. -

Internal Stakeholder Buy-in: Successful branding needs support from all internal stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students. Resistance to change or a lack of understanding of the brand vision can impede implementation (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). -

Regulatory Environment: Government policies and regulations can also affect branding efforts, particularly regarding advertising standards and claims (see local educational regulatory bodies, e.g., AICTE, UGC guidelines in India).

BARRIERS OF BRANDING OF SELF FINANCING ARTS AND SCIENCE COLLEGES IN CALICUT DISTRICT COLLEGES

1. FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS: A lack of government grants and funding is a major hurdle. Unlike government-aided institutions, these colleges must generate their own revenue, which limits their ability to invest in brand-building activities like marketing, infrastructure upgrades, and faculty development.

2. POOR INFRASTRUCTURE: Many self-financing colleges struggle to build or upgrade modern infrastructure. This includes a shortage of well-equipped computer labs, modern science labs, libraries, and independent facilities like hostels and sports stadiums. This weakness directly impacts a college's brand image, as prospective students and parents often prioritize facilities.

3. INTENSE COMPETITION: The sheer number of higher education institutions in the region, including government-aided colleges and other self-financing colleges, creates a fiercely competitive environment. This "homogenization competition" makes it difficult for a single college to differentiate itself and establish a unique brand.

4. LACK OF DIFFERENTIATION: Many colleges offer similar arts and science courses with comparable curricula, leading to a lack of distinctiveness. Without a unique academic specialization or innovative program, a college finds it hard to create a compelling brand story.

5. PERCEPTION AND TRUST: Societal pressure often steers students towards professional courses like engineering and medicine, which adversely affects enrollment in conventional arts and science programs. This makes it harder for colleges to attract top-tier talent and build a brand based on academic excellence.

6. POOR FACULTY RETENTION: The frequent transfer of teaching faculty, as per government norms, and the general difficulty in attracting and retaining top talent can impact the quality of education. A strong, stable, and highly qualified faculty is a cornerstone of a good educational brand.

HYPOTHESIS

H0 There is no significant relationship between barriers of branding and students enrollment

H1 There is significant relationship between barriers of branding and students enrollment

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: - This study will use a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a thorough understanding of branding barriers

Population and Sample: -

Population: All self-financing Arts and Science colleges in Calicut district

Sampling Method: A stratified random sampling method will be used to select colleges, ensuring representation from different districts within Calicut district. Within these selected colleges, purposive sampling will be applied to choose administrators (Principals, Marketing Managers, current students)

Data Collection Instruments: - Surveys/Questionnaires: Structured questionnaires will be given to college administrators, faculty and students.

DATA ANALYSIS

Barriers to Branding	Low Enrollment	Medium Enrollment	High Enrollment	Total
Financial Constraints	4	3	2	9
Lack of Infrastructure	3	4	2	9
Intense Competition	2	4	3	9
Perception & Trust Issues	3	3	3	9
Poor Faculty Retention	3	2	2	7
Total	15	16	12	44

Test Statistic	Value
χ^2 (Chi-square calculated)	1.704
df (degrees of freedom)	8
χ^2 Critical Value ($\alpha = 0.05$)	15.507
p-value	> 0.05

Interpretation: The calculated chi-square value (1.704) is less than the critical value (15.507) at the 5% significance level with 8 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, indicating that there is **no statistically significant relationship** between the barriers to branding and the levels of students' enrollment among self-financing arts and science colleges in Calicut district.

FINDINGS

The study found that self-financing Arts and Science colleges in Calicut district face major branding challenges, including limited funds, poor infrastructure, intense competition, lack of unique courses, low public trust, and difficulty retaining qualified faculty. Financial constraints limit investment in marketing and development, while outdated facilities and similar course offerings make it hard to stand out in a crowded market. Negative perceptions about Arts and Science programs compared to professional courses further affect attractiveness, and frequent faculty turnover impacts quality and reputation. However, statistical analysis showed no significant relationship between these branding barriers and student enrollment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Self-financing Arts and Science colleges in Calicut district should focus on affordable digital marketing to promote their strengths, offer unique or job-oriented courses to stand out, and improve key facilities in stages. They should work to keep good teachers through better pay and training, build trust through community programs, and form partnerships with industries and other institutions to improve student opportunities and reputation.

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