

# The antecedents and consequences of university brand: a systematic review



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**Abstract** University brand is becoming a research topic that is increasingly of interest to researchers and university administrators because of its great role in the context of the strong development of higher education. This research aims to review and synthesize current studies on definitions, antecedents and consequences of university brand. The study applied a systematic synthesis method of 76 articles from reputable database sources in the period 2000-2023. The research findings indicate that the antecedents of university brand are divided into tangible group and intangible group with 08 factors including brand design, facilities and equipment, human resources, training programs, financial policies, communication activities, reputation and brand personality. Furthermore, from the standpoint of approaching university stakeholders, the consequences of university brand are highlighted in this study. Finally, the study points out some policy implications for institutions and suggests some future research directions.

**Keywords:** university brand, brand in higher education, systematic review

## 1. Introduction

Universities are facing significant challenges in the higher education sector (Miotto et al., 2020), such as an increase in the number of institutions with diverse curricula leading to enormous pressure to attract and retain students (Amani, 2022; Miotto et al., 2020), a reduction in budget subsidies from the government (Sultan & Wong, 2019), and the need for innovation in teaching and learning methods to respond to rapid changes in the labor market (Miotto et al., 2020).

Increasing challenges have made branding an integral aspect of university management (Sung & Yang, 2008). Universities consider brand building a differentiation strategy to have competitive advantages in the education market (Pinar et al., 2020). The university brand creates a distinct identity for the institution, represents its history and people, and is a tool to convey the core values of the university. A well-known brand is an invaluable asset to a higher education institution (Kamal et al., 2020), and it is key to bringing consumers into long-term relationships (Hannan, 2021). As a result, the university brand must be carefully developed and managed (Pinar et al., 2014).

University brands have received increasing attention from academics and policymakers due to their growing significance (Pinar et al., 2020). Various aspects of university brands have been researched, including their nature and importance (Chapleo, 2010; Panda et al., 2019; Shamil, 2014), branding activities (Bunzel, 2007; Judson, 2008; Kuriakose, 2023; Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020) and internal brands (Clark et al., 2020; Dechawatanapaisal, 2019; Ikram et al., 2021; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016).

Although there have been some studies on university brands, the number of studies in this area is still limited, particularly those that focus on specific characteristics of university brands (Yaping et al., 2023). Current research articles do not thoroughly cover the scales, measures, and components of university brands (Jois & Chakrabarti, 2022; Yaping et al., 2023). Furthermore, while some studies have explored the influence of university brand on some stakeholders (Amani, 2022), a comprehensive approach to the consequences of university brand, especially from the perspective of consumers using the service - students - still needs to be investigated further. Yaping et al. (2023) conducted a recent literature review on university brands; however, the study focused only on theories, related topics, university brand strategies and impacts of university brands on students and employees. Although such studies add to the pool of knowledge on brands in the higher education sector, a synthesis of existing research on the antecedents and consequences of university brands is lacking. This study attempts to fill the previous research gap by reviewing research articles on university brands published during the period 2000-2023 on reputable databases to synthesize definitions about university brands, identify and classify the antecedents and consequences of university brands, and suggest some avenues for future research.

The research paper is divided into six sections. The following section outlines the research method with detailed implementation stages. Some descriptive statistics on the characteristics of the studies included in the literature review are presented in Section 3. Section 4 shows the findings of the research in detail, including a summary of the definitions, antecedents and consequences of university brands. Part 5 discusses the research results, and the final part highlights the study's limitations as well as possible implications for future research directions.



## 2. Materials and Methods

The authors applied the systematic review with the following four steps proposed by Walker (2010).

### Step 1: Identify the key words and database

This study used “university brand”, “branding in higher education”, and “brand building at universities” as key words for searching relevant research from five reputable publishers, including ScienceDirect, Emerald, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley. In step 1, the number of studies that resulted from the keywords was 1233.

### Step 2: Screen and preliminarily assess the studies

This step aimed to ensure the suitability of each article for inclusion in the preliminary shortlist. The following criteria were used to choose research articles: (i) studies published between 2000 and 2023; (ii) studies (including both experimental and theoretical) published in peer-reviewed academic journals; (iii) research articles written in English; and (iv) studies that discussed the definition, antecedents and consequences of university brands. The above criteria were reviewed using filtering tools on databases and manually by the authors through reading the titles and abstracts of research articles to make a preliminary assessment of relevance to the research topic. At this step, the results were reduced to 152 articles.

### Step 3: Extract data from the short list

At this stage, the authors undertook a thorough reading of the articles to determine the final number of articles included in the literature review. A total of 76 research publications were chosen for the final shortlist. The data of these articles were extracted by building an Excel table with information columns, including the title of the article, authors, journal name, year of publication, country of research, research methods, classification of content related to the research topic (definition, antecedents or consequences of university brands), and main research results.

### Step 4: Analyze the extracted data

Based on the results from step 3, the authors conducted data analysis with the aim of addressing the initial research objectives. The following sections describe the characteristics of 76 studies and present the main findings of this study. The steps to carry out the research are shown in Figure 1.

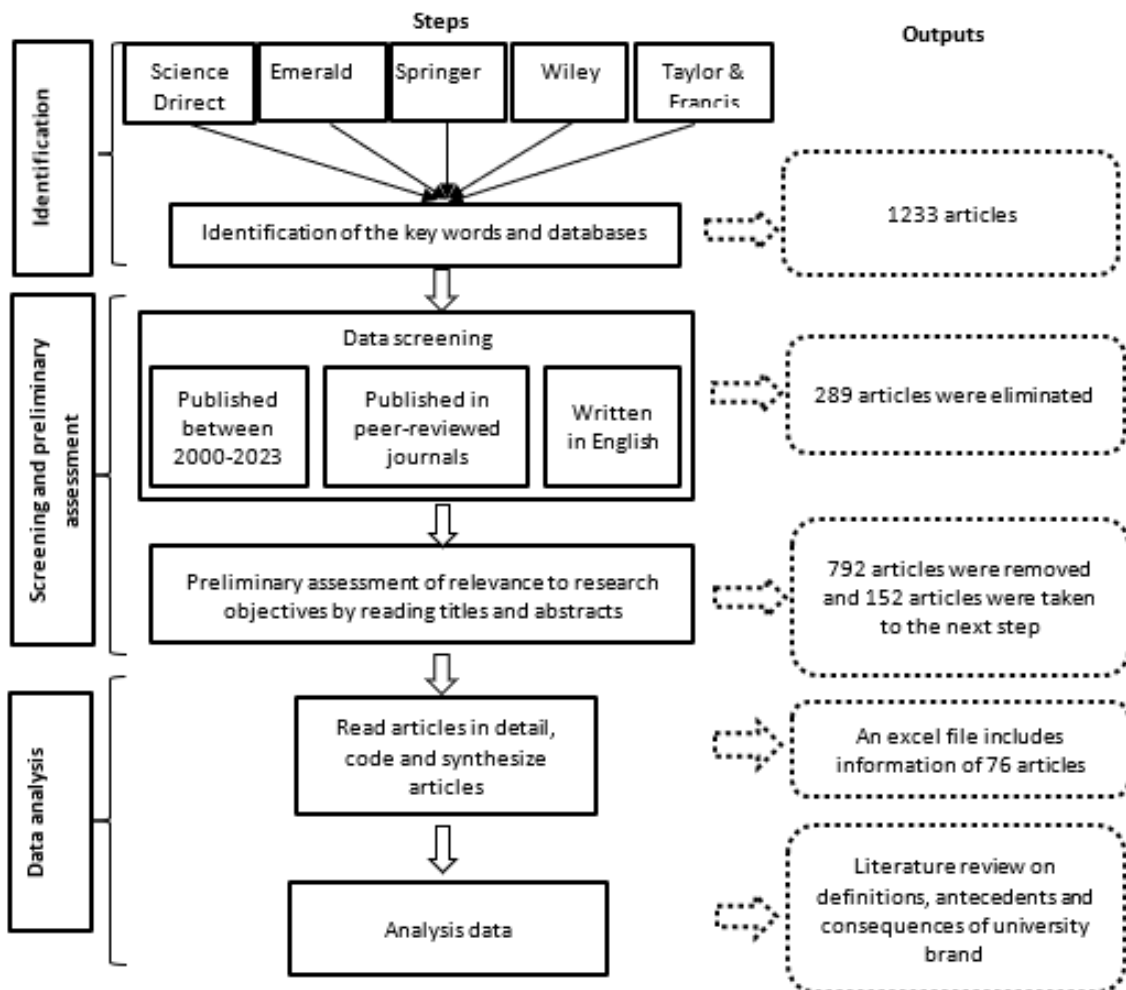


Figure 1 Steps to conduct the research



### 3. Descriptive analysis

The following section summarizes the characteristics of the 76 articles reviewed in this study by database and journal, time of publication, and country of research.

#### 3.1. Databases and journals

Emeral and ScienceDirect are two databases with the highest number of publications reviewed, 30 and 20 articles, respectively. The remaining studies were collected from other reputable databases, such as Springer (9 articles), Taylor and Francis (7 articles), and Wiley (3 articles). Table 1 shows the number of articles by database.

**Table 1** Number of articles by database

Database	Number of articles	Database	Number of articles
Emeral	30	Wiley	3
ScienceDirect	20	Sage	2
Springer	9	Others	5
Taylor and Francis	7		

The articles related to the research topic were mainly published in journals specializing in the branding, marketing, business, and higher education sectors. Among them, there are 2 journals that publish the most relevant research publications, namely, the International Journal of Educational Management (11 articles) and the Journal of Business Research (10 articles). The next most common are the Journal of Brand Management, the Journal of Product & Brand Management, and Economics of Education Review, with 6, 4 and 3 studies, respectively. The remaining journals had 1 to 2 articles. The number of publications by journal is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Number of articles by journal

Journal	Number of articles	Journal	Number of articles
International Journal of Educational Management	11	International Journal of Public Sector Management,	1
Journal of Business research	10	Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education	1
Journal of Brand Management	6	Journal of Marketing	1
Journal of Product & Brand Management	4	Journal of Marketing Research	1
Economics of Education Review	3	Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity	1
Cogent Education	2	Journal of Public Economics	1
Heliyon	2	Journal of Research in Social Sciences	1
International review on public and nonprofit marketing	2	Labor Economics	1
Journal of Marketing for Higher Education	2	Managing Service Quality: An International Journal	1
Quality Assurance in Education	2	Marketing International Journal of Business and Management Science	1
International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education	1	Multidisciplinary Reviews	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	1	Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education	1
Corporate Reputation Review	1	Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences	1
EuroMed Journal of Business	1	Services Marketing Quarterly	1
Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal	1	Social Indicators Research	1
Higher Education	1	Studies in Educational Evaluation	1
Higher Education Policy	1	Technology in Society	1
Higher Education Quarterly	1	Tertiary Education and Management	1
Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning	1	Trust in Higher Education Institutions	1
Human Resource Management Journal	1	Vilakshan-XIMB Journal of Management	1

3.2. Year of publication

Figure 2 shows the number of studies published each year. The number of articles published between 2000 and 2015 was low. In recent years, from 2016 to present, there has been a significant increase in the number of publications discussing university brands. This trend demonstrates that university brand is emerging as a prominent subject that is receiving increasing attention from researchers worldwide.

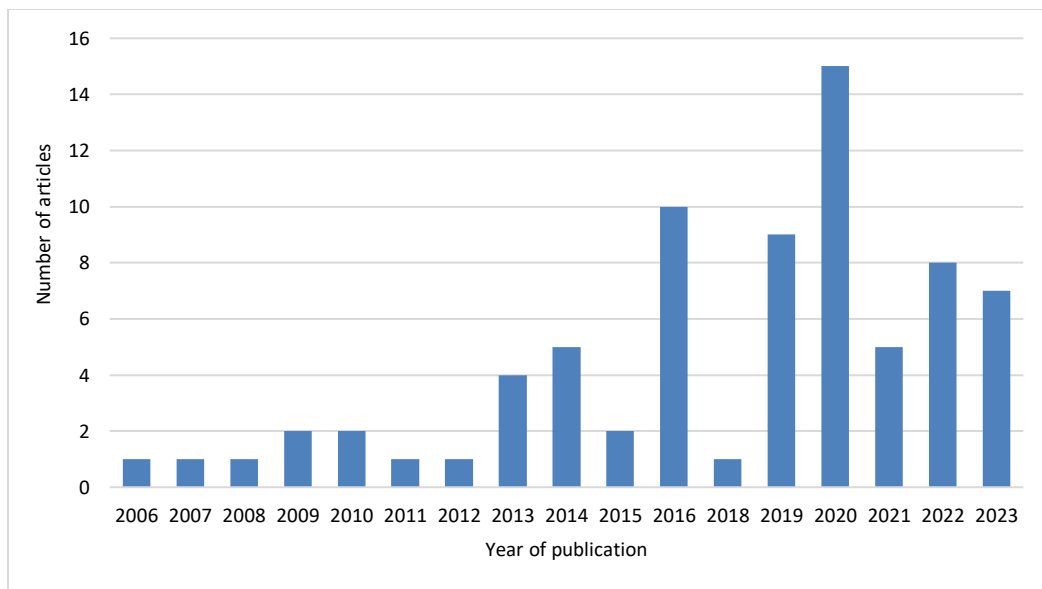


Figure 2 Number of articles published by year

3.3. Country of publication

Figure 3 shows that the studies were conducted in 28 countries, and 6 studies were conducted in many countries (excluding theoretical studies). The USA has the most researchers exploring the topic of university brands, with 15 articles, followed by the UK, with 5 articles. The research is undertaken in a variety of countries, but it appears to focus primarily on developed countries. Research in developing nations has been limited, and further studies are needed in this area.

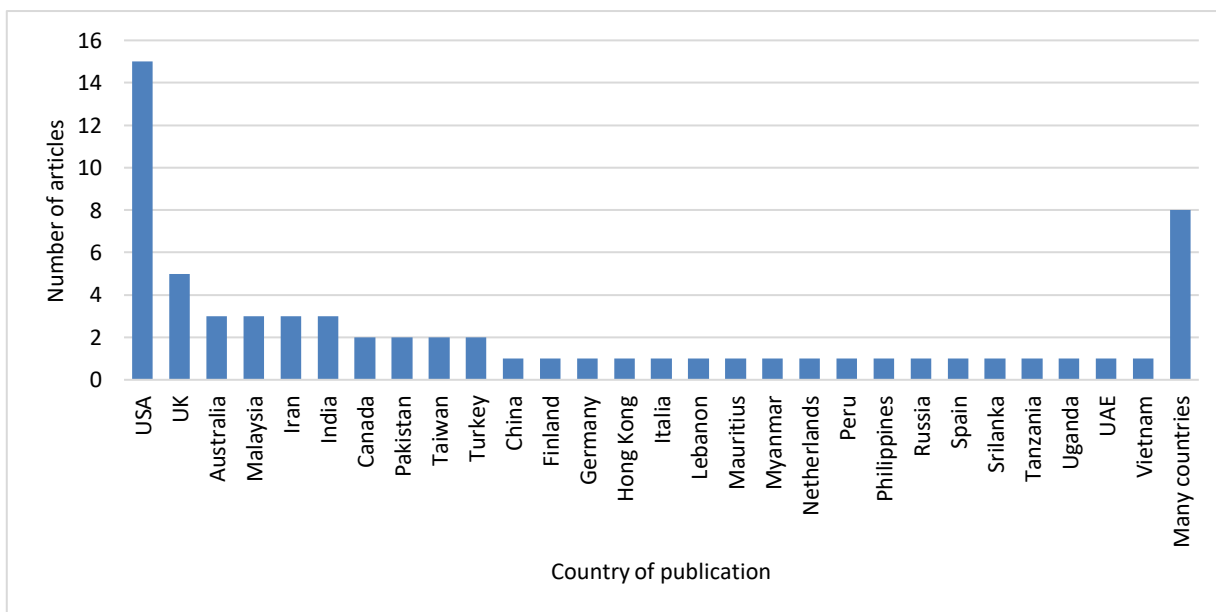


Figure 3 Number of articles by country



## 4. Results

### 4.1. Definition of university brand

Since the 1990s, researchers from all over the world have discussed branding in higher education (Rutter et al., 2016). However, there is no consensus among scholars on how to fully and comprehensively define university brand and its dimensions (Hannan, 2021). Some definitions of university brand given by researchers are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3** Definition of university brand

Authors	Definitions
Temple (2006)	"The brand emerges as a function of how well the institution performs in meeting the needs of its clients: it is the result of effective marketing and consequential changes in activities".
Chapleo (2010)	"Clear vision and the support of leadership seem to be factors that particularly support successful brand building."
Ali-Choudhury et al. (2009)	University brand is defined as "a manifestation of the institution's features that distinguish it from 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 potential recruits to make wise enrollment decisions"
Beneke (2011)	A higher education brand is defined as "perception or emotion maintained by a buyer or a prospective buyer describing the experience related to doing business with an academic institution with its product and service"
Rauschnabel et al. (2016)	"A university brand represents the totality of perceptions and feelings that stakeholders associate with that particular university"
Sultan and Wong (2019)	"A university's brand comprises the institution's distinct characteristics that will elevate it when compared with others"
Panda et al. (2019)	"A university brand can be considered as the total impression of images, emotions, experiences and facts that a university has created in the public mind"

It is clear that the definition of university brand has shifted in recent years. Brand definitions are linked to a university's ability to maintain competitive advantages. According to previous studies, university brand is described as a combination of many components expressing the appearance, characteristics, personality, and capacity of a higher education institution to provide educational services to maintain and improve competitiveness.

### 4.2. Antecedents of university brand

The complex nature of the brand notion determines the existence of many different approaches to this concept. Shamil (2014) mentioned the elements of university brands, including university attributes and the image of the university. Ali-Choudhury et al. (2009) approached university brands through three components: "promises", a set of promises to the wider society about the benefits of the brand, expressed through the organization's vision, mission, career prospects and learning environment; "realities", a collection of distinct characteristics that define the inherent nature and reality of the brand, such as training and research activities, facilities, tuition fees, accommodation costs, and the safety of the educational institution; and "symbolic representations", which describe the name, symbol, logo, uniform and marketing activities of the university. Panda et al. (2019) conceptualized university brand image according to three aspects: university heritage, trustworthiness and service quality. Heritage includes (i) material heritage such as buildings, libraries, other facilities, etc.; and (ii) immaterial heritage such as intellectual heritage, culture, values and ethics, rituals, etc. University trustworthiness represents the student's belief in the university staff (including administrators, lecturers and staff) and the university's management policies and practices when implementing commitments. Service quality is evaluated in different areas, such as teaching and research activities, training management, human resources, sports and extracurricular activities and the general environment of the university.

Thus, there are many different approaches to the antecedents of university brand, and the choice of a specific approach is based on the research context and its significance to key stakeholders. Overall, the aspects that researchers mention can be categorized into two groups of factors: tangible components and intangible components (Huyen et al., 2023). In particular, the group of tangible elements is associated with factors in the service space, such as facilities, people, and service creation activities. However, intangible factors are related to a brand's reputation, personality, and emotional values. Education is a service that consumers cannot see or touch, and the benefits of education are not available immediately after purchase. Therefore, successful higher education marketing requires identifying tangible and intangible features and differentiating them from those of competitors (Han, 2014). Table 4 summarizes the antecedents of university brand and divides them into two categories: tangible and intangible.

**Table 4** Antecedents of university brand

Factors	Subfactors	Sources
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<b>Tangible factors</b>			
Brand design	Attractive logos	Jevons (2006), Drori et al. (2013), Shahnaz and Qadir (2020)	
	The slogan is memorable and illustrate the brand's benefits	Shahnaz and Qadir (2020)	
	Attractive colors	Shahnaz and Qadir (2020)	
	Clear vision and mission	Pinar et al. (2014), Chapleo (2010)	
Facilities and equipment	Good infrastructures	Sultan and Wong (2019), Teeroovengadum et al. (2016), Jois and Chakrabarti (2022), Joseph et al. (2012)	
	Favorable environmental factors (cool, safe, peaceful, etc.)	Teeroovengadum et al. (2016), Arrieta and Avolio (2020), Stephenson et al. (2016)	
	Modern teaching equipment	Htang (2021), Jawad Abbas (2020), Sultan and Wong (2019)	
	Modern libraries include electronic libraries and other open resources	Teeroovengadum et al. (2016), Sultan and Wong (2019), Pinar et al. (2014)	
	Modern technology to support learning activities ( <i>Internet, e-learning platform, etc.</i> )	Arrieta and Avolio (2020), Kirupainayagam and Sutha (2022), Joseph et al. (2012)	
Human resources	Modern sports, entertainment and service facilities	Teeroovengadum et al. (2016), Htang (2021), Pinar et al. (2014), Stephenson et al. (2016)	
	Highly qualified lecturers	Sultan and Wong (2019), Jawad Abbas (2020)	
	Highly skilled lecturers	Sultan and Wong (2019), Teeroovengadum et al. (2016)	
	Experienced lecturers	Jawad Abbas (2020)	
	The lecturers' capacity to link learners and employers	Jawad Abbas (2020)	
	Administrative personnel with extensive competence	Jawad Abbas (2020)	
	Skilled administrative personnel	Sultan and Wong (2019)	
Training programs	Response time to student inquiries is quick	Sultan and Wong (2019), Teeroovengadum et al. (2016)	
	Accredited training programs	Elliott and Soo (2013)	
	Training programs are updated regularly and provide practical knowledge for postgraduation work	Htang (2021), Joseph et al. (2012), Teeroovengadum et al. (2016)	
	Training programs provide necessary skills for postgraduation work	Teeroovengadum et al. (2016), Jawad Abbas (2020)	
Financial policies	Training programs consider students' professional potential	Jawad Abbas (2020), Htang (2021), Teeroovengadum et al. (2016)	
	Reasonable tuition fees	Balmer et al. (2020), Hieu (2020), Elliott and Soo (2013)	
	Diverse financial support policies ( <i>subsidies/tuition fees, loans, etc.</i> )	Anderson (2020), Joseph et al. (2012)	
Communication activities	Diverse scholarship policies	Andrews et al. (2020), Firoozi (2022), Anderson (2020), Joseph et al. (2012)	
	Communication activities on the official website	Hoang and Rojas (2015), Calma and Dickson-Deane (2020), Ghorbanzadeh (2023)	
	Communication activities on social media chanel	Rutter et al. (2016), Pinar et al. (2020), Song et al. (2023)	
Intangible factors	Communication through visits, events and cultural experiences at university	Stephenson et al. (2016), Jois and Chakrabarti (2022)	
	Reputation	The university has a good reputation	Htang (2021), Sultan and Wong (2019)
		The university has a high-ranking order	Dearden et al. (2019), Miotto et al. (2020)
		Many influential people are alumni	Panda et al. (2019)
	Brand personality	Graduates are highly appreciated by employers	Sultan and Wong (2019)
		The staff's dedication, politeness, and thoughtfulness	Rauschnabel (2015), Jawad Abbas (2020), Sung and Yang (2008)
		The level of excitement and energy	Rauschnabel (2015), Teeroovengadum et al. (2016), Kaushal and Ali (2020)
The level of justice and honesty		Rauschnabel et al. (2016), Kaushal and Ali (2020), Arrieta and Avolio (2020), Jawad Abbas (2020)	
The level of prestige in training and research activities	Rauschnabel et al. (2016), Kaushal and Ali (2020)		

The level of attractiveness of training programs	Rauschnabel (2015), Balaji et al. (2016), Kaushal and Ali (2020)
The level of internationalization	Rauschnabel (2015), Kaushal and Ali (2020)

*Brand design* includes the signs, symbols, and names that help identify and differentiate a brand from its competitors (Walsh et al., 2010) and is considered the most prominent sign that influences customers' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors (Chen & Bei, 2019). Walsh et al. (2019) noted that logos are recognized as a component of brand identification, and organizations employ them as a tool for brand management to establish their brand's value and set themselves apart from competitors (Erjansola et al., 2021).

Ali-Choudhury et al. (2009) believed that *facilities* are one of the elements of "realities", one of the three components of the university brand. According to Arrieta and Avolio (2020), a college campus's physical characteristics, including its layout, lighting, classrooms, aesthetics, cleanliness, and general conditions, are considered part of the education infrastructure. Jawad Abbas (2020) asserted that students enrolling in higher education institutions expect to have a quality education; therefore, higher education institutions must guarantee the highest standards of facilities and learning conditions. An institution's campus infrastructure and technological factors play a vital role in shaping a higher education brand (Jois & Chakrabarti, 2022).

Chapleo (2010) believed that internal support is a critical component in developing a successful institutional brand. Students' trust in university staff is founded on their personal experiences as well as the university's policies and management practices regarding the fulfillment of promises (Brodie et al., 2009; Panda et al., 2019). Students believe that managers, lecturers and administrative personnel will meet their expectations of receiving high-quality educational services. The greater the degree to which students trust a university's human resources, the fewer students complain, leading to positive perceptions, which contributes to boosting the university brand (Panda et al., 2019).

*The training program factor* was confirmed by Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009) as one of the realities - one of the essential aspects of the university brand. Among university brand components, curriculum is the factor with the greatest importance to students (Kuriakose, 2023). According to Weerasinghe and Fernando (2018), a quality curriculum is a flexible and well-designed curriculum that equips students with diverse knowledge and skills. Meanwhile, some studies highlight the practicality and updates of training programs (Htang, 2021) or compatibility with students' future careers (Teeroovengadum et al., 2016).

Numerous studies have confirmed that *financial policies* play a significant role in university brand components (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Panda et al., 2019; Shamil, 2014). Financial policies include tuition fees and other forms of financial support programs, such as tuition subsidies and scholarship policies (Anderson, 2020). According to Balmer et al. (2020), price positively affects customer satisfaction with the brand, and the level of students' identification with a university brand increases when the price paid is perceived as favorable.

Research by Chapleo (2010) suggested that the size, growth and structure of the marketing function contribute to the success of a university brand. A university needs to be identified by its own brand, and the brand awareness of its stakeholders cannot be ignored. To increase brand awareness, universities need to adopt different marketing strategies (Abbas, 2019). Apart from the positive impacts, higher education institutions must be careful when developing their brand through traditional and digital media (Pinar et al., 2020). According to Pringle and Fritz (2019), contents that are inauthentic or violate organizational norms when shared on social media channels influence negatively on the university brand.

A university's *reputation* is an important brand marketing strategy, and it is one of the key elements of the university brand from the perspective of a potential student (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009). Kaushal and Ali (2020) asserted that reputation is a crucial part of brand management since it creates favorable perceptions among an organization's stakeholders. Reputation is an overall assessment by stakeholders made over a long period of time in comparison to other components of the university brand.

*Brand personality* is found to be useful when describing an institution and developing a university's brand (Balaji et al., 2016), and it plays an essential role in building relationships between consumers and university brands (Saeed et al., 2022). Adopting and cultivating brand personality allow organizations to differentiate their brand capabilities and characteristics (Rauschnabel et al., 2016; Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013). Stephenson and Yerger (2014) found that university brand is evaluated based on distinctiveness, uniqueness, positive image, and attractiveness, which has a positive influence on university identification.

#### 4.3. Consequences of university brand

The important role of university brands is increasingly strongly affirmed in the context of the development and globalization of higher education. Many studies have demonstrated the role and impact of university brands from various perspectives, such as boosting university competitiveness (Panda et al., 2019; Shamil, 2014), having an advantageous effect on the behavioral intentions of students (Mohamad Saleh et al., 2022; Sultan & Wong, 2014, 2019) and alumni (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014), and enhancing the loyalty and satisfaction of learners (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2019; Masserini et al., 2019) and employees (Yameen et al., 2021). Universities have a wide range of stakeholders, including students, alumni, human resources,

employers, partners, etc. The following section will summarize the research on the consequences of university brand for each stakeholder.

#### 4.3.1. Consequences for students

Universities use their brand as a marketing strategy to attract potential students and retain current students (Stephenson et al., 2016; Sultan & Wong, 2014). Beneke (2011) affirmed that a positive brand plays a vital role in a higher education institution because prospective students consider whether to attend a top university based on its brand. Bang et al. (2016) concurred that a university's brand serves as an indicator of its ability to offer higher education services, which will help future learners make the right decision when choosing a suitable university to study. Several recent studies have confirmed that branding is essential in university marketing efforts to attract more international students (Mohamad Saleh et al., 2022), and congruence with a university brand positively affects students' intentions to stay in school (Oy Lar Kiki et al., 2023).

The role of the brand is also shown in fostering long-term partnerships and student loyalty (Pinar et al., 2020; Sultan & Wong, 2019). Research by Bang et al. (2016) revealed that brand performance, brand image and reputation all play significant roles in increasing learners' commitment to university. Students are more likely to participate in university activities and increase support behaviors for the institution when they believe in and are proud of their university's brand (Balaji et al., 2016). The research results of Khanna et al. (2023) also confirmed that brand identity, brand image, and brand meaning are instrumental in sustaining and enhancing student engagement with higher education institutions.

Some studies show that university brands influence employers' choices, thereby affecting students' employment opportunities. Beneke (2011) argued that in the field of higher education, university brand seems to be a means of evaluating the quality of graduates. A university ranking strategy or a university differentiation strategy has a positive impact on job placement and the salaries that graduated students will receive (Lozano et al., 2020). Sultan and Wong (2014) also highlighted aspects related to career prospects such as the employment rate, starting salary and success rate of graduates in the brand structure of a university. The brand is built over time and is reflected through many aspects, including university rankings and the quality of training and research activities. Students who graduate from a university with a good brand will have better career prospects than students from other universities.

#### 4.3.2. Consequences for alumni

Palmer et al. (2016) explored the existence of a link between brand recognition, alumni brand loyalty and brand advocacy. When receiving a positive experience while studying at school, most alumni participate in university brand evangelism (Amani, 2022). This means that a well-known university brand will have a positive influence on alumni's intention to support branding activities such as engaging in positive word of mouth (Rauschnabel et al., 2016; Stephenson & Yerger, 2014), returning to the institution to become an inspiration and sharing experiences with potential and current students, thereby contributing to increasing enrollment for the university as well as maintaining the loyalty of students. Research by El Nemar et al. (2020) also showed similar results that alumni satisfaction is an effective means of communication for both future and present learners.

#### 4.3.3. Consequences for human resources

In the context of the strong development of higher education, universities compete not only for potential candidates but also for high-quality human resources such as lecturers, researchers, and administrative staff. One of the critical difficulties in university human resource management has been identified as the ability to attract and retain top talent (Van den Brink et al., 2013). Previous studies have demonstrated that universities with strong brands are considered desirable places to work (Matongolo et al., 2018). A university's brand becomes an effective recruitment tool as candidates self-select, and only those whose values align with the organization's values will apply (Jevons, 2006). Recent research by Yameen et al. (2021) collected data from 141 employees working at universities in India and found that university administrators should aim to strengthen employer (university) brands and focus on factors such as career development, rewards and opportunities, social responsibility, service quality and core values to attract staff.

In addition, the role of the university brand also affects staff retention and loyalty. A university with a famous brand will generally increase employees' job satisfaction and intention to continue working, thereby positively impacting employee dedication to achieving the organization's brand goals (Ikram et al., 2021; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016). Individuals' positive attitudes toward the university's brand will also affect their attitude when interacting with students and partners. This shows that human resources play a vital role in the development of university brands (Clark et al., 2020). Research by Sheikh and Aghaz (2019) also revealed the significance of university brands in increasing the impact of professional commitment on the organizational commitment of professors at universities in Iran.

#### 4.3.4. Consequences for partners

Universities are currently making branding efforts as a way to cope with significant declines in government subsidies (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014). The university brand helps improve funding from both local and international sources. It is clear that a good university brand has affirmed a higher education institution's position in training and scientific research and created trust with domestic and foreign partners, thereby attracting financial resources to invest in the university's projects and activities (Kamal et al., 2020; Miotto et al., 2020).

#### 4.3.5. Consequences for universities

A famous brand is an invaluable asset for an academic institution (Kamal et al., 2020). Building a strong brand is considered a strategic instrument for promoting a university's image and educational quality, as well as a means of maintaining competitiveness and dealing with growing obstacles (Pinar et al., 2020; Wilson & Elliot, 2016). Shamil (2014) reviewed the main components and stages of a university brand's establishment and development and affirmed that the brand is a key factor that benefits the university and contributes to increasing the competitiveness of higher education institutions. Panda et al. (2019) noted a favorable moderating influence on the association between university brand image and student satisfaction levels. A good reputation acts as a positive signal to prospective students and helps the university stand out. The combination of a good brand image and good reputation will increase student satisfaction, which will ultimately result in positive word of mouth and brand loyalty, contributing to university competitive advantage. A comprehensive list of consequences of university brand by stakeholders is presented in Table 5.

**Table 5** Consequences of university brand

Stakeholders	Consequences	Sources
Students	Attract potential students	Kamal et al. (2020), Beneke (2011), Sultan and Wong (2014), Bang et al. (2016), Jevons (2006), Oy Lar Kiki et al. (2023)
	Increase student satisfaction level	Panda et al. (2019), Hanson et al. (2020)
	Enhance student engagement, commitment, and loyalty	Kaushal and Ali (2020), Fazli-Salehi et al. (2019), Bang et al. (2016), Pinar et al. (2020), Sultan and Wong (2019), Khanna et al. (2023)
	Improve students' intention to support and participate in university's activities	Balaji et al. (2016), Hassani and Wilkins (2022)
	Increase student employment opportunities	Lozano et al. (2020), Sultan and Wong (2014)
Alumni	Improve intention and behavior of donating and supporting the university	Palmer et al. (2016), Amani (2022), Stephenson and Yerger (2014), Rauschnabel et al. (2016), El Nemar et al. (2020)
	Improve alumni loyalty	Palmer et al. (2016)
Human resources	Attract high quality human resources	Yameen et al. (2021), Hamidzadeh and Mohammadnezhad Fadardi (2019), Matongolo et al. (2018)
	Enhance retention and loyalty of staff	Ikram et al. (2021), Saleem and Iglesias (2016)
Partners	Attract sponsorship sources and raise project funds	Kamal et al. (2020), Miotto et al. (2020)
Universities	Enhance competitiveness	Panda et al. (2019), Shamil (2014), Kamal et al. (2020), Sultan and Wong (2019), Wilson and Elliot (2016)

## 5. Final considerations

University brands are becoming increasingly popular among researchers worldwide due to their importance in the development of universities. Through careful collection and screening steps, this study identified 76 research articles on university brands from reputable databases to conduct a literature review. The majority of the research has been conducted from 2016 to present and in some developed countries, such as the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada and some developing countries, such as Malaysia, Iran, and India. This study used a systematic synthesis method to present multiple viewpoints on university brands as well as their antecedents and consequences. The main research results and some implications are as follows:

First, by systematically and comprehensively presenting university brands, including their definitions, antecedents and consequences, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the impact of university brand components on stakeholders. There are numerous definitions of brand in higher education, but in general, most of the definitions given link university brand to the characteristics of the institution (including image, capacity, emotions, etc.) in the minds of stakeholders (students, general public, partners, etc.) to set a university apart from its competitors (Ali-Choudhury et al., 2009; Bang et al., 2016; Panda et al., 2019). From this point of view, college leaders are aware of university brands as well as the current shift in brand perspectives, allowing them to design successful strategies for developing university brands in a reasonable and effective manner.

Furthermore, this study has demonstrated that there are two categories of intangible and tangible elements that can be considered antecedents of university brands. The group of tangible factors is associated with the characteristics and functions of the university, such as brand design (Erjansola et al., 2021; Walsh et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2010), facilities and equipment (Ali-Choudhury et al., 2009; Jois & Chakrabarti, 2022), human resources (Chapleo, 2010; Panda et al., 2019), curricula (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Kuriakose, 2023), financial policies (Balmer et al., 2020), and communication activities (Abbas, 2019; Chapleo, 2010). All of the intangibles present emotional values, university reputation (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Kaushal & Ali, 2020) and brand personality (Balaji et al., 2016; Saeed et al., 2022). These findings also imply that an educational institution must not only identify and differentiate the tangible characteristics of the organization from those of its competitors (Han, 2014) but also emphasize intangible elements such as the reputation and personality of the university. Currently, students are more cautious when selecting a university to attend; they are looking for both material and immaterial benefits.

Finally, with regard to consequences, this research has shown the effects of university branding by institutional stakeholders, including (i) *students* attracting potential students (Mohamad Saleh et al., 2022; Oy Lar Kiki et al., 2023), enhancing student engagement, commitment, and loyalty (Balaji et al., 2016; Khanna et al., 2023), and increasing job opportunities for students after graduation (Lozano et al., 2020); (ii) *alumni* improving the intention and behavior of supporting the university (Amani, 2022; Stephenson & Yerger, 2014) and alumni loyalty (Palmer et al., 2016); (iii) *human resources* attracting experts, lecturers and staff (Matongolo et al., 2018; Yameen et al., 2021) and improving employee retention and loyalty (Ikram et al., 2021; Saleem & Iglesias, 2016); (iv) *partners* attracting resources (Kamal et al., 2020; Miotto et al., 2020); and (v) *universities* improving competitiveness (Pinar et al., 2020; Wilson & Elliot, 2016). This result emphasizes the necessity for administrators in the education services sector to gain a deeper understanding of a university brand's competitive advantages from different viewpoints and stakeholders (Yaping et al., 2023).

## 6. Limitations and future research directions

Although there have been certain contributions to the system of research articles on the topic of university brands, this research still has some limitations. This study evaluated only the antecedents and consequences of university brand using a list of 76 research articles from 5 major databases. Therefore, there are research articles on other databases or other research products such as books and conference proceedings on research topics that the authors have overlooked. Future studies can broaden the search scope to obtain new findings that contribute to the research topic.

From the results of the study, this research draws some suggestions for future research directions as follows:

First, this study indicates that the antecedents of university brands consist of two categories of elements: tangible and intangible. However, there seems to be limited research that comprehensively addresses these antecedents of university brands in a specific context. In the future, researchers can consider performing empirical studies on these university brand components and making comparisons between different elements to draw policy implications for university leaders.

Second, the growth of higher education in the context of increased competition and globalization trends has highlighted the role of university brands in boosting competitiveness. In the future, researchers can continue to study more deeply about brands associated with the development of sustainable competitiveness or sustainable university brands (Miotto et al., 2020; Mohamad Saleh et al., 2022).

Third, the study investigated the impact of university brands from the perspective of stakeholders, including students, alumni, human resources (experts, lecturers, staff) and partners. Future empirical studies can expand the research topic to gain a deeper understanding of the effect and role of stakeholders in building and developing a university's brand.

Fourth, from the results of the literature review, future studies can also conduct more in-depth empirical research on the impact of each specific group of factors (material or immaterial group) or each specific element (such as brand design, facilities, human resources, training programs, financial policies, marketing activities, reputation or brand personality) on stakeholders (students, employees or partners) of the university, in which the university brand is considered an intermediate variable.

### Ethical considerations

Not applicable.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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