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EDUCATION IS A FEMININE BRAND PERSONALITY: A CASE STUDY ON FACEBOOK ADVERTISING BY NON-STATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The research understands Higher education Institutions and the masculine, and feminine brand personality. Different brand perspectives for Facebook advertisement and development have been set out with unique aspects of creating different advantages. A key issue in this research is the lack of brand personality-based studies in higher education in Sri Lanka. The research methodology does provide desk research with a case study of Facebook ad library-based content publishing by HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) Aaker's model on brand personality traits is applied: (1) Sincerity, (2) Excitement, (3) Competencies, (4) Sophistication, and (5) Ruggedness. In this research, the role of the results gathered is to provide insights that are enabled by unique findings. With the qualitative research carried out it was clear that the non-state HEIs are promoting a "feminine brand image". Excitement was a key factor that had not been utilized by then on state HEIs.

Keywords: Brand Personality, Higher Education, Facebook Advertising, Feminine Brand Personality, Marketing, Values

1. Introduction

Brand gender consists of two dimensions – brand masculinity and brand Femininity, gender traits that consumers associate with brands (Gohamann, 2009). Brand gender is an aspect of brand personality (Aaker, 1997). Masculine brands are much more focused on aggressiveness and dominance; feminine brands are much more focused on sensitivity, and gracefulness. For a practitioner, it will be important to understand the brand gender to determine the brand personality traits – and create a strategic function for marketers to keep investing in these features. Secondly, the role of understanding and creating a brand personality is important to create affinity and trust for the customer to commit to the brand.

Social perception is formed and established with brand perceptions (Fournier, 1998). People's reliance on appearance cues in the influence process has been convincingly established (Borkenau and Liebler, 1992). Appearance cues are used in conjunction with behavioral cues (Kenny 2004) or relied upon exclusively when behavioral cues are not accessible (Penton-Voak et al. 2006). Static representation of the target with photographs which are able to serve as a cue in the formation of personality inferences (Penton-Voak et al., 2006).

1.1. Research Problem

The knowledge gap is present in Sri Lankan higher education marketing literature for the subject of brand personality-based studies. Though current literature presented by Perera et al. (2023), Rathnayake (2008), Chanaka and Kumara (2016), and Weerasinghe et al. (2018) attempt to cover some aspects of marketing, such as - student satisfaction, service quality, brand feelings, social media marketing - there is a larger scope with advertising techniques. Current Literature does not identify the different brand personalities that do exist.

The second reason for carrying out this research is the need to advance digital marketing advertising practices in Sri Lanka. There is a need to advance the practice of advertising specifically the Facebook advertising practices which account for a larger amount of lead generation in the local industry context.

This research aims to set up research that is able to understand the gender roles of different brands that are present. Digital marketing and brand building in the Sri Lankan higher education space is very limited. While the non-state higher education sector has extensively focused on Marketing driven toward Sales (Student enrollment) – the requirement for creating a brand image has been very limited. Often it is possible to see functional advertisement being worked out in the local marketplace in contrast to Universities from the UK, the USA, and Australia establishing a very unique marketing function with brand building that has been well established. By analyzing the 2024 Facebook ads that have been published on the social media platform, communication will study the different aspects of communication that have been carried out.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions are set out.

- (1) How do masculinity and femininity in branding get represented?
- (2) What are the elements used in different advertising to convey brand value traits?

2. Literature Review

Gohmann (2016) outlined that the perception of how brands are looked at as per the Gender roles will influence the attitude carried by

customers. The work of Gohmann (2016) outlines the font styles that are used. Brand names and the way of writing product labels are studied. One of the research gaps highlighted are the aspects of masculinity and femininity of the brand that are less highlighted. As such, the work of Gohmann (2016) is only focused on the fonts that are used.

Pereira et al (2014) outline the aspects of designation brand personality. A gold-related website that can provide insights. A similar study to Gohmann (2016) outlines the work of Pereira et al (2014) and also sets out a study on text. The study is comprehensive with 144 gold-related websites and n=963 frequency of text. The methodology adopted includes the “Big-Five” model of personality. The personality is matched to Aaker’s scale. The big five personality used are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness.

Understanding the digital aspects provides the ability to meet the requirements of customers. The aspect of Pereira et al (2014) justifies the use of Internet media, as most of the consumption happens online. Another model of understanding masculine and feminine brand personality is the use of the BSRI test. BEMSex-Role Inventory (BSRI) is a test that evaluates the role of masculinity and femininity. In 1974 American psychology was an androgyny theory. The scale uses 20 parameters that could indicate the characteristics (Jahanbakhsh et al, 2015). The study classifies masculinity, femininity, and shared personality traits. Having these personality traits will allow us to categorize the traits that are identified.

Items for evaluating masculinity	Items for evaluating femininity	Non-typed items
1.- Self-reliant.	2.- Yielding.	3.- Helpful.
4.- Defends own beliefs.	5.- Cheerful.	6.- Moody.
7.- Independent.	8.- Shy.	9.- Conscientious.
10.- Athletic.	11.- Affectionate.	12.- Theatrical.
13.- Assertive.	14.- Not susceptible to flattery.	15.- Happy.
16.- Strong personality.	17.- Loyal.	18.- Unpredictable.
19.- Forceful.	20.- Feminine.	21.- Reliable.
22.- Analytical.	23.- Sympathetic.	24.- Jealous.
25.- Leadership ability.	26.- Sensitive to others’ needs.	27.- Truthful.
28.- Willing to take risks.	29.- Understanding.	30.- Secretive.
31.- Makes decisions easily.	32.- Compassionate.	33.- Sincere.
34.- Self-sufficient.	35.- Eager to soothe hurt feelings.	36.- Conceited.
37.- Dominant.	38.- Soft-spoken.	39.- Likeable.
40.- Masculine.	41.- Warm.	42.- Solemn.
43.- Willing to take a stand.	44.- Tender.	45.- Friendly.
46.- Aggressive.	47.- Gullible.	48.- Inefficient.
49.- Acts as a leader.	50.- Childlike.	51.- Adaptable.
52.- Individualistic.	53.- Does not use harsh language.	54.- Unsystematic.
55.- Competitive.	56.- Loves children.	57.- Tactful.
58.- Ambitious.	59.- Gentle.	60.- Conventional.

Source: Hyde (1995, p. 134).

Figure 1: BEMSex-Role Inventory (BSRI).

Ridgeway & Myers (2014) identified aspects of brand logos and brand personality. Likeability and relatability influence the brand personality. Consumers can increase profitability. A fashion brand’s marketing communication can meet customer attraction. Consumer perception of the brand logo colors is set out. Ridgeway & Myers (2014) pin on the Associative Learning theory. Associative learning theory pins

on the psychological principles of classical conditioning and Operant conditioning. According to the associative learning theory, a connection can be created between any pairing of stimuli, not just animals and food, but humans and colors as well (Grossman & Wisenblit, Citation1999). The work of Self-Congruity Theory has been enabled by Aaker (1997), Morris Holbrook (1999), and Sirgy Joseph (1982). The model identifies the self-reflection of a consumer which influences brand preference and purchase behaviour.

Li et al. (2020) outlines the brand personality and the effect of loyalty, affective, cognitive, and behavioral perspectives which can provide. Three-dimensional construct along a continuum: affective loyalty, cognitive loyalty, and behavioral loyalty. Fugate & Philips (2010) outline that gender changes are prominent and influential in the current trend with gender patterns being of gender role shift. Finlay & Wenner (2020) identify the aspects of the “crisis of masculinity” seen in the alcoholic industry. Sports-driven advertising sets out the “bro culture”. Another set of advertising focuses on proud keepers of tradition.

When understanding the research gap, the focus on education marketing-based literature is limited. Gunawardena (2023) has several publications on the aspect of the gender gap. While Diraj et al. (2017) focus on the aspects of gender roles. Education marketing studies have often involved the study of social media platforms (Perera et al, 2022), Student satisfaction measures (Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018), CRM usage (Adikaram et al, 2016), and Student Choices (Somaratna, 2020). To summarize, it could be identified and validated that a gap in the literature exists in understanding branding-oriented studies. Hence, a study of gender-oriented brand personality studies will provide fruitful insights.

Aaker's Brand Equity Model is highly useful for a brand advertising study focused on gender roles because it offers a robust framework to examine how brand attributes and consumer perceptions intersect with identity aspects, including gender. David Aaker's model emphasizes the components of brand equity—brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations—which are critical in understanding how consumers perceive and engage with brands in a gendered context. (Eisend, 2010) Aaker's model highlights brand associations, which encompass the emotions, thoughts, and values that consumers link to a brand. For a study focused on gender roles, this aspect is particularly relevant because brands often use advertising to project-specific gendered characteristics and appeal to gender-based identities (Eisend, 2010). Gender-targeted advertising can shape and reinforce associations, influencing how men and women perceive brand personality traits such as masculinity, femininity, or neutrality (Grohmann, 2009). Aaker's model enables researchers to categorize and

assess these associations, examining how gendered messaging affects brand perception. In Aaker's model, perceived quality is a fundamental component, referring to consumer judgments regarding a brand's overall excellence. Gender roles often shape expectations around quality, with consumers tending to evaluate brands differently based on gender-targeted marketing messages. For example, products traditionally advertised as masculine (e.g., cars or tools) may prioritize strength and durability, while products advertised as feminine (e.g., cosmetics) emphasize aesthetics and care (Pounders et al., 2016).

Puolakka & Najem (2020) have examined gender-neutral advertising through the lens of the BSRI. By identifying masculine, feminine, and androgynous traits in consumer perception, the research offers insights into the effectiveness of gender-neutral strategies in brand advertising. This study by Klymenko and Kozelska (2020) explored how advertisements featuring specific gender role models impact viewer memory and attention toward brands. Using BSRI, the study revealed that men and women process stereotypical gender portrayals differently, influencing ad recall and brand perception. This research highlighted the BSRI's effectiveness in capturing nuanced responses to gender portrayals, particularly showing that male viewers focus more on visual elements, whereas female viewers emphasize relational aspects in ads.

There is limited synthesized research that utilizes both BSRI and Aaker's model in brand advertising studies. The study evaluated whether consumers perceived brands with distinct personalities (masculine or feminine) and the impact of these perceptions on brand loyalty and affinity. This research, though limited in identifying the antecedents, only focuses on gender role classifications.

3. Methodology

The process of methodology will be carried out by analyzing the 2024 Facebook ads that have been published on the social media platform, the communication will study the different aspects of communication that have been carried out. A total of sixty (60) brands from Sri Lanka are studied. The analysis takes a view of the advertisement placed on Facebook. A total of 1,422 advertisements are logged with the identification of different attributes pinned out. Facebook Ad library (<https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/>) has been used to establish a clear direction. Content analysis has been carried out. While the higher education industry is undertaken as a case study.

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is a research method used to interpret and systematically analyze qualitative data, such as text, images, or multimedia. The goal of QCA is to understand the underlying themes, patterns, and meanings in the content, rather than simply counting frequencies as in quantitative content analysis. This approach

is particularly effective in capturing the context, nuance, and subjective interpretations of social phenomena, making it a popular choice in fields such as sociology, psychology, marketing, and media studies. (Schreier, 2012) The technique is used to analyze content to understand the context in which certain words, phrases, or symbols are used. Researchers seek to uncover implicit messages, societal norms, or cultural values embedded within the text (Schreier, 2012).

Qualitative content analysis has been carried out where the study involves an understanding of social media posts made with the framework of Aaker and BSRI Test. The coding analysis is conducted with selective coding. A hybrid coding methodology was adopted. Inductive (Open) Coding starts with no predefined categories and allows codes to emerge organically from the data. This is ideal when exploring a new topic. Deductive (Theory-Driven) Coding uses an existing framework or theory to guide your coding. This is helpful when you have specific research questions or hypotheses in mind (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Shaldana, 2016)

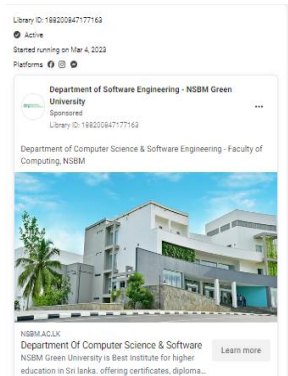
4. Results/Analysis and Discussion

The results that are gathered include Aaker's model. Use of (1) Sincerity, (2) Excitement, (3) Competencies, (4) Sophistication, and (5) Ruggedness.

Sincerity: Sincerity does provide the commitment of the institution to the community, and education profession. Social media posts are utilized as a function of communicating updates.



A step towards community engagement



Sincerity in investment illustrated with the infrastructure availability



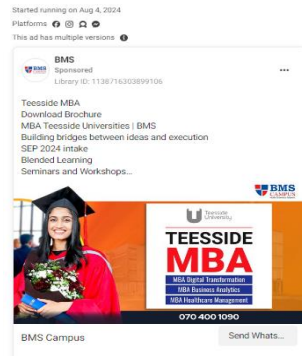
Use of students and association of statements “Happy students learn better” – Accreditations with logos are an effective methodology.

Moving ads that show the different infrastructure elements that are available within the campus.

Figure 2: Examples of Sincerity.

Figure 1 indicates the sincerity elements available in the higher education industry. As for the aspects of sincerity, the implementation has been extensive. Often showing recognition of accreditation bodies and partnerships.

Excitement: Excitement does provide the institutions providing the ability to highlight factors that are driven by elements that could drive the exciting factors.



BMS advertising highlights the excitement on graduation day.

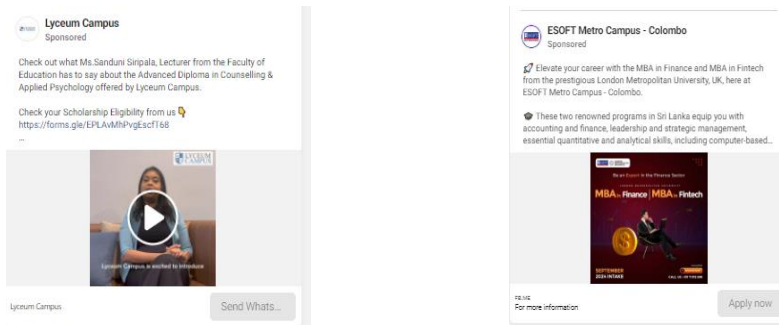
Sincerity in investment illustrated with the infrastructure availability.

Figure 3: Examples of Excitement.

Figure 2 illustrates mostly the emotional angle of graduation ceremonies, which are often noticed as a hallmark of the educational industry’s achievement. Excitement elements could be further explored, which can provide a way forward for industry.

Competencies: Competencies outline the capability of the institution to provide reliability, responsibility, intelligence, and efficiency requirements at the organizational level, ensuring student

quality.



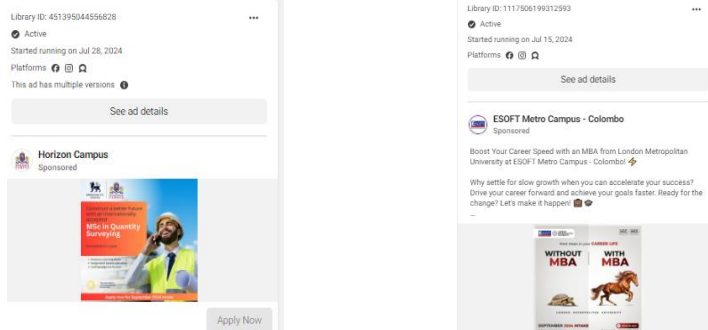
Lyceum Campus has utilized the academic panel to provide specific insights about their program and allows opportunities to build trust.

Unique programs that can bring an attractive response to the student and professional expectations.

Figure 4: Examples of Competencies.

Figure 3 helps to understand the angle of competency that has been showcased by the institution – showcasing innovation, and academic excellence will provide the ability to pinpoint advantages.

Ruggedness: The ruggedness will include strength, unconventional, and outdoor-oriented branding concepts. In higher education, this concept is applied with limited aspects.



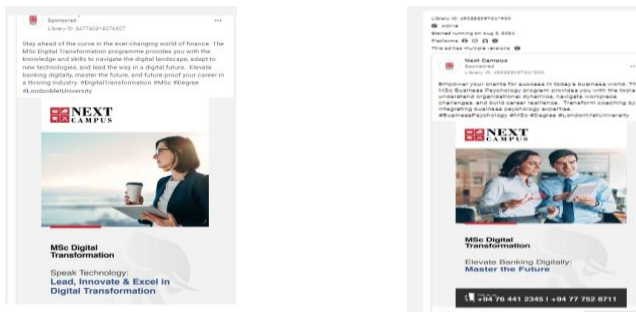
Horizon Campus is focusing on the outdoor nature of the job – The key visual that is being used is that of a male.

ESOF metro campus has shown with visualization the differences and advantages that an MBA could provide to a candidate.

Figure 5: Examples of Ruggedness.

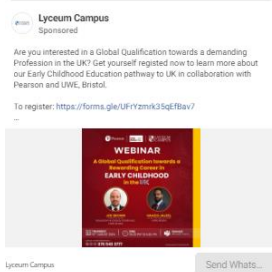
Figure 4 illustrates rudeness towards the job category and the program category allows us to attract the surplus advantage that has been made available.

Sophistication: Sophistication enables an understanding of the different available features that can meet the needs to provide lavishness and quality orientation at the institutional level.



Use of a foreigner to highlight the achievement of being a respected individual.

Use of foreigners to create a perception of foreign university backing for the program.



Workshops allow the audience to connect with the institution. This is an effective tool to understand the marketing carried out.

Figure 6: Examples of Sophistication.

Figure 5 outlines the sophistication and capability of the institution to bring in an international perspective, and workshops that allow for global resource personnel in the institution's marketing activities. This will allow for better acceptance and appreciation.

Table 1: A Copy of the Coding Analysis Conducted.

Criteria	Ad copy number												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Items for evaluating masculinity													
Self-reliant								✓	✓				
Defends own beliefs													
Independent													
Athletic													
Assertive													
Strong personality											✓	✓	
Forceful									✓				
Analytical								✓					
Leadership ability													

Jealous				
Truthful			✓	
Secretive				
Sincere				
Conceited				
Likable	✓	✓	✓	
Solemn				
Friendly	✓	✓	✓	
Inefficient				
Adaptable				
Unsystematic				
Tactful				✓
Conventional			✓	✓

Key Insights:

- The results highlight that the industry is using various forms of communication elements to bring femininity to the higher education industry.

Currently, the study only reviews the aspects of Facebook advertising. However, the primary mode of communication for large higher education institutions is still offline education. “Campus Tour” and “Open Day” are consistent modes of promotions that are used by these institutions to showcase the positive aspects of the brand personality. A physical presence provides the comprehensive advantage of understanding the infrastructure and creates a “Moment of Truth” for a student.

However, it is understandable that virtual tours or a digital-ready strategy have not been put in place by any of these institutions.

- Facebook advertising with investment tends to be more rationalized in communicating messages. On the other hand, the social media pages have been used to publicize the community engagement, activities, and events.

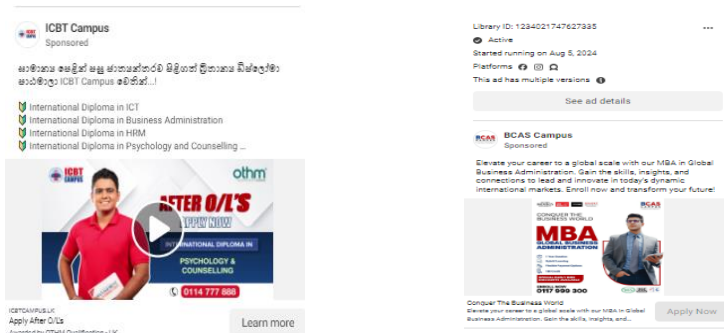


Figure 7: Examples of Straightforward Messaging.

The advertising is quite primitive and would be called out to create a “student recruitment” oriented advertising with direct communication of the benefits. This allows the student to make a call. A limited effort online to create brand equity could be seen.

- Gender stereotyping and use of models.

Gender stereotyping based on the profession–course. Education/teaching always portrays a female character. Similarly, Male images were used in the courses for Quantity surveying, Mechanicals, and Engineering. Some of the programs such as Piloting, IT, and Psychology increasingly showed indicators of female student participation.

Gender stereotyping and the use of models are still followed by mainstream institutions. BMS (2024) has been able to cut the clutter by showing known faces of the students: athletes, famous managers, and bankers. This allows for positive affiliation of the brand with people and the community.

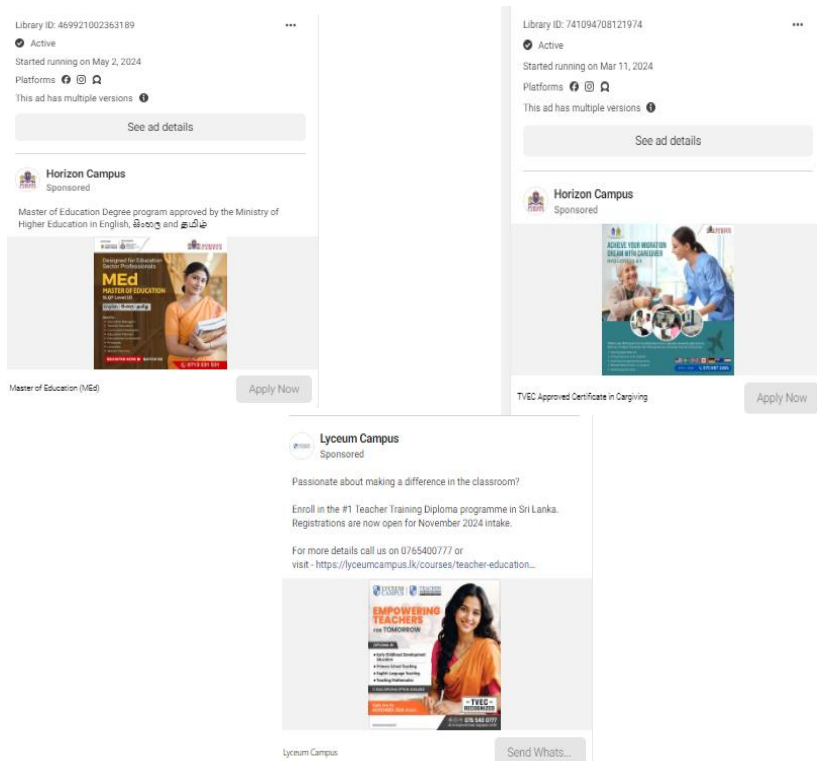


Figure 8: Examples of Gender Stereotyping.

The aspects of using models as in Figure 7 do indicate a possible disconnect or an opportunity missed out to highlight local heroes, active students, and past students.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The following range of conclusions could be drawn with reference to the research topic, which gives insights into the aspects of research.

Principles generalized from the study

Feminine brand personality as per Aaker is in place in the Higher education industry in Sri Lanka. However, the application in the local industry has been extremely limited with reference to the Facebook platform. The need to display these aspects could be identified to be drawn to the aspects of lack of social media-oriented competition. The nature of the industry has been limited in terms of social media-based competitiveness. The higher education industry could be called out to be less aggressive online.

Conclusions drawn from the study

In understanding the overall images used and the different key visuals included, the following conclusion could be made.

- (1) There is an immense gap in the higher education industry space to break the clutter.

The marketplace is less focused on digital media; understandably, the industry still relies on traditional marketing methods.

- (2) Functional advertisements provide for better immediate conversion results. However, the brand building is not visible on the Facebook platform.

Facebook has enabled corporations to gain leads, contacts, and interest in a product or service. However, the functional level of advertising is routinely used due to higher Facebook ad results.

- (3) Traditional advertising methodology is more visible with brands such as NSBM, and AOD which do not boost much on Facebook ads.

The use of Facebook as a media platform is being seen by large-scale Non-State Higher Education Institutions (HEI), which do not advertise. Hence, the focus on using the digital platform is minimal. It is used as a platform to share results.

- (4) Gender stereotypes in programs still exist. E.g. Nursing and health care

Gender stereotyping is exceptionally high in the Sri Lankan Non-State HEI space. This is due to Hofstede's country-level analysis of Sri Lanka, which indicates that Sri Lanka is a feminine culture. One of the inherent features of the culture is gender Stereotyping.

- (5) The "femininity" in the brand personality required for higher education is lacking online. Requires more brand work.

The femininity of the brand equity-building work is very limited online. This is about ensuring effective quality representation.

Any exceptions and problems with generalizations

The analysis presents the challenge of looking only at the Facebook social media platform. The aspects of research results are extensively limited when reviewing traditional marketing practices, which impact brand personality.

Theoretical and practical implications of the study

The study provides much necessary insight into the required brand personality. The study can validate the feminine brand personality that is required in the higher education space.

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