

The effects of perceived brand orientation on university brand preference

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Abstract: This research aims to examine the role of perceived brand orientation on university brand preference with moderating role of career development support. To this end, we utilized multi-wave survey data collected from students of public and private sector universities in Pakistan. The collected data were analysed through structural equation modelling using AMOS. The results show perceived brand orientation has significant association with university preference. Moreover, the results further revealed that career development support moderates the link between perceived brand orientation and university brand preference. This study significantly contributes to brand management and higher education literature by empirically testing the effects of perceived brand orientation on brand preference through moderation of career development support, an under-researched phenomenon. Beside many strong points, this study also had a few limitations such as ignoring perceived market orientation and dimensions of the university brand equity in the research model of the study. The study advances and addresses gaps found in academic literature to help academicians, higher education industry practitioners, and policy makers to understand the interplay between perceived brand orientation and university brand preference.

Key words: perceived brand orientation; career development support; university brand preference; structural equations modelling; orthogonalization.

Introduction

In today's competitive business environment, universities are facing numerous communal challenges like unemployable graduates, lack of funding support from the government and lower university rankings (Pinar, Girard, & Basfirinci, 2020; Pinar, Trapp, Girard, & Boyt, 2014). Prior studies have discussed the funding and enrollment issues of universities and highlighted the importance of branding and developing a market orientation for the universities in attracting prospective students and to effectively compete in the education market. Due to increased competition in education sector, HEIs are turning out to be more customer oriented and heavily invest on marketing techniques to attract prospective students and increase the number enrolments (Casidy, 2014b; Ghobehei et al., 2019). This competition in education sector, pushed universities to find the ways to attain and sustain the competitive advantage (Casidy, 2013, 2014a; Ghobehei, Sadeghvaziri, Ebrahimi, & Bakeshloo, 2019; Panda, Pandey, Bennett, & Tian, 2019). There is not a single dimension in which universities need to

excel, rather they must try and improve along multiple dimensions to achieve their competitive advantage in order to attract the prospective students and qualified faculty. In given significance of the competitive advantage of a university, the often repeated question is why one university is preferred by the students than another given both operate in the same context? This is the main question this research aims to address.

Previous studies in this domain have mostly focused on branding initiatives in higher education (Lambooy, 2011), university brand image (Angulo-Ruiz & Pergelova, 2013; Duarte, Alves, & Raposo, 2010; Ivy, 2001; Karrh, 2001; Momen, Haque, Omar, & Sultana, 2014), the impact of brand name on student preferences (Ahmad & Dar, 2015), quality of learning environment, cost of education, facilities, socialization, location, and customer focus, (Padlee, Kamaruddin, & Baharun, 2010). However, the impact of perceived brand orientation on university brand preference remained unexplored and no efforts have been devoted so far to examine this unresearched phenomenon. Our study aims to fill this important research gap by studying the relevance of perceived brand orientation on university preferences. It is evident from academic literature that placements of the students in the job market is among the other problems currently being faced by the universities (Adachi, 2006; Alpert, Heaney, & Kuhn, 2009; Coll & Eames, 2000; Ghasemaghahi, Kapoor, & Turel, 2019; Saleem & Amin, 2013). In the last decades, it has been observed that several universities are becoming machines for producing unemployed graduates without focusing on skills and career development aspects. Resultantly, this unemployment has become an emerging problem for governments across the globe generally, and for university graduates and their families specifically. On the other hand, also there are universities which focusses on career development and graduate skills that are required by job market. Therefore, students prefer to study in a university that develop employment skills that are required by industry and provide them a competitive advantage over the graduates of other universities.

Furthermore, it is evident from academic research that universities strongly influence the development of society due its importance in innovation (Alpaydın, Atta-Owusu, & Saman, 2017; Gunasekara, 2006), knowledge transfer (Azman et al., 2019; Crespo & Dridi, 2007), the contribution to innovation (Abramo, D'Angelo, & Di Costa, 2011; Tang, Motohashi, Hu, & Montoro-Sanchez, 2020). However, the role of career development support in influencing university brand preference has been neglected and there is lack of empirical evidence whether career development support moderates the relationship between perceived brand orientation and student's preference of universities. This is a significant area contributing to university preference, as job placement has a wider scope and its performance is dependent on students, firms and universities by properly explaining the responsibilities of each stakeholder. (Frasquet, Calderón, & Cervera, 2012; Mcglathlin, 2003). Therefore, the second objective of this study is to investigate the impact of perceived brand orientation on university brand preference through moderating effects of career development support.

Taken together, this research aims to expand the body of knowledge in service industry particularly in the education sector. The novelty of this research comes from its two key contributions. First, our study contributes to exploration of perceived brand orientation effects on brand preference in education sector, thus paying scholarly attention to rarely examined associations in this sector. Second, our research enriched brand management and education management literature through exploration of career development support as moderating mechanism between perceived brand orientation and university brand preference. This research endeavor will facilitate the better understanding of perceived brand orientation and university preference. Finally, our research provides theoretical and practical implications for top management of HEIs to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in competitive higher education industry.

1. Hypotheses Development

1.1. Relationship of Perceived Brand Orientation on University Brand Preference

Mulyanegara (2010) introduced the concept of perceived brand orientation (PBO) and defined it as a measure of attitude towards a brand or being brand oriented from customer's perspective or organizations members. Drucker (1954) asserted the importance of the brand orientation assessment in customers or employees' prospects. He also believes that the marketing activity is not a specialized activity rather from the customers perspective the whole business is accessed accordingly (Casidy 2014a). There are many studies conducted on perceived market orientation but the concept of brand orientation is still in early stages (O'Cass and Ngo 2009). The relationship between PBO and the responses of customers in crunch context is examined by Mulyanegara (2010, 2011a, b) and suggested that the brand oriented activities perception of crunch members have a significant and meaningful relationship with their crunch activities participations. Later, Casidy (2013a, b) employed the PBO concept in crunch sectors and in higher education. Both studies showed significantly positive effect of PBO on satisfaction perceived behavior and loyalty. This study postulates the perception of students to extent the universities brand-oriented activities influences the student's quality perception significantly. The construct used in this study for brand orientation refers to the perception of students that to which extent the university develops the awareness and interacts with expectation and needs of students.

In the job market students with intense competition would want to graduate from a reputable institute. So, the engagement of the university with strong brand behavior has a significance importance for those graduates as the strong brands could cause enhancement in the awareness of universities reputation which could help in increased opportunities for students in the job market upon the completion of their graduation. The past studies have linked the universities brand image and their brand performance. According to Palacio et al. (2002) students' satisfaction is positively influenced by the by the university's cognitive, effective and overall image. This study also suggests that the perception of students regarding to extent to which engagement of the university with brand orientation behaviour will have a significant impact of their preference. It also gives a competitive edge to students to in job market upon the completion of their graduation and this will also increase the university's preference. Recently Ghobehei et al. (2019) analyzed the impact of perceived brand orientation on perceived service quality and university reputation. Therefore, on the base of the previous literature, following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Perceived brand orientation has positive effect on university brand preference.

1.2. Moderating Role of Career Development Support of University

Graduate career development is an important issue in higher education industry (Matlay & Rae, 2007; Okolie, Igwe, Nwosu, Eneje, & Mlanga, 2020; Tran, 2015). According to Suleman (2018) graduate career development entails set of certain achievements (personal and skill attributes) that increases graduates likelihood of success in finding employment and makes them successful in their chosen profession. Which not only benefits them but is also fruitful for community and country's economy at large. Thereby, the concept of graduate career development encompasses a set of diverse personal and skill attributes that are assumed to enhance one's potential to find and succeed a good job (Nghia, Giang, & Quyen, 2019). It constitutes ability to apply graduates, knowledge, understanding and skills set to employers' context, which involves the acquisition of relevant skills and understanding to effectively adapt oneself the employers' or organizational context (Griffiths, Bullough, Shibli, & Wilson, 2017; Holmes, 2013). Career development thus can be context specific and viewed through multiple perspectives ranging from the need of a specific employer, nature of employment, the knowledge and

skill attributes that graduates need to develop in order to improve their career development opportunities and have better employment outcomes (Burke, Scurry, Blenkinsopp, & Graley, 2017; Christie & Burke, 2020). However, Holmes (2013) highlights three contending perspectives in relation to one's career development such as positioning and possessive. The possessive approach emphasizes on the skill attributes (Farenga & Quinlan, 2016; Pasand & Haghi, 2013; Thirunavukarasu, Chandrasekaran, Subhash Betageri, & Long, 2020). Similarly Blustein (2013) identifies graduate identity, generic mastery in skills and technical expertise as instrumental in career development considerations. Jackson (2014) delineate that the employability involves the development of attributes such as knowledge and skills that enable them to acquire jobs and better perform their tasks at the job; suggesting that higher education domain should be expanded further to include business-relevant skills as well to make it a better fit. This suggestion was made in a study whereby the proposal to include such job or employment oriented courses as communication skills, financial management, knowledge-based businesses and information and communications technology (ICT) received considerable acknowledgment and support from students belongs to all age groups and faculty schools. The positioning perspective on the other hand focuses on career development which refers to the 'success in employment' with the potential to benefit graduates themselves and number of stakeholders as well (Holmes, 2013). Favorable employment outcomes are important for higher education institutions to attract students who pointedly fund their operations (Jackson, 2014; Millican & Bourner, 2011). Finally, the processual perspective represents the job acquisition process by considering graduates' relative identity and interview skills to enable them to likely secure the good job. Adekola (2011) argue that though skill acquisition got considerable attention during career development process, the process of securing employment through developing an interview skill however received little attention which has been identified as core to increase the likelihood of success to acquire good job. Likewise, Brown, Hesketh, and Williams (2004) noted that obtaining a degree remains basic requirement, whereby employers expect applicants to possess variety of personal and skill attributes along with cutting-edge soft and hard skills. In a study examining the effect of numeracy skill on career development of graduates, Gati and Levin (2014) pointed out that employers more often keen and attach great importance to employees' numeracy skills; thereby indicating how poor numeracy skills limit graduates career development instincts, irrespective of the study area concerned. The study by Durrani and Tariq (2012) also show that employers' demand for numeracy literate has been increasing alongside oral communication skills, reliability, and good working ethics. In context of this study, graduate career development represents students' ability to get jobs with ease, which can directly be linked to the university from which they are graduated. In response to the increasing significance of graduate career development, higher education institutions are reshaping the contents of their academic structure, programs and extra-curricular activities to improve graduates career development skills (Knight & Yorke, 2004; Römgens, Scoupe, & Beusaert, 2020). In a study on graduates, Jackson and Bridgstock (2018) indicate that institutes positive perception is a precursor to the graduate employment outcomes, although they also maintain that this is not a strong indicator regarding the education quality as employers do not have an objective assessment of the quality standards adhere by the institutions (Sykes, 2016). Blanca et al. (2013) argue that institutions with positive perception of quality teaching and research practices build strong reputation among students in pursuing their higher studies, as graduated from a ranked institute is considered as valuable in the job market. Blanca et al. (2013) added further that the degrees secured from top ranked institutions are more credible and valuable in the job market; helping graduates to acquire jobs after graduation. Therefore, alongside mathematical skills acquisition, career development should also consider the soft personal attributes, recognizing graduate

identity through certain interview skills, and thereby institutions may build positive perception and reputation in minds of both students and employer. It somehow indicates that graduate career development has the potential to develop overall quality perception of institution among students and thus affect their choice and preference in selection of educational institutions. On the base of the above cited literature, it is proposed that

H2: Career development support from the university moderates the relationships between perceived brand orientation and university brand preference.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants and Procedure

In this research, sampling frame consist of the business graduates studying in universities of Pakistan. The reason for choosing the business students for data collection was they had awareness about the branding activities. The survey questionnaire of the study was written in English language, which is the official language for teaching in the Pakistani universities and schools and many researches have used this language in their previous researches conducted in Pakistan (Arain, Hameed, & Farooq, 2012; Arshad et al., 2021; Naeem, Channa, Hameed, Akram, & Sarki, 2019). The conceptual framework of the study consist of the moderation link, therefore this research adopted multi-wave design. The information of the students was collected from the business departments of the university to distribute the survey forms randomly to students. We attached a cover letter with each questionnaire for explaining the objective of the study and to ensure to confidentiality of the respondents. It was also informed the respondents that the data will be collected in three stages after every two weeks interval. For this reason, we assigned specific code on each survey form to match the data later. As mentioned earlier, data collection of the study was completed in three phases: at time-1, data for independent variable such perceived brand orientation, data for moderator such as career development support was collected at time 2, and at time 3, data for dependent variable such as university brand preference was collected. Therefore, a unique number (ID) was mentioned on survey form at time-1 and was informed to the respondent. Later the respondent reported the same ID on the survey form distributed at time-2 and time-3 that helped us in matching the data collected in three wave. The survey form were distributed to randomly selected students from the sampling frame in the class hours after getting permission from the head of department. At first stage we distributed 350 survey forms at Time-1, out of which 320 survey were returned. After two weeks, at second stage we distributed the survey form to the same respondents and asked them to fill the forms. A total of 302 forms returned at time-2. At time-3, we received 295 survey forms generating the response rate of 84%. After excluding the mismatch and incomplete forms, 263 survey forms were used for further data screening and then after excluding the 07 multivariate outliers 258 cases were used for further analysis. The sample of the study consist of 35% female and 65% male. Most of the students (70%) were enrolled in semester 5-6 and 30% were studying in 7-8 semester. Moreover, 40% of the respondents were younger than 25 years of age and 60% of the respondents were above the age of 25 years.

2.2. Measures

All the construct measurements were adapted from prior published research. Twelve items for Perceived Brand Orientation (PBO) were borrowed from Ewing and Napoli (2005). Likewise, five items of career development support was adopted from the study of Pinar et al. (2014), whereas the eight items of university brand preference was adopted from the study of Effah (2017). All the indicators of the scale of the study were measured on five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree = 1 to strongly agree = 5). Demographic variables for this study included gender, age, current semester of students.

2.3. Analysis

Data analysis of this study was conducted using SPSS 24 and AMOS 24. During the analysis, the researcher analysed the missing values, aberrant values i.e. values that were not within the normal range of response categories. There was no missing value as well as aberrant value in the data set. However, the normality of data was also checked using the normality test. There was one multivariate outlier, which was removed from the data set for further analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Test for Common Method Variance (CMV)

Many useful techniques can minimize the value of CMV, as CMV dramatically affects (minimize) the results and their validity especially from the results which are derived using cross-sectional data as well as data collected through surveys. The researcher used the recommendations made by Podsakoff et al. (2003) and made sure that all the questions were clear to understand. Moreover, the researcher avoided the usage of double-barrelled questions. In addition to the clarity, a cover letter was also used with the questionnaire for explaining the study and its objectives. The researcher made sure in the cover letter that responses will remain anonymous. The researcher also used Harman's single factor test as there were always the chances of CMV in the data. Moreover, principal component analyses were also performed with the available items using the eigenvalue criteria (i.e., eigenvalue > 1). By this analysis, it came in the knowledge that CMV is not a concern as the first-factor variance was only 19.6% and total of three factors were used in the dataset.

3.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

In this research, SPSS 24.0 statistical software was used to perform factor analysis with principal component matrix. To minimize the number of constructs with high loadings on one factor Varimax rotation method was used as suggested by Malhotra, Hall, Shaw and Oppenheim (2002). The purpose of using rotation was to achieve the simplicity and boost the interpretability of the measurement instruments. Factors having eigenvalue more 1.0 were retained in this study. Eigenvalue helps to determine the number of factors which basically reflects the amount of variance associated with each variable.

The two items of perceived brand orientation, one item of career development support, and one item of university brand preference construct was deleted due to factor loading less than 0.5. Once the item with low factor loading was deleted the factor loading test was performed again to retain the items with factor loading greater than 0.5. The results of EFA demonstrated that the career development construct and university brand preference is in consistent with the previous studies of Pinar et al. (2014) and Effah (2017) respectively. Whereas the scale of PBO was developed to reflect 3 brand orientation themes originally, but in this research only one factor was extracted through EFA. So, the unidirectional nature of perceived brand orientation scale was analysed which is consistent with the studies of Hankinson's (2001b) related to brand orientation in non-profit sector.

3.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Assessment of Measurement Model

Prior to the evaluation of the structural model, evaluation of measurement model is considered an important step (Hair, Anderson, Babin, & Black, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). After performing EFA, CFA is considered one of the most important procedures to refine the factors or constructs to assess the reliability and validity of the scale by standardized loading of the factors.

When the researcher performed CFA for the first model that includes all the items of perceived brand orientation, career development support, university brand, the fit indices of the model was not up to the mark such as (CMIN/df = 4.651; TLI = .881; CFI = .890, RMSEA = .057). To improve the model fit statistics, the items with low factor loading were removed i.e., three items for PBO. After that the model fit statistics strengthened and improved to an appropriate standard. Further, CFA was again performed to enhance the fit indices. This was done on the basis of the modification indices by co-variation the error terms of the indicators. The outcomes of CFA with updated indicators showed that the data in the second model, such as CFI, TLI, CMIN / df and RMSEA values, were all within the range of fair acceptance (CMIN / df = 2.838; CFI = .933; TLI = .919; and RMSEA = .039).

3.4. Reliability and Validity

Furthermore, composite reliability, Convergent validity, as well as discriminant validity of the scale were tested. As recommended by hair et al. (2010), composite reliability should be greater than 0.70 whereas average variance is extracted should be above 0.50 for analysing the convergent validity. Moreover, for analysing the discriminant validity, maximum shared squared variance, should be less than the average variance extracted. All values are as per recommendation except as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Reliability and Validity

Constructs	CR	AVE	MSV	1	2	3
1.University Brand Preference-time 3	0.833	0.557	0.220	0.746		
2.Perceived Brand Orientation- time 1	0.866	0.508	0.220	0.469	0.713	
3.Career Development Support- time 2	0.791	0.501	0.135	0.304	0.367	0.701

Note: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted; MSV = Maximum Shared squared Variance.

3.5. Hypotheses Testing in Structural Regression (SR) Model

In branding, majority researchers opted structural equation modelling (SEM) for the purpose of only CFA and they have tested the hypothesis by using multiple regression analysis. But this study had used the SEM for the purpose of hypothesis testing using structural regression (SR) models. The advantage that SR gives over multiple regression analysis is that SEM is able to address the measurement errors presence in statistical models while this is not case with regression analysis. In figure 01, the view of all SR models along with proposed relationships in provided. The SR model along with all the paths has demonstrated good fit to the data (CFI = .92, CMIN/df = 2.61, TLI = .91, & RMSEA = .044).

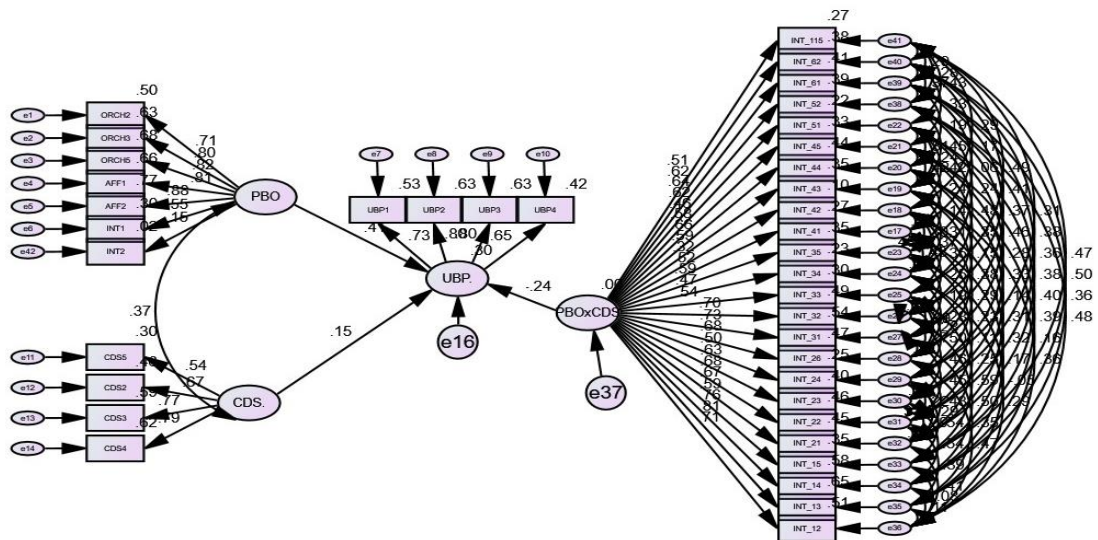
Table 2
Structure Regression

University Brand Preference- time 3
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	Unstandardized β	S.E	p-value	R ²
Perceived Brand Orientation- time 1	0.416	.029	0.000	
Career Development Support- time 2	0.189	.036	0.000	0.298
PBO*CDS	0.384	.043	0.000	

The SR model supported H1, which argued that time-1 Perceived brand Orientation has positive influence on time-2 university brand preference. The results given in Table 02, demonstrated that perceived brand orientation has positive influence on university brand preference (H1: unstandardized $\beta = 0.416$; S.E = 0.029; $p = 0.000$). Hence H1 of the study is supported.

Figure 1
Baseline Full SR model with all the proposed relationships of the study



3.6. Moderating Effects of CDS on the relationship of PBO and UBP

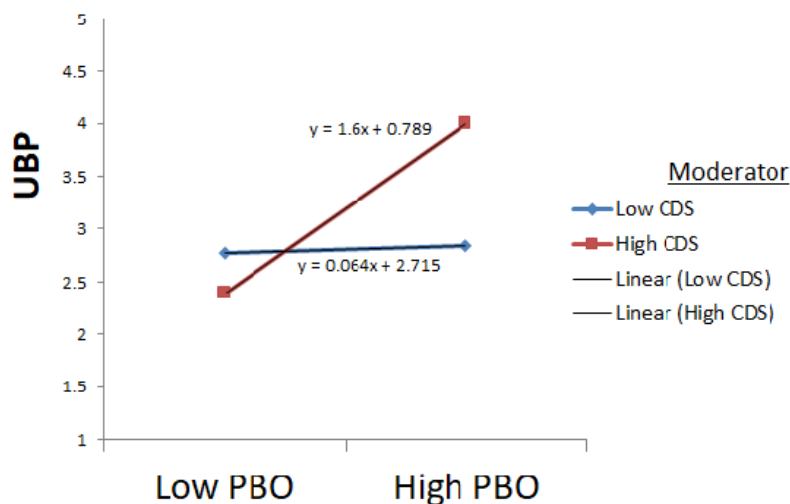
Little, Bovaird, & Widaman, (2006) has mentioned in his research that testing of interaction effects in multiple regression analysis have some limitations, e.g., the largest limitation is not accommodating the effect of measurement error on the determining of such relationships. This problem is particularly troublesome for testing interaction effects through regression models (Kenny & Judd, 1984; Little, Bovaird, & Widaman, 2006; Marsh, Hau, Wen, Nagengast, & Morin, 2011). Therefore, testing

interaction through latent structure model is statistically more reliable than doing it in regression model and several techniques have been proposed so far to investigate latent variable interactions in SEM. The three more commonly applied methods are, latent moderated structural (LMS) model (Klein, Jiang, & Cheney, 2009), unconstrained product indicator approach (Marsh, Wen, & Hau, 2004), and orthogonalization approach (Little et al., 2006). However, Little et al., (2006) compared the results of latent variable interactions in SEM through orthogonalization approach with both LMS & unconstrained product indicator approach and found that orthogonalization method had better fit to the data. Thus, we used orthogonalization approach and created orthogonalized indicators for the two latent interaction terms¹, i.e., PBOx CDS (where PBO was independent variable and CDS was moderator), to test the above cited interaction effects. The results presented in Table 02, showed that the latent interaction term of PBOx CDS had significant effects on university brand preference (H2: unstandardized $\beta = 0.384$; S.E = 0.043; $p = 0.000$). Thus, the results support the H2 that there is moderating effect of the CDS on the relationship between PBO and UB was supported.

3.6.1. Probing of significant interactions

Moreover, Figure 2 present graphical evidence in support of H2. The slope of Figure 2 shows that the relationship between perceived brand orientation and university brand preference is moderated by career development support such as the relationship becomes stronger when career development support practices are high as compared to when they are low.

Figure 2
Interaction Effect of Career Development Support



4. Discussion

Now a days preferring a university is not easy for students and their parents because universities and institutions are striving to capture the attention of the current and potential students. There are two possibilities for the universities: enhance the student’s enrollment and imply the branding strategies in order to capture the student’s preference for higher studies and make them loyal to their university. Therefore, the aim of this research was to analyze the relationship of perceived brand orientation, career development support by the university and brand preference. The conceptual framework of the current

¹Details on how to create orthogonalized indicators for the latent interaction term and to test it in structural regression model in SEM can be found in the paper of Little et al., 2006.

study was based on the literature of the existing studies by linking the constructs. This study analyzed the proposed hypothesis by structural equation modelling, especially the moderating effect of career development is test through orthogonalization approach.

The result of the study showed that perceived brand orientation has significant influence on university brand preference. This suggest that students and other stakeholders of the university value that brand orientation strategy in preferring the University for the Studies. The finding of the study are in line with the Casidy (2013) and Ghobehei et al. (2019)

Therefore, it is suggested to the management of the universities to involve the students in designing and promoting the branding ideas. No doubt the decisions are made by the executive managers, but the students always live their university brand and can keep alive the university brand by promoting through their positive word of mouth. Moreover, universities management should remain close to their students and fulfill their needs timely. Finally, the universities must ensure that brand activities are coordinated properly with each other to encourage the enrollment of the potential students.

The second objective of the study was to examine moderating effect of career development support between the relationship of perceived brand orientation and university brand preference. To accomplish the research objective, hypothesis (H2) were accomplished. To test the proposed hypothesis, this study used orthogonalization approach and created orthogonalized indicators for the latent interaction terms² i.e., PBOsxCDS (where, CDS was moderator and PBOwas independent variable). The results presented suggest the moderating effect of the CDS on the relationship between PBO and UBP was supported. It means the relationship between perceived brand orientation and university brand preference is moderated by career development support such as the relationship becomes stronger when career development support practices are high from the university as compared to when they are low. Undeniably, it has been observed in many universities of Pakistan that they had allocated offices for the support of the students in the search and placements of the students in the industry.

The findings of the study elaborate that any university who plays moderating role in the placement of the students in the job market will be preferred more form the students. For instance, students believe that quality teaching and research are main components for a university to award the degree to the students (Blanca et al., 2013). Similarly, Morrish and Lee (2011) and Shah et al. (2015) describes that degree from high ranked institutions are considered to be more valued in profession. Students from the highly ranked universities are more obliged in professional life, this shows that support from the university helps students in attaining jobs after completion their degree along with the perceived brand of the university (Blanca et al., 2013). As a result, Tolbert (2014) perceives that educational institutions create a specific image in the minds of stakeholder, attracting good employees and enhancing intellectual personal (Brown and Whysall, 2010).

5. Implications of the study

The conceptual framework for the present study has its roots from theoretical gaps identified from the previous literature. The empirical testing of the antecedents such as PBO, university brand preference and the moderating effect of career development support are the major theoretical contributions of research. This study plays an important role to understand the PBO in the sector of Higher Education. Up until, from the consumer's point of view very rare research has been conducted to observe the brand orientation in overall and particularly with reference to university students. Thus, this research tries to be fill research gap by investigating brand orientation from the student's

²Details on how to create orthogonalized indicators for the latent interaction term and to test it in structural regression model in SEM can be found in the paper of Little et al., 2006.

perspective on the selection of the university. There are few studies where the concept of PBO has been in the service sectors particularly in the education sector. One of the most theoretical contributions of this research is that it incorporates career development support by university as moderator between the relationship of perceived brand orientation and university brand preference in a single model. Further this research is helpful for marketing personals of universities in general and particularly it gives insight for policy makers of educational sector. A university must ensure the sufficient and satisfactory understanding of students needs and wants approach if it endeavors to build a strong university brand equity and university brand preferences. Considering the implications for HE institutions for instance degree awarding institutes and universities, there exists a growing competition and rivalry between local and international level education providers which they must face. This study gives an additional insight to the role of BO from the student's perception in the HE sectors. For the creation of strong brand, policy makers should focus on three dimensions of brand orientation. Moreover, university brand preference enhanced through perceived brand orientation. Brand oriented universities create more strong perception in the minds of stakeholders as compare to those institutes who gave less preference to branding and marketing. For the reason, universities more focus on enhancing brand activities and sensing the market requirements. Now the institutions realized that branding is an asset that will help to achieve competitive advantage.

6. Limitation of the study and future research directions

Although present study has supported many hypothesized relationships, but one cannot deny the context of certain limitations that every study exhibit. Therefore, this study has also certain limitations that are recommended for the future researchers to research upon. First, this study offers quite limited generalizability due to the focus on students of business departments of top ten business schools. Future researchers are recommended to include other departments and universities as well to generalize the findings. All the public and private universities can be studied and compared as well with each other. Second, this is the cross-sectional study that stops researchers to measure the causal inferences from the population hence future researchers are requested to go for longitudinal design so that they can measure the construct at different time to confirm and generalize the research findings. Third, research context is also the main limitation of the study. The HE sectors consider exceptional service organization. There exists a continuing level of commitment and meetings among customers and the service providers. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the overall satisfactory level of consumer in this context. Fourth, this research collected data from the students only, but it has been observed that parents and other stakeholder such as teachers, friends of the students mostly play role in the selection of universities. In future studies, it is advised to collect data from other stake holders.

7. Conclusion

Collectively, current study has provided additional empirical evidence towards existing literature of brand orientations from the student's perspectives and university brand preferences. It also adds an empirical evidence to the existing body of knowledge in the context of career development support from the university that has been incorporated as moderator for the present study. Findings of the study provided an ample support for the proposed theoretical hypothesis. Specifically, present study has successfully addressed all the research objectives despite some limitations. Although much has been explored about perceived brand orientations and brand preferences but this study has incorporated the theoretical gap by using career development support from the university as a moderator in the said relationship in order to determine the intensity of the given relationship.

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