Turiba University

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SYNOPSIS OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Formation of Brand Loyalty Matrix for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Developed for doctor's degree in Business Administration (Dr. oec)
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The Doctoral thesis consists of 232 pages including 25 tables, 27 figures and 32 Appendixes. The list of literature contains 253 sources.

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ANNOTATION

There was a time when branding was limited to Fast Moving Consumer Goods and mass manufacturers, but the recent times have seen the importance of marketing and brand management of novel sectors like education. So, in the era where institutions are marketing themselves aggressively to get customer/student attention, it becomes significant to overview students' expectations as what is valued by them the most and what can make them repurchase/reuse and loyal to their chosen brand. Considering the very fact, this thesis aims to investigate the impact of brand awareness of HEI (Higher Education Institutions) and service quality - together with the mediating role of brand trust on brand loyalty of HEIs in the long run.

Chapter 1 of the thesis discusses branding in higher education institutions and an overview of research context i.e. Pakistan's Higher education.

Chapter 2 analyses the literature encompassing necessary concepts regarding branding, previous studies about higher education branding and theoretical models discussing determinants and factors affecting customer (student) loyalty.

Chapter 3 brings analysis and interpretation of research activity conducted in the thesis. The study is correlational by design with parametric approach. Quantitative data consists of students as respondents, whereas semi structured interviews were conducted from heads of marketing and admission committee of various institutes to check the impact of "Band awareness" and "Service Quality" on brand loyalty of students. As inferential statistics was employed, Factor analysis and regression analysis were conducted along with required descriptive and reliability tests using SPSS. The results depicted that though both brand awareness and service quality effects brand loyalty of educational institutes, it's the service quality that contributes more to brand loyalty in the long run, yet both aspects work side by side and need to be focused.

Chapter 4 of the thesis take aid from literature review, empirical findings and expert analysis. Based on this information from previous

chapters, the development, working and implications of Brand Loyalty Matrix (BLM) has been discussed as part of Scientific Novelty of the study. The developed Brand Loyalty Matrix gives new insights and discuss different scenarios limiting the use of both service quality and brand promotion as per market scenarios in which the HEIs are operating. Recommendations and suggestions have been put as necessary implications of this BLM, thus aiding Higher education Institutions, students, state accreditation bodies and consultancy firms in making informed decisions. Also, the brand loyalty matrix is one of its kind, the novelty of which can prove out to be valuable and vital as per theoretical contribution in further research to come.

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Keywords: brand management, higher education branding, brand loyalty of HEIs, service quality, brand trust, brand awareness, student relationship management.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the era where promoting a brand has become priority of every industry to flourish and strengthening the brand has become determinantal of success for long-term growth, the need for proper brand management is becoming especially significant. A time in which running promotional campaigns and preferring advertisement budgets over quality was limited to fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs) only, has taken transition to the novel sectors like education (Simoes & Soares, 2010: 372), as these institutes are on the verge of aggressive promotional campaigns (Amzat, 2016; Celly & Knepper, 2010**;** Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007; Maringe & Gibbs, 2009). For institute being big or small, old or new, whether located in Africa or Asia, Europe or America – the focus towards attracting students is a top priority of educational institutes (Elliot & Healy, 2001: 4) which is maintained through proper brand management. Apparently, it looks as gone are the times when quality was considered by customers (students) the only criteria for selecting an educational institute as how well the brand is familiar and established is a key attribute in their decision-making process now (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013: 214). They want their educational institute to be famous or have an awareness in common, so they carry with them a tag of an acclaimed and trusted brand; thus, helping them in job placement as well (Mabkhot, Shaari, & Salleh, 2017). While students and guardians (being customers) prefer a renowned brand as their educational institute (Kayombo & Carter, 2017), higher education institutions (HEIs) are considering this rising trend as an opportunity and making all necessary attempts to brand their institute (Mavondo, Tsarenko & Gabbott, 2004; Schertzer & Schertzer, 2004: 90).

The other aspect, however, of this promotion orientation could be the fact that quality provider institution which are lacking in promotional run could become unfamiliar. Therefore, it is important for these institutes/universities to consider the aspect of Brand awareness for their respective institutes as well (Chen and Chen, 2014: 143). Having said this all, this discussion is extended to the fact that what is the best combination of both brand awareness and service quality that can contribute to ultimate brand loyalty of higher education institutions.

Attracting the students through various promotional aspects and apparent claims might help universities in making students as one-time consumers, but the need is to find what happens with the loyalty of educational institutes in the long run, and this is going to be the research problem to be discussed in the later section.

In short, continuing with business terminology, a company is expected to grow till the time the customer makes repetitive purchase (Dick & Basu, 1994: 111) and in context of higher education institutions the repetitiveness of customer's purchase means the education institution is on right track. Though Zehir et al. (2011) discuss the impact of established brand and service quality on building brand loyalty in automobile and other service industries, the need is to analyze the contribution of established and esteemed brand awareness and service quality on brand loyalty of higher education institutions. Not only this, as it is also important to analyze that is it wholly solely the one attribute out of two discussed above or a combination of two along with some other factors? Or is it a fit between the two aspects that need to be chosen by HEIs in different scenarios. What can really win customer's trust and what can make them to repurchase from the same brand of institutions, is the need of hour for modern day HEIs to know. These institutions are competing in red ocean fostering perfect market competition (Lamboy, 2011) where it will be the loyalty of customers that ensures the long-term competitive advantage. Talking about previous studies in the field of higher education research, the notable recent works include Alam, Adnan & Afridi (2018: 5) according to whom internal branding impacts on institutional brand in general. The authors have emphasized on the role of staff and workforce to reflect on overall institutional brand image. In contrast to the formers' point of view Alam et al. (2019) present findings on issues which HEIs in Bangladesh are facing as part of their inability to brand respective institutes. The authors further reveal that students do prefer highly branded institutes over quality education that gives this research a lead as well about essential branding concepts i.e. Brand Awareness, Brand Trust and Brand Loyalty etc. so that it is better analyzed to not only to attract these customers (students) but efforts should be made to retain them as well. These are the real concerns which are raised in this research as part of research problem discussed in the section below.

Problem Statement

Taking lead from introduction part and discussing the impact of claims by higher education institutions being big brand, being renowned or trusted brand and claiming as a brand of which people are aware, it is **important to figure out whether the admitted students consider their decision wise and aim to repeat purchase in the near future or one time promotion, claimed, known and familiar quality of services by HEIs are good enough to retain students in the long run**. What happens to the trust factor afterwards which is initially developed by HEI at the time of admissions? As mostly it is observed that students' lost interest in the due course and are seen complaining about not getting what they were promised for. This is generally the problem with quite a few aggressively branded HEIs, and need is to analyze the contribution of established brand awareness of HEI in developing brand loyalty. Do customers as students/guardians/parents/decision makers/opinion makers/ influencers continue to use the services or rate the services same as these were guaranteed or the educational institutions failed to update themselves with changing dynamics of competition. The trust factor is another aspect which can keep on reducing with every passing semester or it can be increased if the big brands have been able to sustain competitive advantage over their counterparts. As per Joseph, Mullen & Spake (2012: 7), the integral aspect of service quality that ranges from quality teaching to student counselling and from infrastructure to efficient job placements are generally missed and the institutions missing on these aspects lose their customer loyalty. So, the need is to tackle this problem and to suggest higher education institutions the best fit of both important and integral aspects of brand loyalty i.e. Brand Awareness and Service quality.

The different scenarios in which these institutions should behave accordingly and the situations where an alteration of strategy becomes a must takes us to formulate objectives of the study which are discussed in the next section.

Area of Research

Higher education Brand loyalty.

Object of the Research

Impact of brand awareness and service quality on brand loyalty of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Hypothesis

Brand Awareness and Service Quality increase student trust on the HEIs, which in turn affects students' commitment and enhances HEIs' brand loyalty, while in comparison service quality contributes more towards HEIs' long term brand loyalty.

The main hypothesis is supported by the following supporting hypothesis, which will be tested empirically.

H1: Brand awareness (BA) positively affects Brand trust (BT).

H2: Service quality (SQ) has significant impact on Brand Trust (BT)

H3: Brand Trust (BT) has significant impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

H4: Brand awareness (BA) has positive impact on brand loyalty (BL).

H5: Service quality (SQ) has significant impact on Brand Loyalty (BL)

H6: Brand trust (BT) plays a mediating role between Brand awareness (BA) and Brand loyalty

H7: Brand trust (BT) plays a mediating role between Service quality (SQ) and Brand loyalty (BL).

Goal of the Study

To **make comparative analysis of the effect of Brand Awareness and Service Quality on HEIs' brand loyalty and to** develop Brand Loyalty Matrix for Higher Education Institutions, which may further aid HEIs to focus on their brand positioning and repositioning and enable other stake holders i.e. students, state accreditation bodies and consultancy firms to proceed with informed decision making and developing strategies accordingly.

Tasks of the Study

The following are the tasks organized to achieve the described goal of the study:

- to study scientific literature encompassing student loyalty, service quality, brand awareness and trust factors;
- to review previous studies on HEI branding for contribution in the existing field;
- to overview Pakistan's HEI sector/ market;
- to evaluate customers' (students') expectations about factors responsible for their brand loyalty in order to choose the best fit of brand awareness and service quality to increase brand loyalty;
- employing validated questionnaires as part of primary research to record respondent's view as input to results and conducting interviews from the experts in the field;
- work out Branding oriented models and Model for Branding Higher Education Institutions to reach the development of brand loyalty matrix for HEIs.

Limitations of the study

The Higher Education branding is such a diverse field that its impact may vary from course (study program) to course, country to country with varying demographics and cultures, having less or more population and other psychographic features. So, these factors might show deviations as the research context is Pakistan's higher education sector. Also, HEIs being state or private can account for different monetary sufficiency, however the same depth and diversity in the field points to generalizability that revolves around branding and loyalty as an essential parameter for HEIs. This generalizability aspect allows the usage and aid of results – as part of brand loyalty matrix, for these HEISs to position themselves and work out the loyalty requirement accordingly.

Research Period; 2016–2019

Stage 1

Research period is from 2016 to 2019. In November 2016, the author conducted preliminary discussion with experts in Pakistan regarding growing need of branding in Higher Education Sector and literature review started encompassing base theories and previous research in the field.

Stage 2

In fall 2017, the discussion about suitability of topic was carried out with eminent researchers in Prague, Czech Republic and during this mobility program the research methods were discussed, and validated questionnaire was selected to proceed with the study, which was sent electronically to part of the population for pilot study. By the mean time in June 2017, necessary statistical skills to perform empirical analysis were learnt during "quantitative research methods" course in Oslo, Norway and choice of statistical tests was discussed with professors from Oslo and Spain.

Stage 3

The author continued researching the literature review and emerging trends in the selected field and published related articles, before another pedagogy assignment in 2018 in Poznan, Poland made author to master his statistical skills. The literature review had been completed by then and questionnaire was finalized with little modifications. In April 2018 the final version of expert interviews was conducted, and data collection completed. The pilot study results were then presented in Doctoral seminar in Poznan, in June 2018. The acceptability and validity of pilot results and findings from expert views aided in evaluation of Brand Loyalty Matrix.

Stage 4

By December 2018, completion of empirical results achieved, and research results were presented in Conference in Berlin in December 2018, and in Doctoral Seminar at Turiba university in January 2019. The thesis writeup was completed in the same month and research output was further approbated as a result of expert discussion and in conference titled "Emerging Trends in Economics, Culture and Humanities" at Riga in April 2019.

Research Methods

The theoretical base of the doctoral thesis is comprised of established scientific theories and acclaimed models in the field of branding and higher education. The empirical results consist of mixed method approach i.e. quantitative and qualitative A validated questionnaire was employed for evaluating customers' (students') response in assessing the contribution of independent variables on mediating and outcome variable. The data analysis was processed via SPSS and methods used were descriptive, Cronbach's alpha for reliability, factor analysis for data reduction and complete set of regression analysis for hypothesis testing. Also, AMOS software was further utilized to double check the scores factor loadings as were obtained from SPSS. Expert interviews were conducted as part of qualitative analysis by using recursive abstraction method, so to back the statistical findings and to link its implication in developing brand loyalty matrix as an outcome of this research, in a meaningful way. Further, the evaluation of Matrix was conducted by experts in the field. Descriptive statistics was employed to analyse their evaluation. The detail explanation of the research methods is presented in chapter 3 of this Thesis.

Theoretical & Methodological Base for Research

Scientific Literature and articles on knowledgebase concerning Brand Management and its significance is structured on view of American Society of Marketing (AMS) and on the scientific works of authors as Murphy, 1987; Aaker, 1996; Hoyer & Brown, 2001; Keller, 1993; Stephen, 1993; Kapferer, 2004; Alkhawaldeh, et al., 2017; Schiffman, Bendall, O'Cass, Paladino & Kanuk, 2005; et al.

The definitions and description of essential concepts in Branding are comprised on the scientific work/articles of Oppong & Phiri, 2018; Aaker & Keller, 1990; Zakaria, Basset & Said, 2009, Miller, Muir, 2004; Rowley, Dawes 2000; Van Osselaer, Janiszewski, 2001; Ghodeswar, 2008; D'Astous & Boujbel, 2007; Valette-Florence & De Barnier, 2013; Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman 1993; Davis, 2002; Oliver, 1999; et al.

Scientific Literature and articles on Higher Education Branding; Abbas, Hussain & Rasool, 2019; Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2017; Alam,

Adnan & Afridi, 2018; Chapleo, 2010; Temple & Shattock, 2007; Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007; Duesterhaus & Duesterhaus, 2014; et al.

Assessment of key features in Brand promotion campaigns were analyzed thoroughly on the scientific notion of AIDA model (Strong, 1925) using literature (Kotler, 2002; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Kennedy, 1982; et al.).

Scientific Literature on analysis of the customer's behavior of loyalty and its dimensions is based upon Customer Loyalty Model (Aaker, 1996; Dick & Basu 1994; Bloemer & Lemmink, 1992; Oliver, 1999; et al.).

Students' as customers view and desirability for a renowned brand and their decision making as customers is based upon the scientific literature of; Cardoso, Carvalho & Santiago, 2011; Jongbloed, 2003; et al.).

Novelty of the Research

1. The matrix, termed as Brand Loyalty Matrix (BLM) has been developed which can assist HEIs and other stake-holders to position and rank various HEIs as per their current standing. This Matrix can track future performance of these HEIs as well, which is one of its kind in higher education setting.

2. The empirical comparisons between service quality and brand awareness accounts for new insights and device ways for HEIs to limit and devote their attention and expenditures to the most beneficial aspect of the two. This comparison could be found in automobile and other industries, but in higher education sector – aimed at loyalty, it opens new horizons of analysis which is adjustable and coherent with varying target markets and regions.

3. Definitions worked out.

The following definitions have been created and defined by author as part of novel contribution during the process of thesis:

- Higher Education Brand Loyalty
  "The Power of an educational brand to retain student for future offerings and enable the students as customers to spread positive word of mouth about the institute".
- HEI as Generation Brand

"The impact of an educational brand that ensures its loyalty across generations". As, loyalty accounts for repurchase behavior of customers, in higher education setting the generation brand appears to be the one which is referred or suggested or recommended by prior consumers/users to the forthcoming generation within the circle of their influence.

- HEI – Brand Loyalty Matrix
  "A matrix allowing stake holders to identify brand positioning of HEIS and making necessary decisions accordingly". The decision making may range from strategic decision making to consumer decision making; depending upon stake holders' characteristics. While student being stake holders can make informed decision making about selecting their educational institute and State accreditations entities be aided with development of rules and parameters for HEIS on its basis, the institute's management and marketing consultants might opt for corrective measures for re-branding of respective HEIs.

Practical Contribution of the Research

1. The developed matrix further benefits to foresee revolutionary change from curricula to staff training, and from infrastructural reforms to strategical alliances etc. It can aid strategic management process right from formulating, implementing and evaluating stage, which can be practiced in unique dimension for HEIs.

2. As the higher education branding is a demanding topic, this thesis bears potential to bring valuable addition in the entire education system of sample region, courtesy the quantitative and qualitative findings.

3. The author's research shall promote the implementation and execution of quality education services for Brand Management of Higher Education Institutions; irrespective of the nature being state owned, private or semi government institutes.

Target Beneficiaries

Considering the rich scope of the study, the target beneficiaries of this thesis comprise of:

- higher education institutions to have room for strategically rethinking by evaluating their current position, bringing radical or needed reforms and strengthening or maintaining their brand;
- students/guardians as consumers to find the appropriate and quality-oriented brand as their educational destination;
- accreditation bodies to employ and enhance necessary obligations for HEIs to maintain and being adaptable to quality standards;
- research and consultancy firms to keep track of HEIs performance and designing maintenance and remedial plans for HEIs, when required;
- state by having an acclaimed and recognized educational system worldwide – further aiding in country branding as well.

Scope of the Thesis and structure

Introduction analyses the topicality, problem, and tasks of the study. This section forms all the necessary basis to justify the importance of analyzing brand loyalty in higher education setting.

Chapter 1 discusses the research context mentioning Higher Education scenario in Pakistan. Details including number and type of HEIs, students' enrolment, the accreditation body and academic legislations have been presented so to give reader an idea about the trends and perspectives regarding Higher education and branding practices related to it.

Chapter 2 encompasses the literature review in the chosen field of higher education branding. Definitions about the study variables and scientific contribution about the constructs have been discussed to develop statistical hypothesis. Also, a detailed mention of previous studies gives a clear progress of thesis in its desired direction, while emphasizing upon the importance of the field and gap analysis as well. The chapter taking lead from previous studies and literature then marks the essential theories regarding branding and Higher education Branding in particular. The description of AIDA model to deify the significance of Brand Awareness and use of Customer Loyalty Model by Aaker makes a perfect platform for intended statistical orientation. Also, the inclusion of Higher Education Brand Management model triggers the need for focusing on

Loyalty development for HEIs, which is one of the core objectives of this study. This chapter sets a tone for required statistical analysis in the thesis.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of research methodology, the questionnaire and results. It confirms the statistical hypothesis by usage of descriptive, reliability, and inferential statistical tests. The inferential statistics comprise Factor analysis and regression modelling, whereas Cronbach Alpha analysis has been used for reliability analysis. The author has shown correspondence of statistical findings with other researches in the past. These findings are then backed by analysis of expert interviews; conducted from the professionals in the field. The conclusion reveals that both brand awareness and service quality have an impact on Brand loyalty while the implication of both can be varied as per varying demand. However, in contrast service quality proves out to be more impact full.

Chapter 4 brings the pure research in to action by developing the brand loyalty matrix as a core outcome of the research. This matrix, given the name as HEI–BLM (Higher education Brand loyalty matrix) is developed to fulfil the needs of various stakeholders. These stakeholders may place a specific HEI in different contexts on the existing level of their brand awareness and brand loyalty. The implications and working of the Matrix have been further matched with experts' opinion. The various stages of this matrix development have been separately discussed by author to give readers a sound understanding about its formation.

Conclusion and Recommendation section accounts for summarized remarks on the study. This part also reflects the outcomes from research results with their connection from theoretical basis as well. The corrective measures to be taken by stake-holders and implication for future research has been discussed as finishing line of the study.

Thesis Proposed for Defence

1) The greater the brand management of higher education institutions, the higher the brand loyalty.
2) The best fit of esteemed service quality of educational services and awareness generation through ads and promotional means boost overall trust and effects branding of HEI in a positive way,

considering the present-day student not only demands quality service but a renowned educational brand as well.

3) Brand awareness and service quality contribute to brand loyalty of Higher Education Institutions; however, quality of services serves the purpose in the long run without compromising on required level of promotion, which altogether lead to awareness.

4) The brand loyalty matrix may enable the HEIs' decision making bodies to assess their market standing as a brand and can further design, implement and execute strategies i.e. identify and reorganize their target markets, evaluate and reconsider their product (course curriculums) offerings/ portfolios, the maintenance and updating of infrastructural reforms, fostering the training and development needs, ensuring and maintaining better customer relationship management and formulation and recreation of promotional campaigns etc. thus contributing to brand loyalty of HEIs.

Approbation of the Research Results

The list of scientific papers published during the study includes the following:

- Abbas, S. A (2019). Brand Loyalty of higher Education Institutions. M*arketing and Management of Innovations*, 1, pp. 46–56, http://doi.org/10.21272/mmi.2019.1-04. Database: Web of Science (ESCI), Clarivate Analytic, EBSCO
- Abbas, S. A. (2017). Legal Regulations and Branding Higher Education Institutions. *Asian Journal of Social Science Studies*, 2(3), pp. 27–30, https://doi.org/10.20849/ajsss.v2i3.195
- Abbas, S. A. (2016). Teaching and Learning – A Complementary Study on Effective Teaching and Learning. *Asian Education Studies*, 1(2), pp. 87–92, https://ssrn.com/abstract=2844400
- Abbas, S. A (2014). Brand Management of Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Innovative & Applied Research*, 2(6), pp. 151–172, https://ssrn.com/abstract= 2461648

Other Papers

- Abbas, S. A (2018). Extrovert Followership and its Impact on Agreeable Leadership. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 6(2): pp. 154–179, http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.2018.3111, Database: Web of Science (ESCI), Clarivate Analytic, EBSCO, ERIC EJ1185804
- Abbas, S. A. (2018). Entrepreneurship and information technology businesses in economic crisis. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues,* 5(3): pp. 682–692. https://doi.org/10.9770/jesi.2018.5.3(20), Database: Scopus, Web of Science (ESCI), Clarivate Analytic

The conferences participated

- Presented research results, presentation "*Effect of Brand Awareness and Service Quality on Brand loyalty of Higher Education Institutions*". EU Economics, Finance and Business Processes and Trends. 10th May 2019, Kaunas at Vytatus Magnus University
- Presented research results, presentation "*Factors Affecting Brand loyalty of higher education Institutions*". XX International Scientific Conference on Social Sciences, 26th April 2019, Riga at Turiba University
- Presented research results, presentation "*Assessment of Students' Brand Loyalty in Higher Education Institutions*". International Conference on Emerging trends in Economics, Culture and Humanities. 24th to 26th April, 2019 in Riga at University of Culture and Economics
- Presented research results, published "*Comparative Analysis of the effectiveness of Brand Awareness and Service Quality in effecting Brand Loyalty of higher Education Institutions*". International Conference on Social Science, Humanities and Education, 21st to 23rd December, 2018 at Berlin
- Presented pilot study results, presentation "*Brand Loyalty of Higher Education Institutions in Pakistan*". Doctoral Seminar

Conference at Poznan University of Economics, Poland (June 29, 2018)

The theoretical and empirical research results were discussed in the scientific meeting (pre-defense of the thesis) on 1st April 2019 at Turiba University.

Pedagogical Assignments

Besides, the author has been involved in pedagogical assignments at Poznan University of Economics and taught Business Statistics and Quantitative Methods to Bachelor and Erasmus students. Also, under the ERASMUS mobility the author has taught Managerial Decision Making, HRM and Market Research at University of Economics and Management, Prague.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE NOTION OF BRANDING IN THE CONTEXT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This chapter includes the literature regarding essential concepts, definition and explanation about Branding as a prime step for hypothesis development. Also, issues encompassing what is brand management, its need in Higher education sector, the challenges and the significance of loyalty in higher education emerge out to be the focus of discussion; thus, contributing to the foundation and essence of the study. To add to it, an overview of Pakistan's higher education will be presented for adequate understanding of research context.

1.1. Brand Management

Considering, the significance of branding as one of the most valuable intangible assets, branding has become a top-notch option for firms and management (Keller & Lehmann, 2006: 742). Brands continue to act as durable and long lasting unless and until they keep providing the value which customer expects from them (Murphy, 1987).

Nowadays, to build a strong image has always been an important aspect of product and brand management. The more the stronger brand is created, the greater will be the revenue generation both in short and long term (Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 1993). So, the ultimate goal for creating brand value is to come up with the brands that last for decades (Aaker, 1996). As far as consumer behavior theory is concerned, a brand is defined as a mark that differentiates a branded identity from others, which could be a symbol, slogan, mark, tag line, specific design, colorful pattern or a best possible combination of all of these (Schiffman et al., 2005). **Historically**, initiation of branding as a concept can be linked to the late nineteeth century when developing branded consumer products were on a row (Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011). As per Wolpert (1999), it all started with putting identification marks on goods and services as a token of pride and quality by respective tradesmen and artisans and that occurred nearly a millennium ago. The phenomenon of this identification kept pace in 16th

century and was used as symbols by brick makers in ancient Egypt, while by the end of 18th century these symbols were replaced by pictures of animals and places of origin to make up for producer's name (Clarke 2009). The issuance of trademarks as a legal binding came after 1857 when France approved a law about brands whereas in terms of Arab world, Tunisia passed a special law about trademarks in 1889 (AlMaamari, 2013).

The post-industrial revolution resulted in technological advancement and mass production, thus increasing demand for brand identification as a need at then modern times. Theoretically, the advent of word "branding" in literature occurred as a result of paper written by banks in 1950 and now the significance of it has become a must for sustaining and attaining competitive advantage for all modern-day firms (Priporas & Kamenidou, 2011: 271). Therefore, meeting the demand of perfect competition in higher education sector as well, brand management is something not to be overlooked.

1.2. Branding of Higher Education Institutions

Around the world, there exist numerous universities and colleges which are applying marketing and brand management practices to gain competitive advantage (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Asaad, Melewar, Cohen, & Balmer, 2013). As higher education refers to service, therefore all the marketing principles of services can be applied to Higher Education Institutions. In this scenario of Education services, the customers will be the students, employers and public as being beneficiary of higher education services. Further, following the principle of target market and segmentation, the primary consumers in this case are students (Kantanen, 2007: 57).

There is no disagreement on the fact that undergoing consistent brand management is valuable to universities (Duesterhaus & Duesterhaus, 2014; Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007), however there is still lot to be done for research comprising of university's image, reputation, identity and in totality about university as a brand (Arpan, Raney, & Zivnuska, 2003; Melewar & Akel, 2005). Reflecting the prior research, the use of updated communication tools in higher education branding impact not only the stake holders (Chapleo, 2011: 112) but also the employees

working for its betterment (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels, & Gordo, 2009). As according to Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2006), Nguyen & LeBlanc (2001) & Rindfleish (2003) there can be experienced relevance of brand love in higher education research and future studies should include this brand love mechanism about HEIs as well (Vaette-Florence, Guizani & Merunka, 2011; Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012), this brand love proves out to be vital in determining loyalty of students.

Taking into consideration the development of brand identity of an HEI, promotional tools such as brand symbols, brand name and mission statements are used to create a distinct identity (Bosch et al., 2006; Melewar & Akel, 2005). As per Melewar & Akel (2005) higher education corporate identity is based upon four following sub constructs I.e. culture, market conditions, behavior and communication & visual identity, but Bosch et al. (2006) stresses that verbal expressions is another key determinant of HEI brand identity along with visual expressions.

The **challenges for Higher Education Institutions' branding** are numerous that ranges from brand architectures (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007) to varying demands of stakeholders (Waeraas & Solbakk, 2009). Though the branding of education services may encounter number of challenges contrary to a commercial service provider (Vijander, 2007), Chapleo (2010) suggests the use of commercial branding methodologies. Secondly, most of the education branding hasn't been the focus and center line of case studies or scholarly articles; however, they can be cherished as a commodity brand when the demand exceeds the supply (Anctil, 2008). Also, in case of conventional product like cola or biscuits the product differentiation is very less which increase the scope for branding whereas in educational branding the element of differentiation could be high i.e. number of degrees, courses offered etc. which ensures a limited branding scope of higher education (Grohmann, 2009). As far as diversity and strength of students are concerned the study institutions ambitions, aim and involvement may vary from portion of society to certain limit, whereas lot of students may not like these offerings (Warwick, 2003: 123) which makes branding of educational institutions a little tough. The element of similarity cannot be neglected irrespective of constant claims by different institutions as being 'best",

Another important challenge in Higher education branding is the difference in perception of owners and consumers (Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013: 30). The institutional owner looks over his/her competitors which may not exactly or is equally important for the students or guardians (Belanger, Mount & Wilson 2002). The investment of higher education institution is mostly focused towards building, infrastructures, cafeterias, sports facilities etc. This investment could be vulnerable in contrast to same investment in FMCG market because in educational sector trust and relationship may take long time to develop and are breakable in shorter span of time (Twitchell, 2002), though in the FMCG market it can be regained with promotions and offers, even after early breakup between supplier and customer.

1.3. Retaining Brand Loyalty and its Significance

Though it is being discussed so far in this study that students are considered as customers of higher education, yet the idea is not that welcoming or appreciated equally across all sets of higher education community. The advocates of this idea have strong belief on increased university image by considering student as customers (Hennig-Thurau, Langer & Hansen, 2001) while as per Emery, Kramer & Tian (2001), payment of tuition fee must not be considered as an equivalent or alternative to getting a degree. Dealing students as customer may result in compromising of quality on part of both faculty and students, which may result in less hard work by both the parties – governed by lack of shared responsibility (Clayson & Haley,2005). However, in other scenarios a student considering him/herself as customer might blame teachers for his/her failure. So renowned quotes like "customer is always right" might not best reflect the situation in terms of student as customers (Bay & Daniel, 2001) and to that academic quality can somehow or greatly be dependent on students' choice and terms (Sirvanci, 1996).

The idea of absorbing students as customers is not as simple as described because the repercussions could be severe for the demanding

teachers in terms of student feedback (Yunker & Yunker, 2003), whereas on the other hand less competent teachers may use the same argument for justifying their poor performance as well. However, Marsh & Roche (2000) have found the existence of positive co relation between students' grade and teachers' feedback, Yeo & Li (2014) believe that making student going through hard times and competitive study schedule can prove out to be vital for rising student intellect. So, for Bogler & Somech (2002) it is better to focus on government or general public or other locales as customer rather than students, but with in-depth analysis it is worth understanding that students; even though considered as customer, might not be given all the liberties which an ordinary customer can, unless an HEI is a predatory institute. The word customer for student is rather a metaphor used for marketing literature and that HEIs get aid with these terminologies to work on their branding. Also, being proponent of this concept, student can be considered as customer if it gives HEI motivation and capability to stand out as top-notch institute which is directly related with HEI's quality services; though HEIs should avoid following marketing quotes as "Customer is King/Boss".

Aiming to establish a sound **image of an HEI** appears a demanding task as according to Galinienë et al. (2009) attributes such as type of university, competitive admission procedures, versatility in programs offered, financial budgets possessed by HEIs and tuition fee contribute to an HEI image, whereas Polat, Arsalan & Yavas (2016) include core academic features like quality of studies, faculty quality, research activities and academic achievements of university graduates as a multiplier to university image.

As the image of HEI plays a pivotal role in students' selection, thus effecting job placements also (Polat, Arsalan & Yavas, 2016), branding concept can be implanted for universities with its long-term implications (Landrum, Turrisi & Harless, 1999). The image of organization becomes part of consumer's memory with its respective association (Keller, 1993). As per Capriotti (1999), an image describes the mental representation of an object in the absence of that object, so the essence of HEIs image in customers' mind needs to be on positive side. The greater the positive image, the higher the chances for student to reconsider rendering its services in future, considering

an image is like a general perception of the organization in customers' mind (Leiva, Ferrero & Calderon, 2016). Also, it's kind of a psychological personality profile (Haedrich, 1993) which has a lot to deal with critical student psyche. The HEI image may also be studied as corporate image of the organization which comes as an output of user experience with that of the organization's services (Zimmer & Golden, 1988).

1.4. Word of Mouth, Satisfaction & Perception

Jackson, Helms & Ahmadi (2011; 393) argue that "educational institutions, like businesses, are forced to confront the fact that, since perception is reality to customers, it is the perceptions that must be considered if improvements are to be recognized". Word of mouth is considered as an integral source of powerful communication for non-profit organizations, which include HEIs (Lang & Lawson, 2013). Coping with word of mouth, especially in the service sector, is a complicated task to undertake, and if it is in the domain of HEIs, then the impact is even more. In context of this study, a WOM by students is portraying, presenting and talking about their existing or recently attended HEI to their friends/ peers/ colleagues or in their circle of interaction where they are considered as opinion makers. Positive word of mouth in association with service quality features has been found as prominent element by prospective students (Bruce & Edgington, 2008; Carter, 2009). MacCallum, Browne & Sugawara (1996) also revealed that positive word of mouth is driven by relational and functional facets of service quality, which is subsequent to customer satisfaction.

Thus, knowing the sensitivity of word of mouth and its probable effect on student decision making, (Kitchroen, 2004: 16) it is desirable to ensure positive WOM through improved curriculum and trained faculty – the provision of which to students can act as a catalyst for brand recognition, thus, having its continuous and long-lasting effect on HEI as brand.

So, the discussed factors i.e. Students as customers, HEIs' Image and WOM should be taken under consideration during empirical and qualitive analysis, as they may be influencing HEI brand loyalty, which is the ultimate agenda of this study.

1.5. Overview of Higher Education Context in Pakistan

Strategically located at critical geography and culturally rich, Pakistan is a sixth largest populous country carrying over 200 million inhabitants (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2016). With youth comprising 64 % of its total population (UNDP Pakistan, 2018), the country's current literacy rate lies at 57% (UNESCO, 2014). As per developments, Governments' initiatives to raise literacy rate – though on its agenda, needs to be refined aimed at new reforms (National Plan of Action, 2001 – 2015, 2006), there has been observed the essence of education amongst parents and students over the last few decades. Especially in context of higher education attainment, students, in pursuit of demanding post study career, tend to move from remote areas to metropolitan cities with the aim of quality university studies. This subsequently leads them to opt for a renowned and acclaimed HEI so that their chances for placements are ensured (Abbas, Hussain & Rasool, 2019). This scenario is considered as an opportunity by these HEIs which leads to brand management of these HEIs. It's no more a surprise that to cater this influx of students, HEIs make every attempt to establish themselves as a brand. From promotion to marketing and advertisements, and from newspaper ads to gorilla marketing, HEIs employ all the necessary constituents of branding theory to brand themselves as a trusted and renowned brand (Alam, Adnan & Afridi, 2018). As discussed in introduction part of this Thesis, this branding may not appear harmful, unless, being compromised on quality of education, as there are concerns over the low quality teaching in some of the newer schools (Daily Times, 2015) and such is the downside of this heightened branding that there are actually left less quality provider HEIs and some of these may not be as recognized in general as the highly marketed. Though, this short-term build-up often turns up in disloyal students as customers and their repeat purchase behavior i.e. continuation of studies, becomes questionable (Ali, Tariq & Topping, 2013). Therefore, achieving and maintaining student loyalty in Pakistani HEIs is a concern to be given attention, if not in all HEIs.

Contrastingly, the known quality provider HEIs are either more competitive (state) or comparatively rather expensive (Private) that not every prospect candidate turns in to student. Also, the state universities are insufficient in numbers, so the access of economic studies to all is less equitable. Therefore, the element of trust and loyalty generated by HEIs, as part of awareness campaigns and quality of services cannot be overlooked, considering the gap between student demand and supply of HEIs are huge. To bridge this gap, at current there exist 179 HEIs/DAIs (Degree Awarding Institutions) nationwide (see Appendix 1 in thesis),

offering different degree programs in the field of Arts, Business, Medical and Engineering to name the few. While, Punjab being the most populous province (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017) caters student with 57-degree awarding institutes, including 32 public and 25 privates in total, Lahore being capital of the Punjab province serves with 43 DAIs in total, with 13 public and 30 private sector universities which indicate the dominance of brand related strategies as a determinant to operate in competitive educational environment. The list of other affiliate colleges with these universities can be seen as appendix 2 in full text of the thesis.

In most of the cases, due to the merit and limited number of seats in public sector universities, the remaining students choose the top private HEIs as a best possible alternative, depending upon factors like affordability, rankings and quality of education. On the other hand, a very few private institutes are considered more reliable that they become priority of some of these top lot of students and act as benchmark private HEIs.

A brief **analysis of issues at hand in Pakistani Higher Education** as addressed by National Educational Policy framework (2017) include low gross enrolment ratio (GER) at higher education level at merely 10%, campuses in urban and more developed regions, incompatibility of quality education with international standards, low number of PhDs, lack of a research culture, disproportions in Budgetary allocations for higher education to the needs of the country, issues related to effective Governance in HEIs, politicized appointments of senior leadership in universities are also found in some cases and weak industry academia linkages are name to few.

2. ESSENTIAL BRANDING CONCEPTS

Chapter 2 further extends the literature about branding concepts, factors contributing towards branding, the theoretical models that may act as value addition to branding concept and the previous studies and results as how brand loyalty has been measured in the past.

Aaker (1991) defines the word brand as "a distinguished name or a symbol for identification of goods and services of respective seller or group of sellers so they appear different from competitors who tend to provide similar products or services". There could be linked different definitions to it depending upon the context – though the mostly used by ASM, i.e. American Society of Marketing states a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design or any other combination of those features that identifies one seller's or organization's good or service as distinct from those of other competitors (Zakaria, Basset, & Said, 2009)". While Lee, Miloch, Kraft, & Tatum (2008) explain brand mark as a visual appearance which is communicated but not spoken, the use of pictures as torch, books, pens are normally used symbols by higher education institutes whereas the words like knowledge, power, and light etc. are commonly used in slogans as part of brand identification (Miller & Muir, 2004).

According to Oliver (1999) **loyalty** is the repurchase behavior of customer that is not affected by situational influences or marketing efforts of competitors. The moment customer repurchase makes company believe of its service with the motivation of continued value addition in its products and services. This repurchase sets a certain biased behavior of buyer towards a specific brand among other existing brands (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2000).

He further discusses that **brand loyalty** forms basis for low marketing budgets which would have been required at initial stages as it can generate new customers and better trade advantages. No wonder HEIs are running after brand loyalty measures and making spending over brand awareness and service quality like never before. Another interesting finding has come into branding literature by Dick and Basu (1994) according to which favorable **word of mouth** and customer resistance to

competitive strategies are termed as one of the key outcomes of brand loyalty.

Attitudes or habits is the other aspect by which brand loyalty can be indicated or identified (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973), however on conceptual grounds it can be considered distinct from attitudes or habits. There is no doubt about the admitted phenomenon that loyalty is one of the measures that can check customer's satisfaction with the product/ service performance (Bloemer and Lemmink, 1992; Ballester and Aleman, 2005). Linking this with higher education sector, a student on enrolling in the last attended or existing HEI again reflects the amount of satisfaction on quality of services i.e. education, teaching, curriculum etc. of the institute as these attributes account for student trust (Carvalho & Mota, 2008: 163). The more the number of current students or pass outs joining their HEI again the greater is the quality, these HEIs are providing.

As brand loyalty will be dealt as the outcome variable in this study; with its linkages as a testimony of trust and repurchase behavior through quality of services and brand awareness theoretically, the relative statistical hypothesis will be developed after discussion of predictors in later part. So, presented below are the table 1 and table 2 mentioning the previous studies and results measuring brand loyalty construct with the independent effect of branding related variables. The studies are selected based upon the methods chosen as quantitative and brand loyalty as a determinant of independent variables as service quality, brand awareness and brand trust. Also, studies from other sectors have been discussed as well so to see the effect of these constructs in other sectors and to provide lead for future research i.e. the contrasting effect. Also, the studies are selected post 2000 (in terms of years) considering it an era where branding in higher education became noticeable to emerging trends.

Table 1

Comparison of studies measuring brand loyalty construct

Author	Topic	Construct	Method	Questionnaire Type
Knox & Walker (2001)	Measuring and Managing Brand Loyalty	Brand Loyalty	Quanti-tative	Survey
Mekic & Mekic (2016)	Impact of higher education service quality on student satisfaction and its influence on loyalty	Student Loyalty	Quanti-tative	Survey
Emel Yildiz (2017)	Effects of service quality on customer satisfaction, trust, customer loyalty and word of mouth	Loyalty	Quali-tative	Face to Face Interview
Chi, Yeh, Yang (2018)	The Impact of Brand Awareness on Consumer Purchase Intention: The Mediating Effect of Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty.	Brand Loyalty	Quanti-tative	Survey
Ehsan, Warriach & Sehribanoglu (2016)	Measuring Brand Loyalty in Cola Market	Brad Loyalty	Quanti-tative	Survey

Source: author's own construction, based on prior studies

Other notable studies than the ones discussed in Table 1 and 2 include the empirical works of Agyei (2013) determining the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty towards telecommunication brands in Kenya. The stratified random sampling technique was adopted and sample size of 320 was achieved. Loyalty was measured by using person product moment Correlation and Regression Analysis as Statistical methods.

Also, in the context of Pakistan, a recent study by Waseem (2016) showed the significant impact of service quality on brand loyalty. Convenience sampling was used to acquire data. He made use of both exploratory and descriptive approach on the study. To further test the hypothesis, inferential statistics was used to prove the significant impact of service quality on brand loyalty.

There have been some studies regarding satisfaction of students and service quality of HEIs and in particular about brand management of Higher education Institutions (discussed in sub chapter 2.2 of thesis), however, the comparison of brand awareness and service quality refers to scarcity in literature that needs to be analysed. To sum up, this gap is a point to address in this Thesis aided by the respective variables from prior research. Table 2 below shows some more results about relationship between the prospect constructs in the study.

Table 2

Studies with Results on Relationship between Constructs

Researcher	Results
Christobal et al. (2007)	Web design, customer service, assurance and order management affect customer satisfaction and also customer satisfaction affect consumer loyalty.
Roostika (2011)	There is an indirect relationship between service quality and customer loyalty through trust.
Rizka and Widji (2013)	Service quality has positive effect on customer loyalty
Mirzapur et al. (2014)	Service quality has significant and positive effect on customer loyalty.
Ivanauskiene and Volungenaite (2014)	Three service quality dimensions as personal interaction, policy and product quality have positive effect on customer loyalty.
Saravanakumar and Jayakrishnan (2014)	Service quality has positive effect on customer loyalty but empathy and reliability are the most important effective factors on customer loyalty
Kim et al. (2004)	Customer satisfaction has significant positive effect on customer loyalty.
Alkhawaldeh et al. (2017)	There is a significant relationship between brand awareness and brand loyalty.

Lien et al. (2014)	Service quality has positive effect on trust.
Zarei et al. (2015)	Service quality affect trust.
Nejad et al. (2014)	Service quality, satisfaction and trust have positive effect on customer Loyalty

Source: author's own construction, based on prior studies

Both the table 1 and table 2 above have shown the outcome of brand loyalty as an input of service quality, trust and brand awareness in common. The literature regarding these input constructs have been discussed in detail in Thesis and is presented precisely in the coming section. Also, as per table 1, quantitative methodology has been applied in general to measure loyalty, which is better suited to methodology in this study as well. As these predictors (SQ, BA, BT) are generally found to be common in measuring brand loyalty as far as Management studies is concerned, the need arises to analyse the comparative effect of brand awareness and Service quality in assessing the brand loyalty, especially in the education sector and that together with the mediating role of brand trust, which comes once the service is experienced and the customers gets awareness of brand. This appears to be the novel aspect in this study. The previous studies and results shown in the table 1 and table 2 and extended literature in the coming section aims to further establish the basis for developing hypothesis encompassing these constructs, whereas items to measure these variables are taken from previous scientific literature, the details of which will be discussed in the research methodology section.

Brand Awareness

Brand awareness is related to the power and familiarity of a brand about which a customer/consumer is fully aware of. The brand awareness is considered as a first step towards knowledge and attitude of the brand which give an in-depth overview of what the product is all about. As Aaker (1996) believes that brand awareness can be analyzed from three different aspects I.e. recognition, recall, first recall, he further adds that consumer is simply concerned in remembering the brand name. Also, it is important to mention that creating awareness amongst masses could be an expensive task to do, the expense of which can be compensated if it is done effectively to increase the brand equity.

The above discussion in the context of brand awareness in connection with brand loyalty and brand trust leads to the formulation of respective hypothesis in this study, which are presented below.

H1: Brand Awareness (BA) positively affects Brand Trust (BT).

H4: Brand awareness (BA) has positive impact on brand loyalty (BL).

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the willingness of normal consumer to believe on the stated performance by the brand itself (Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman 1993: 315). This trust can be experienced as an expectation, a sentiment or a belief that has been achieved by brand's expertise and reliability (Dwyer and LaGace, 1986). This argument gives important insight to the fact that students' trust in HEI brand setting accounts for vulnerability that must be maintained till the end from the time the students are enrolled. Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992) also speak about relevance of trust in uncertain conditions. They are of the view that trust factor gets importance in the scenario of uncertainty, which justifies the fact in this research that students' trust on brand comes into play when the quality and credibility of their HEI is questioned or there exists a fierce competition in the market, as that is the time which can entangle students to their respective brands as part of their trust. Also, Elliot & Healy (2001) advocate customer relationship management for accelerating trust for HEI among their students. This further encompasses that organization (HEI) in this case must act in favor of the customer i.e., student so to maintain his/ her trust for a smooth ongoing relation. Therefore, factors like honesty, safety and reliability make a perfect blend of trust as far as consumer view of it is concerned. To sum up, it is presumed as trust is a well thought and consciously considered thought process; the existence of which ensures stability of any company or HEIs as a brand. This stable trust by customer leads to long term commitment which is called Brand Loyalty (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Carvalho and Mota, 2010)

As trust is a measure of business to business relational exchanges (Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande, 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994), it can be suggested that brand trust not only leads to repurchasing of goods and services again and again, but it brings attitudinal loyalty as well. **Based**

on this attitudinal loyalty it is therefore assumed that trusted brands should be purchased more often as compared to untrusted ones, so the following hypothesis are suggested.

H3: Brand Trust (BT) has significant impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

H6: Brand trust (BT) plays a mediating role between Brand awareness (BA) and Brand loyalty

Service Quality

Service quality relates to the perceived benefits and customers' perception about the elements of service. The outcome of ensuring successful relationship with customers revolves around service quality (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). It is defined as global judgement or attitude relation to the overall excellence or superiority of the service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988: 14). The elements of service quality especially in education sector include interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality. Linking all these elements to HEIs, interaction quality accounts for teaching, physical environment refers to infrastructure, whereas outcome quality is the result of the service both in terms of admission intakes and further to the results/scores of the students. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) further defines it as "the degree of discrepancy between customers' normative expectations for the service and their perception of the service performance".

As there still exists a room regarding relationship between service quality, brand trust and band loyalty, especially in the context of higher education Institutions (HEIs) –the empirical research could better be conducted ensuring value addition in the field.

So, based upon the discussion and previous studies discussed above, the hypothesis concerning service quality construct in this study are proposed as:

H2: Service quality (SQ) has significant impact on Brand Trust (BT).

H5: Service quality (SQ) has significant impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

H7: Brand trust (BT) plays a mediating role between Service quality (SQ) and Brand loyalty (BL).

Other important concepts discussed as part of literature review include *Brand experience* (Davis, 2002; Lockwood & Hadd, 2007), *Brand Personality* (Aaker, 1997; Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014), *Brand Identity* (Aaker, 1997; Ghodeswar, 2008), Brand Association (Keller, 1993), Brand Touch Points (Jha, 2016; Kujala, 2015), Percieved quality (Aaker, 1996; Perin et al., 2012).

Theoretical Models

While previous section discusses the literature and definition of essential concepts required for brand setting and establishing brand loyalty, this section covers the conceptual analysis of previous theories that set pattern and guidance to bridge the gap in existing research about brand loyalty.

As this model gives the basic insights as how customer makes its purchase in a series of steps, this Thesis will take further lead from this model to discuss as what happens after the last step in this model and what contributes to loyalty of customer (student) in higher education business. How the decision-making process in AIDA takes us to develop and discuss brand loyalty of HEIs to next level and which among the stages in the AIDA model are providing lead to future research in HEIs brand setting. These are some of the concerns that justify choosing AIDA in this study.

Figure 1. **AIDA Model** (Strong, 1925)

The first stage in AIDA model (Figure 1) is termed as "**Attention**" stage. This stage aims at generating awareness about the product/service in general. In precise, as an outcome to awareness campaigns i.e. gorilla marketing, discount offers, billboards, souvenirs, social media campaigns etc., customer attention is achieved at first spot. This attention about the existence of product/ service in the market is a first step towards making prospect customers, in case the product or brand is new in the market, while for an additional product in the product line this stage caters the existing customer (user) to turn into loyal customer. Aligning this stage with students as customer in Higher Education market, HEIs not only need to have an efficient marketing campaign rather a skill full marketing department should be established to foresee the demands from traditional/conventional to modern awareness campaigns.

Based on the first step of generating awareness and seeking attention of customer amidst becoming prospect customer, AIDA model presents its second acronym "I" as **interest** which is taking lead from the previous "A" as Attention. This "I" i.e., interest is the outcome of that aggressive marketing campaigns which are initiated by the company/ brand itself.

This is a very meaningful stage in AIDA model as it sets the tone and enable the customer to think as what s/he needs and how the very product can fulfil his/her demands. In Higher education setting, this interest stage accounts for the quality of services ranging from teaching quality to up to date course curriculums and the extracurricular services, that students/customers might look for their interest and therefore it is important for the marketing departments at universities to design the ads as per accordance of these interest factors by students. This "interest" factor from AIDA model will help this study to look into the influence and effect of better brand awareness and result oriented service quality features that are of direct students' interest and in turn these have a normative impact on building brand loyalty of these HEIs, which is being studied in this research.

The third capital letter or stage in the model denotes "**Desire**" which is generated through the effect of step two i.e. Interest. This interest oriented/ aroused "desire" makes buyer to develop favorable disposition about the

brand. The buyer has now totally lean into the offered benefits of the product/ service and now is desirous to think of buying the brand (Kennedy, 1982).

The fourth stage in the model is termed as **Action**. All the prior stages awareness, interest and desire have now made the customer to think of his/ her desired brand. The power of the communication message becomes viable by communicating the benefits of product/ service to make customer a purchase. This generation of message is equally important in higher education setting, thus enabling AIDA model is an advocate of effective Brand awareness.

Customer Loyalty Model

To identify the valuable impact of service quality and awareness campaigns, customer loyalty model by Aaker (1991) is being employed to assess various stages of prospective customer to turn into loyal customer. The first stage (see Figure 2) accounts for "**Switchers**" representing the class of customers who are price sensitive. They have no loyalty with the product/service and can be easily switched to other product if a better price or promotional offer is presented to them. HEIs may best use these campaigns to attract these customers/students in terms of low fee or sibling/referral discounts; however, the short-term life expectancy of these customers can be enhanced by focus on better service quality. The next stage in model indicate "**habitual**" customers, who have no solid reason to change but as part of their habit of trying different or new product/service in the market. Their changing attitude with lack of commitment to an HEI demands a tactically driven campaign and innovative methodology to keep their interest alive in their chose university.
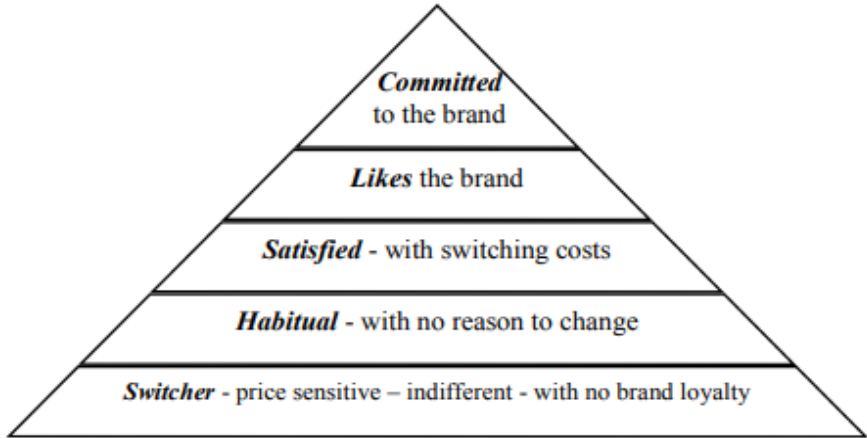
Figure 2. **The Loyalty Pyramid** (Aaker, 1991)

Satisfied buyers as next stage of the customer loyalty model are the ones who are aware of the perceived merits of the product and are satisfied after its usage. Their opinion about product/service is satisfactory and they may intend to use it again, however they can not be termed as loyal and a very god offering or a product with extremely positive word of mouth might affect their decision making. They are satisfied but not a guaranteed customer for repurchase. After the satisfied buyers, there comes a spot for the customer who **likes** the brand. Their liking towards a specific brand is a result of series of purchase and that the product/ service has always delivered what was expected of it. This consistent performance of the product has made the customer to like the brand. As this is the last stage before customer can turn into loyal customer, HEIS need to be aware of current quality trends and competitors' analysis and offerings so that their liking towards them is not affected. In consequence of this liking stage, the last spot in customer loyalty model discusses **committed** customers. All the marketing efforts and quality measures taken by company could go waste if the customer doesn't turn into a loyal customer. As, the loyal customer is the one who is not only repurchasing the product all the time but is spreading positive word of mouth and is

more like a promoter of the particular product/service now. This loyal customer has reached that level of sincerity with the product that it stands with the product in any worst possible scenario. Rise in prices and even product underperforming than expectations at times, still have little or no effect on customer's buying behavior towards it, that's why they are called loyal customers. HEI's in pursuit of long-term success should always aim at loyal customers, as it can turn the existing students to enroll in other or higher degree program for further studies as well.

Summarizing further, the Customer Loyalty Model as one of the core theoretical concept for this Thesis, **aspects like brand awareness, service quality, brand trust and their impact on brand loyalty are integral to incorporate in Higher Education setting**. Also, taking students as ultimate consumers of the services given by these HEIs and assessing their loyalties towards their already chosen institutions form genuine basis for this research and demands new contribution as part of scientific knowledge. This loyalty model by Aaker thus makes its viability important for taking and discuss the customer loyalty in another domain of Higher education sector; the outcome of which aims to further develop the scientific knowledge in the said field.

The **model for branding higher education institution** is a recent scientific contribution by I. Hussein Amzat. Amzat (2016) has simply but meaningfully described the essence of creating a university brand; considering its importance by modern day student. The model – designed on the grounds of previous research and expert findings leans into develop any HEI as a brand i.e. a brand that every HEI should be think of becoming in order to compete in today's market environment.
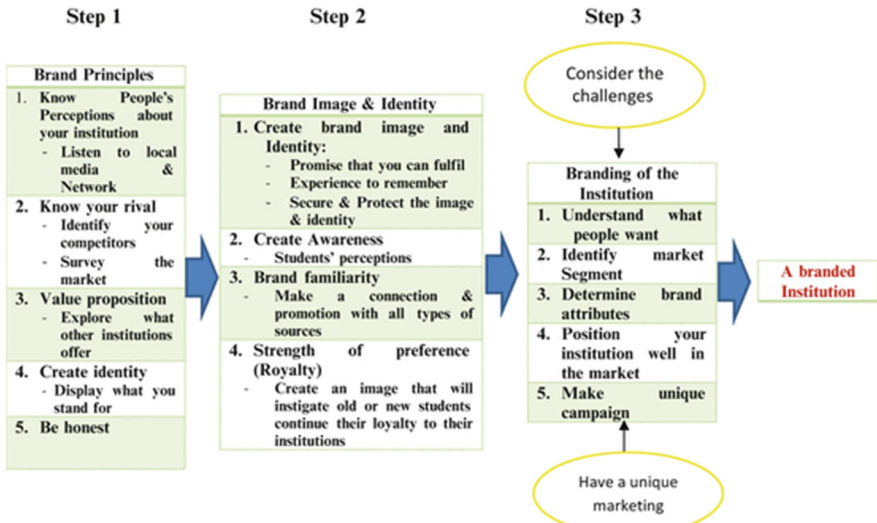
Figure 3. **Model for Branding Higher Education Institution**
(Amzat, 2016)

It can be seen in Figure 3 above that model is divided in to three steps. The **first step** is called "Brand Principle". The brand principle stage accounts for understanding the basic issues on which any brand is built in general. This first step is categorized into five main domains which include brand perception in which it is important to know how people think of an institution and what is the opinion of customers about the institution. This opinion can be heard by listening to social and local networks. Then comes competitor analysis. These include all the basic analysis from product lines to price and the promotion messages. It is important for an institute to not only know where it stands as per its competitor but keep tracking the performance of its competitor as well. This will help an institution in developing value proposition and offering something at least or at par, if not better than competitor institute. This value proposition will result in creation of self – image of the institute that needs to be accompanied by good services as well.

The **2nd step** focuses on creating brand image and identity of the institute. As activities in step one has formed a basis for institute to naturally be able to create its own identity, it is that phase when an institution will itself speak as what it stands for. Whether it's an economical institution, a quality

provider, quality at affordable price, an ultra-modern brand, an emerging or cashing on it being historic. However, it is extremely appropriate to make right claims as at the end of the day, these heightened claims can haunt the institution image on permanent basis. This stage of identity construction demands a meaningful and appropriate awareness campaigns.

While the previous two steps have worked out on introducing and creating brand image of a higher education institute, the **third step** aims at ensuring a right adjustment of branding as a futuristic brand. This stage, which is the outcome of previous two stages, searches the people connect so that a brand is finally positioned and can be taken or accepted in the market as a brand. This requires careful observation of people's wants and determination of rightly fit target markets. After monetarily spending and excessive time costs, it's time for management to finally address their rightly chosen market, considering the expectations of their segmented marketed and continue working on all the brand attributes that can benefit those set of customers.

Though Amzat (2016) has devised a mechanism for branding a higher education institute, there can still be a room for induction of concepts and theories. However, in terms of scientific contribution this branding model stresses on the importance of treating and converting higher education institute as a brand, thus giving researchers a lead towards further research on developing matrixes, models or theories about the branding concepts and categorization of brand management of higher education institutions to next level. The incorporation of brand loyalty concept and desired aim of developing a loyalty matrix for higher education institutions in this Thesis, can surely be considered a valuable advancement in the very field of higher education branding; thus, fulfilling one of the gaps in existing research as well.

This chapter initially discussed the essential concepts and previous studies regarding brand management and branding Higher education institutions. These concepts assisted in developing various hypothesis in context of higher education branding and loyalty. From theoretical perspective, first AIDA, then Customer loyalty and at last Model for branding HEIs were discussed in sequential order i.e. AIDA model aimed at generating awareness and raising desire in customer through advertisement campaigns to make customer decide about the product/

service. Then Customer Loyalty model was studied to discuss various kinds of customers who show variant behaviors of loyalty towards the chosen product and service that surrounds around switcher to committed buyers. Finally, to link these loyalty attributes of consumers, Model for Branding Higher Education was discussed to analyze as how an educational institute should brand itself across various stages of Branding processes. This setup of models gives lead to this study to next step by discussing the factors that can affect, enhance, or contribute to brand loyalty of higher education institutions. This also provides an opportunity and need to develop a model that can assist all the stakeholders to overview the current position, brand image and loyalty of a specific or group of HEIs, which is the main output of this research. So, the theoretical analysis I.e. discussion of essential concepts, review of prior studies and scientific interpretations of models (discussed previously) lead this study to hypothesis development; thus, encompassing the significance of branding and necessary drivers for attaining loyalty in education sector. The main hypothesis therefore is stated as:

"Brand Awareness through proper brand management, and Service Quality ranging from quality teaching to better student relationship management increase student trust on the HEI, which in turns affect students' commitment and enhances HEIs' brand loyalty in the long run" or in simple rather scientific notion it can be further summarized as "the greater the brand awareness and service quality of higher education institutes, the higher will be the brand loyalty, though, in comparison it's the service quality that constitutes greater loyalty".

This main hypothesis is supported by the following statistical hypotheses which will be tested in empirical analysis in the next section.

H1: Brand awareness (BA) positively affects Brand trust (BT).

H2: Service quality (SQ) has significant impact on Brand Trust (BT).

H3: Brand Trust (BT) has significant impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

H4: Brand awareness (BA) has positive impact on brand loyalty (BL).

H5: Service quality (SQ) has significant impact on Brand Loyalty (BL).

H6: Brand trust (BT) plays a mediating role between Brand awareness (BA) and Brand loyalty.

H7: Brand trust (BT) plays a mediating role between Service quality (SQ) and Brand loyalty (BL).

3. CUSTOMER EVALUATION FOR DEVELOPING BRAND LOYALTY MATRIX

This chapter takes a step ahead for developing brand loyalty matrix as an outcome of quantitative research conducted for the study. The discussion encompasses the research methods chosen, justification for statistical analysis, qualitative analysis of expert panel and further interpretations. The statistical results achieved are then corresponded with the theory and results by other researchers as well.

3.1. Methodology & Research Design

The primary sources used in this study account for questionnaires from previous studies and semi structured expert interviews, whereas for secondary sources journals, articles and previous studies have been considered.

This study is a mixed method study i.e. both qualitative and quantitative approaches are being used to investigate and seeking meaningful results (Creswell, 2013; Timans, Wouters, & Heilbron, 2019). The reason for choosing semi structured interview lie on its ability to generate leads and developing more insights about unexplored areas of the topic in hand (Galletta, 2012). Seeing the importance of Higher education branding as a trending topic and expected ways in which an HEI can pursue branding options, conducting semi structured interviews by the author meets appropriateness of method selection. The experts' profile (detailed in analysis section) in relation to academia and industry, their JDs (Job Descriptions etc.) conform with the research theme for meaningful analysis.

Also using quantitative approach, with reference to the types – the research is an explanatory study with the purpose of defining and explaining the relationship among respective variables. Also it examines the internal relationships among the respective variables (Bernard & Bernard, 2012), so the need for correlation study is justified considering the prospect nature of cause and effect relationship between variables. These latent variables; backed by scientific literature, are associated as causal

(predictors/Independent/X) i.e. Brand Awareness & Service Quality, the Mediator (M) i.e. Brand Trust and the outcome (effect/dependent/Y) variable i.e. Brand Loyalty. Their interconnections in one or the other way are found in existing literature however, in this study the impact of Brand Awareness (BA) and Service Quality (SQ) through mediation of Brand Trust (BT) on Brand Loyalty (BL) of HEIs will be analyzed. These empirical findings may allow author to form enough basis for developing Brand loyalty Matrix for Higher Education Institutions. Whereas the subsequent findings will be verified qualitatively; aided by expert panels, from which necessary suggestions to the model and implications to be made further. The evaluation of matrix will be proceeded with different set of experts – chosen on the basis of their experience in the field. Their responses about matrix applicability and efficiency will be recorded and analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics.

The unit of analysis is individual consumers of higher education institutions i.e. students. Further, the research design chart is presented below (figure 4) reflecting various stages in the ongoing study.
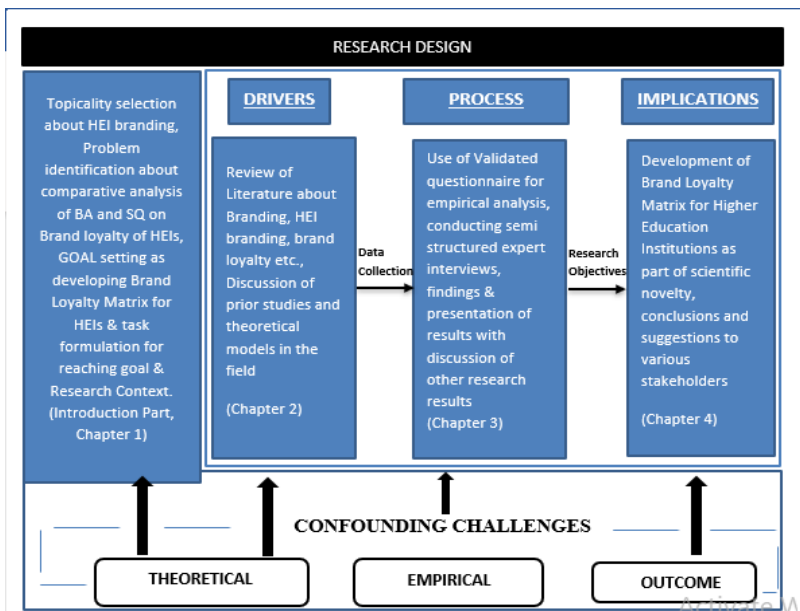

Figure 4. **Research Design** (Author Own Compilation)

As per precise overview of the figure 4 above, the study started with theoretical knowledgebase covering brief understanding from topic formulation and problem identification to goal setting and deliverables of the study. The Higher Education context analysis for Pakistan was conducted and the review of essential branding concepts and related theoretical models further act as driver to conduct empirical and qualitative analysis; the findings of which lead to achieve objectives as outcome of the study i.e. Development of brand loyalty matrix. The recommendations and suggestions further serve the purpose as part of implications of this research.

Data Analysis Framework

The framework for statistical data analysis is presented below as figure 5. This framework is comprised of independent variables as Brand Awareness (BA) and Service quality (SQ), while Brand Trust (BT) is mediating and Brand Loyalty (BL) is taken as dependent variable.
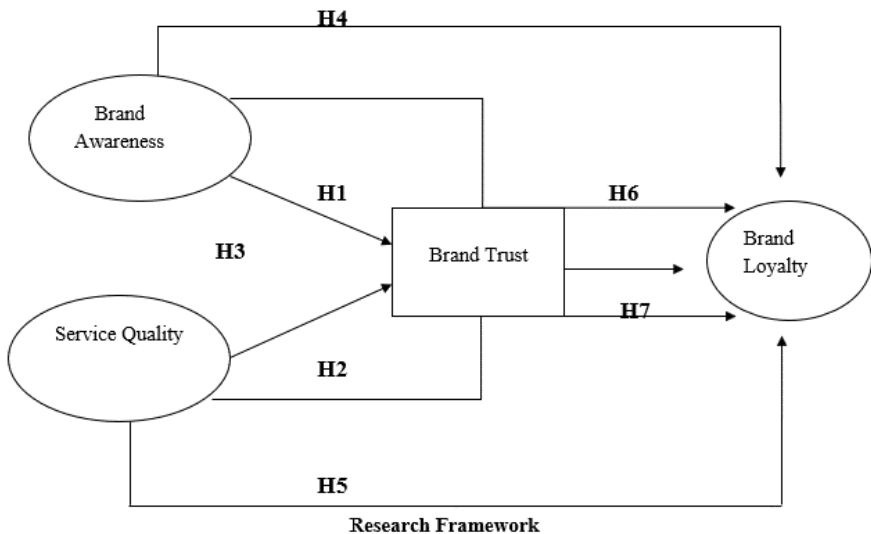

Research Framework

Figure 5. **Framework for Data Analysis** (author's construction)

Measure of Constructs

The constructs in the study were developed by using questionnaires having measurement scales adopted from previous studies. Five-point Likert scale with 1– Strongly disagree and 5 – Strongly Agree has been used to measure the constructs. All, thirty-six items, later reduced to twenty-seven as a result of data reduction were positively worded with no leading and double barrel questions. The content validity of the questionnaire was ensured. Items for measuring brand awareness were adopted from (Aaker, 1996) whereas Items for Service quality (SQ) were taken from previous studies (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Terblanche & Boshof, 2001). Similarly, the brand trust measures were taken from the previous studies of (Hsteh & Hiang 2004; Caceres & Paparoidamis 2007; Ballester-Delgado & Aleman-Munuera 2005; Dixon, Bridson, Evans & Morison 2005; Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001, etc.). and lastly the brand loyalty (BL) measures were adapted from multiple sources (Algesheimer, Uptal & Herrmann, 2005; Fullerton, 2005; Heithman, Lehman & Herrmann, 2007; Hess & Story, 2005; Johnson, Herrmann & Huber, 2006; Sierra & McQuity, 2005; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1996).

Table 3

Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Brand Awareness (BA)	0.79
Service Quality (SQ)	0.83
Brand Trust (BT)	0.90
Brand Loyalty (BL)	0.90

Source: own calculations

Table 3 represents reliability analysis for the variables. As value of Cronbach alpha above than established threshold of 0.7 accounts for higher reliability and internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978) i.e. the close relation between items as a group to measure a construct (Cronbach, 1951), the value of each study variable passes the reliability test considerably, thus making the point clear that respondents understood the questions clearly and responded in similar way as well.

Data Collection & Sample: As discussed in previous section, Higher Education Institution (HEIs) have been selected as research context for this study. The sampling data was collected randomly in the sense of independent selection of respondents both in person at chosen HEIs (Government & Private) and electronically through official database, thus enabling every respondent had equal opportunity to respond. These HEIs located in metropolitan and diverse city of Lahore (known as educational hub) are selected irrespective of their domains in terms of field and course offerings, considering the research at hand comprises about Brand Loyalty due to existing level of Brand Awareness, Service quality and brand trust which these HEIs are providing to their students. Also, these HEIs were selected based upon their nature being Government and Private, as Government/public institutes tend to focus on service quality whereas non-state/non-funded or private institutes rather rely on promotional aspects as well. However, all the chosen HEIs are renowned for being quality provider institutes. So, gathering responses from both types of HEIs enable the author to better predict and interpret the findings in meaningful way than would have been otherwise.

Though the required sample was 382, the sampling frame with the response rate of 75% consists of 401 respondents comprising 53% (214) females and 47 % (187) males. As per Gay and Airasian (2002) for a population over 200 million, a sample size of 400 is adequate, and according to Robert (2019), random sampling allows extraction of samples easily for larger populations and it is better suited when sample representation doesn't require further classification and sub categorization for sample to be appropriate, as it is the case in this study. Table 4 & 5 below present an overview of age and education of respondents.

Table 4

Age Structure of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
18 to 23	238	59	59.4	59.4
24 to 28	128	32	31.9	91.3
29 & above	35	9	8.7	100
Total	**401**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Table 5

Education Profiling of Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bachelors	200	49.9	49.9	49.9
M. Phil	29	7.2	7.2	57.1
Masters	164	40.9	40.9	98.0
PhD	8	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	**401**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Source: own calculations

3.2. The Quantitative Investigations and Breakdown

This section includes empirical analysis encompassing descriptive, factor analysis, regression and mediation analysis to test hypothesis. Results from the said analysis are targeted to identify necessary parameters and student's view about essence of brand loyalty and factors affecting it.

Descriptive Analysis for Variables

As purpose of descriptive study is to identify the measure of central tendencies and to draw summary about respondent's responses following a certain pattern (Etchegaray & Fischer, 2009), students' understanding, their choices and level of satisfaction with their HEIs can be observed as where their answers lie the most; though descriptive may not depict the final results; especially the testing of statistical hypothesis etc.

Brand Awareness Items

The table 6 below presents the results of descriptive statistics for items of the Brand Awareness Variable.

The Items for brand awareness are tailored to get an independent view of respondent's opinion about HEI's awareness and its influential impact on their future decision making can be proceeded from hereafter. It is evident from table 6 above that considerable mean scores for respondents having an opinion about the brand is a positive sign considering its impact on loyalty.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Brand Awareness Items

		I have an opinion about this brand (university)	I have heard of this brand (University)	I am aware of this brand (University)	I frequently think of this brand (University)
N	Valid	401	401	401	401
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.94	4.20	4.17	3.73
Median		4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode		4	5	5	4
Std. Deviation		0.952	0.999	1.019	1.085
Minimum		1	1	1	1
Maximum		5	5	5	5

Service Quality Items

The results of descriptive statistics for Service quality items are presented below in table 7.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Service Quality Items

Service Quality	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mode
This brand (University) provides superior service	401	1	5	3.66	.985	4
This brand (University) offers excellent service	401	1	5	3.58	1.03	4
My study experience in this university is always good	401	1	5	3.69	.975	4
I feel good about what this brand (University)offers to its customers (students)	401	1	5	3.67	.926	4
Overall, I would say the quality of my interaction with this brand's (University's) employees is excellent	401	1	5	3.54	1.010	4
I would say that the quality of my interaction with this university's employees is high	401	1	5	3.42	1.010	4
I would say this university's physical environment is one of the best in its industry	401	1	5	3.58	1.061	4
I would rate this university's physical environment highly	401	1	5	3.68	1.064	4
This university has fair system for the handling of complaints	401	1	5	3.12	1.188	3
This University's staff efficiently deal with customer (students') complaints	401	1	5	3.09	1.154	3
Valid N (listwise)	401					

Source: own calculations

Mean values for Service Quality are another indicator about the importance of educational services which are deemed to be necessary for HEIs. This shows that continuous improvement in services is what these students seek in their HEIs. From the taken set of population, results depict that students nearly agree with the existing level of educational and curriculum development from their HEIs. From complaint handling to

dealing with other employees, there is diverse need for improvement, though in terms of teaching quality, students believe as they are getting what they had been promised to some extent. Their satisfaction is on moderate level with mostly students considering their HEIs as quality service providers. From applied perspective of research, the impact of service quality looks obvious on student selection. Physical space i.e. infrastructural arrangements and updated facilities are some of the other items which are discussed in questionnaire and their average mean values are a sign of concern for HEIs. This stresses the need for infrastructural developments within HEIs, if being state of the art is unachievable in the short run. The statistical relation that will further be dealt in later part of analysis may further imply that educational institutes should rely on quality-oriented services in a consistent manner, which have direct and long-lasting impact on student liking in the long run.
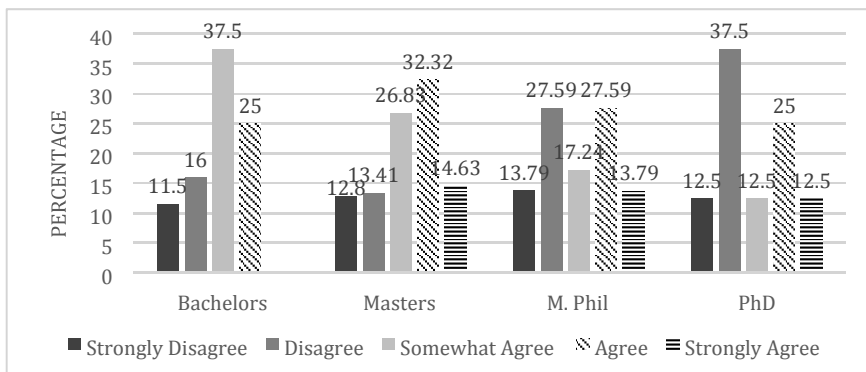
Figure 6. **Service Quality Item 9**
(this university has fair system for the handling of complaints)
Source: own construction, based on survey

As revealed in the descriptive Table 7 that proportion in "disagree" and "strongly disagree" column for Customer relationship management should be a sign of concern, another way to analyze figure 6. would be the voice of bachelor level students for whom dissatisfaction with handling of complaints is more in comparison to Master students, and their (bachelor students) loyalty towards institute could be decisive for HEIs' long term success. The study by Pember, Owens & Yaghi (2014) reveals the importance

of CRM for student retainment for increasing institutions' responsiveness and results here also demands room for improvement. This also can indulge the training and development of employees in their respective field so better CRM is ensured.

Brand Trust Items

Talking about the third study variable i.e. brand trust, mostly answers lie on somewhat agree column (see Table 8 below) which shows that respondents are divided in their opinion and undecided when it comes to trust factor.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Brand Trust Items

Brand Trust	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D	Mode
X (University/ HEI) meets my expectations	401	1	5	3.37	1.017	4
I feel confident in X	401	1	5	3.61	1.007	4
X never disappoints me	401	1	5	3.30	1.091	4
X guarantees satisfaction	401	1	5	3.41	1.021	4
X would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns	401	1	5	3.38	1.015	4
I could rely on X to solve my academic problem	401	1	5	3.42	1.048	4
X would make any effort to satisfy me	401	1	5	3.34	1.051	4
X would compensate me in some way for the problem with some courses	401	1	5	3.31	1.063	4
Valid N (listwise)	401					

Source: own calculations

As it's the trust factor that serves the purpose in the wider perspective, the mode (most repeated value) around 4 i.e. agree column in questionnaire is a motivating sign for HEIs, whereas mean value around 3.5 depict that HEIs have a lot to do in this domain. Students somehow trust their institution but are not sure if it would compensate the students in case of unfavorable circumstances (see items seven and eight). These unfavorable circumstances could range from fee instalments to course changes, from practical training to job placement arrangements. This alarms that

sincerity of HEIs can be questioned by students and this modern generation of students expect more from these HEIs to justify their status as a concerned and caring HEI. Though mean around 3 is something which may not be desirable considering the competitive environment in HEI setting and in particular for the institutes who aim to be the market leaders. So, shortcomings in this trust factor raises concern for the HEIs in order to generate consumer engagement. As, Liu, Lee, Liu & Chen (2018) emphasize the role of consumer engagement in building consumer trust, it can be added that this trust further leads to long term commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

Overall, the descriptive for brand trust items fall just higher than "somewhat agree" or "neutral" response pattern. This demands the trust enhancement to ensure loyalty. Apparent issues related to trust factor counts for complaint handling that can affect word of mouth; which can have its severe implications on student loyalty i.e. repurchase decision making. So issues surrounding customer relationship management and solving student issues should be at priority list of HEIs to increase their overall level of trust on students.

Brand Loyalty Items

Discussion about brand loyalty is substantial in this Thesis as it is the outcome variable in the study. The entire study revolves around significance of this variable which will also be proved statistically but for the population studied, its mean value is almost like the formerly discussed brand trust factor i.e. 3 at somewhat agree scale (see Table 9). For higher education setting in general and for individual cases (institutions) as well, it is an issue to deal with. The score inspires in instances for few items when questions are asked about taking other courses in the university which is proportional to university's loyalty, but when asked about if students are willing to pay higher price for studying the same course, the mean value fell down slightly showing that students as customers are cost conscious and one of the reasons that they are in the selected university is being economical. This drives the need for better fee structures by these HEIs. Also, it demands for increasing quality of education so that students

choose institutions not only based on economy but quality as well. Bringing the impact of competitor's advertisement in to discussion, which is significant, it is mandatory for HEIs to keep pace with changing demands of awareness and it also shows as how promotion and awareness campaigns can generate second thoughts in customers' mind. So, the impact of awareness on loyalty can be seen here as well.

While the value for spreading word of mouth appears positive which shows students satisfaction as well, HEIs should look at continuous development to ensure word of mouth serves the loyalty purpose to maximum, especially seeing at "somewhat agree" values for choosing their ongoing university as future destination. So, all in all the subjected HEIs are found to be maintaining their quality to somewhat above average level, and it's also observed that how quality and commercial messages work hand in hand to achieve sustainable and consistent brand loyalty.

Table 9

Descriptive for Brand Loyalty Items

Brand Loyalty	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D	Mode
I intend to study in this university/ institute in the near future	401	1	5	3.17	1.208	4
I intend to take other courses (optional/ extra) of this university	401	1	5	3.25	1.180	3
I consider this University as my first choice in my chosen field of study.	401	1	5	3.27	1.244	4
The next time I need to study again, I will choose the same university	401	1	5	3.04	1.244	3
I will continue to be loyal customer/ student for this brand (university)	401	1	5	3.48	1.179	4
I am willing to pay a higher price for studying in this university instead of choosing courses from other institutions	401	1	5	2.85	1.319	2
I would only consider study in this university again, if it would be substantially cheaper	401	1	5	3.37	1.220	4

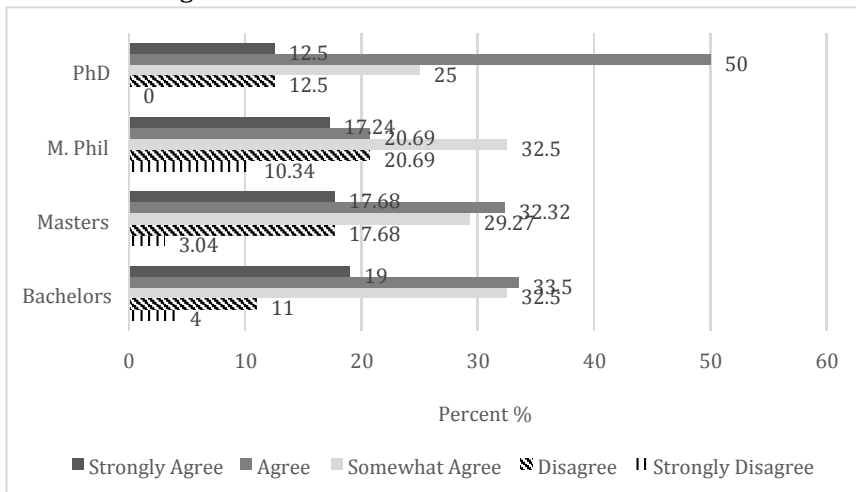|						
Commercials regarding to competing brands are not able to reduce my interest in studying this university	401	1	5	3.46	1.070	4
I say positive things about this university to other people	401	1	5	3.78	1.012	4
I recommend this university/ institution to someone who seeks my advice	401	1	5	3.66	1.054	4
I intend to recommend this brand (university/ college/ institution) to other people	401	1	5	3.66	1.049	4
I consider this university my first choice in the next few years	401	1	5	3.25	1.238	4
This university runs (teaches) courses I am looking for	401	1	5	3.53	1.061	4
I get good value for my money	401	1	5	3.43	1.116	4
Valid N (listwise)	401					

Source: own calculations
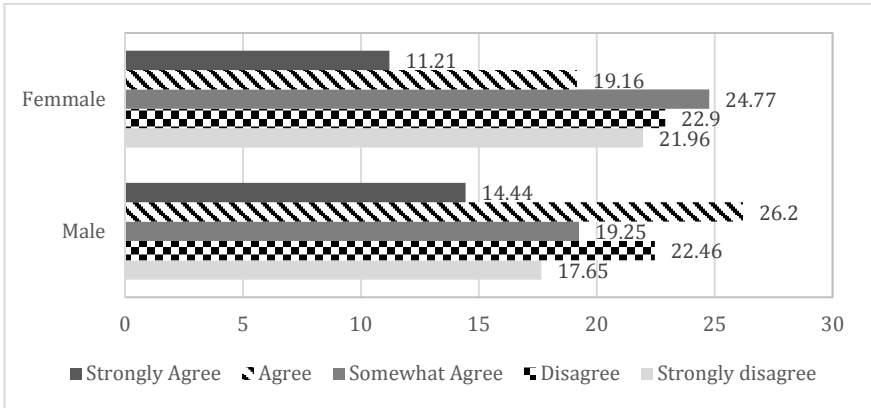
Figure 7. **Brand Loyalty Item 6 (%)**
(I am willing to pay a higher price for studying in this university instead of choosing courses from other institutions)

This is a concern for HEIs that set pattern for student loyalty. It is evident from the figure 7 above, the responses are alarming. Especially for the females. the "strongly agree" column is almost as half of "strongly disagree" column when asked about paying a higher price for studies in future. That also gives an insight that how fee structures and being economical might affect loyalty of the institute that should be taken into consideration as well. Also, the service quality needs to be of such level where rise in fee/charges etc. is less likely to effect student's choice of institute. This is going to be an important input for recommendation part of this study where one can easily understand various dimensions of student preferences effecting their decision making and commitment to the institute.

Figure 8. **Brand Loyalty Item 8**
(Commercials regarding competing brands are not able to reduce my interest in studying this university)

Figure 8 depicts mix review about the competitors' advertisement on respondents' selection criteria. Though high bars for "somewhat agree" and 30% of sample showing that they may get effected by competitor's campaigns, it altogether reflects the general impact of competitive environment and significance of promotional programs which might turn an existing customer into a switcher.
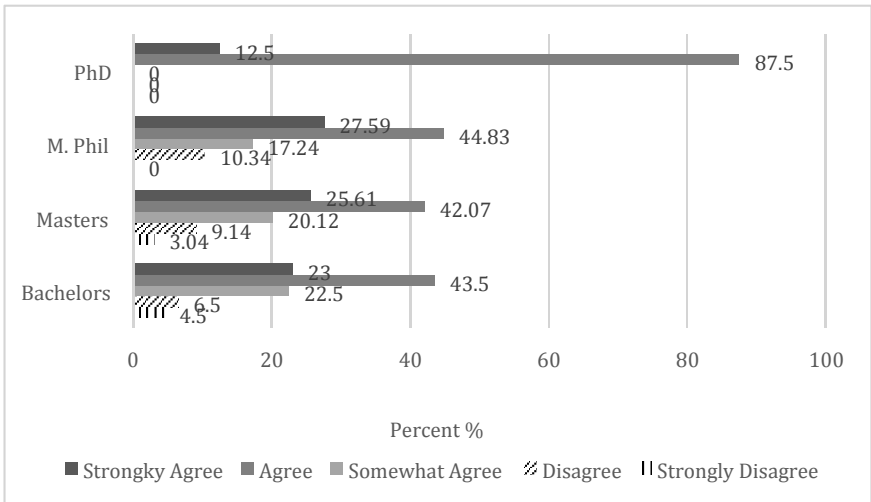
Figure 9. **Brand Loyalty Item 9**
(I say positive things about this university to other people)
Source: own construction, based upon survey

Positive word of mouth is evident as per Figure 9. The HEIs must cope with ongoing requirements of students as this contributes to positive word of mouth, which itself, is a long lasting and impact full awareness tool of the HEI. The better the word of mouth for institute, the greater will be the overall image and student intake of HEI. The literature encompassing the works of Silverman (2001) and Ferguson (2008) discusses the essence of word of mouth in depicting soft image of organizations, which is also confirmed by these findings in large numbers as well as student in majority say positive things about their HEIS, yet more efforts needs to be done to further increase this percentage of customers/students with positive word of mouth.

The descriptive results showed the average response in terms of student satisfaction with their HEIs. Quality of services, and student relationship management are also the areas to be considered, which need great advancement. All, these factors have found to be impacting student trust, which should ideally be on the higher side. Also, the results revealed the essence of advertisement for brand awareness which can have severe

impact on student commitment with their institutions, as considerable proportion of students have found to be attracted towards ad content. To add to it, a lot of work needs to be done by these HEIs to ensure student loyalty.

Factor Analysis

To obtain best fit of data and measuring the constructs, the items of a validated questionnaire were subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax solution. From the extraction results, the prime thing is to look at KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value which should normally be more than 0.50 (Kaiser, 1974). As KMO test is a measure of how well the data is suited for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). The KMO value obtained for this study is 0.94 which shows the data suitability for factor analysis to great extent as the obtained value is very near to 1.

As discussed above that varimax rotation was used for investigation, the best fit of data was obtained after squeezing the items from 36 to 27. These 27 items include 4 items for Brand Awareness (BA), 5 items for Service quality (SQ), 8 Items for Brand Trust (BT) and 10 items for Brand Loyalty (BL). All factor loadings are higher than 0.5 thus confirming validity (Hair, et al., 2006). The total explained variance accounts for 60.31 % including 5 % for BT, 6% for SQ, 9 % for BT and 40% for BL respectively (see appendix 13 in thesis). This 60% variance justifies the fit of model and factor analysis for the intended study (Hair, et al., 2006), thus taking the statistical analysis to next level of proceedings. The factor loadings are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Rotated Component Matrix

Brand Awareness		Service Quality		Brand Trust		Brand Loyalty	
BA1	.673	SQ1	.639	BT1	.653	BL1	.673
BA2	.856	SQ2	.602	BT2	.595	BL2	.662
BA3	.843	SQ4	.561	BT3	.668	BL3	.681
BA4	.676	SQ5	.748	BT4	.790	BL4	.799
		SQ6	.669	BT5	.740	BL5	.724
				BT6	.730	BL6	.571
				BT7	.737	BL8	.597
				BT8	.611	BL10	.636
						BL12	.775

					BL14	.597
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.						

3.3. Regression and Hypothesis Testing

Regression Analysis is conducted to assess the relationship in terms of strength and direction among two or more variables. It accounts for independent and dependent variables in general which are also known as predictor and outcome variables respectively. Scholars may further interchange the terminology by calling them as X and Y variable, based upon their position across the axis. Depending upon the nature of this study i.e. causal and design i.e., regression analysis is being used to identify the statistical significance of relationships between various variables used in this study. These variables, representing different scenarios are related and affecting each other, on the basis of which the theoretically developed hypotheses will be tested. Presented below are the details of regression analysis for each of the stated hypothesis individually together with a mention of necessary assumptions.

Regression Assumptions

Table 11

Correlation Analysis

	Mean	Median	Mode	S. D	Brand Awareness	Service Quality	Brand Trust
Brand Awareness	4.01	4.00	4.00	.79	1		
Service Quality	3.57	3.60	3.80	.76	.358**	1	
Brand Trust	3.39	3.50	3.88	.80	.209**	.648**	1
Brand Loyalty	3.28	3.4	3.60	.88	.199**	.622**	.695**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The standard deviation is not far from 1, showing that data is not scattered that much. As for correlations, all the relationships between variables are significant and in positive direction. Between BA and BT (r = -.209, p= 0.000) and BA and BL (r=0.199, p= 0.00), there are found week positive relation. Though, the author advocates this relation considering predictive ability of brand trust as mediator in this study, and by also considering the practical impact of small change in brand awareness on brand loyalty, which can be decisive. As for Service quality being independent variable, there are found moderate positive relation between SQ and BT (r = 0.648, p= 0.000) and between SQ and BL (r=0.622, p=0.00), whereas between BT and BL there exists strong positive relation (r=0.695, p=0.00). This somehow may justify the weak relation between previously discussed BA and BL as BT acts mediator in this study and that it can enhance the essence of relationship between BA and BL through it. As seen in table 11, correlation between predictors/input/independent variables are weak which show the avoidance of collinearity issues among respective variables. Table 12 below presents the regression results for supporting or rejecting the hypothesis.

Table 12

Regression Results

	Path	Direction	Beta	p-Value	t	F Value	Supported
H1	BA →BT	+	0.209	0.000	12.58	18.16	Yes
H2	SQ → BT	+	0.648	0.000	6.48	288.5	Yes
H3	BT → BL	+	0.695	0.000	5.168	373.29	Yes
H4	BA → BL	+	0.199	0.000	10.855	16.848	Yes
H5	SQ → BL	+	0.622	0.000	251.31	4.404	Yes

Table 12 displays that all hypotheses are supported, and the alternative null hypotheses are rejected as the p value for all hypothesis is less than 0.05. Also, by comparing the beta value of both (BA → BL and SQ → BL) hypothesis, it can be held that it is the service quality which impacts more on brand loyalty. As of now, this finding is significant development in order to confirm the main hypothesis of the study prior to mediation results, which are presented as table 13 and table 14 below.

The inclusion of mediator entails for using F Hayes test of mediation. Baron and Kenny (1986), Judd and Kenny (1981), and James

and Brett (1984) discussed four steps in establishing mediation. Out of the four, the first three steps have already been accomplished as per regression analysis above i.e. H4 as step 1, H1 as step 2, and H3 as step 3. The fourth step accounts for mediation of brand trust between brand awareness and brand loyalty, the results of which are depicted in table 13.

Table 13

The Mediation Model for H6 – Step 4

X: Brand Awareness		M: Brand Trust			Y: Brand Loyalty	
Model Summary						
R	**R-sq**	**MSE**	**F**	**df1**	**df2**	**P**
.6974	.4864	.4031	188.4583	2.0000	398.0000	.0000
Model	Coeff	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.5030	.1918	2.6219	.0091	.1258	.8801
Brand Awareness	.0623	.0406	1.5340	.1258	-.0175	.1421
Brand Trust	.7472	.0402	18.6074	.0000	.6683	.8262

The mediation appears as **full/complete mediation termed as "direct effect"** i.e. nullifying the effect of independent variable (BA) completely with intervention of mediating variable (BT) on dependent variable (BL). Whereas the overall model stays effective with F=188, R2= .48, at sig 0.00 (p < 0.05), which leads us to confirm hypothesis (H6) that Brand Trust plays a mediating role between Brand Awareness and Brand loyalty. It is worthwhile to mention here that R square value changes dramatically with the addition of mediating variable i.e. from 0.20 (20%) to .48 (48%), thus making model more reliable and describing the relation of brand awareness through brand trust in rather increasing fit pattern. . This finally concludes that relation or impact of brand awareness on brand loyalty can be better explained through brand trust in contrast to analyze the direct effect of brand awareness on brand loyalty. So, it's better to first aim at increasing trust through awareness which further contributes to brand loyalty. This finding corresponds with the results of Yu-Chun, Shu-Hsien, & Wen-Jung (2018) and Casal, Flavin, & Guinalu (2007). This finding aims to establish strong basis about generation of Trust in awareness and promotional campaigns which will be discussed in recommendation and conclusion section.

Similarly, table 14 below shows the testing of hypothesis 7 to analyse the mediating role of brand trust between service quality and brand loyalty. Again, the same four steps will be followed to perform mediation out of which first three steps have already been performed and confirmed i.e. step 1 as H5, step 2 as H2 and step 3 as H3. The fourth step representing mediating role of brand trust between service quality and brand loyalty is revealed in table 14 as under.

Table 14

The Mediation Model for H7 – Step 4

X: Service Quality		M: Brand Trust		Y: Brand Loyalty		
Model Summary						
R	**R-sq**	**MSE**	**F**	**df1**	**df2**	**P**
.7307	.5339	.3658	227.9398	2.0000	398.0000	.0000
Model	Coeff	Se	T	P	LLCI	ULCI
onstant	.2028	.1515	1.3381	.1816	-.0951	.5007
Service Quality	.3400	.0518	6.5688	.0000	.2382	.4418
Brand Trust	.5511	.0491	11.2205	.0000	.4545	.6476

Results in table 14 above indicate **partial mediation** with R square = 0.53, F= 227 at Sig= 0.000 (p < 0.05). Though this result proves that mediating variable (BT) hasn't been able to fully nullify the impact of independent variable (SQ) on Brand Loyalty, which is dependent variable, yet the overall increase in coefficient of determination (R2 = 53%) has been achieved. The hypothesis (H7) though supported with little modification as "Brand trust plays a partial mediating role between Service quality and brand loyalty".

This is again a valuable finding; revealing the essence of quality services as a must for HEIs having their direct impact on loyalty of students. SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman, Ziethaml & Berry (1985) can be linked with these findings to overview the basis for better service quality. This effect of service quality on loyalty is also backed by the results of Elliot & Healy (2001).

Expert Interviews

The expert interviews are employed to get details and in-depth knowledge about the problem/issue in hand from the experts in the respective field, considering that the experience and knowledgebase of experts may provide valuable insights for research question as well as it can aid in interpretation and imparting conclusive remarks on study as well (Linderman, Baker & Bosacker, 2011)*. As branding of higher education institutions and loyalty of students as customers are under observation in this research, experts in this study are chosen as educationalist and administrative, who are involved in admission committees and having rich exposure being part of running successful admission campaigns; encircled years of experience. Their experience in understanding of students' expectations at the time of admissions and about the varying nature of student loyalty as per the claims and actual delivery of services, could best be used to align the statistical findings and various attributes of promotion and quality services that can effect the HEIs' brand loyalty.

The analysis has been pursued using recursive abstraction i.e. a technique to analyze qualitative data in the form of summary (Leshan, 2012). Recursive abstraction, though having its limitations like other methods, have its merit of being suitable for summarized details, thus enable to extract huge information from interlinked concepts which can further lead to conclusive and meaningful analysis.

The following are the **key and common findings from expert interviews**.

1. HEIs should brand themselves irrespective of being private, government or semi government.
2. Service quality ranges from quality teaching, effective curriculum and infrastructural requirements.
3. Aggressive marketing campaigns are must for initial intakes that can be slowed down in the later stages, while long lasting loyalty can be achieved through service quality.
4. HEIs need to understand lifecycle stages about their current, past and future positions in market and need adjustments accordingly.
5. At some point of time, even established HEIs need to market themselves again to get public familiarity among new generation.

6. Alumni reunions are must to be organized for continued brand loyalty.
7. Industry – Academia linkages and job placements cells in HEIs should efficiently be operating for becoming a life time brand.
8. Seminars, workshops, study tours, extracurricular activities are vital for maintaining student trust.
9. Fake marketing claims and false promises of job placements may result in loss of student commitment and trust on HEI, which does effect loyalty in the long run.
10. Word of mouth about HEIs can be a deciding factor, hence a right fit between various domains of service quality be accomplished.
11. Teachers' training and development should be ensured in quality conscious HEIs.
12. Branding strategies should be incorporated while keeping both consumer and customer in mind.
13. HEIs operating in different scenarios of High BA/ BL or Low BA/ BL need different set of strategies as per their standing. These ideas as strategies will be discussed and employed in making of Brand Loyalty Matrix (BLM) in next chapter.

To conclude the empirical section, descriptive analysis revealed the shortcomings in factors like customer relationship management and better infrastructure as major areas of concern. Other influencers on student decision making include price factor and interestingly the advertisements by competing brands; though considerable adequate students are found to be satisfied with staffs' competency as faculty and consider it a source of their increased trust on the respective HEIs. This along with statistical testing of hypothesis via regression analysis have shown the impact and significance of both brand awareness and service quality on loyalty of students; however, the contribution of service quality is found to have greater impact on students' future purchase decision of educational services. All the statistical hypothesis in the study have been found as statistically significant with desirable p and F values, while further input from experts not only verify these quantitative findings but also justify the need for developing brand loyalty matrix and its application and further implementation.

4. MATRIX FOR HIGHER EDUCATION BRAND LOYALTY

The review of literature encompassing branding theory and models, statistical findings and findings from expert interviews make provisions for development of Brand Loyalty Matrix (BLM), which adds to the novelty of this research activity. For a recall, one of the objectives of the Thesis was to suggest the universities/ HEIs the best fit between brand and service quality, so to ensure long-term brand loyalty. As it is proved that service quality tends to serve the ultimate brand loyalty and has moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) with Brand Loyalty, the concern here is to analyze different scenarios for those universities/ HEI which are focusing on brand awareness by means of brand promotion, so to analyze the different Loyalty and Awareness scenarios in which these HEIs fall by manipulating/ interchanging/adjusting the different dimensions of brand awareness and brand loyalty aspects.

Construction of Brand Loyalty Matrix (BLM)

This section presents the formation of Brand loyalty matrix in 3 phases. **Phase 1** describes that factorial design matrices are used to identify the various combinations and interactions between the factors. The factorial design may consist of up to 2 or more factors (variables) with each factor may set at two or more levels (Antony, 2014). Each combination/match up of factors and level is called treatment combination (Fontana, Rapallo & Rogantin, 2014). So, in case of two-way interaction between factors A and B, there will be four combinations.

The proposed brand loyalty matrix is divided among 4 tables (quadrants) with 2 each on X and Y axis. As X axis generally denotes the independence of variables – the predictable variable (Korkmaz, 2019), therefore based upon the research framework used in this study, the variable Brand Awareness (BA) is placed on X axis. The two ends of the X axis show the two extremes as "High" and "Low" which are predicting the different scenarios and outcomes for Higher education Institutes to deal with, which will be discussed below in matrix application part.

Similarly, on Y axis, which normally denotes the dependence of Variables – the outcome variable in Statistical/ Social sciences, the variable Brand Loyalty (BL) is placed with its two ends having similar extremes with "High" and "Low". These two extremes along with the combination of extremes on X axis (independent variable) will justify scenarios and suggestions for HEIs/ Universities to operate in hyper competitive education markets, thus fostering perfect competition.

The **Phase 2** aims at next development stage of BLM where different combination of Brand Awareness and Brand loyalty will be interlinked to further analyze as how HEIs can be placed in different quadrants of the matrix, at what combination of awareness and loyalty they stand and what should be their focus on. Based upon their focus on core strategy, these HEIs will be further advised to incorporate respective strategies and suggestions to sustain or improve their current standings.

These four different scenarios accounts for the combination of High BA and low BL, low BA and low BL, low BA and High BL and High BA and High BL.

Figure 10. *Brand Loyalty Matrix by Author*

At this stage (**phase 3**) of Matrix development (see figure 10), high BA and low BL box represents institutes who are lacking in quality services, so their focus should be on Service Quality. While for quadrant having both low BA and low BL, the focus of HEIs should be to enhance brand recognition and service quality side by side. Similarly, the top left quadrant i.e. high BL and low BA represents HEIs which need to focus on brand recognition and top right last quadrant with both high BA and high BL defines HEIs which are highly recognized and also have high retention and their focus should be towards ensuring further stability.

As per Working and Application of Brand Loyalty Matrix – Phase 3 one can analyze its different aspects and strategies in HEI setting. This Matrix is all set to interpret the four probable options in which different HEIs can be placed as per the amount of their existing Brand Loyalty (discussed on Y axis), whereas existing Brand Awareness of the HEIs lies at X axis. After understanding and placement of HEIs in respective columns, the HEIs are presented with suggestion – acting as implications of strategies in the respective quadrants, which stem from literature review, empirical findings and output from expert interviews. A brief overview of four quadrants of BLM is as under:

Low BL and High BA

The first column/ quadrant of matrix on down right accounts for Low Brand Loyalty and High Brand awareness of the institutes. It can be seen in general as there exist quite a few institutes which may fall in this column, which normally have focused more on brand promotion, advertisements, but down the line have somehow compromised on Service Quality of the institute which foresee long term Brand Loyalty. HEIs following this aggressive marketing strategy may catch initial attention of customers and consumers (guardians/students), because of which initial boom in the admissions can be expected but somehow fail to retain student's commitment in the long run. These could be those institutes which are newly established or the ones with limited private capital, which is wholly solely dedicated to marketing campaigns thus entails to compromise on other important features required to establish HEI as a strong and futuristic brand.

So which institutes falling in this quadrant will continue to survive? As mentioned earlier, only those, whose motive is making money with available leverage of financers and capital and it could be for a limited period, but how about those institutes in this quadrant whose aim is not just profit motive but respectable accreditations from their respective councils and how can their short-term life be converted as an institute of credibility and shared responsibility. To achieve that and to extend their short term life expectancy – knowing the issue at hand is lacking in service quality not the awareness, strategies like **quality teaching, market oriented curriculum, efficient customer (student) relationship management and specially the better employee staff management** are some of the key strategies for these institutes on, which have been detailed explicitly in the full text of thesis.

Low BA and Low BL

This quadrant on down left side of the BLM, accounts the worst scenario for an HEI which is dying or may be already in crisis. HEIs falling in this category may be termed as failed institutes which have nothing to offer to its customers or prospect customers considering these are lacking terribly in both brand awareness and brand loyalty, and the focus of these HEI so as to sustain in hyper competitive education market revolves around both "Brand Recognition and Service Quality", because these can be the core issues these institutes are suffering from.

These institutes could normally be the newly established HEIs, lacking finances excessively or be at long cycle of introductory stage which haven't tasted their growth path. These are the institutes whose inability to invest in required marketing campaigns and altogether bringing quality teaching, is been a major dilemma thus making customers (students/guardians) perceive or believe about them as low, unstandardized and a proven failed institution. As these HEIs lack in both BA and BL, they have to start from the basics and employ all possible options for their survival ranging from **better teaching quality, up dated curriculum, efficient customer (student) relationship management, provision of basic infrastructure, affordable fee structure, arranging extracurricular activities and mainly focus on aggressive promotional campaigns** that may surround conventional marketing practices to gorilla marketing.

High BL and Low BA

There exist some institutions which are hardly seen in newspapers, TV ads etc. yet have huge pool of applicants down the line with multiple merit lists. These are the institutes which have their own splendid history being operating in conventional and methodical educational culture and this particular aspect is also observed in the behavior of its staff and employees as well. In simple words, BLM put these types of institutes in the category of high BL and low BA. As discussed previously, awareness here refers to the brand awareness aspect of HEIs also in terms of common public and guardians as customers, because in most cases, especially in Middle East and South East Asia, parents/guardians are one of the key decision makers. The HEIs falling in this quadrant are generally but not limited to Government institutes whose enough public funding doesn't intensify the need for aggressive marketing campaigns and thus their aim to get quality students is fulfilled due to it being a generation brand.

So here we are dealing with the issue of Brand Recognition and focus must be on its continuous enhancement, because recent progression has changed the market environment and relying only on being old institute might make it an institute of niche. So, their recognition can be worked out by following strategies such as **publishing periodic advertisements during admission intakes, arranging and organizing industry driven seminars and workshops, use of press releases and working and collaborating with Government agencies and funded projects**.

High BA and High BL

The top right quadrant of Brand Loyalty Matrix mentions all the benchmark institutes which are right up on top. These are the institutes with high brand awareness and high brand loyalty. Not much difficult to understand about this quadrant of BLM as HEIs placed here set standards for the entire industry. Not only these are the dream institutes for study by students, but every other institute aspire to enjoy the same stature as these HEIs currently enjoy. At priority of the industry while their brand act as a name of quality and success, these institutes are the desire of masses. Customers and consumers feel pride to associate themselves with these institutes while students may go through rigorous training, do pre-admission tests, and make every attempt to

get in these HEIs as they believe it a turning point of their career to get admitted in these HEIs. Top employers demand graduates from these HEI considering the lot from here as a best human capital they can acquire for their company. These HEIs have become high image brands just like other renowned brands in clothing, soft drinks, automobiles and mobile phones etc. Even the abbreviations or slogans of these institutes act as a sense of pride for its existing students and staff whereas their alumni continue to affiliate themselves with them for rest of the life.

So again, the question arises here if all these HEIs have reached their apparent maximum or are at stable or maturity stage, is it all for them? To answer that, and to avoid their probable decline in terms of life cycle stage or in an attempt of extension in their stability stage, these HEIs should work on **improved R&D, developing futuristic curriculum, strategic alliances in terms working with and for global funded bodies and agencies**.

Matrix Evaluation Form

The items of matrix evaluation form have been constructed keeping in view three main aspects i.e. Novelty, Applicability and Efficiency. The items are self-explanatory in terms of their required function to be evaluated from the experts e.g. Novelty is aimed at new scientific contribution, efficiency is being approached for its easy use to gather quick results, customer interface employs the understanding of its usage by the user and dependability function explores the acceptance of results achieved through this matrix. To add to it, five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – somewhat agree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree) has been used to assess the agreeableness of experts about various dimensions of matrix evaluation along with the calculation of mean scores for each of the item; thus representing the average response as final remark. The experts chosen for evaluation are different than those selected for prior qualitative analysis, though the selection criteria based on vast years of experience surrounding industry academia linkages, and exposure in running admission campaigns.

Table 15

Matrix Evaluation by Experts

Function	Item	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Mean Scores
Novelty	The developed matrix corresponds to newness in Higher Education Context	4	4	5	4.33
Content Validity	The formation and implementation of matrix is based upon Branding literature	5	4	4	4.33
Applicability	The developed matrix can be applied to various HEIs across Pakistan and in countries with similar demographics.	5	4	4	4.33
Practicality	The discussed scenarios and results achieved from imple-mentation of Brand Loyalty Matrix can be linked with real world phenomenon in HEIs	5	5	5	5
Efficiency	The matrix can approach new findings or solutions in short time	4	4	5	4.33
Value proposition	The matrix may add valuable contribution to solve issues concerning HEIs brand loyalty	4	4	4	4
Customer Interface	The matrix is understandable of its use by the customers	5	5	4	4.66
Predictability	The brand loyalty matrix can predict positioning of an HEI	3	5	5	4.33
Dependa-bility	The HEIs can rely on findings of brand loyalty matrix for their strategy formulation	5	4	4	4.33
Connectivity	The matrix may connect future research and scientific theory in the domain of HEI's branding	4	4	5	4.33

Source: own calculations

Table 15 reveals evaluation of matrix in positive way by the experts as mostly values are falling in agree and strongly agree column.

The encouraging aspect of evaluation results surrounds the fact that experts seem quite uniform in their opinion about various dimension of matrix evaluation. Matrix functions encompassing novelty, efficiency, value proposition and customer interface etc. are well perceived and accepted by experts as well. For instance, score of 4.33 for Novelty depicts that experts find this matrix a value addition in the context of Higher Education literature and this matrix may result in effective findings for future research, for which the connectivity score attained is 4.33 i.e. agree column on questionnaire. The efficiency score is also above 4, indicating matrix problem solving ability in suitable time. This entails further to identify brand positioning and suggesting corrective actions for higher education institutions for future direction as well. This also meet agreeableness of experts with the achieved mean score of 4.33 in terms of item for dependability. So, the better the matrix is dependable in terms of its findings, the greater are the chances for right fit of strategies to be incorporated. In total, it shows that matrix implementation, its execution and its contribution to science is also accepted and supported by the experts. The brand loyalty matrix aims at being considered a valuable addition in branding literature and that it should be utilised to get best of the results in higher education setting.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the literature reviewed, discussed essential concepts, statistical inferences and developing brand loyalty matrix as an outcome to this research, the conclusion can be initiated by Mark Twain's statement as "**Many a small thing has been made large by right kind of advertisement**", especially if we talk about the role of brand awareness in customer decision making. From an FMCG to a luxurious item, it's the essence of brand image which entitles customer to make a purchase. Taking this phenomenon to education setting, it is concluded that

1. HEIs should consider it a must to properly manage and brand themselves. By utilizing all the available promotional channels and focusing innovative and result oriented campaigns, the desired amount of awareness can make a difference and can assist an HEI to stand out in competition. It is obvious that from cost leadership to focused differentiation and from penetration to diversification, HEIs should continue to get the best out of this awareness, yet it is important to remember that this brand awareness comprised of known promotional activities, existing image and customer being familiar with qualities of goods or services could serve the purpose for current name or initial branding but lacks the spirit for converting this effective role into comprehensive impact on loyalty.

2. Though proved as positive and statistically significant correlation ($r=0.20$ or 20% and $p= 0.00$) between brand awareness and brand loyalty in this study, the real concern for HEIs is the retainment of students and making them repurchase or reuse the services. This repurchase behavior in higher education refers to getting enrolment in future degree programs, spreading of positive word of mouth to peers, friends or colleagues is the outcome of quality services which is termed as brand loyalty. To attain loyalty, it has been extracted that HEIs need continuous integration and excellence in terms of service quality which has strong impact on brand loyalty.

3. The service quality features discussed in continuation with previous literature and achieved as part of this research include Teaching

quality, modern curriculum development, customer relationship management, teachers training, required accreditations, local and foreign alliances with the inclusion of necessary physical appearance; need for infrastructure to equipment needs, add a lot to attain student loyalty. The statistical significance of this argument has been proved in analysis with p value = 0.00 and r = .48. These statistical results also correspond with Aydin & Ozer (2005)**;** Deng, Lu, Wei, & Zhang (2010); Etemadifard, Kafashpoor & Zendehdel (2013).

4. Also, in some cases these service quality features, though still be impactful, can come via brand trust which then transforms that trust into loyal customers. This positive interference of trust for loyalty of students (R square = 0.53, F= 227 at Sig= 0.00) in this study is found relevant with the results of Sweeney and Swait (2008) and Mazodier and Merunka (2011).

5. The trust factor has found to be influenced mostly through proper handling of complaints, efficient customer relationship management and competency and skills of staff i.e. both faculty and administrative. These findings regarding impact of trust shows consistency with the results of Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992); Morgan and Hunt (1994).

6. Taking conclusion further about quality of services, it won't be wrong to take aid from one of the expert's comment as "awareness brings pool of students while quality brings pool of loyal students". In order to see higher education not diminishing from the market and enjoying longevity, HEIs must align themselves with all the modern and updated requirements of running an educational institution. This android user generation of students is so fast and informed that heightened marketing claims and fake promises won't serve the purpose anymore. Therefore, HEIs must be conscious enough in claiming what they are capable of in real.

7. HEIs need to well define themselves not only being a recognized institute but the one being real quality provider institution. Otherwise, in an era where word of mouth spreads quicker than fire – curtsey social media, it will be very tough for HEIs to survive if their claim loses the worth.

8. On the contrary, the importance of awareness generation should continue to be exercised and it's time for state and renowned institutes also to keep in constant connect with students through all latest mediums of promotion, so to avoid the fading effect. Relying on and aiming to survive at already earned name will make survival hard. Getting assistance from developed brand loyalty matrix (BLM) in this study could be handy for these HEIs to set and evaluate their future direction. Not to forget the active role of a trust factor that plays its role for enhancing brand loyalty to edge brand awareness and service quality.

9. Though it is evident in comparison that quality of services contributes more towards loyalty or long-term retention, yet the importance of awareness through promotion is significant in its own domain and in varying situations it might be needed the most, even for a specific time period. Be it aggressive or rhythmic at times, HEIs should connect itself to all the means contributing towards its brand building. And in that context, provision of quality services and promotional attempts become part of this established brand awareness that aims at cashing future awareness and brand loyalty of students. This further makes the point clear raised by expert panel that awareness does impact the loyalty but for consistent and long-term retention focusing on awareness only cannot be the right idea. However, at the same time, this doesn't allow HEIs to overlook awareness aspects.

10. Adding to the understanding of loyalty, the concern for HEIs rises here is the loyalty of students and stress on loyalty is not only based upon students getting and being readmitting in the institution, rather the loyalty factor should be considered as quintessential for these HEIs. This loyalty, though is a part but not limited to getting students through awareness, retaining students through services and trust, but it's about getting their satisfaction for life time. As per this study, the price factor is also found to be significant for quite a few for attaining, maintain and retaining the loyalty.

11. So, concluding further from above discussion, the students should not be considered loyal only because of selecting and reselecting the institute but it's how they trust, how they stand for and how they

speak for their chosen or attended HEI is what should be point of concern for HEIs. That's what a trusted, enhanced, reliable, credible and durable brand means and that's what the concerned management should aim for. The purpose of all this brand awareness and services quality effort will be justified if a student speaks for and recommend the specific institute even after decades, and that's what it is called as a life time brand. HEIs need to realize and keep themselves branding with this approach for being "A brand for all the seasons and equally for all the reasons".

12. At last, it can be safely stated that HEIs should find a perfect mix between awareness and service quality, depending upon what they need the most at times. Off course the compromise on quality for promotion is not desirable, yet conformance with general recognition is the need of the hour. So, any HEI i.e. big or small, wide or short, specialized or multidisciplinary, Government or Private etc. need loyal students, instead this fast paced, informed and result oriented lot of youth will make these HEIs a story of past.

> "There is a big difference between a satisfied customer
> and a loyal customer."
> *Shep Hyken*

Summarizing the information gathered during this research, the author hereby concludes that hypothesis is confirmed as brand awareness and service quality are significant for achieving student loyalty, while in comparison service quality which mainly include quality teaching and better student relationship management as part of overall study experience increases students trust and contributes more towards long term brand loyalty of HEIs.

Recommendations & Suggestions

Based on the outcome of comprehensive analysis comprising literature review, previous studies, statistical findings and analysis from the expert interviews, the following stake holders i.e. both direct and

indirect, which are beneficiary of this research as well, are given the following recommendations (detailed in dissertation).

<u>The Higher Education Institutions</u> should:

1) Use the given brand loyalty matrix (BLM) to position, reposition and re-establish themselves;
2) Understand the importance of optimum and efficient educational services for consistent and long-term brand loyalty;
3) Comply with respective accreditation authorities both local and internationally;
4) Overview students' expectations with modern demands of changing era;
5) Use brand promotion to the extent that it corresponds with delivered or prospect delivery of services;
6) Allocate a balanced fit of financial resources to promotion and actual delivery of services so that Higher education institutions must not face the financial imbalance by distributing all their capital to promotion and awareness strategies;
7) Undergo continuous training and development of staff at all levels. In case of faculty, teachers training workshops should be organized periodically;
8) Focus on attaining B/C grade and average students as well and make sincere effort to light them up to next level. This is essential from perspective of revenue generation as well.
9) Bring in Small and Medium enterprise sector in collaboration to ensure applied and practical research;
10) Ensure maximum job placements through initiation or updating of existing Quality Enhancement/Job placement cells – Keep diversifying, aimed at both related and unrelated diversification – Identify appropriate target markets for operations.
11) The customers including **students/guardians/caretakers or the concerned custodians in decision making process are suggested to** Identify institute/ HEI using Brand Loyalty Matrix thus having better understanding about present standing or future of the selected institute and also get themselves

acquainted with the knowledge of merits and demerits of an accredited HEI so that avoidance of any undesirable scenarios is ensured after degree completion.

12) **The Respective State Accreditation Entities** are suggested to have a constant and periodic check on accredited HEIs' performance. The developed BLM could be very useful tool in this domain. Also, these bodies should develop innovative and challenging KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for HEIs for successful accreditations.

The Research and Market Agencies are suggested the effective use of Brand Loyalty Matrix which can make their work easy in Ranking of HEIs and their performance – developing and interpretation of customers' (students etc.) surveys and questionnaires – Designing the marketing plans for the Institutes based upon their current standings in the market – Making comparative and competitive analysis etc. for their consulted HEI.

The International Bodies/Partners/Alliances are Recommended to use BLM in order to monitor the performance of HEIs to avoid any compromises on their international image. These international partners should decide if they are associated or want an association with a reputable, established or an ordinary institute. The designed classification in BLM with all the attributes can further establish the strength of relation with the existing or prospective partners.

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