

# ANATOMY OF BRITISH BUSINESS SCHOOL BRANDS: ATTRIBUTES AFFECTING CHOICE AMONG PAKISTANI POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

## ANATOMIJA MARAKA BRITANSKIH POSLOVNIH ŠKOLA: OBILJEŽJA KOJA UTJEČU NA ODABIR STUDENATA POSLIJEDIPLOMSKOG STUDIJA U PAKISTANU

TRŽIŠTE

UDK 378.633(410:549.1):658.626  
Prethodno priopćenje  
Preliminary communication

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### Ključne riječi:

*poslovne škole, Ujedinjeno Kraljevstvo, marka, kvalitativno istraživanje, Pakistan*

### Key words:

*business schools, UK, brand, qualitative research, Pakistan*

### SAŽETAK

Malobrojna su istraživanja koja proučavaju marke poslovnih škola iz perspektive azijskih korisnika usluge. Ovim istraživanjem nastoji se otkriti obilježja maraka britanskih poslovnih škola koja utječu na pakistanske studente poslovne ekonomije pri prijavi za više stupnjeve obrazovanja. U skladu s naturalističkom tradicijom, podaci su prikupljeni kroz polustrukturirane intervjuve na

### ABSTRACT

The research studies that investigate business school brands from an Asian consumer perspective are scarce. Current study aims at discovering the branding attributes of UK Business Schools that influence Pakistani business students to apply for admission in higher degrees. Following a naturalistic tradition, data has been collected through semi-structured interviews from a sam-

uzorku od 25 studenata koji su planirali studirati u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu (UK). Ispitanici su identificirani kroz osobne kontakte i kasnije odabrani u namjerni uzorak. Provedena je tematska analiza radi generiranja tema iz podataka. Analizom podataka došlo se do četiri dominantne teme koje utječu na izbor poslovne škole u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu. To su Financijska pomoć, Zapošljivost, Reputacija marke i Rang. Ovo je jedno od prvih istraživanja u kontekstu upravljanja markom sveučilišta iz perspektive Pakistana kao zemlje u razvoju. Marketinškim stručnjacima u visokom obrazovanju u Velikoj Britaniji ono može biti korisno za osmišljavanje inicijativa upravljanja markom u kojima su studenti u središtu aktivnosti. Isto tako, može koristiti pakistanskoj akademskoj zajednici za razvijanje maraka poslovnih škola prenošenjem tih obilježja radi boljeg natjecanja s poslovnim školama u Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu.

ple of 25 students who were planning to study in United Kingdom. The respondents were identified through personal sources and were later selected using the purposive sampling technique. Thematic analysis was performed to generate themes from the collected data. The data analysis generated four dominant themes that influence the choice of a business school in United Kingdom. These are "financial assistance", "employability", "brand reputation" and "rankings". The study is a pioneer work in the field of university branding from a developing country perspective of Pakistan. The research will be useful to British higher education marketers in devising student-centered branding initiatives. It will also benefit the Pakistani academia, as the country can develop business school brands as well by imparting these attributes to better compete with business schools in UK.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The origins of defining a university date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century work of Newman (1889, p. 5), where he argued that a University is “a place for liberal education and the teaching of universal knowledge”. He further delineated the idea of a University to consist of wonderful communities of scholars who are committed to discovering knowledge and making it useful to the societies. However, since the 1960s, there has been a pragmatic change in the British university system, facilitating and proposing a new perspective towards a traditional definition of a University (Smith & Langslow, 1999). This modern system is today attributed with converting 18 colleges of advanced technology into full-fledged universities (Smith & Langslow, 1999); the making of post-1992 universities; grant of the status of a university to 42 polytechnics (Bakewell & Gibson-Sweet, 1998); introducing tuition fees to undergraduates and converting numerous higher education institutions into universities (Chapleao, 2007). This also led to the commercialization of education in the United Kingdom, as a large number of students started to enroll in universities (Drummond, 2004).

With these changes in the British higher education system, universities were required to attract a larger number of students in order to generate their own income (Marginson, 2006; Tysome, 2007). The pressures, such as managing finances and reduced reliance on Government funding, turned the focus of universities from a knowledge production center to commercial units making money (Chapleao, 2007).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the UK are behaving increasingly as corporations, mainly for the sake of meeting financial obligations in order to stay competitive (Bunzel, 2007). There has been an increased number of international students who are gaining admission in British business schools, with the UK as the second leading country to export education in the world after the USA (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). The British

Council recently reported that 9,815 Pakistani students are already studying at UK universities. This places Pakistan amongst one of the top six countries, accounting for 54% of the UK's international students since September 2001 ([www.pakalumni.com](http://www.pakalumni.com), 2012).

There have been some notable contributions from researchers who presented the university branding perspective from different country contexts. For example, brand positioning of Asian universities (Gray et al., 2003), brand components that make up a university brand (Ali-Choudhury, 2009), business school branding in India (Shahaida, Rajashekar & Nargundkar, 2009) and Greek students' motivation to study at UK universities (Priporas & Kamendiou, 2010) are significant contributions. However, a Pakistani perspective is absent from the literature. Pakistan has a rich history, with different cultural and social contexts. Geert Hofstede (1980) defined culture of any country as ‘collective programming of mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others’ (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005) on four varying domains; power distance (PD), individualism/collectivism (IC), uncertainty avoidance (UA) and masculinity/femininity (MF). People in Pakistan score high on power distance, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. The extent to which power is unequally shared and accepted among the members of society has been understood as power distance. The high score on this dimension indicates that inequality of power is attained and accepted in Pakistan. The country has been considered as a collectivist society, in which decisions are made for collective, rather than personal advantage (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The age and gender roles have been associated with masculinity/femininity orientation, with Pakistanis scoring high on masculinity. It indicates that achievement, competition and success are the social values that govern the Pakistani society. Finally, as to the UA index, Pakistanis score high on this dimension too. People do not like to take risks and this can be due to social and economic distress, alongside corruption at all levels of society. This is also true in every sector,

including higher education, where in selecting a university, students may still seek to minimize their associated risks.

There is no doubt that, like a number of underdeveloped nations, Pakistan faces financial constraints for various reasons. The Government of Pakistan allocates about 3 percent of the total annual budget for education; for the year 2006-2007, it was 2.42% and increased 0.5% last year, whereas the global average spending has been 4.5% of the overall GDP (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2006-2007). All these elements, such as cultural differences and highly diverse socio-economic conditions, make Pakistan an interesting country context.

The UK is among the countries with the highest number of students recruited but the country has not experienced as much growth as the USA and Australia over the last few years (Jones, 2005). While this can be attributed to factors such as bad economic conditions, researchers also acknowledge the aggressive marketing strategies employed by Australia and USA (Binsardi & Ekwulogo, 2003). This has also been due to university management, recognizing the importance of higher education marketing across the globe (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Some major events occurring in recent years have impacted students' decision to choose a particular university. The events such as the economic crunch, terrorism and complex visa procedures demand higher education marketers to explore some new factors that trigger decisions concerning the choice by students, especially from Asian countries (Rudd, Djafarova & Waring, 2012). There are a large number of Pakistani students going to the UK for higher education but the factors that influence student choice of a university are largely unknown to higher education marketers. The study will be useful to British higher education policy makers who are trying to attract a larger number of international students from countries such as Pakistan. Pragmatically, it will benefit Pakistani society as a large number of students are unable to join a British university due to several constraints that can be minimized based on the findings of the current study.

Furthermore, the elements that influence students' decision to study a UK business schools have pragmatic value. Growing demand in Pakistan for acquiring quality higher education has strengthened students' willingness to study abroad further. This is where the current study will contribute by achieving the following research objective:

- to identify the elements of business school brand that influence student choice of a business school in UK.

Keeping these factors in mind, this study is aimed at presenting a Pakistani perspective to modern literature of university branding. The paper begins with a review of the literature on branding and brand management, with a special focus on university branding. The methodology for this study is explained next, leading to the results section. Lastly, conclusions are drawn and presented, outlining the factors considered by Pakistani business students while opting to study at UK business schools.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Branding

Historically, a brand has been defined as "a piece of burning wood, its animation arises from the vitality and passion that comes to us in its presentation" (Levy, 1999, p.15). The earliest roots of branding come from 15<sup>th</sup> century craftsmen, who utilized the concept by physically branding a unique, distinguishable mark of ownership on their livestock for the purposes of differentiation among fellow owners and suppliers (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998; Stern, 2006). In the commercial domain, a number of prior studies have attempted to dismantle brands into ultimate components (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo 1998; Balmer & Soenen, 1999; Alessandri, 2001; Melewar & Jenkins, 2002; Stern, 2006).

Authors have suggested that the higher education sector has begun to function like an in-

dustry (Gumport, 2000) and that the modern university now seems more like a “stakeholder university” than a “republic of scholars” (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2007). If this suggestion is correct, it would mean that higher education establishments, such as business schools, would need to develop a brand to assist in their advertising and differentiation in a competitive market.

Melissa and Baldwin (2006) described brand as being about creating an entity in the consumers’ mind so that they can see a representation that includes a whole series of images, beliefs and actions. Effective branding is the means by which a brand can stay in the market longer and be profitable because it has been created properly. De Chernatony et al. (1998a, p. 778) concluded that any “brand success is a multi-dimensional construct comprising both business based and consumer based criteria”. This concept of distinctive values that meet consumers’ perceived needs is proposed by De Chernatony and McDonald (2003). Vrontis and Thrassou (2007) argued that international marketing and branding is more successful when it is standardized across the board.

## 2.2. University branding

Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2008, p. 4) characterized a university’s brand as “a manifestation of the institution’s features that distinguish it from others, reflect its capacity to satisfy students’ needs, engender trust in its ability to deliver a certain type and level of higher education, and help potential recruits to make wise enrolment decisions”. The higher education system has gone through a change that actually affected British university systems in the 1960s. The changes include: The Robins Report of 1963 (Robbins, 1963; Smith, 1999), The Education Reform Act of 1992 (Bakewell & Gibson-Sweet, 1998) and The Dearing Report. After this change, the British recruitment system switched from hiring elite class towards mass recruitment, and was further supported by students who entered the insti-

tutions from lower socio-economic levels. This has led to the “commercialization” (Stilwell, 2003; Drummond, 2004; Lynch & Baines, 2004) and “commodification” (Doti, 2004; Hayrinen-Alestalo & Peltola, 2006) of the British higher education system, essentially meaning that students from different walks of life could apply to study at all higher levels of education.

Within the global economy, where higher education is regarded as just another economic sector (Gumport, 2000), it is important to collect, systematize and compare service providers. With branding initiatives becoming pivotal to the success and reputation of a higher education institute, it is imperative to understand the tenants of a university brand.

Over the years, marketing scholars outside the university environment have acknowledged the influences of brand image on consumers’ beliefs. Thus, it is imperative for university officials to strengthen the positive association of a university brand in the mind of its stakeholders in an effort to differentiate itself from competitors (Brown, Zuefle & Batista, 2007). However, marketing scholars assert that branding strategies must be aligned and congruent with the university brand mission in order to achieve effectiveness (Chapleo, 2005). Existing studies either discuss branding policies in general or in specific institutions (Belanger et al., 2002; Chapleo, 2004; Judson et al., 2006) or else they focus on external aspects of branding (Bulotaite, 2003; Gray et al., 2003). Within the university setting, branding strategies are designed to create and develop meaningful differences among stakeholder attitudes and perceptions (Aaker, 1991).

One of the important elements of a university brand is its visual identity. This symbolic, external representation includes anything from logos, typefaces and colour pallets to stationery, apparel and transportation vehicles (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996). For the benefit not just of intending students, but also for the benefit of potential and existing staff as well as research clients and graduate em-

ployers, universities should develop meaningfully differentiated brands to communicate their strengths (Jevons, 2006).

### 2.3. Brand elements and university choice

Financial stability and support through grants have also been found to influence the university choice decision. Developing nations have been shifting costs from taxpayers to parents and students in the form of tuition and fees – a tradition that has been in place for decades in several industrialized and OECD countries. Although education apparently has a positive correlation to employability and employment, regional differences often have an impact on this relationship as regional, social and economic disparities affect graduates' job opportunities (European Commission, 2002). It is important to add that there is still a lack of research regarding the transition from higher education to working life (Dahlgren et al., 2006; Johnston, 2001).

Brand reputation has been found to be a major variable influencing students' choice of business schools. Argenti (2000) argued that brand reputation is pivotal because it includes campus facilities offered, the credibility of faculty evident through research, business school's contribution to society, good quality students and reputable image in the corporate sector. Various factors influence students' university-choice decisions, so it is assumed that marketing managers must promote institutions through these factors in order to increase enrolments. The factors such as university's reputation and brand (Palacio et al., 2002), and campus facilities provided (Gray et al., 2003) have been considered pivotal in university-choice decisions. Evidence is available to support the notion that prospective students look for the "learning environment" of a university that is a product of its library facilities, computer labs, study rooms, parking facilities (LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1996), qualifications of its faculty, teach-

ing at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (Gray et al., 2003). One of the major contributory factors identified through a study by LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999) is the overall reputation of the university. The authors argue that the university's contribution to society is an important indicator of reputation, and that factor has also been found to positively affect the student choice of universities (Gatfield et al., 1999).

Employability has been found to be an important element to consider while selecting any university for one's higher education (Ivy, 2001). This makes sense in an economy that is characterized by higher levels of inflation and difficult employment conditions. Some researchers found that students, while making university choice, want to minimize the associated risks, including financial risks and the social risk, in particular (Bergerson, 2010). Financial risks include the costs of study that can be minimized by offering scholarships to international students. However, the social risk can be minimized through earning a good university reputation among the members of society. Since it is believed that students consider the university choice decision as a "trade-off" between costs and values (James et al., 1999), they want to minimize the risk of being unemployed once they graduate. Since they want to secure employment and be respected by employers, students consider university rankings as an important element and this is specifically true for students who plan to study abroad (Guruz, 2008). There are many organizations that rank business schools. However, White et al. (2009) proposed that an accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is highly regarded among academicians, and it also positively impacts business school enrolment choice decisions.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

Despite significant contributions regarding higher education research, business school branding

is at an infancy stage of research; literature highlights many gaps, in terms of perspectives as well as methods (Priporas & Kamenidou, 2010). The context of Pakistan has its importance but academic researchers have never explored it. Keeping in mind the current state of research in the area of business school branding, the researchers opted for a qualitative approach. This was done by considering the ability of qualitative research methods to provide detailed descriptions of any phenomenon (Amaratunga, 2002). In the case of our research, qualitative investigation adds to the ecological validity and relevance to business school choice models (Meredith, 1998). The informants were qualified on the basis of their intent to study abroad, in the UK, opting for higher education in business and management. A qualifying question "Are you planning to study at any of the business schools in the UK?" was posed to potential respondents. The students who said "yes" and were willing to spare some time for the interview were requested to take part in the research process. Employing semi-structured interviews to collect data was deemed appropriate so that complex and ambiguous issues can be penetrated (Gummesson, 2005, p. 309). An in-depth interview method also provided a depiction of the participants' true feelings on the issue of studying at UK business schools (Chisnall, 1992). The interview questions were based on the literature, and interviews were conducted between the months of March and April 2012. Face-to-face interviews were preferred to collect data over other tools because interviewees can be probed for detailed responses in an effort to reduce confusions. Furthermore, an in-depth exploration regarding the student choice of UK business schools was performed to the best extent possible by employing qualitative methods of inquiry (Pole & Lampard, 2002). An interview guide was developed to make sure that every respondent is asked the same set of questions. However, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the free flow of ideas and the concepts pertaining to the exploration of elements that influence the student choice of UK business schools.

The sample size was determined by the saturation method of sample selection that has been employed extensively in qualitative research studies. The collected data from 25 graduate business students enrolled in a private sector University was constantly compared with previously collected data. Once a saturation point was achieved at 25 interviews, the research team decided to stop interviewing the informants. These approaches to sample selection and sample qualification have been highly acknowledged among qualitative researchers (Patton, 1990). The size of the sample is also justified by the recommendations made by McGivern (2003), where a sample size of 25 has been recognized as appropriate to understanding interviewees' collective views in order to unlock the construct. The interviews lasted for almost 45 minutes each and a detailed noteset was prepared for comparison of the data within the sets developed after each interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to more easily convert the data into themes to promote the accuracy of data collection while also permitting the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee (Patton, 1990). The contents of the semi-structured interviews were checked for both face and content validity. All the data collected was recorded both manually and on audio tape. The contents were analyzed both horizontally and vertically (one person's comments against his/her own comments and against those of others) to get the maximum information out of them. Thematic analysis was performed to generate certain themes out of the interview data. All relevant answers were categorized and then divided into themes such as "financial assistance" and others. These themes were then further considered for important sub-dimensions and potential explanations.

#### 4. FINDINGS

The thematic analysis revealed four predominant themes: financial assistance, employability, brand reputation and rankings.

## 4.1. Financial assistance

Financial assistance provided by the business school was considered an important factor influencing the decision to enroll in a UK business school. One male MBA student explained:

*"I would like to study abroad in the United Kingdom as many of my friends are already studying there. The crucial element for me is to manage the finances, once enrolled in any business school."*

The students were concerned about the cost of living and unemployment in the UK that led them to think solely about the provision of financial assistance. One female MBA student said:

*"I have achieved good academic records in my previous qualification. This is the major reason I wanted to go to good business schools in UK but the fees are very high, and so is the cost of living."*

One male student explained the importance of financial assistance provided by the business school prior to admission into degree programs. By highlighting different types of financial assistance, he said:

*"I realize the value and the importance of being recognized as 'UK-qualified' across the globe, but money is an important consideration. Hence, I would prefer the business schools that offer financial assistance in the form of discounts, merit scholarships, teaching or research assistantships to international students."*

## 4.2. Employability

Another factor contributing towards admission to UK business schools is its "market value". That is, how much respect the industry pays to business school graduates while hiring for various employment opportunities. One male MBA student explained:

*"Education is better now even in Pakistan but my aspiration to get a higher degree in the UK is the market value of business schools, once I have the degree. I do not want to stay unemployed after getting a*

*high-cost degree from the UK and always look for those business schools whose graduates got employment soon after graduating. A higher degree from the business school with high 'employability' can provide me extra advantage to work in my home country."*

This phenomenon was further explained by a female student as follows:

*"I like to brighten my chances for employability by earning an internationally acclaimed degree in business. This can be achieved after studying in the UK for a year or two."*

The students were not only motivated to seek employment in Pakistan after the completion of their chosen degree but also seemed motivated to stay in the UK and ultimately immigrating. One male MBA student said:

*"I know that the job market is tough in Pakistan in the face of a large number of educated people who are jobless. Hence, I would like to earn a business degree that is respected by employers in Pakistan and abroad. This can be a useful route to immigration after the degree and once employment conditions are favorable, I may come back and serve the country."*

Some students were found to have focused on the idea of coming back and working for Pakistan-based organizations. The concern of taking care of the family was also observed. One female student explained:

*"I wanted to get education from any UK business school that has the highest rate of employability in the UK as well as in Pakistan. Job is imperative to grow further and also to serve the family needs. Although career growth is important, family is my priority. Instead of finding employment in the UK, I would like to come back to Pakistan and will find employment here to stay close to the family."*

## 4.3. Brand reputation

Brand reputation has been an important element in student choice criteria in previous studies, and this is also true of the current piece of



research. Students seem to highly value the university's brand name awareness and its reputation. One male MBA student said:

*"I have earned an MBA in Pakistan but to further improve my research skills, I wanted to join a university having a reputation in terms of faculty publications and wonderful research culture. I would prefer the universities where the faculty is actively involved in research so that I can make a meaningful contribution to the Pakistani society after graduating in the UK."*

Students also valued highly the university brand name as a major element affecting their choice decision. One female student explained it as follows:

*"I am ready to spend money to earn an International MBA (IMBA) from any well reputed business school in the United Kingdom. When I was exploring business schools, the factors such as a strong name and good image in stakeholders' mind were significant elements."*

*"I like the painted walls of University X in a specific way. It is not only the walls, but a message of inspiration and leadership that spurs me to be a part of that community of intellectuals."*

Some students valued the quality of education in Pakistan and shared that the major reason for their pursuit of higher degree in business administration abroad was to gain an international, diversified and unique experience. One male MBA student said:

*"I wanted to experience life in an environment that is diversified, and international in nature. The internal environment of business schools to my mind is understood as a brand. I believe that business school X, where I have applied for admission, has a good reputation, and prestige in the academic as well as the corporate world."*

#### 4.4. Rankings

Rankings are considered important due to multiple factors, and students consider high ranking of business schools as a function of all the factors discussed earlier. One male MBA student said:

*"I think that going abroad to the UK for higher studies is a risky decision as it involves a significant amount of time and a monetary investment. Alongside that, the newness of culture adds to it. Given the risks associated with business education in the UK, I always consider highly ranked business schools that are respected by the academia and the corporate sector, have good brand reputation and image, and above all, their 'return on investment'."*

*"Investing in (studying at) high-ranking business schools always provides wonderful returns in the form of having good career prospects, respect in the society, and high rates of financial return."*

Students seem to be influenced by the business school rankings provided by different organizations that are considered an important element affecting the business school choice. One male MBA student said:

*"I look for MBA rankings by different organizations and completely understand the value of it. However, since many organizations are providing rankings of business schools, I think that business schools accredited by the AACSB are really very good business schools in the UK, having a good infrastructure, credibility in the corporate world, and creating wonderful student experiences."*

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results reveal that four major factors influence the decision of Pakistani students to take admission at UK business schools. The first theme that emerged from the analysis was financial assistance. The importance of financial assistance has been an important element for Pakistani students. The studies of Bergerson (2010) and James et al., (1999) clearly propose the idea that business students look for financial assistance being provided by business schools. The findings of our study highlight the importance of minimizing the risk of financial failure that has already been discussed by researchers (Gregory, 2002). The Pakistani students understood the extent of risk involved with studying at UK business schools. Without any scholarship it

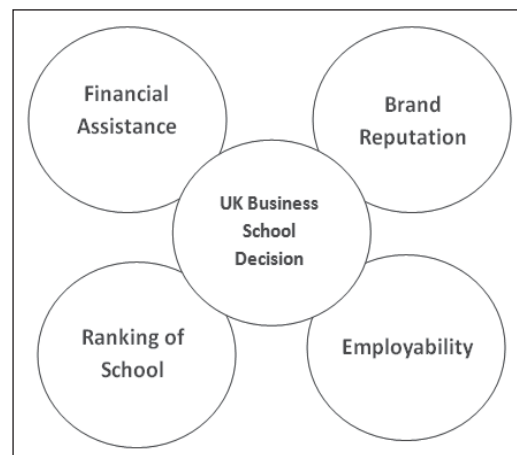
will be a high risk decision that can prevent them from seeking admission at a particular business school. The element of risk associated with any management decision has been highlighted by Hofstede (2005).

The second theme emerging from the analysis is employability. For most students, the ultimate goal following a successful graduation is to get a good job that can provide financial benefits to them. Choosing a business school that will improve their chances of stable employment upon returning to Pakistan is clearly very important to the participants of this study.

Thirdly, brand image and reputation have been found to strongly influence the decision to choose a business school in the UK. The reputation of a business school can be established by attracting quality students, offering facilities and through faculty and research initiatives. The "collectivist" thinking is also evident from the results. The students wanted to come back and contribute to the Pakistani society upon their return. These results are in line with the analysis conducted by Hofstede (2005), indicating clearly that the Pakistani society exhibits a "collectivist" culture and that is different when compared to Western individualistic societies. Bennett and Ali-Choudhury (2009) highlighted the importance of logos, stationery and transportation vehicles contributing towards the overall brand recognition and recall for universities. Melissa and Baldwin (2006) also argued that it helps students to feel a "sense of being one" with the university through images and environment. The findings are in line with these studies as students look for strong brand names and other elements such as the "environment" of business school as elements of choice. The students also wanted to become part of a community where they can contribute to the public welfare in order to gain respect in the academia and industry. These results also support the ideas presented by Palacio et al. (2002), where the researchers valued the importance of student experiences in building a strong brand and ultimately contributing to the university reputation.

Finally, the university ranking appeared to be a common theme for the participants of this study. A university that addresses the stakeholder needs in a superior manner has been ranked highly by international ranking agencies. The importance of ranking has been well-documented through the work of Guruz (2008). However, White et al. (2009) specifically advocated the influence of business school accreditation by the AACSB on the student choice of business schools. The accreditation is challenging but it has a profound impact on the student choice. The business school brand is important to prospective students' choice decision because it delivers information about the quality, environment and external reputation of the university (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Melissa & Baldwin, 2006). The collective role of four branding attributes that affect Pakistani students' choice decision has been figuratively presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Business school brand attributes



## 6. CONCLUSION

The present study presents a contextual view point on business school branding elements that influence students' choice decisions to study in the UK. With an increase in the number of students aspiring to enroll in business schools located in the UK, tough competition among business schools all around the globe, and specifically in

the UK, and the presentation of Pakistani the context make this research a valuable contribution. In addition, the branding attributes that Pakistani students consider valuable in taking admission at UK business schools were absent, and this gap is filled by the preset research. This study is the first to research branding in higher education involving Pakistani postgraduate business students applying to UK business schools. Despite its notable contribution by highlighting a Pakistani perspective, the researchers believe that more studies are needed to unlock the current state of the stipulation of branding in higher education. Even though the sample used in this study was adequate for the purpose of a qualitative inquiry and allowed level-headed conclusions to be drawn, it cannot be considered representative of all students aspiring to study abroad. Further research on a nationally representative sample using quantitative measures should be performed to confirm and strengthen the current findings in order to improve the ability to generalize.

As this research belongs to the emerging stream of research in the field of business school branding, it will be useful for British higher education consultants, planners and marketers in devising their educational branding activities. For instance, these attributes must be considered important by business schools in the UK in attracting students from Pakistan. Given the global financial crises, we believe that the offering of generous scholarship of a wide variety can at-

tract numerous students. So-called kinship or alumni-based programs offered to attract students can be an important strategy. The major reason for this strategy is that a large number of Pakistani students have graduated from business schools in the UK. Once a business school takes these initiatives, it will create an important "node" in the memory of a potential student and graduate. Given the collectivist culture of Pakistan, the family members who have graduated from UK business schools can prove to be a strong reference in the business school choice decision. Finally, it is a matter of reducing the risk associated with the selection of a business school in the UK. The rankings, employability and brand reputation will work on this important element, affecting choice decisions. It is important to note that these attributes are equally beneficial for Pakistani business schools as well. The attributes such as employability are significant for business schools to stress while promoting their business degree programs. Pakistani business schools can attract these students, provided that certain jobs can be arranged for students upon their graduation. Given the various risks associated with the business school selection decision, the availability of jobs right after graduation can prove to be an important attribute affecting student choice. Furthermore, brand image and reputation can be positively enhanced through development of a culture of support, dedicated faculty and high class infrastructure that fosters academic learning in a business school context.

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