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DETERMINATION OF THE PERCEPTION LEVELS OF THE BRAND IDENTITY OF AN INTERNATIONAL PRIVATE EDUCATION INSTITUTION BY FAMILIES (FAMAGUSTA AND KYRENIA CASE)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the level of parental perception regarding the brand identity of the Doga International Schools of the TRNC. This study holds value in unveiling parental perceptions of brand identity while elucidating the concept and process of branding. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to enhancing and realizing the brand identity of private educational institutions. In this context, the research conducted adopts a survey model. Regarding the nationality of the parents, there are 128 (43.4%) Turkish parents, 88 (29.8%) Russian parents, and 79 (26.8%) Iranian parents. Data were gathered using the Brand Identity Scale for Higher Education Institutions. This scale consists of 33 items designed to gauge the brand identity of educational institutions. Additionally, the scale included respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education level, occupation, and income. The scale exhibited high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.978, indicating strong internal consistency. Although initially intended for higher education institutions, the scale was adapted for use in a private educational institution in the TRNC for this study. The data collected during the research process were inputted into the SPSS-25 software package. The study broadly investigated parents' perception levels regarding the brand identity of their children's school. The scale was analyzed across sub-dimensions such as distribution channel, word of mouth, public relations, promotional materials, service facilities, employee service, brand name, product/core services, price, and employee development/training. Based on the findings, the "brand name" sub-dimension (Doga International Schools) was rated highest by the participating parents.

Keywords: Private education institution, Branding, Parental perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

The Turkish Federated State of Cyprus (TFSC), founded on February 13, 1975, with the aim of representing Turkish Cypriots and safeguarding their rights and freedoms, proclaimed its independence on November 15, 1983, establishing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). The TRNC operates under a republican system of governance, with state oversight and control over educational matters. Individuals and entities are permitted to engage in educational activities under state supervision and in compliance with the law. The framework for the TRNC's education system was established through the enactment of the National Education Law by the parliament in 1986, bearing resemblance to Turkey's National Education Law. To harmonize with Turkey's education system, the following two provisions were added to this law:

1. Ensuring alignment between the curricula implemented in Turkish Cypriot National Education Institutions and those in equivalent educational institutions in Turkey, while also considering the needs of the Turkish Cypriot community, subject to the provisions outlined in paragraph (2) below.
2. Placing particular emphasis on addressing the characteristics and needs of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in organizing and implementing educational programs, along with social studies, civic education, practical skills, vocational education, and other relevant subjects, and permitting the establishment of schools tailored to these needs.

Educational planning and activities in the TRNC are overseen by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the Higher Education Planning, Evaluation, Accreditation, and Coordination Council (YÖDAK). The Ministry of National Education holds responsibility for overseeing all levels of education within the TRNC, which encompass pre-school, primary education, secondary education, and higher education. The TRNC's education system is divided into formal and informal education, with formal institutions including pre-school, primary education, and secondary education institutions, while informal institutions cover higher education and vocational education. Alongside public educational institutions under the TRNC government, the presence of private educational institutions in the education sector has been facilitated to accommodate the growing population and evolving economic conditions.

According to data from the (MoNE of the TRNC in 2022), there are a total of 55,298 students enrolled in the TRNC education system. Among them, 7,556 are in the preschool age group of 3-5 years old, with 3,665 attending public state schools and 3,891 attending private schools. At the primary school level, there are 20,434 students, with 16,193 enrolled in public schools and 4,241 in private schools. Middle school enrollment stands at 11,925 students, with 10,234 attending public schools and 1,691 in private schools. For high school, there are 15,141 students, with 13,053 enrolled in public schools and 2,088 in private schools (TRNC MoNE Education Statistics Yearbook, 2022).

Based on these data, it is evident that in the TRNC education system, 51.5% of preschool students attend private schools, while 48.5% attend public schools. At the primary school level, 26% of students are enrolled in private

schools, compared to 74% in public schools. Similarly, for middle school students, 14% attend private schools, while 86% attend public schools. According to the (MoNE of the TRNC) (2022) data, 22% of students attending formal education institutions are enrolled in private educational institutions, while 78% attend public schools. This percentage is notably higher than the 9% observed in Turkey and surpasses 20% on average in OECD countries, while in the United States, it stands at 65%.

As per the 2022 data released by the Ministry of National Education of the TRNC, the proportion of foreign students attending private schools, excluding those from the TRNC and Turkey, stands at 17%. Nearly 1700 foreign students are currently enrolled across preschool, primary, middle, and high school levels in the TRNC. This notable percentage and its yearly upward trajectory contribute to the increasing prevalence of international schools within the country. Approximately 50 international schools are operational, offering education at various tiers nationwide. Consequently, private schools within the TRNC are increasingly prioritizing enhanced recognition, institutionalization, and branding, both domestically and internationally. Branded institutions have garnered recognition not only locally but also on a global scale.

The era of globalization has spurred heightened competition among institutions across various sectors, including education. In this competitive landscape, establishing robust institutional frameworks that enhance value and foster credibility among stakeholders enables educational entities to provide sustained quality services to society. Institutionalization and branding have assumed pivotal roles within the education sector, particularly within private educational and training establishments, since the 1990s. While the significance of branding in education became apparent later, the rapid proliferation of private educational and training institutions has expedited efforts towards institutionalization and branding. This trend is mirrored in both Turkey and the TRNC.

Branding is a concept that undergoes various interpretations and evolves over time. For a private educational institution to establish itself and create a brand, it must attain legitimacy, possess predefined visions, missions, and values, develop its institutional identity, ensure its sustainability, be recognized by its surroundings, and adapt to innovations by monitoring changes. It is also essential for all stakeholders of the institution to organize themselves accordingly and support and enhance this process.

With the growing demand for and awareness of private educational institutions in the education sector, there has been and continues to be an increase in the number of private schools. Therefore, each institution must address the needs and expectations of its clientele with its unique brand, establish collaboration with consumers/customers, and establish trust and empathy by sharing their narratives. Thus, whether public or private, building trust, satisfaction, collaboration, and robust relationships between institutions and parents-students is crucial in education. The trust provided by the corporate identity in private schools, the continuity of the education offered, its innovative nature, the school environment, and the social opportunities it provides all contribute to enhancing the institution's reputation. This scenario offers a competitive edge (Fombrun, 1996).

Benefits of branding for private educational institutions (Demir, 2012):

- Branding ensures the private educational institution's presence in the sector and increases its market share.
- Private educational institutions have the flexibility to price their services higher compared to their competitors.
- The service provided by private educational institutions is distinct from that of competing institutions, leading to a preference for their services.
- Branding fosters "brand loyalty," ensuring sustained demand for the institution.
- Branded private educational institutions allocate less expenditure to promotional and advertising activities.
- Branding enhances the image of the services provided by private educational institutions.
- Branding aids in expanding the market share of private educational institutions.
- Other organizations adopt pricing strategies similar to those of branded private educational institutions.
- A branded private educational institution facilitates the introduction of new services to the public and ensures their acceptance.
- Branding maintains the profitability rate of private educational institutions at a consistent level.

Education institutions operate within the highly competitive service sector. Consequently, private educational institutions, functioning within this sector, employ branding strategies to safeguard their presence in the competitive landscape. The significance of these branding strategies is increasing not only in private schools within the TRNC but also in educational institutions globally. With the escalating number of private schools worldwide, there is a concerted effort to establish a robust market position through comprehensive branding and institutionalization processes, emphasizing their unique qualities. This underscores the crucial role of branding for private schools.

The primary objective of the research is to assess parental perceptions of the brand identity of the International Nature Schools in the TRNC. This study holds value in unveiling parental perceptions of brand identity while elucidating the concept and process of branding. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to enhancing and realizing the brand identity of private educational institutions.

METHOD

This study aims to determine the level of parental perception regarding the brand identity of the Doğa International Schools of the TRNC. In this context, the research conducted adopts a survey model. According to Karasar (2007), the survey model is an approach aimed at describing a past or current situation as it exists. Statistical and mathematical models are utilized to analyze data in quantitative research. The findings obtained from the research are objective, impartial, and free from personal biases (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The numerical data derived from these studies are subjected to semantic transformation to render them interpretable (Coyne, 1997).

Study Group

Participants were the parents of students enrolled at the Doga International Schools in the TRNC.

Table-1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Parents' Demographic Characteristics.

Characteristics	Categories	f	%
Nationality	Turkish	128	43,4
	Russian	88	29,8
	Iranian	79	26,8
Gender	Female	194	65,8
	Male	101	34,2
Monthly Income	10,000 -22,000	61	20,7
	Over 22,000-44,000	103	34,9
	Over 44,000-55,000	59	20,0
	Over 55,000	72	24,4
Education Level	High School	30	10,2
	Bachelor's Degree	232	78,6
	Postgraduate	33	11,2
Age	26-35 years	39	13,2
	36-45 years	164	55,6
	46 years and over	92	31,2
Total		295	100,0

Upon examining Table 1, the distribution of parents' demographic characteristics can be observed. Regarding the nationality of the parents, there are 128 (43.4%) Turkish parents, 88 (29.8%) Russian parents, and 79 (26.8%) Iranian parents. Looking at the distribution based on gender, there are 194 (65.8%) female parents and 101 (34.2%) male parents. There are 61 (20.7%) parents with an income of 10,000-22,000, 103 (34.9%) parents with an income of 22,000-44,000, 59 (20.0%) parents with an income of 44,000-55,000, and 72 (24.4%) parents with an income over 55,000. Analyzing the distribution by education level reveals 30 (10.2%) parents with a high school education, 232 (78.6%) parents with a bachelor's degree, and 33 (11.2%) parents with a postgraduate degree. Lastly, considering the age distribution, there are 39 (13.2%) parents aged 26-35 years, 164 (55.6%) parents aged 36-45 years, and 92 (31.2%) parents aged over 46 years. Overall, the study includes a total of 295 (100.0%) parents.

Data Collection Tools

Data were gathered using the Brand Identity Scale for Higher Education Institutions, adapted by Yüksekbilgili (2017). This scale consists of 33 items designed to gauge the brand identity of educational institutions. Additionally, the scale included respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education level, occupation, and income. The scale exhibited high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.978, indicating strong internal consistency. Although initially intended for higher education institutions, the scale was adapted for use in a private educational institution in the TRNC for this study. The survey was duplicated by the researcher

and distributed to parents in sealed envelopes. The data collection process was completed over a period of approximately 12 days.

Findings of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

An initial confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to establish the item-factor relationship based on the previously developed structure of the scale. Prior to analysis, the normal distribution of variables was assessed using Skewness coefficients. The initial results, conducted with 12 variables and 2 factors, revealed that the model fit was not achieved. Furthermore, two variables exhibited factor loadings of 0.90 or higher (institutional culture and system/process), while the correlation between the two factors was notably high at 0.92. However, the exploratory factor analysis showed that there was only one component with an eigenvalue exceeding 1, and the ratio of the first component to the second component was tenfold higher, suggesting that a single-factor structure might be more appropriate for the scale.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Between Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.Distribution Channel	.00	.57 **	.50 **	.53 **	.56 **	.58 **	.56 **	.63 **	.48 **	.64 **	.54 **	.56 **
2.Word of Mouth			.64 **	.57 **	.67 **	.51 **	.56 **	.60 **	.47 **	.71 **	.49 **	.61 **
3.Public Relations				.72 **	.65 **	.63 **	.53 **	.56 **	.50 **	.69 **	.60 **	.71 **
4.Promotional Materials					.57 **	.62 **	.58 **	.53 **	.46 **	.60 **	.59 **	.73 **
5.Service Facilities						.65 **	.56 **	.61 **	.48 **	.72 **	.55 **	.63 **
6.Employee Service							.62 **	.59 **	.52 **	.71 **	.70 **	.73 **
7.Brand Name								.58 **	.56 **	.73 **	.58 **	.66 **
8.Product/Core Services									.65 **	.82 **	.68 **	.76 **
9.Price										.70 **	.57 **	.66 **
10.Employee development/Training											.72 **	.81 **
11.Overall Scale												.86 **
12. System Culture												1
	.63 **	.69 **	.73 **	.69 **	.72 **	.75 **	.73 **	.83 **	.72 **		.83 **	

*:p<0,05 **:p<0,01

Table 3. Results of the Final Reliability and Validity Analysis of the Scale.

Model Fit Index	Compliance Results	Variables	DFA		AFA	
			F1 Std.	t	F1*	r
X ² /sd	4,63	1.Distribution Channel	.70		.75	.69
RMSEA	.07	2.Word of Mouth	.78	18,52**	.77	.71
SRMR	.03	3.Public Relations	.77	18,91**	.81	.75
GFI	.96	4.Promotional Materials	.73	18,10**	.79	.73
NFI	.97	5.Service Facilities	.79	18,97**	.80	.75
NNFI	.96	6.Employee Service	.83	20,20**	.82	.77
CFI	.98	7.Brand Name	.73	18,01**	.77	.72
Factor Load Range	.65-.85	8.Product/Core Services	.77	20,94**	.82	.76
KMO	.93	9.Price	.65	16,07**	.72	.65
Bartlett's p	.000	10.Employee development/Training	.83	19,89**	.80	.75
Eigenvalues (in the first three rows)	6,18/.73/0,61					
Covariance correlation	DC-CS, WOM-SF, WOM-ES, WOM-Training, PR-PM, SF- Training, CS Price					
Total variance (%)	61,84					
Cronbach Alpha	.93					

Data Analysis

The data collected during the research process were inputted into the SPSS-25 software package. Mean and standard deviation values were provided to illustrate the distributions of participants' perceptions based on the sub-factors of the utilized scale. To determine whether the data distribution is parametric or non-parametric, tests for normality and homogeneity were conducted. Skewness and kurtosis values were examined to assess the assumption of normal distribution for both the overall scale and its sub-factors. Analysis of Table 4 reveals that the skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of -1 to +1, which is generally considered acceptable for assessing the normality assumption (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner & Barrett, 2004, p.50). Furthermore, examination of the Levene homogeneity test for test variances indicated a p-value greater than .05, suggesting that the test variances of the score distribution were homogeneously distributed, thereby confirming the homogeneity assumption.

The scores obtained from the scale represent continuous data observed at the interval scale level. The fulfillment of parametric test assumptions is supported by the independence of the two samples (groups), measurement of dependent variables at the interval or ratio scale level, and adherence to the assumptions of normality and homogeneity. Assuming normal distribution of scores becomes challenging when the number of groups falls below 30 for some researchers or 15 for others. Nevertheless, researchers conducting small-group experimental studies may still utilize parametric statistics if the distributions of their collected data are deemed appropriate (Köklü, Büyüköztürk, & Bökeoğlu, 2007).

Table 4. Skewness and Kurtosis Values for the Scores Obtained from the Brand Identity Scale Administered to Parents.

	N=374	Skewness	Kurtosis
Brand Identity Scale	Distribution Channel	-.851	.958
	Word of Mouth	-.396	.466
	Public Relations	-.817	.959
	Promotional Materials	-.495	-.537
	Service Facilities	-.426	-.266
	Employee Service	-.947	.802
	Brand Name	-.884	.850
	Product/Core Services	-.996	.764
	Price	-.357	-.075
	Employee development/Training	-.713	.574
	Overall Scale	-.997	.713

Differences in perceptions among participating parents based on gender were assessed using Independent-Sample T-Test. One-Way ANOVA (One-Way Analysis of Variance) was utilized to examine variations in perception levels across parents' nationality, monthly income, education level, and age. For variables with more than two groups showing significant differences, the Tukey test was applied for post hoc comparisons within the one-way ANOVA analysis (Can, 2014). Interpretations of the analysis results were made considering the criteria provided in Table-5 for understanding the levels of perception regarding brand identity.

Table-5. Criteria for the Averages Obtained From the Scale.

Scale Likert	Criterion Range	Perception Level
Strongly agree	4.24-5.00	Very High
Agree	3.43-4.23	High
Neutral	2.62-3.42	Moderate
Disagree	1.81-2.61	Low
Strongly disagree	1.00-1.80	Very Low

FINDINGS

The study examined the perceptions of parents regarding the brand identity of the school where their children were enrolled. During the analysis, each average score was divided by the number of items in that dimension, and comparisons were made with predetermined criteria to interpret the results. In the sub-dimension of distribution channels, with an average score of 3.86, parents' brand identity scores were observed to be high. For the word of mouth sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.24, parents' brand identity scores were moderate. In the public relations sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.54, parents' brand identity scores were high. Regarding the promotional materials sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.60, parents' brand identity scores were high. In the service facilities sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.34, parents' brand identity scores were moderate. For the employee service sub-dimension, with an average score of 4.09, parents' brand identity scores were high. In the brand name sub-dimension, with an average score of 4.12, parents' brand

identity scores were high. In the product/core services sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.94, parents' brand identity scores were high. Regarding the price sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.40, parents' brand identity scores were moderate. In the education/staff development sub-dimension, with an average score of 3.87, parents' brand identity scores were high.

Table 6. Mean and Standard Deviation Results for the Sub-Factors and Overall Brand Identity Scale.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	\bar{X}	S
Distribution Channel	295	2,00	10,00	7,71 (3,86)	1,60
Word of Mouth	295	2,00	10,00	6,47 (3,24)	1,54
Public Relations	295	5,00	20,00	14,16 (3,54)	3,09
Promotional Materials	295	2,00	10,00	7,20 (3,60)	1,95
Service Facilities	295	4,00	20,00	13,37 (3,34)	3,60
Employee Service	295	3,00	10,00	8,17 (4,09)	1,59
Brand Name	295	3,00	10,00	8,24 (4,12)	1,56
Product/Core Services	295	5,00	20,00	15,77 (3,94)	3,19
Price	295	2,00	10,00	6,79 (3,40)	1,63
Employee Development/Training	295	3,00	10,00	7,73 (3,87)	1,62
Overall Scale	295	31,00	130,00	95,62 (3,68)	17,15

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

The study employed a scale derived from the research of Mei Teh Goi, Chai Lee Goi, and David Wong (2014), adapted to Turkish by Yüksekbilgili (2017), titled *The Turkish Adaptation of the Brand Identity Scale for Higher Education Institutions: A Validity and Reliability Study*. This scale, comprising 33 items, aimed to gauge brand identity in educational institutions. The second part of the study included demographic information of the respondents (e.g., gender, age, education, occupation, and income). With a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.978, indicating high reliability, the scale was primarily designed as a "brand determination scale" adapted for use in higher education institutions. However, in this study, it was completed by parents whose children attend a private educational institution in the TRNC. Although the scale primarily encompasses higher education institutions, it has also been utilized by Kayıkçı, Armağan, and Dal (2019) to determine brand identity in private schools and colleges, suggesting its applicability beyond higher education.

The study broadly investigated parents' perception levels regarding the brand identity of their children's school. The scale was analyzed across sub-dimensions such as distribution channel, word of mouth, public relations, promotional materials, service facilities, employee service, brand name, product/core services, price, and employee development/training. Based on the findings, the "brand name" sub-dimension (Doga International Schools) was rated highest by the participating parents. This suggests that parents have confidence in the brand name of Doga International Schools. Moreover, parents highly rated the services provided by school staff, implying a strong connection between perceived brand identity and the quality of education and services offered. Similarly, parents perceived the employee development/training sub-dimension to have a high brand identity, suggesting satisfaction with educational services. Additionally, high ratings were given to the promotional

materials sub-dimension, possibly due to parental involvement in student activities and event sharing on social media. Moreover, parents perceived the public relations sub-dimension positively, indicating effective communication between school staff and parents. However, moderate ratings were given to the service facilities sub-dimension, likely due to the aged condition of the school building in Gazimagusa. Similarly, the word of mouth sub-dimension received moderate ratings. Notably, these dimensions exhibited significant resemblance to levels reported in the study conducted by Yüksekbilgili (2017).

SUGGESTIONS

In line with the information and findings obtained from the literature review and survey research of this study, the following suggestions can be made:

In addition to the variables of perceived quality and brand association strength, other variables can also be examined to influence private school preference.

Considering that the research was conducted only in one school in Famagusta and Kyrenia provinces in TRNC, it may be recommended to conduct studies in many different regions and institutions.

Qualitative research methods can be used to examine the views of families on private school preference. Especially considering the digitalized educational environments, the effect of technology on perceived quality and brand association can be measured.

ETHICAL TEXT

"This article complies with the journal's writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics and journal ethical rules. The responsibility for any violations that may arise regarding the article belongs to me. The ethics committee permission of the article was obtained by the Cyprus University of Health and Social Sciences/Publication Ethics Committee with the decision dated 17/10/2023 and numbered 1034.

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