



Brand positioning as a factor in the choice of the candidate for higher education

El posicionamiento de marca como factor en la elección del aspirante a la educación superior

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ABSTRACT:

The increase in the supply of educational services and the competitive intensity has led Higher Education Institutions to adopt Educational Marketing, where the brand and positioning are decisive in the election processes. Through quantitative exploratory research, the elements of positioning and relevant factors that affect the decision of a potential consumer are characterized, being the academic reputation and the relationship between satisfaction and expectations that have the greatest influence on the consumer.

Keywords: Positioning, Educational Marketing, Higher Education Institutions, Brand

RESUMEN:

El incremento de la oferta de servicios educativos y la intensidad competitiva ha llevado a las Instituciones de Educación Superior adoptar el Mercadeo Educativo, en donde la marca y el posicionamiento son determinantes en los procesos de elección. Mediante una investigación exploratoria cuantitativa, se caracterizan los elementos del posicionamiento y factores relevantes que afectan la decisión de un consumidor potencial, siendo la reputación académica y la relación entre satisfacción y expectativas la que tienen mayor influencia en él consumidor.

Palabras clave: Posicionamiento, Mercadeo Educativo, Instituciones de Educación Superior, Marca

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEI) start to consider the marketing-oriented processes. This has led to the creation and consolidation of exclusive areas in directing communications and commercial messages of the universities. However, the Colombian economic situation, the increase of HEI, the concentration of HEI in the main cities and the effort to increase market invite that some elements related to the educational brand take relevance in order to establish themselves in the minds of the potential students.

The processes of brand building for an HEI, and the establishment of factors related to consumer behavior through elements such as attitude and memory, as well as influence groups to develop beliefs or absolute truths about brands (Shiffman & Leslie, 2001; Peter & Olson, 2006; Solomon, 2008) are factors that affect the choice of a brand in the higher educational field.

In this context, it is necessary to identify some elements considered as attributes for a university brand thus the HEIs need to know their consumers, establish the factors that are important to them when choosing a university in order to determine the elements of the positioning to be developed for the so-called brand. Some of these aspects to consider have relevance since the corporate context such as mission, vision and corporate values, as well as brand, emphasizing the commercial slogan, image and brand (Cortina, Cardona –Arbelaez & Simancas –Trujillo, 2017).

The adoption of management concepts is common for the HEI, predominantly the relationship between modern management approaches and traditional collegiate models (Restrepo, Trujillo & Guzmán, 2012), changes in the search for efficiency, incorporating in the HEIs a market orientation and implementing own marketing activities are some of the examples. HEIs must recognize in an environment of high competitive intensity that requires the use of own marketing tools (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) and the use of relational marketing (Helgesen, 2008), therefore they also must direct their efforts to establish a positioning.

From 1980, conventional marketing concepts have been appropriated by the field of higher education (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006), time when the term educational marketing arises (Kotler & Fox, 1985) associating marketing theory in the context of educational organizations in their market alignment (Gordan, 2013; Rivera-Camino & Moleró, 2010) and the consumer orientation in educational marketing activities (Judson, Aurand, Gorchels, & Gordon, 2008), facts that reinforce the relationship between marketing actions and universities (Mazzarol, 1998).

Since the choice of a university implies a significant step in the life plan of a person that involves a conscious search, similar to the process of selecting an informed consumer (Baldwin and James, 2000), which is characterized by an incessant search for information in order to make value judgments that will be the determinants in the choice, thus the implementation of marketing actions in universities is increasingly common (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Oplatka, 2009).

Several of the studies in educational marketing analyze potential students and the image given by the reputation among universities (Miranda, 2005), where positioning in higher education is a tool that allows creating an image, through attributes that students consider relevant to choose a university (Kotler and Fox, 1985). For this reason the image, reputation and brand or name acquire a leading role in educational marketing; Ivy (2001), Oplatka (2002) and Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) involve image and reputation as primary components of positioning, as well as the relationship of attributes in the internal and external market, having an association with the brand (Chapleo, 2011 ; Judson et al., 2008; Judson, Gorchels, and Aurand, 2006; Temple, 2006), and relational marketing activities (Judson, Aurand, and Karlovsky, 2007; Lay-Hwa, 2011).

Relationships between image and reputation have been established regarding enrollment mainly in universities in an environment of international competition (Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2009; Finch, McDonald & Staple, 2013; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006; Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013), giving importance to the brand building in Universities (Beneke, 2011; Judson et al., 2006; Temple, 2006), as well as elements related to social perception (Alcántar and Arcos, 2004).

Positioning has been used as a strategy to differentiate educational institutions in high competitive intensity environments in Mexico (Ynzunza, 2001; Cháves, 2005), as in Chile and Peru there are models for measuring the positioning of higher education (Pérez- Acosta, 2006) similar to the positioning that occurs in other markets such as business in the labor sector (González, Yáñez, and Reyes, 2013).

Among the most sought after attributes in the context of higher education Miranda (2005) lists employment opportunities, social and sports activities, academic reputation, variety in qualifications, educational quality, international exchange, research and scholarships and Bulotaite (2003) suggests including differentiating elements such as ancient and historical infrastructure. As for the students, some researches have focused on the processes of choice and the valuations of the factors that they consider relevant according to their preferences (Mortimer, 1997; Soutar and Turner, 2002), this has involved analysis of the processes of makes decisions (Pampaloni, 2010) in the choice of a university face to another. However, some references are made to the appropriation of endomarketing actions related to student appreciation in terms of social responsibility (Caridad, Salazar & Castellano, 2016).

On the other hand, market segmentation in the educational environment is preponderant in marketing actions, due to the allowance of generating successful positions in different interest groups since perceptions about institutions can vary depending on the origin of their students (Ghosh, Javalgi , and Whipple, 2007), satisfaction and quality (Melchor and Bravo, 2012), the transition from prospect student to enrolled student, as well as in the strategies aimed at

satisfying the needs of consumers and how they can influence the factors of choice from a university (Kusumawati and Perera, 2010).

Research in Colombia on educational marketing has revolved around the brand positioning of HEIs, considered from the perspective of the organization (Vásquez, 2011), as well as oriented towards continuing education from the perspective of the strategy in environments of high competition (Blanco, 2008), from neuromarketing, linking the positioning with the corporate image in the HEIs web pages (Alarcón and Leyva, 2013), focused on the perception of quality (Duque and Chaparro, 2012), management and relationship with their stakeholders (Duque, 2009), corporate governance (Restrepo et al., 2012), or related to triple helix models in the University - State - Company relationships (Ramírez and García, 2010).

1.1. Brand and brand management

The brand is "a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of these elements, which identifies the manufacturer or seller of a product or service" (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008), which goes beyond the name, to individualize a product in its tangible differentiating characteristics, by functionality, and intangible by its symbolic nature (Kotler and Keller, 2006) and that simplifies the choice, promising a level of quality, reduces risk or generates credibility (Keller & Lehmann 2006) , therefore it gives an identity, in that sense, it is an important element that cannot be changed, like other elements of the brand such as symbols or slogans (Clifton and Simmons, 2003).

Keller (2013) considers branding as a brand building process to be in consonance with what the consumer assumes that generates value for him or herself, these associations contribute to consolidate brand equity (Aaker, 1996) that allow the transfer of perceptions and attributes in the extensions of the original brand (Aaker & Keller, 1990), as well as the social context of consumption provides a symbolism to social consumption (Hernández, 2015).

External pressures take actions on market changes which makes difficult to build a long-term brand (Aaker, 1996) where external pressures intervene on market changes, the internal conditions that make brand relationships become in complex situations due to excessive brand extensions, the use in different media and strategic changes that generate inconsistencies in communication regarding the brand identity or positioning disruptions.

However, in high competition environments the strategy must involve changes aimed at creating barriers against competing brands, in that sense the brand must be in a process that allows to extend its functional benefits and involve the interests of its consumers (Aaker, 2012) and face the evolution of media that challenge brand building processes, This should be implemented in communications programs aimed at generating effective dialogues, which foster recall and strengthen the relationship with the brand.(Keller, 2009).

The concept of corporate branding is understood as the reputation of an organization represented by the quality of its products, the integrity and transparency of its actions (Clifton and Simmons, 2003), related to the credibility and profile that an organization has acquired from the general public (Keller, 2013), but in turn implies that a consumer's perceptions of a product can be influenced by the manufacturer's perception (Aaker, 2002).

1.2. Brand equity

It is the value provided by a good or service manifested in the relationship between perceptions and attitudes that consumers have towards a brand based on their experiences (Kotler and Keller, 2006), for Aaker (1996) it is a combination of elements that are associated with a brand and generate value, not only to the customer but to the organization, that is why they are considered as assets by generating recognition and brand loyalty, perceptions of perceived quality, associations of the brand with the primary objective of generating strategic actions that cannot be imitated by competitors. The strategic management of a brand and brand equity have contributed to transforming the marketing into the conception of the brand as an asset (Aaker, 2014) seen as a business strategy that encourages a consumer to acquire knowledge about a brand and generate a brand-consumer relationship (Keller, 2013), based on experiences, feelings and perceptions.

1.3. Brand and brand management

The positioning of a brand gives greater advantage to a particular product in a given target market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008), it communicates the value proposition to a specific target group

(Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2006) supported by key conditioned perceptions to achieve the desired positioning (Ries & Trout, 1982), it is the way in which a product is perceived by the market (Arellano, 2010), which is not always consistent with what the organization or with what the brand wants to express, due to the involvement of the attitudes, beliefs and experiences of the consumer towards the product. This perception is generated by the use and decision making. Therefore it is the process of building an image of a product, in relation to its competitors, taking as reference all those elements that an organization has to be able to build the so-called image (Serna, Salazar & Delgado, 2009) or as a consequence of a marketing mix strategy, aimed at the consumer having a general perception about a product or a brand, in that sense, the organization establishes what are the elements or factors on which the consumer builds that image (Lamb, Hair & McDaniel, 2011 ; Solomon & Stuart, 2001; Arellano, 2010).

Brand positioning is the center of the marketing strategy, which allows printing positive or negative associations on a brand in the mind of the consumer (Keller, 2013), associations that support differentiation. This implies recognizing the segment on which they will develop positioning actions, competing brands and associations to position themselves in order to highlight differentiation.

In the context of higher education, positioning in HEIs refers to elements that are associated with the tangible dimension of the service. It involves the service, financing, the campus, among others; However, reputation derives the recognition of an academic program by society (Van Rooij and Lemp, 2010).

1.4. Effect of perception, attitude and memory on behavior

Cognitive and behavioral processes of the consumer, during decision making determines their behavior. The perception is generated when an individual interprets the world through the stimuli received by the senses, but only those that achieve the attention of the consumer allow to reach an interpretation or meaning to the stimuli (Solomon, 2008), these stimuli can be related to advertising actions or the intrinsic attributes of a brand or product that a consumer identifies as relevant and symbolic of that brand (Kotler and Keller 2006).

The attention becomes important since the consumer has the possibility to select the stimuli to which they are exposed, but it is affected by the situational context, motivation and expectations face of a specific need (Shiffman and Leslie, 2001). Also, the consumer can omit some stimuli subconsciously when they are considered threatening. It reduces the probability of being perceived actively.

The attitude has interference in the perception process, which allows to the consumer to make value judgments towards a brand. This judgment is based on the experiences of interaction with the brand making the judgment favorable or unfavorable (Peter and Olson, 2006). At the same time, attitudes can be influenced by beliefs, influencers and primary relationship groups that also provide judgments concerning a particular point of view and attitude towards the valuation of a product (Shiffman and Leslie, 2001).

The interpretation of the stimuli that the consumer performs in the perception process can be modified by the previous attitude of the consumer. In this way, the interpretation of stimuli should be oriented to minimize or maximize the perceived risks such as functional, financial, psychological, social and security. These perceived risks affect motivation and the approach to a brand, due to the consumers are risk averse (Conchar, Zinkhan, Peters and Olavarrieta, 2004). The memory refers to the process in which information is acquired and stored (Solomon, 2008). In order to achieve this, the stimulus must be present in different situations that are relevant to the target group and that allows the generation of associations with the perceived attributes (Shiffman and Leslie, 2001). The stimulus must catch the necessary attention to be consciously perceived, avoiding saturation, eliminating risks and at the same time leaving a cognitive impression to facilitate the process of recognition and recall.

Within the brand building process, it is important to keep in mind the elements associated with consumer psychology, such as perception, attitude and memory. This will allow generating associations of attributes with the brand, based on previous experiences and beliefs as well as positive or negative evaluations, this permits a cognitive impression to be generated, which will facilitate the processes related to memory and recognition, key elements to develop the positioning towards a brand and contrast the perception of potential students and initial students. This is made to observe the differences and similarities between these populations.

2. Methodology

This exploratory type research, with a quantitative approach, takes as reference the work carried out by Miranda (2005). It establishes representative attributes in the positioning in higher education, used in previous studies. A survey was used as a data collection technique, developed in 2 phases: in the first one it corresponded to the application of an instrument that allowed measuring a top of mind -TOM, attributes, and brand identity to a population of young people between 15 and 25 years old, inhabitants in strata 2 and 3 of the city of Bogotá. In the second phase, students from first, second and third semesters of a university in Bogotá from the same socioeconomic level were taken as population, to whom the collecting data instrument was applied to measure top of mind, positioning, and brand identity. It would be relevant to say that the population did not fill the instrument out within the facilities of the university. The data obtained were processed through the SOFA statistical software.

3. Results

Table 1 lists the determining factors for choosing a university, but their position of importance varies between those who intend to enter an HEI (group A) and those who are enrolled (group B); in such a way that the main factor for prospective students lies in the employment opportunity for their graduates (15.4%), contrary to those who already take some semesters the reputation element (24%) is more decisive when selecting a university. On the other hand, both the reputation and the value of the semester are among the first three positions of both samples, therefore, these two factors are relevant to the choice of an HEI.

Table 1
Determining factors to choose an HEI

Phase I (potential students)		Phase II (new students)	
Determining factors	%	Determining factors	%
Job opportunities for its graduates	15,4%	Your academic reputation (recognition for your research and ranking)	24,0%
Your academic reputation (recognition for your research and ranking)	10,6%	If you have highly qualified teachers	14,0%
The value of the semester	10,1%	The value of the semester	11,7%
If you have scholarships	9,9%	If you have high quality accreditation	8,9%
If you have highly qualified teachers	8,9%	If you have scholarships	5,6%
If you have high quality accreditation	8,7%	The opinion of a graduate	5,0%
If you have the possibility of international exchanges	4,1%	Job opportunities for its graduates	4,5%
If you have financing and credit lines	2,5%	If you have the possibility of international exchanges	4,5%
If you have seedbeds, practices and research	2,3%	If you have seedbeds, practices and research	4,5%
Others	12,1%	Others	15,3%

Source: The authors

The high quality accreditation factor has similar percentage of importance (group A: 8.7%, group B: 8.9%) in both samples. This means that this factor can have a degree of importance in the intention and choice.

In the TOM (table 2), it is observed that the results are heterogeneous among the samples. In that sense, the National University has the highest spontaneous memory in the group A (18%) in comparison to the group B (8.4%). In contrast, Jorge Tadeo Lozano University has a higher level of spontaneous memory in the group B (14.7%) than in the group A (4%). Therefore, the dispersed results between the two groups suggest that the spontaneous memory of the Universities is affected by the change of the condition of prospective student to enrolled student.

Table 2
Top of Mind HEI – Bogotá

Group A			Group B		
#	HEI	%	#	HEI	%
1	NACIONAL	18%	1	TADEO	15,3%
2	SALLE	7%	2	ANDES	14,7%
3	JAVERIANA	6%	3	JAVERIANA	11,6%
4	SANTO TOMAS	5%	4	NACIONAL	8,4%
5	ANDES	4%	5	DISTRITAL	7,4%
6	TADEO	4%	6	CENTRAL	5,8%
7	POLITÉCNICO	4%	7	LIBRE	4,2%
8	DISTRITAL	4%	8	EXTERNADO	2,6%

Source: The Authors

Regardless of the percentages of spontaneous recall, the samples coincide in listing the National, Javeriana, Andes, Tadeo and District universities, as well as placing the Javeriana University in third place.

Table 3
HEI Recall- Bogotá

Group A			Group B		
#	HEI	%	#	HEI	%
1	NACIONAL	7,4%	1	ANDES	7,7%
2	ANDES	6,9%	2	JAVERIANA	7,6%
3	JAVERIANA	6,6%	3	TADEO	7,6%
4	SANTO TOMAS	5,0%	4	NACIONAL	7,1%
5	TADEO	5,0%	5	CENTRAL	5,9%
6	DISTRITAL	4,7%	6	DISTRITAL	5,9%
7	SALLE	4,3%	7	CATOLICA	4,9%

8	LIBRE	3,7%	8	ROSARIO	4,8%
9	PEDAGÓGICA	3,4%	9	EXTERNADO	4,5%
10	CENTRAL	3,3%	10	PILOTO	3,9%

Source: The Authors

On the other hand, in the identity and personality traits (table 4) there is a projection that the consumer makes between his or her actual and ideal state, he or she projects his or her ideal state in the future by completing his or her studies averaged when he or she is 26 years old in comparison to his or her actual state, as a student or as an aspirant for higher education. However, in the group A it is considered as someone successful. The stereotypes of success associated with the lifestyle are evident.

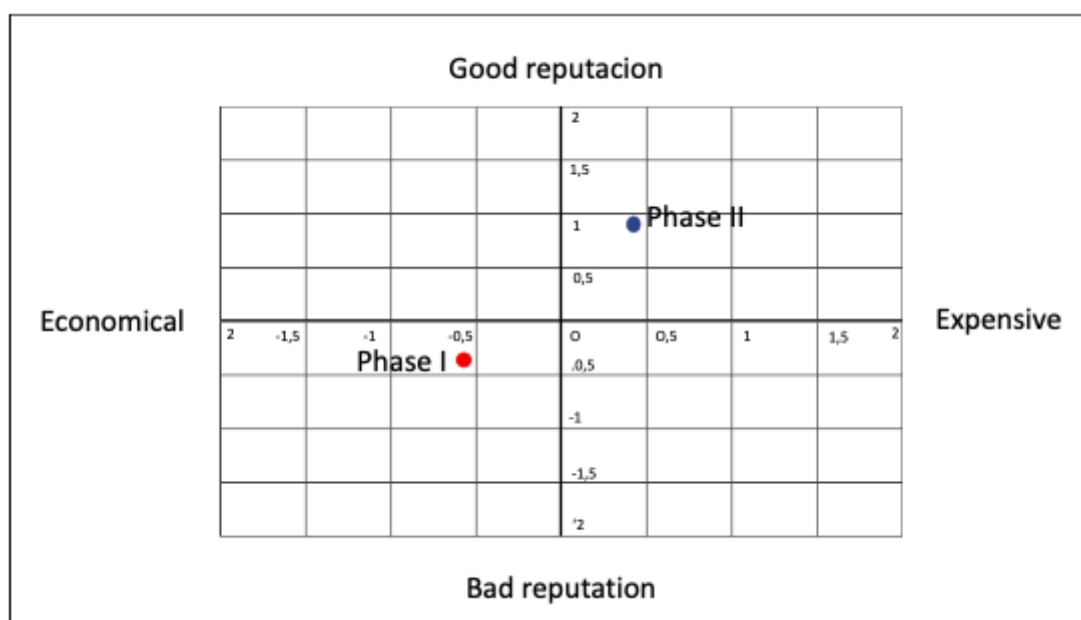
Table 4
Perception of identity and personality

Group A (Potential students)	Group B (New students)
Male or female, over 26 years old, and his or her personality would be associated to being related to sciences, but keeping the modernity factor in his lifestyle, and mainly that he or she succeeds.	Man or woman, over 26 years old, they would be physically considered attractive, his or her way of dressing mainly would be informal, and related to the personality traits They would be logical, analytical, rational, orderly, fair, effective and innovative people, but still being cheerful.

Source: The authors

It could be observed that group B is an oriented person who developed multiple intelligences but at the same time with a humanistic trait. It means, not only a study oriented person, but that he or she may be able to be a person with feelings and emotions that are adjusted to behaviors accepted by society in general.

Figure 1
Perceptual map
reputation-cost



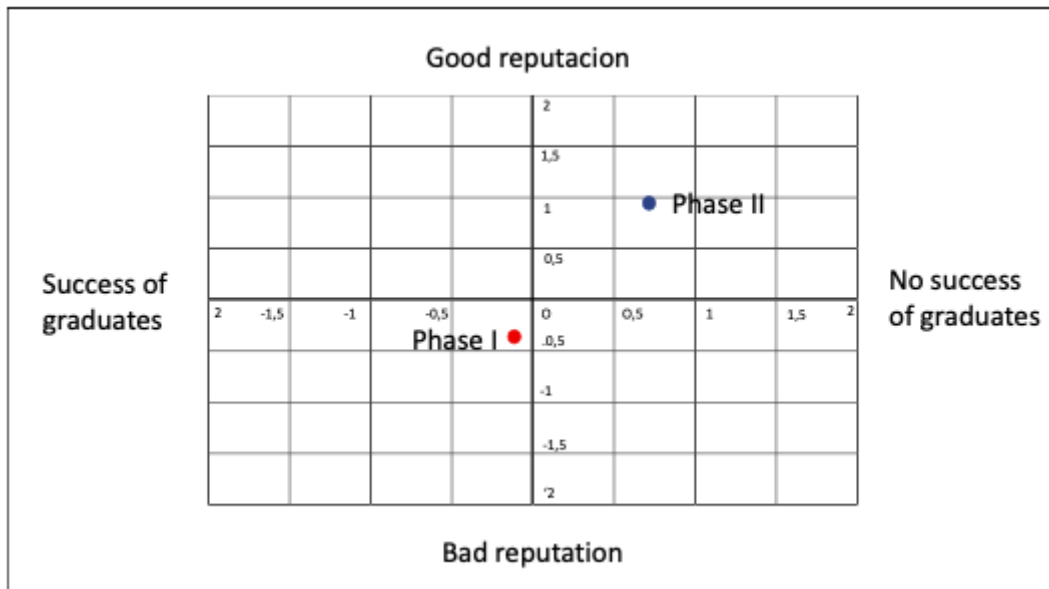
Source: The authors

In order to identify the perception of potential consumers and current students, three perceptual maps were made according to Miranda (2005). In the figure 1, the reputation-cost relationship is found and the perception of the group A towards one of the HEIs tends to be associated with the

economy and low reputation. However, at observing the memory results, it can be inferring that potential consumers do not know the HEI. This perception contrasts with group B who consider the HEI with a good reputation and costly.

In Figure 2, it is observed that there are significant differences between the perception that potential consumers and current consumers have, where the success factor of graduates is in the negative quadrant as far as the perception on the part of the potential consumers is not the best one in front of these two variables. However, it is oriented to the center, therefore the lack of information can be a determining factor in the perception.

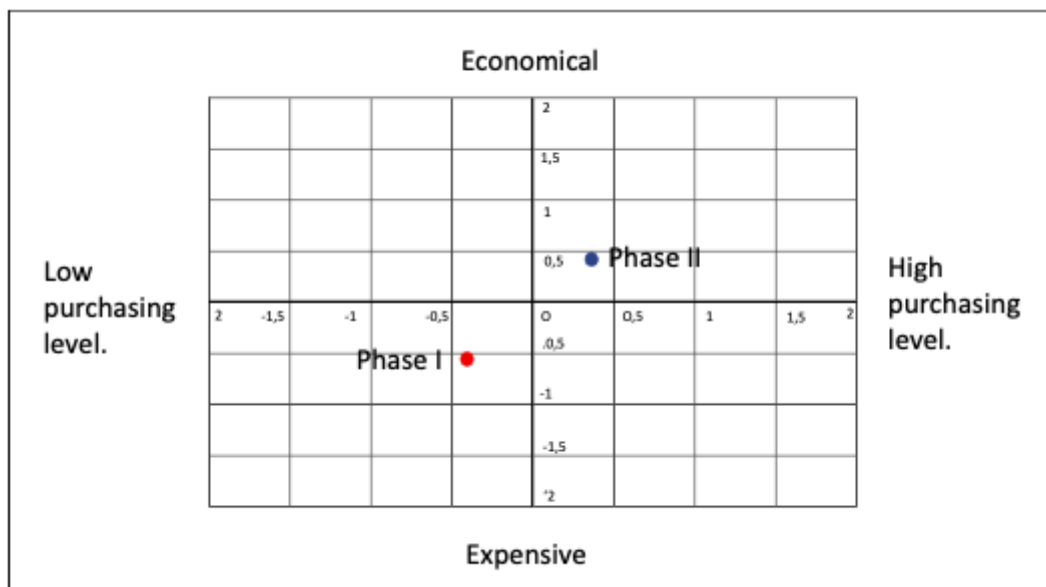
Figure 2
Perceptual map
reputation-success



Source: The authors

On the other hand, in figure 3, the relationship between the variables such as cost and perception is found. Students consider expensive and it is the same for people with a high purchasing level.

Figure 3
Perceptual map Cost
Student purchasing level



Source: The authors

3.1. Discussion

The name of the HEI is its corporate brand, and the academic programs are the products. In that sense, the reputation of an HEI is framed in elements associated with the success of its graduates, which produces a value judgment that allows society, through beliefs and experiences, make a judgement to an organization and its products. This phenomenon could be called attitude.

The corporate brand and its products produce a multiplier effect of communication, in front of its current consumers who produce beliefs in potential consumers, being this an influencer in the choice. Therefore, current and graduated students are key pieces in the formation of attitudes and reputation. For this reason, reputation in the HEI context is related to the success of its graduates, represented in the employability of the graduate, teaching quality, high quality institutional accreditation, facilities and semester value.

The positioning acquires relevance related to this type of associations that society in general makes in relation to a category of products or brands. In the case of HEIs, these associations are directly related to the differentiating attributes between one or more HEIs.

4. Conclusions

It was found that when identifying the attributes associated with a university as a brand, some of them are more relevant according to their status as a potential student or enrolled student. This is how the prospect has to generate greater recall of that HEI offered an academic program of interest. The HEIs that catch greater attention from the prospects are the ones that have some positioning attributes associated with professional success, employment opportunities for their graduates and the semester value. Also, the prospects maintain their expectation in some factors associated with quality of the teacher, high quality accreditation, research groups and seedlings that impact on academic reputation. In addition, the prospective secondarily associates with a university brand some features of financing and credit lines, international exchanges, and access to a scholarship.

In contrast, current students tend to position the university brand based on reputation, the professional success is directly related to reputation of HEI due to the student begins to make an assessment between the level of satisfaction and their expectations versus the value promise of a university.

Therefore, the attributes proposed by Miranda (2005) such as employment opportunities at the end of studies, social and sports activities, academic reputation, variety in qualifications, educational quality, price-quality relationship, international exchange, research and scholarships are still valid in the educational marketing. Those elements that correctly used in the positioning of the brand of a university, they would achieve greater attention for the stimuli generated. In the same way and taking in account the implication and repetition, they will imprint in the memory of the target segment relevance conditioned by the status of the prospects or the enrolled students.

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