# Brand name strategies at universities: Comparison of three distinct naming strategies

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to compare the corporate credibility of universities with three distinct naming strategies: strategies based on the name of a famous person, city-of-location and region-of-location. By using the corporate credibility scale, a face-to-face questionnaire was administered to 295 participants chosen through purposive sampling in Eskisehir (Turkey). The results showed that the region-of-location-based name was the least preferred type of university name and it had lower perceived corporation credibility than the other alternative university names based on the name of a famous person or city-of-location. Also, the research was organized into two distinct studies of university samples. The first study showed that the university name based on the name of a famous person was preferred over the city-of-location-based university name and it had higher corporation credibility than the latter name. The second study, on the other hand, showed that the city-of-location-based university name was preferred over the university name based on the name of a famous person and it had higher corporation credibility than the latter name.

Keywords: University naming strategies, the higher education marketization, corporate credibility, brand name strategies.
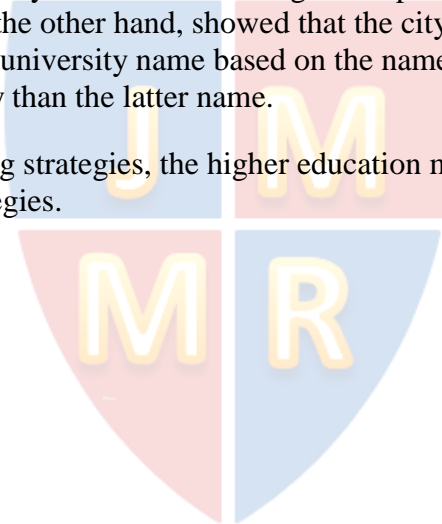
INTRODUCTION

Today firms compete with their rivals to increase their market shares and make profits. They attempt to differentiate from their competitors and be superior to them. Firms' corporation names and brand names are factors that can make them advantageous in this competition. For this reason, firms' choice of corporation names or brand names is an important process.

Types of firms that need to be careful about choosing a corporation name or brand name are not limited to only commercial firms operating in the open market. This is because a lot of sectors today involve competition. One of these sectors is the higher education sector. Universities, which can be perceived as non-profit organizations free of financial concerns at first glance, are the actors of the higher education sector.

With the increasing competition in the international higher education arena, the higher education sector has started to gain more commercial aspects and, in a sense, it has been marketized. Marketization of higher education refers to the process in which the marketing strategies of firms in the open market are adopted by the actors operating in the higher education market (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). As a result of this marketization process, universities now act like firms operating in the service sector (Cornell and Galasinski, 1998; Brookes, 2003; Bunzel, 2007). In this sense, students studying at higher education institutions are regarded as customers by universities (Schee, 2011).

The names of firms operating in the service sector are considered as brand names (Low and Lamb, 2000). Therefore, when universities are considered as firms operating in the service sector in the marketization of the higher education sector, names of universities can be examined as brand names. Choosing a brand name is an important factor that can affect customers' perceptions of the same brand (Klink, 2001). In the same way, names of universities could be regarded as an important factor that can affect students' perceptions of universities. In the light of this, examining the impact of the naming strategies of universities on students' perceptions of universities can provide a significant contribution for universities to improve their brand values.

In this study, universities are regarded as brands operating in the higher education sector and names of universities are regarded as brand names. The aim of this study is to examine students' preferences in terms of three distinct university naming strategies – university names based on the names of famous people, region-of-location and city-of-location – and to compare students' perceptions of corporate credibility about universities. As a result of this study, some inferences can be made about university branding process, which is a complex structure, (Chapleo, 2011) and a similar study by Peluso and Guido (2012) can be partly tested on a sample with a different cultural background and make a significant contribution to the relevant literature. Finally, examining the corporate credibility of a university naming strategy based on the names of famous people can make an original contribution to the literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The increase in students' demand for universities and in opportunities for international education has triggered the competition among universities in the higher education sector. This increase in the competition among universities has a caused an increase in the number of universities emerging in the higher education sector (Nardalı, 2011:153). According to a quantitative analysis of the historical development of universities in Turkish higher education sector, a total of 88 new universities were founded in Turkey between 2006 and 2011 and currently there are 165 universities in Turkey. In addition, while there were 322.320 students

studying at universities in 1984, this number went up to 3.817.086 in 2011 (Günay and Günay, 2011). The number of universities in Turkey increased in parallel to the increase in the number students in the higher education sector. The increase in the number of universities in Turkey could be suggested to have increased the competition in the sector. The current competition among universities in the higher education sector makes branding attempts critical for universities (Nardalı, 2011: 48-49).

Universities need to have strong brand values so that they can increase their shares in the higher education market (Bennett et al., 2007). Brand values of universities are composed of a number of factors such as their images, educational qualities, faculty members, names, informative brochures, stickers, websites, logos and slogans. These factors, which affect brand values of universities, have been a popular area of research over the recent years. Gray et al. (2003) claimed that the complimentary stickers and brochures delivered to students by universities have a very slight effect on universities perceived images while the ease of access to their websites and the emotional messages they give have a significant effect on their perceived images. This finding suggests that universities, which are considered to have brand values, need to focus on abstract attempts rather than concrete attempts regarding the strategies they follow to create a favorable image as a part of their marketing strategies. Particularly in this technology age, university administrations need to use the Internet effectively. In this sense, making attempts to create and improve their images in social media and social networks can help universities obtain significant gains for universities to give message to students, who already use the Internet intensively in their daily lives.

The credibility of universities as perceived by students affect students' preference for universities and their loyalty to universities (Helgesen, 2008). Students who have loyalty to a university can be important marketing agents in terms of attracting prospective students to the same university and publicizing it. Therefore, making investments on their credibility can increase universities' shares in the higher education market and obtain financial gains.

In the higher education market, where students are regarded as customers and universities are regarded as brands, the products offered by universities to students include courses, diplomas and certificates (Ramachandran, 2010). Students make their preferences for universities especially based on their expectations about the period after graduation, which are the outcomes of the products and services offered to them by universities (Tas and Ergin, 2012). In this sense, offering degrees (or diplomas) for areas that need more employees can make universities more preferable by students.

Another factor that have an impact on brand values of universities are their images. The images of universities can cause students to prefer them (Iqbal et al., 2012). Every university needs a positive image and a brand through which they can reflect that image in order to differentiate from their competitors (Parameswaran and Glowacka, 1995). The image of a university can be more effective than the quality of its instruction in terms of prospective students' preference for universities (Mazzarol, 1998). The image of a university is a phenomenon closely related to that university's name. In fact, the name of a university is known to evoke image and experiences (Bulotaite, 2003). For universities, creating a favorable image begins with being careful about choosing their names. Universities with names that are catchy and attention-grabbing and have positive connotations can maintain a favorable image and achieve higher brand value in the higher education market.

A university's name can help it be distinguished from other universities (Coulon, 2007) because name of a university as a brand name is the most important indicator of the brand value of the same university (Muzellec et al., 2003). Just like firms, universities need to be attentive about the selection of brand names. In this regard, brand names build the image of brands and reflect their reputation and identity (Aaker, 1996; Kohli and Labahn, 1997; Tadelis, 1999). Moreover, how a brand name is pronounced and the connotations it evokes

can have an impact on brand preference (Bao et al., 2008). Therefore, a name that is easy to pronounce and evokes positives experiences can have a positive effect on the image and credibility of a university.

Turley and Moore (1995) divides brand names into two categories: person-based names and geographic names. Examples of these two types of brand naming strategies can be seen in institutions and organizations operating in various sectors. In addition, the names of universities in the higher education market are known to include proper names, political names, names of famous people and geographical location names. In fact, just like some brands today (Muzellec, 2006), some universities are named after their founders in order to reflect their history.

In terms of Turley and Moore's (1995) category of geographical brand names, universities tend to be named after cities or regions. University names based on region-of-location evoke vague connotations than those based on city-of-location. Since regions cover larger geographical areas than cities, they lead to a more vague perception than cities and may bring about problems about maintaining a specific brand image for a university with names based on region-of-location. Adopting a name based on city-of-location, on the other hand, provides universities with more specific and memorable images (Peluso and Guido, 2012). Also, because the possibility that the same regional name may be adopted by many other universities located in the same region is higher than the possibility that the same city-based name may be adopted by multiple universities, having a regional name may make a relatively less significant contribution to the credibility of a university perceived by students in terms of differentiating from its competitors. Peluso and Guido (2012) carried out a study with an Italian sample and found that, in comparison with a region-of-location-based naming strategy, a city-of-location-based university brand naming strategy is associated with more favorable perceptions in terms of preference, reputation, credibility, distinctiveness and memorability. In the light of this, the following research hypotheses were developed:

H_1: A university name based on city-of-location is more preferable than a university name based on region-of-location.

H_2: The perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on city-of-location is higher than the perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on region-of-location.

In terms of Turley and Moore's (1995) category of person-based brand names, universities may adopt the names of famous people. The main idea underlying this strategy is thought to be promoting brand images by means of famous people (Erdogan, 1999). With this strategy, universities use the names of the people who are considered to be famous and distinguished within their geographical location in their brand names in order to transfer the known qualities of these people to their brand images (Brierley, 1995; Erdogan and Drollinger, 2008). Considering perception of universities as brands and their names as brand names in the higher education market, adopting a university name based on the names of famous people can provide a significant contribution to the perceived credibility of and preference for the same university. In the light of this, the following research hypotheses were developed:

H_3: A university name based on the names of famous people is more preferable than a university name based on region-of-location.

H_4: A university name based on the names of famous people is more preferable than a university name based on city-of-location.

H_5: The perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on the names of famous people is higher than the perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on region-of-location.

H₆: The perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on the names of famous people is higher than the perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on city-of-location.

METHODOLOGY

Universe and Sample

This study is a cross-sectional research with regard to its perspective of time. The research universe consisted of university students in Eskisehir (Turkey) city center. The reason why the research universe and sample consisted of university students was the fact that the target population of universities are students. A non-probabilistic sampling method, the purposive sampling method, was used in this study due to time constraints and the difficulty of access to the sample. As a part of the data collection process, a total of 300 questionnaires were administered to the participants, but the analyses were carried out with a total of 295 questionnaire forms as five of them were excluded because of incomplete or incorrect answers. Considering the fact that there were eight statements and two questions in the questionnaire, the study met the minimum sampling size criteria suggested by Stevens (1996, p.72) and Tabachnik and Fidell (2007, p.123). In other words, the participant/statement ratio of the size of data obtained in this study was approximately 30.

Data Collection Method and Tool

A questionnaire was used in this study to collect data. The data were collected through a questionnaire and face-to-face method. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, eight statements and two questions. The first part included the construct of corporate credibility that was designed by Peluso and Guido (2012) based on the studies by Ohanian (1990) and Guido and Peluso (2009) and composed of three dimensions (three statements) (expertise-trustworthiness-attractiveness) in order to measure the corporate credibility of the university names based on three distinct naming strategies. The second part included two questions aimed to collect data about the participants' gender and household monthly income. The participants' level of agreement with the scale statements were measured with a 7-point rating scale. For the internal validity of the scales, expert opinion was sought and translation/back-translation method was used. In addition, a pilot questionnaire was administered in order to revise the scale items. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the statements in the scales. Finally, the data were assessed with SPSS 18.0

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was conducted with university students residing in Eskisehir city center by using a non-probabilistic sampling method, the purposive sampling method, due to time constraints and the difficulty of access to the sample. For this reason, caution is recommended regarding the generalizability and external validity of the results of this study.
2. The results of this study are limited to the time period when the research data were collected (January 2013-March 2013).

Design of the Study

This study was designed based on two universities in the higher education market in Turkey, namely: Namık Kemal University and Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University. Namık Kemal University was founded in 2006 in Tekirdağ, Marmara region, Turkey and Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University was founded in 2007 in Karaman, Central Anatolia region, Turkey. These two universities were chosen for the study based on the following criteria:

1. Both of the universities were founded at around the same time and have similar organizational and physical structures.
2. Both of the universities were named after famous people with favorable local and national reputation. Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey[1] is a famous and historic person who lived in Karaman city and its surroundings. Similarly, Namık Kemal[2] is a famous and historic person who lived in Tekirdağ city and its surroundings.
3. One of the selection criteria for the universities to be examined in this study was that their names had to be based on the names of famous people who were not famous for their involvement in a political party or political movement at present or in the near past. For this reason, Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University and Namık Kemal University were chosen for the study among the universities in Turkey named after famous people. The purpose of this criterion was to eliminate the risk that the participants could express their opinions under the influence of their political views.
4. In the questionnaire, the participants were asked about their hometowns and asked to choose among three options given as Karaman, Tekirdağ, and Other. In this way, the risk that the participants who were from cities where the universities in the study were located could be influenced by their feelings about their hometowns was eliminated and the analyses were conducted based on the data obtained from the participants choosing the 'Other' option as their hometowns. Also, the study was not carried out with university students residing in Karaman or Tekirdağ in order to compare the corporation credibility of the mentioned universities based on the opinions of students who were studying at universities other than the universities examined in the study.

The names of both of the universities in this study were based on the names of famous people. Also, as a part of this study, alternative names were derived for the universities based on their region-of-location and city-of-location (Table-1, Appendix).

By means of the questionnaire form administered to the participants, the perceived corporate credibility of the current names Namık Kemal University and Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University and of the alternative names derived for these universities was measured. The perceived corporate credibility of universities adopting naming strategies based on the name of a famous person, city-of-location and region-of-location naming strategies was compared.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Nearly half of the participants were female (50.2%) and nearly half of them were male (49.8%). With respect to household monthly income, 43 (14.6%) were in an income interval of 750 TL-or-less, 91 (30.8%) were in an income interval of 751 to 1500 TL, 89 (30.2%) were in an income interval of 1501 to 2250 TL and 72 (24.4%) were in an income interval of 2251

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[1] (?-1280) son of Kerimü'd-din Karaman and the second bey of Karaman Beylik, a Turkish principality in Anatolia in the 13th century (Source: wikipedia).

[2] (1840-1888) A member of the Young Ottoman movement and an Ottoman writer, poet, journalist, and statesman (Source: wikipedia).

TL-or-more. Also, each of the internal reliability levels of the corporate credibility scales administered for the six different university names was found to be higher than the acceptable lower limit of 0.70 suggested by Nunnally (1978: 245) and the acceptable lower limit of 0.80 recommended by Field (2009) ($\alpha_{karamanoğlu}$=0.94; $\alpha_{karaman}$=0.94; $\alpha_{southerncentralanatolia}$=0.95; $\alpha_{namıkkemal}$=0.94; $\alpha_{tekirdağ}$=0.94; $\alpha_{westernmarmara}$=0.95).

Table 2 (Appendix) shows that the participants preferred the city-of-location-based university name (54.2%) most, followed by the university name based on the name of a famous person (33.9%) and the region-of-location-based university name (9.8%). Also, χ^2 analysis identified a statistical significance of 0.001 regarding the difference in the participants' preferences for the university names.

As shown in Table 3 (Appendix), the participants preferred the university name based on the name of a famous person (52.5%) most, followed by the city-of-location-based university name (26.4%) and the region-of-location-based university name (18.3%). Also, χ^2 analysis identified a statistical significance of 0.001 regarding the difference in the participants' preferences for the university names.

As can be seen in Table 4 (Appendix), with respect to the name Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University and the alternative university names, the university name with the highest corporation credibility as perceived by the participants was the city-of-location-based university name (m=3.80; sd=1.74; t=37.58; p=0.001) while the university name with the lowest corporation credibility as perceived by the participants was the region-of-location-based university name (m=2.90; sd=1.65; t=30.17; p=0.001). On the other hand, the corporation credibility of the university name based on the name of a famous person as perceived by the participants was higher than the region-of-location-based university name but lower than the city-of-location-based university name (m=3.27; sd=1.82; t=30.82; p=0.001).

As shown in Table 5 (Appendix), with respect to the name Namık Kemal University and the alternative university names, the university name with the highest corporation credibility as perceived by the participants was the university name based on the name of a famous person (m=4.07; sd=1.70; t=41.32; p=0.001), followed by the city-of-location-based university name (m=3.61; sd=1.68; t=36.94; p=0.001) and the region-of-location-based university name (m=3.58; sd=1.78; t=34.52; p=0.001).

As can be seen in Table 6 (Appendix), with respect to Study 1 conducted on the name Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University and the alternative university names, the hypotheses H_1, H_2, H_3 ve H_5 were supported while H_4 and H_6 hypotheses were not supported. On the other hand, with respect to Study 2 conducted on the name Namık Kemal University and the alternative university names, the hypotheses H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, H_5 and H_6 were all supported.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the university name preferred least by the participants among the three university naming strategies given to them was the region-of-location-based university names. Also, in the examined case, the university name with the lowest corporation credibility as perceived by the students was the region-of-location-based name. With respect to the two distinct studies (university samples), which this research was organized into, the first study conducted for the university in Karaman showed that the city-of-location-based university name was preferred more by the participants than the university name based on the name of a famous person and it had higher perceived corporation credibility. On the other hand, the second study conducted for the university in Tekirdağ showed that the university name based on the name of a famous person was preferred more by the participants than the city-of-location-based university name and it had higher perceived corporation credibility. In

this regard, the study couldn't come up with a consistent conclusion about the superiority or inferiority of the city-of-location-based name or the name based on the name of a famous person to each other in terms of preference for university names or corporate credibility associated with these university names.

As in the case of naming a firm or brand, the name to be given to a university should be distinctive and memorable. This is because distinctive and memorable names have positive effects on brand image (Turley and Moore, 1995). Moreover, people are known to react to the symbols or names that are associated with any university (Landrum et al., 1998; Sevier, 2001; Temple, 2006). In this sense, the expressions and terms in the names of universities can evoke various connotations in students' minds. For this reason, universities should choose the words and expressions in their names carefully so that they can promote their brand images and brand values in the eyes of students.

As in the case of brands (Erdoğan, 1999), it is critically important for universities to be careful when choosing the right famous person and adopt the name of that person as the university name. Adopting the name of every famous person with a favorable reputation does not necessarily mean that this will always make positive contributions to the image of a brand or university. In fact, this research showed that the university name based on the name of a famous person was not proven to be the most preferable name or the one with the highest perceived corporate credibility in both of the studies conducted for the universities in Karaman and Tekirdağ cities. The fact that this research was organized into two distinct studies made it possible to obtain more consistent results. As in the case of firms (Erdoğan and Baker, 2001), university presidents, who can be regarded as the brand architects of universities in a sense, need to make a multidimensional and elaborate evaluation when choosing the name of a famous person as the name of the university. This study revealed that naming universities based on the names of famous people may not always be the best choice for their images. Also, with respect to its contribution to university naming strategies and the literature, the results from this study are similar to those from the study by Peluso and Guido (2012). Peluso and Guido's (2012) suggestion that city-of-location-based university names are superior than region-of-location-based university names in terms of preference for universities and corporate credibility was supported by this study.

Universities having difficulty with their images can change their names in order to renew or revise their images (Stuart and Muzellec, 2004). Also, universities can make renaming attempts for a re-positioning in the market like trademarks (Lomax and Mador, 2006). The results of this study suggest that adopting a naming strategy based on city-of-location or the names of famous people rather than a region-of-location-based naming strategy could provide a positive contribution to the corporation credibility of universities.

This study was carried out within the limitations of the names and naming strategies of universities. Future studies could measure the corporation credibility of universities with respect to their slogans or logos and students' preference for them. In this way, the literature on the higher education market could be improved in terms of developing a general theoretical framework.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: University names used in the study

Name of a Real Person (A Famous Person)	Derived Name (City)	Derived Name (Region)
Namık Kemal University	Tekirdağ University	Western-Marmara University
Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University	Karaman University	Southern-Central Anatolia University

Table 2: The participants' preferences for the name Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University and alternative university names
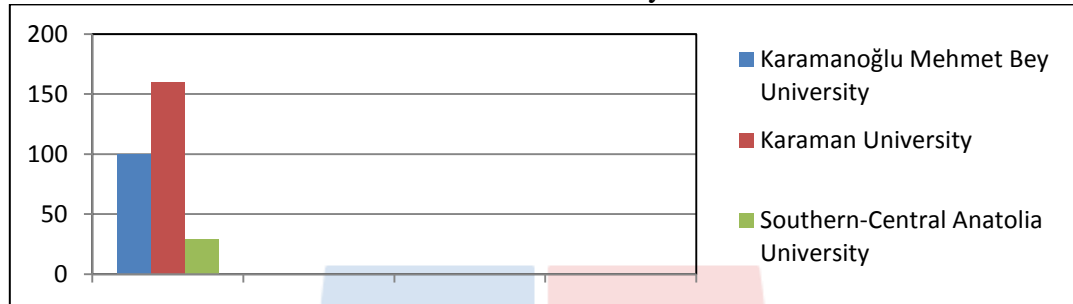
Table 3: The participants' preferences for the Name Namık Kemal University and alternative university names
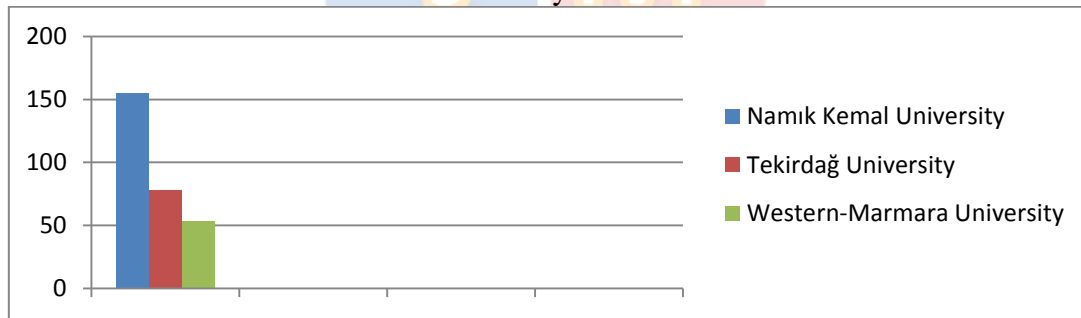
Table 4: One sample t-test analysis results for the comparison between the corporate credibility of the name Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University and alternative university names

	M	Sd	t-value	P
Karamanoğlu Mehmet Bey University	3.27	1.82	30.82	0.001
Karaman University	3.80	1.74	37.58	0.001
Southern-Central Anatolia University	2.90	1.65	30.17	0.001

Table 5: One sample t-test analysis results for the comparison between the corporate credibility of the name Namık Kemal University and alternative university names

	M	Sd	t-value	P
Namık Kemal University	4.07	1.70	41.23	0.001
Tekirdağ University	3.61	1.68	36.94	0.001
Western-Marmara University	3.58	1.78	34.52	0.001

Table 6: Analysis results for the research hypothesis

	Study 1 (Karaman)	Study 2 (Tekirdağ)
H₁: A university name based on city-of-location is more preferable than a university name based on region-of-location.	Supported	Supported
H₂: The perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on city-of-location is higher than the perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on region-of-location.	Supported	Supported
H₃: A university name based on the names of famous people is more preferable than a university name based on region-of-location.	Supported	Supported
H₄: A university name based on the names of famous people is more preferable than a university name based on city-of-location.	Not Supported	Supported
H₅: The perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on the names of famous people is higher than the perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on region-of-location.	Supported	Supported
H₆: The perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on the names of famous people is higher than the perceived corporation credibility in the case of a university name based on city-of-location.	Not Supported	Supported