



Humanization of the brand and its impact on the purchasing decision. Case: Espíritu Santo University Technology

Humanización de la marca y su impacto en la decisión de compra. Caso: Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo

Ernesto Wladimir Rangel Luzuriaga

M.Sc. Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo, ewrangel@tes.edu.ec, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3003-3431>

Alexis Estephany Viteri Lozano

M.Sc. Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo, aeviteri@tes.edu.ec, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0037-8383>

Carlos Ermel Bourne Gastezzi

M.Sc. Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo, cebourne@tes.edu.ec, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9785-9126>

Abstract

In the digital era, the humanisation of brands emerges as a vital component to establish emotional connections with their audiences. This research is a result of the research project Methodology for measuring positioning through multivariate analysis for the development of brand value: a business approach. It studies and explores various strategies implemented by TES (Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo) to infuse humanity into its brand identity. It demonstrates how the incorporation of elements of social activities and the determined use of social media content has contributed significantly to the positive perception of the TES brand towards students.

Keywords: Brand humanisation, emotional marketing, emotional connection, consumer perception, higher education.

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Corresponding Author

Ernesto Rangel Luzuriaga

ewrangel@tes.edu.ec

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Resumen

En la era digital, la humanización de marcas emerge como un componente vital para establecer conexiones emocionales con sus audiencias. La presente investigación responde a un resultado del proyecto de investigación Metodología para medir el posicionamiento por medio del análisis multivariado, para el desarrollo del valor de marca: un enfoque empresarial. La misma estudia y explora diversas estrategias implementadas por el TES (Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo) para infundir humanidad en su identidad de marca. Se demuestran cómo la incorporación de elementos actividades sociales y el determinado uso de los contenidos de las redes sociales ha contribuido significativamente a la percepción positiva de la marca TES hacia los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Humanización de marca, marketing emocional, conexión emocional, percepción del consumidor, educación superior.

Introduction

The humanisation of the brand is a business strategy whose work elements are based on empathy and ethics, relating the socioemotional characteristics of the business (Álvarez, Cristián, & Páez, 2022). These types of strategies have rejuvenated the communicational dynamism between brands and their audience, without leaving aside part of the main objectives proposed by traditional marketing, such as "the sale of products or services" (Mendoza Calderon, 2019).

Nowadays, universities and other institutions dedicated to academic training use brand management strategies to attract, retain and build customer loyalty; in this case, students whose parents or guardians pay for their courses (Casanoves & Küster, 2017). Reputation management is one of the most significant elements in the construction of messages and content for social networks and traditional media in marketing. For this, it is important, from the vision of (Casanoves & Küster, 2017) to build the image of a brand;

identifying chronological data of the environment that lived, the customer profile of the 90s, which was immersed in competitiveness and excessive offers of products and services; and the current customer, as an urban user with a high mobility and changes in trends due to the immediacy with which their environment of greater visual consumption of brands is presented, which is the internet.

It is inevitable that within Marketing 5.0 the brand is not evident in social networks (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2021). That is why authors such as (Gallegos & Gavilanes, 2022) taking as a reference the studies of Cancelo & Almasa (2013), Gonzalo, Laaser & Toloza (2015) and Salas et. al, (2022) identify some of the characteristics that are sustained in the proper management of the brand on social platforms:

Figure 1 Benefits of social networks for Higher Education Institutions



Note. The graph represents the benefits of social networks for Higher Education Institutions, from Gallegos & Gavilanes (2022) citing the works of: Social networks in Spanish and Mexican universities, by Cancelo & Almasa (2013); The use of social networks by universities at the institutional level. A comparative study by Gonzalo, Laaser and Toloza (2015); Main effects of advertising on social networks at the

affective-cognitive level in millennials, by Salas, Martínez, López and Jiménez (2022).

In addition to building and maintaining a habitat of interaction in the social media environment as part of Marketing 4.0, (Villalobos, 2020) points out that the consumer should not only be analysed by the purchase management in the present, but also by the emotional management generated by that product or service: before, during and after the purchase. Brands currently stand out for having their own expression, but at the same time connected to the innovations that are generated in the range of their products and services. The construction of the brand's expressive identity becomes a mirror of the emotional elements of the company's prospective and loyal customers (Trujillo & Palacio, 2022).

In the case of universities in Ecuador, the focus of customer attraction and loyalty or retention is centred on elements such as: The generation of content on social platforms and institutional website, the analysis of prices and competitiveness in the prestige of the academy in relation to the competition; and finally, the treatment of the student before, during and after their training (Gallegos & Gavilanes, 2022).

Authors such as (Trujillo & Palacio, 2022) connect brand humanisation strategies with Experiential Marketing, citing (Schmitt, 2002), highlighting the five types of experiences called Strategic Experience Modules, which provide labels to identify some of the strategies implemented: "1. Sensory experience/feeling, 2. Affective experience/feeling, 3.

Another of the characteristics highlighted by (Ramirez, 2017) related to the user's connection with the brand, lies in provoking credibility and trust in the customer for the company. To this end, the same author proposes the following:

Figure 2. Strategies for the Humanisation of the Business Brand.



Note. Own elaboration.

Likewise, (Ramos, 2021) through his research on the importance of Social Media Marketing in private educational institutions, takes as a starting point his results to highlight the elements that he focuses on as a company dedicated to academic training:

"...Private Educational Institutions applied social media marketing through the social networks of Facebook and WhatsApp with use of 65.38% and 96.20% respectively, quality management with respect to the management of strategies leadership (69.23%), costs (84.62%) and discount (84.61%), in teacher evaluation and administrative staff 84.62% and 80.77% respectively..." (p.7).

On the other hand, brand equity as a company dedicated to higher educational training must evaluate its development taking into account 5 axes that determine the learning process of the same; such as: "...1) birth of the brand, 2) creation of recognition and associations, 3) creation of perceptions of quality and value, 4) emergence of brand loyalty and 5) launch of brand extensions..." (Casanoves & Küster, 2017, p. 100, citing Gordon, Calantone and Di Benedetto, 1993).

In Ecuador, at the beginning of 2023, the Municipality of Guayaquil, through the Public Enterprise of Social Action and Education with the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, signed agreements with several universities and private university technology centres in the city to grant Scholarships for Academic Excellence to citizens who have not completed their third level studies (Empresa Pública de Acción Social y Educación, n.d.). This kind of encouragement by the autonomous government widened the accessibility of higher education. Among the list of higher education institutions subscribed to this agreement are: Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo, Universidad ECOTEC, Instituto Tecnológico Bolivariano, among others.

In the case of the Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo, the Academic Excellence Scholarship programme has brought together a community of approximately 2000 students in careers such as administration (Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo, n.d.). Taking into account that the cost is not an element to generate competition in attracting clients, due to the fact that its nature is the scholarship of 100% of the cost of the degree, it is important to point out that the management of the brand is therefore concentrated on the prestige of the institution.

To establish the message of a higher education institution's prestige in the audience's retention, it is essential to connect with Marketing 5.0 (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2021). The construction and replication of the message on social media becomes the most important element of work, followed by user retention through management and quality of service.

Thus, the interest of this research focuses on identifying the elements involved in the purchase decision by the student who is interested in the Academic Excellence Scholarship programme offered by the Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo. Taking into account that this purchase decision is related to the image of the Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo as an educational business brand, in the offer of its online academic training modality.

Methodology

The research has a quantitative methodology with descriptive and causal conclusive designs. The aim of the study was to determine the factors that influenced the students of the Academic Excellence Scholarship Programme in the purchase decision process, specifically when choosing Tecnológico Universitario Espiritu Santo (TES) as a Higher Education Institution to carry out their third level studies. The aim was to identify how the positioning and recognition of the brand, as well as its presence in social networks, among other factors, influenced their choice. In this sense, an exploratory factor analysis was proposed to identify the different dimensions of purchase choice.

The study population, as of November 2023, is made up of the 1,100 students in the Academic Excellence Scholarship Programme who are enrolled in the 19 degree programmes offered by TES. The sample included 312 students and was selected by random sampling with a finite population of 1,100 students, 95% confidence level, probabilities of success and failure of 0.5 in each case and a sampling error of 4.7%. The survey was carried out using the Google Forms platform and its delivery was channelled through the academic department.

A self-administered questionnaire (Malhotra, 2016) was applied with 4 closed-ended questions that included demographic variables such as gender, age, city of origin and the degree course each student is studying; as well as 29 items that sought to evaluate, on a Likert scale of 5 categories, the factors that influence their purchase decision.

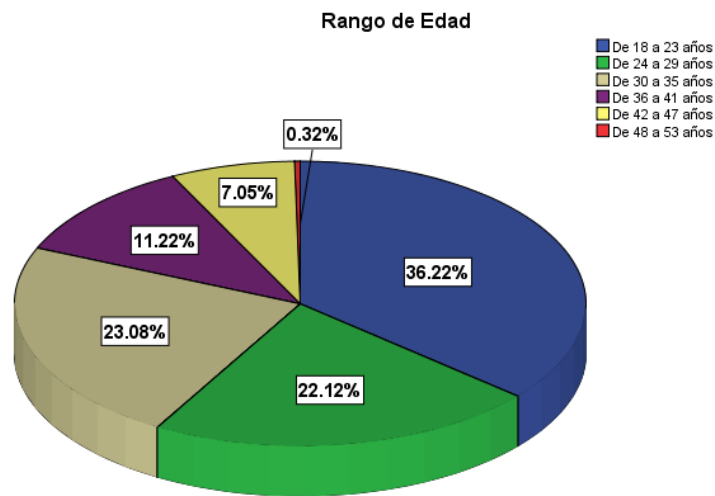
Once the information on the variables had been collected through the Google Forms report, it was migrated to the SPSS statistical package for the respective analysis. The data processing made it possible to identify 4 different types of student purchasing behaviour depending on the variables that influenced their choice.

Results

The information collected was tabulated in the SPSS statistical package where the descriptive statistics of the demographic variables were obtained and the exploratory factor analysis was carried out to identify purchasing behaviours.

The students of the TES Academic Excellence Scholarship Programme show interesting demographic characteristics when it comes to knowing their profile more closely. Thus, it was established that 67.95% are female and 32.05% are male. Their ages range from 18 to 53 years old and their distribution by ranges is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Age range of the students of the TES Academic Excellence Scholarship Programme.



Note. Own elaboration.

96.8% of students are from the city of Guayaquil. In terms of preferred careers, 13.1% studied Quality and Productivity, 11.9% Sales, and the same percentage of 9.9% studied Marketing and Commercial Management and Accounting and Taxation. Table 2 shows this distribution:

Table 1. Careers preferred by the students of the Academic Excellence Scholarship of the Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo.

		Carrera			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Administración	1	.3	.3	.3
	Calidad Y Productividad	41	13.1	13.1	13.5
	Ciberseguridad	7	2.2	2.2	15.7
	Comercio Exterior	16	5.1	5.1	20.8
	Desarrollo Ambiental	28	9.0	9.0	29.8
	Desarrollo de Aplicaciones Web	11	3.5	3.5	33.3
	Desarrollo E Innovación Empresarial	15	4.8	4.8	38.1
	Gestión de Calidad	1	.3	.3	38.5
	Gestión de Operaciones Turísticas	20	6.4	6.4	44.9
	Gestión de Redes y Telecomunicaciones	31	9.9	9.9	54.8
	Tributación	31	9.9	9.9	64.7
	Seguros y Riesgos	11	3.5	3.5	68.3
	Ventas	37	11.9	11.9	80.1
	Dirección De Marketing Y Gestión Comercial	31	9.9	9.9	90.1
	Contabilidad y Tributación	31	9.9	9.9	100.0
	Total	312	100.0	100.0	

Note. Own elaboration.

For Malhotra (2016) factor analysis is a technique used to reduce and synthesise data. Relationships between sets of many linked variables are examined and presented in a few factors. For example, the image of a brand can be measured and respondents are asked to evaluate several items on a Likert scale. These ratings are then analysed to determine the factors on which that image is based.

For this research, the factor analysis allowed us to determine which attributes or factors influenced students to choose TES as a study centre. It also made it possible to identify four types of consumption behaviour based on these attributes.

When the factor analysis was carried out in the SPSS statistical package, it was observed that the KMO statistic, which is the measure of sample adequacy, yielded a value of 0.956, which, being very close to unity, indicates an excellent adequacy of the study data to a factor analysis model. Barlett's test of sphericity, with its p-value of 0.000, shows that the null hypothesis that the initial variables are not

correlated in the population is not significant. These two statistics, shown in table 2, verify that the factor analysis is adequate for the proposed model of purchasing behaviour.

Table 2. *KMO statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity.*

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.956
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7022.708
	df	406
	Sig.	.000

Note. Own elaboration.

To determine how many factors should be included in the model, those whose eigenvalues are greater than 1.0 were chosen, in this particular case there are 4. Confirming this decision, the explained variance of these 4 factors is greater than 60% (Pérez, 2004). It can therefore be stated that it has been possible to identify 4 types of purchasing behaviour. Table 4 shows this analysis:

Table 3. *Methods for identifying the number of factors*

Component	Total Variance Explained								
	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	14.920	51.448	51.448	14.920	51.448	51.448	5.874	20.256	20.256
2	2.193	7.562	59.009	2.193	7.562	59.009	5.865	20.224	40.480
3	1.307	4.506	63.515	1.307	4.506	63.515	5.032	17.351	57.831
4	1.006	3.469	66.984	1.006	3.469	66.984	2.654	9.153	66.984
5	.820	2.828	69.812						
6	.783	2.699	72.512						
7	.680	2.346	74.858						
8	.658	2.270	77.128						
9	.575	1.981	79.109						
10	.511	1.761	80.870						
11	.467	1.609	82.479						
12	.456	1.573	84.052						
13	.426	1.468	85.521						
14	.388	1.336	86.857						
15	.383	1.320	88.177						
16	.361	1.247	89.424						
17	.339	1.170	90.594						
18	.334	1.152	91.746						
19	.314	1.083	92.829						
20	.293	1.012	93.841						
21	.266	.918	94.759						
22	.260	.895	95.654						
23	.219	.756	96.410						
24	.209	.721	97.131						
25	.192	.661	97.792						
26	.182	.626	98.418						
27	.173	.597	99.015						
28	.159	.548	99.563						
29	.127	.437	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Note. Own elaboration.

If the factors that influenced the purchase decision are analysed, 4 types of consumer behaviour types were identified: those who attach importance to educational aspects in general; those who attach importance to brand positioning, reputation and aspiration; those who attach importance to innovation and educational programmes; and, those who attach importance to brand valuation and reputation in social networks.

The first type of behaviour, students who attach importance to educational aspects in general, is mainly influenced by the following factors: experience and professionalism of professors; job opportunities for graduates; available infrastructure and resources; participation in exchange programmes; student support services; participation in social projects; quality of student life; availability of bibliographic resources; collaboration with companies; and, flexibility to customise the curriculum.

For the second type of behaviour, students who attach importance to the positioning, reputation and aspiration of the TES brand, the following factors influence: reputation and image; recognition for offering high quality academic programmes; ease of choice because of the perceived value of the brand; the security of choice conveyed by the brand; the image and values conveyed by the brand and representing what they aspire to be in the future; the reputation for academic excellence; and, variety of academic programmes.

The third type of purchasing behaviour, students who attach importance to innovation and educational programmes, is influenced by the following factors: the offer of academic programmes that match their interests and goals; the use of modern and efficient technological platforms and their incorporation into the learning process; the offer of innovative and up-to-date degree programmes; the offer of resources and programmes for personal and professional development; and agreements and direct connection with the business world.

Finally, for the fourth type of consumption behaviour, students who attach importance to the valuation and reputation of the brand in social networks, the following factors are important: the opinion of friends and family; the opinions and recommendations of influencers

and other experts in social networks; the active presence of the TES in social networks; and, the information, comments, experiences and interactions in social networks with other people.

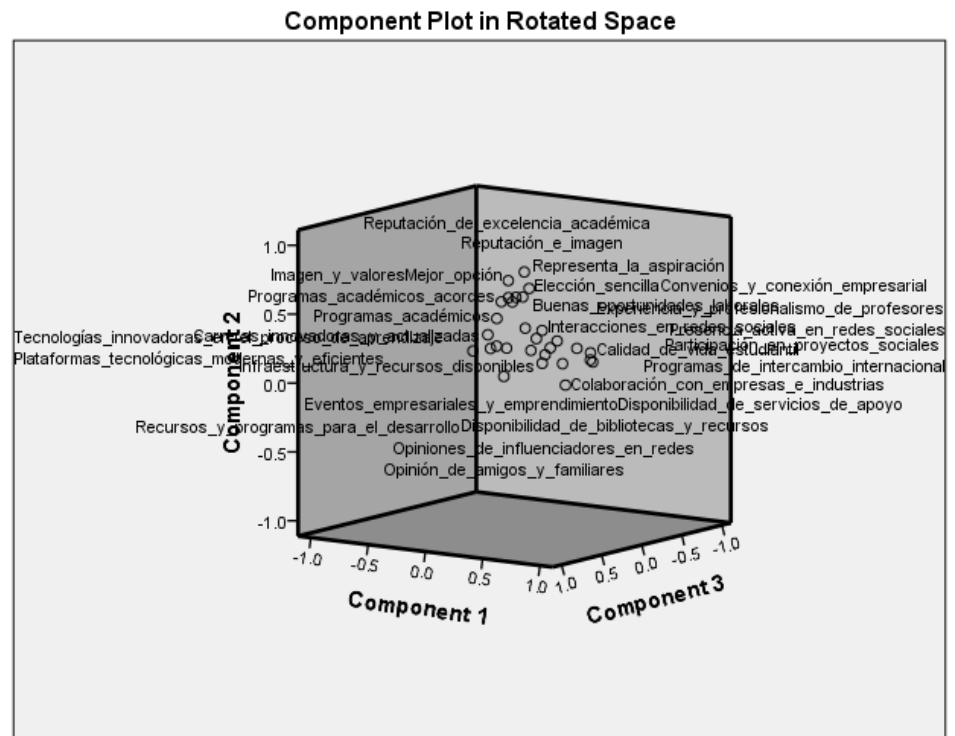
Table 4 shows the rotated component matrix with the 4 types of purchase behaviour, as well as the factors or attributes that influenced each case. Figure 4 shows the spatial location of the 4 types of shopping behaviour.

Table 4. Matrix of rotated components with the types of purchasing behaviour.

Rotated Component Matrix				
	Component			
	Importancia en aspectos educativos en general	Importancia en el posicionamiento o reputación de la marca	Importancia en la innovación y los programas educativos	Importancia a la valoración y reputación de la marca en redes sociales
La reputación e imagen del TES fue un factor importante en mi elección.	.188	.798	.146	.077
El TES es conocido por ofrecer programas académicos de alta calidad.	.157	.614	.387	.101
Se me hizo sencillo elegir al TES sobre las otras Instituciones.	.175	.616	.146	.136
Considero que el TES era la mejor elección.	.243	.657	.421	.162
La opinión de mis amigos y familiares influyó en mi decisión de estudiar en el TES.	.045	.033	.198	.752
Las opiniones de influenciadores y otros expertos en redes sociales que recomendaban el TES ayudaron en mi elección.	.307	.140	.092	.828
La presencia activa del TES en redes sociales impactó en mi decisión.	.432	.275	.172	.622
La información, comentarios, experiencias e interacciones en redes sociales con otras personas fue un factor decisivo para mi elección por el TES.	.421	.310	.069	.610
La imagen y valores del TES coinciden con mis metas personales y profesionales.	.275	.656	.375	.146
Elegí el TES porque representa lo que aspiro ser en el futuro.	.330	.714	.288	.125
La reputación de excelencia académica del TES fue un factor crucial en mi elección.	.175	.760	.327	.144
La variedad de programas académicos del TES fue un factor relevante en mi elección.	.266	.626	.406	.160
El TES ofrece programas académicos que se ajustan a mis intereses y metas.	.263	.533	.596	.091
La experiencia y profesionalismo de los profesores del TES fueron consideraciones importantes en mi decisión.	.484	.384	.418	.173
El TES utiliza plataformas tecnológicas modernas y eficientes.	.164	.310	.752	.223
El TES se destaca por la incorporación de tecnologías innovadoras en el proceso de aprendizaje.	.224	.419	.652	.227
Creo que el TES ofrece buenas oportunidades laborales para sus egresados.	.492	.435	.359	.154
El TES se destaca por ofrecer carreras innovadoras y actualizadas.	.301	.338	.728	.164
La infraestructura y recursos disponibles en el TES influyeron en mi decisión.	.574	.279	.438	.156
La oportunidad de participar en programas de intercambio internacional influyó en mi elección.	.768	.199	.120	.156
La disponibilidad de servicios de apoyo, como tutorías y asesoramiento académico en el TES, fue un factor decisivo.	.691	.218	.388	.224
El TES ofrece recursos y programas para el desarrollo personal y profesional de los estudiantes.	.386	.338	.650	.139
El TES realiza eventos empresariales que motivan el emprendimiento y acercan al estudiante con la empresa.	.300	.345	.651	.033
La participación activa del TES en proyectos sociales influyó en mi elección.	.777	.221	.165	.286
La calidad de la vida estudiantil del TES, incluyendo actividades extracurriculares, fue un factor determinante.	.728	.315	.262	.187
La disponibilidad de bibliotecas y recursos bibliográficos en el TES fue un factor importante en mi elección.	.703	.061	.368	.200
La colaboración del TES con empresas e industrias fue un aspecto crucial para mí.	.775	.273	.159	.120
Creo que los convenios y la conexión directa con el mundo empresarial son un fuerte del TES.	.431	.463	.481	.064
La flexibilidad del TES para personalizar mi plan de estudios de acuerdo con mis intereses fue un factor relevante.	.467	.303	.462	.128

Note. Own elaboration.

Figure 4. Spatial location of the 4 types of buying behaviour



Note. Own elaboration.

Conclusions

In this study, it was corroborated that the positioning of the TES brand (Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo) on social networks was a determining factor for students when choosing the educational institution to access the scholarship. Álvarez, et. al (2002) emphasises the importance of marketing strategies used by higher education institutions to increase the attraction of potential students.

On the other hand, Casanoves & Küster (2017) highlight that the prestige of universities lies mainly in the proper management of content on social networks, which help to build the image of a brand. TES (Tecnológico Universitario Espíritu Santo), according to the

results of the survey conducted in this study, has been able to reach students with clear and precise messages through its social networks, which influenced the decision of applicants to determine which institution they would like to join.

However, it was the participation in social activities and the impact of the community work carried out by TES, which is also communicated on social networks, that helped to identify students as an institution with a humanistic character, which at the same time encouraged applicants to be part of an academic, social and entrepreneurial project.

The present research provides an opportunity to learn about the impact of social outreach activities on students when choosing a higher education institution. However, it has only been possible to demonstrate this in the case of TES; it would be interesting to know the situation of other higher education institutions and be able to make a comparison of student perception and analyse the variables of choice in relation to the brand that each institution reflects.

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