Branding of B-Schools from the Perspectives of Recruiters

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Branding of B-Schools is very important for B-School promoters in this competitive world. Brand of B-Schools communicates the value propositions to its stakeholders. In addition, branding is also very important from the perspective of competition that prevails among B-Schools throughout the world for excellence in business education. In this context, branding should be done by understanding the expectation of B-Schools stakeholders. This study aimed to understand the expectations of one of the major stakeholders, i.e. recruiters of the B-Schools. The study was carried out in Karnataka, and data were collected from 51 recruiters of different B-schools. The data was collected from those recruiters who visited B-School campuses during the period 2016-2021. The data were collected by administering appropriate questionnaires to recruiters.

The important expectations of recruiters from students of the B-Schools pertain to their communication/soft skills, followed by coordination with the placement cell of the institute, students' leadership qualities, confidence in the institute's management, and availability of convenient schedule for campus placements, among others.

The findings of the study have significant implications on the branding of B-Schools. It suggests that B-Schools must formulate strategies and deliver them as per the expectations of key stakeholders (recruiters) in order to achieve a strong brand image in the minds of the stakeholders.

***Keywords:** B-School, Branding, Stakeholders, Recruiters, Value Proposition*

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Introduction

Management education is very important in the modern economy. Good managers give the companies a competitive edge over competitors. With increased globalisation, management education is gaining significant importance and adding new dimensions. Among others, the global perspective is very important for management education. At the same time, local problems should also be addressed. As a result, due considerations should be given to culture, leadership style and organisation's structures.

The management education landscape in India has been undergoing a drastic change in the recent past. Management education is one of the most sought after education streams in India. Today, it is evident from the number of students taking national level entrance examinations like the Common Admission Test for seeking admission to B-Schools. About two lakhs of students appear for this examination every year. The demand and supply in management education have undergone a drastic change. Management education in India is offered in different formats. They are as follows:

- Indian Institutes of Management was set up by a special Act of the Parliament by the Government of India. Examples: IIMA, IIMB, IIMC, IIML etc.

- University departments are set up by the State Universities Act. Example: Canara Bank School of Management, Bangalore University, etc.

- The Institutes are affiliated with universities. These institutes can be divided into two types:

  * Institutes that are being run as per university syllabus Example: RNS Institute of Technology-VTU etc.

  * Autonomous Institutions, which have their own syllabus and evaluation process: Example: Siddaganga Institute of Technology, Tumakuru, Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Bengaluru etc.

- Some of the stand-alone institutes approved by the AICTE are the Indian Institute of Plantation Management (IIPM), Bengaluru and Sri Dharmasthala Manjunateshwara Institute of Management Development Mysore.

- Private Universities include PES University, Reva University.

The first B-School to start in India was XLRI, Jamshedpur. Large numbers of B-Schools have mushroomed in India after the liberalisation in 1991. The total number of B-schools in India is 3,232, with an approved intake of 3,93,035 (Source: AICTE India, 2017)

The mushrooming of B-Schools has posed unique problems concerning the quality of education, placements, etc., affecting the brand equity of B-Schools.

A decade ago, graduates and other aspirants found it very attractive to have management education from a top-ranked B-School. Today getting an MBA degree is not sufficient anymore with the growth in different sectors of the economy. As a result, different specialisations and super specialisations like data analytics, energy management, petroleum management and pharmaceutical management are in demand when compared to traditional specialisations like Finance, Human Resources and Marketing.

There is also an important trend in developed countries regarding aspirants for management education compared to aspirants in countries like India. In countries like the US and other developed economies, candidates with a good number of years of corporate experience get admitted to MBA when they feel that the growth in their jobs is stagnant. Whereas in India, apart from a creamy layer which usually gets admitted to top-rated B-Schools like IIMs and other top-notch institutes, most of the candidates who take admissions in tier 2 and tier 3 B-Schools are fresh graduates from universities. This is one of the greatest challenges for B-Schools in India.

Most of the B-Schools in different countries have specified the average work experience expected from aspirants who wish to get admitted to MBA Program. The average work experience expected is 5-6 years in the USA, 2-5 years in Canada, 1-5 years in Europe and 2-3 years in Australia. But even the top B-Schools in India like IIM-Ahmedabad do not have any defined minimum work experience requirement. However, B-Schools like ISB, Hyderabad have defined

that to get admitted to their PGP Program, at least 24 months of full-time work experience is required (Source: www.isb.edu).

Due to various factors, today, most of the B-Schools are struggling to get the seats filled. It is perceived that quality has come down drastically in Tier 2 and Tier 3 B-Schools. Only established and renowned management institutes like IIMs, IITs and other tiers 1 B-Schools are getting a huge number of applications.

In this competitive environment, branding of B-Schools is very important, and brand plays a major role. It is one of the important parameters students and parents consider in the selection of B-Schools. Brand of a B-School is a function of quality which includes faculty, teaching and learning process, infrastructure, program content, placements, delivery beyond curriculum, innovations and other parameters like advertisement and perception it has created among its various stakeholders. Branding of B-Schools is related to the ranking of B-Schools. In turn, the ranking of B-Schools is an indicator of the quality of B-School.

From the year 2017, The Ministry of HRD, Government of India, has come up with the National Rankings of B-Schools under the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), which has high credibility when compared to rankings given by different magazines.

The ranking is also an important parameter for recruiters and also the parents. Good branding of B-Schools will help attract bright students and help acquire good faculty to the B-Schools. This plays a vital role in delivering quality education, which helps provide good management graduates for organisations to recruit and good citizens to society as a whole.

In this context, it becomes pertinent to study the role of branding and the perspectives of recruiters in the branding of B-Schools.

Literature Review

Bell and Emery (1971) and Fieldman (1971) suggested "societal marketing orientation of business which stresses that an organisation should exist not only to meet the needs and wants of the customer, but also for the society's interests. Under this assumption, the function of a college should be to thrive in the interests of major stakeholders like students, faculty, staff, parents and minor stakeholders like government and society.

Looking from the historical perspective of B-Schools' reputation management at the international level, Argenti (2000) has divided B-Schools branding and reputation management into three periods: Dark Age, Public Relation (PR) and 'Marketing' era. Marketing is not new in the professional education sector. Many authors have recognised the increasing importance of marketing in professional education (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006; Ivy, 2001).

Marketing promotions by colleges and universities are almost similar to marketing and customer service (Klassen, 2000). Services brands represent intangible, while product brands represent tangible aspects of products. Uma Shankar (2001) has given the concept of points-of-marketing to all those occasions where there is direct contact of the service employees with the customer called "Moments-of-truth" (Carlzon, 1987). Conclusions indicate that the responsibility of managing the branding of education is often left to a few administrators. The physical infrastructure, advertising and high prominence are given to placement records.

Pitman (2000) conducted a survey on the understandings of administrative staff to the problems of students and faculty. The study indicates that in interactions with students, administrative people feel that they are not mere service providers and incorporate a mentor role into their interaction. Administrative staffs consider them as internal customers.

Bisoux (2003) explains that branding of B-School means creating an image that reflects in the public mind of stakeholders. It depends on factors like: -

1. Who do you are like the history and legacy of B-School?

2. What do you aspire to be-Where you want to stand?

3. What is the culture and mindset of B-Schools?

More and more, Prospective students, alumni and corporates give close attention to the rankings of B-Schools (Merritt, 2003).

Pitt, Berthon, Spyropoulo, and Page (2006) interacted with 61 MBA directors and administrators, including deans, to rate their own B-School brand using Keller's Brand Report Card methodology (10 brand attributes). These brand attributes cover both internal and external characteristics. Most B-School administrators felt that they were not doing a good job of branding their B-Schools. Even though B-Schools teach branding, they are not doing a good job of branding themselves. They concluded that brand audit is the solution to assess the areas of concern and understand changes in stakeholders' preferences.

Roper and Davies (2007) measured perceptions of a UK based B-School's brand by administering a scale that measured seven dimensions of brand personality. The study included students, employers, and top management. Significant perception gaps were observed across various stakeholders. The authors conclude by suggesting that the viewpoints of all stakeholders must be identified and recognised in branding efforts. A debatable idea of differentiated branding attributes for different stakeholders was suggested.

Gopalan and Thomas (2008) addressed the gap between management philosophy (mission and vision) and branding efforts. They emphasise defining the scope, i.e. domain of operation and the advantages. It is required to identify who are the customers and where they are located. It suggests that conducting the brand audit and determining the ideal combination of branding attributes are important to create a successful B-School brand.

The literature review shows that the branding concept of a B-School can be divided into two dimensions (Shahaida, Rajashekar, & Nargundkar, 2009), namely brand creation and brand perception. The first dimension analyses the factors or parameters that help create a brand. These are strategies and activities or actions taken by the B-Schools that help create the desired brand image in the minds of target stakeholders. The second dimension basically finds out the factors or parameters for understanding the perception of the different stakeholders.

A conceptual model was given by Shahaida et al. (2009) for B-Schools branding with an Indian perspective, with management philosophy and brand management as two constructs of a B-School's brand creation:

i. Management philosophy - the vision and mission, positioning strategies, etc.

ii. Brand management - assessing brand value, developing strategies, implementing branding programs, measurement and evaluation.

Amar Eron Tigga, Pramod Pathak, Rohit Vishal Kumar studied 10 B-schools located in Jharkhand state, and data were collected from a sample of 334 students, 48 faculty members and 34 recruiters. Those good placement opportunities were the most important expectation of students across the different levels of B-school students. There was a significant positive correlation between the expectations of students of national and regional level B-schools. The study showed that recruiters looked for the right attitude and students' ability to adapt to the organisational culture when compared to knowledge. The study suggested that the B-schools must align their strategies and resources to deliver as per their stakeholders' expectations

Objectives of the Study

To understand the important expectations of recruiters of B-Schools in Karnataka, we set the following objectives for the study.

- To identify the types of recruiters in B-Schools.

- To find the inter-correlation between the different expectations of recruiters.

- To rank the different expectations of recruiters.

As part of the research study, the following hypothesis is to be tested:

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between the type of organisation and CTC offered to students.

Hypothesis 2: The mean ranks of the expectations of recruiters are the same.

Methodology of the Study

The study is exploratory in nature and aimed at understanding the recruiters of the B-Schools. A B-School can formulate the strategies in accordance with the important expectations of recruiters and

get the desired brand image. The study aims to understand the relationships between the B-School and its key stakeholder – recruiters through their expectations. The study is being done by collecting the data from fifty recruiters of B-Schools in the Karnataka state of India from July 2021 to September 2021.

Definition of recruiter

A recruiter can be anyone representing the organisation during campus placement drives at a B-School. The organisation can be of any type which has visited different campuses for campus placement drives during the last three academic batches, i.e., 2017-2019, 2018-2020 and 2019-2021.

Research Design

The survey method using a questionnaire was used to know the expectations of recruiters. The Likert-type rating scale was used with a five-point scale, where 1= "Not at all important" and 5= "Extremely important".

Sampling Method and Sample Size

The non-probability sampling procedures were mainly used. A mix of judgmental and snowball sampling was used to identify the recruiters and collect the data. The numbers of respondents were 50 recruiters.

The questionnaires were tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha, and its value is 0.875 (Cortina, 1993 and Cronbach, 1951). The questionnaires were validated through expert opinions among recruiters, and modifications were done after the feedback.
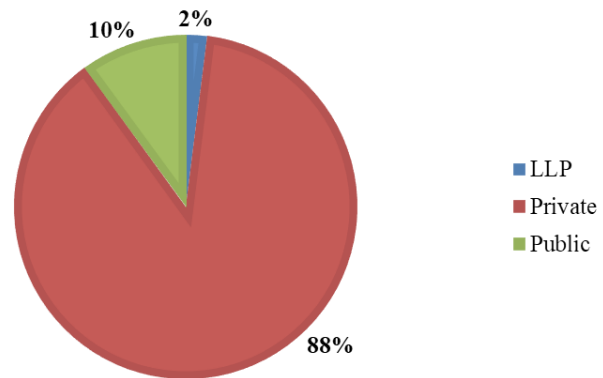
Analysis of Expectations of recruiters

Table 2: Type of recruiters responded to the survey

Type of organisation	No. of recruiters	Percentage
Limited Liability Partnership	1	2
Private Ltd.	44	88
Public Ltd.	5	10
Total	50	100

Source: Field Survey

Chart 1: Type of company

As shown in chart 1, among the companies surveyed, 88% are private, 10% are Public, and 2% of companies are Limited Liability Partnership. The majority of the companies that visit B-Schools for campus placements are Private Ltd. Companies

Hypothesis 1: There is no relationship between the type of organisation and CTC offered to students.

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of type of organisation and CTC offered to students in Rupees (chi-Square)

Type of Organisation	< 3 Lakhs	Three lakhs and less than 5 Lakhs	Five lakhs and less than 8 Lakhs	Eight lakhs and less than 12 Lakhs	> 12 Lakhs	Total
Limited Liability Partnership	0	0	0	1	0	1
Private	12	24	6	2	0	44
Public	2	1	1	1	0	5
Total	14	25	7	4	0	50

The Fisher's Exact test shows

$\chi 2$ (6, 50) = 9.869, p = 0.060

At a significance level of 0.05, we conclude that there is an association between the type of organisation and CTC offered to students statistically.

Table 4: Ranking of attributes based on recruiters expectations

Ranking	Parameters	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Student's communication/ soft skills	4.36	.563
2	Coordination with placement cell of the institute	4.00	.728
3	Student's leadership qualities	3.84	.738
4	Confidence in management of the institute	3.80	.926
5	Availability of convenient schedule for campus placements	3.78	.815
6	The academic quality of the students	3.76	.771
	Interaction with the institute through internships/summer placements	3.76	.960
7	Alumni performance	3.56	.951
8	Interaction with the institute through industry visits/guest lectures	3.52	.974
9	Public Relations activities of B-School	3.44	.972
10	The campus placement record of previous years	3.32	1.168
11	Hospitality for recruiters	3.30	.886
12	Logistics and infrastructure facilities for recruiters	3.26	.777
13	Presence and usage of the Internet and social media for promotion	3.22	1.130
14	Reputation of B-School	3.16	.934
15	Ranking of B-School	3.10	.953
16	Location of the institute	2.84	1.076
17	Advertisements of B-School in Newspapers and Magazines	2.76	1.098
18	Students work experience	2.44	1.033

Table 4 indicates that students' communication/ soft skills are the topmost concern of the recruiters. It is followed by coordination with the placement cell of the institute and students' leadership qualities. This clearly shows that B-Schools should work on improving the soft skills and leadership qualities of the students. This results in the overall personality development of the students and builds a brand image in the minds of the recruiters.

Table 5: Kruskal-Wallis H test statistics

S. No.	Attributes Description	p-value
1	Work experience of students	0.041*
2	Ranking of Institute	0.028*
3	The reputation of the Institute	0.034*

*The distribution is significant at 5% level

Hypothesis 2: The mean ranks of the expectations of recruiters are the same

As the data were collected through a Likert-type rating scale, a non-parametric test (Sharma, 2008) was used. The differences among the expectations of recruiters offering different salary packages were found statistically significant for the following three attributes at a significance level of 0.05 on applying the non-parametric test, namely Kruskal-Wallis H test statistics.

Inter-factor Correlation Analysis for Recruiters

Table 6: Inter-factor correlation analysis for expectations of recruiters

Sl. No	Variable	Variable	Pearson correlation coefficient	p-value	Result
1	Leadership qualities	Communication and soft skills	0.301	0.034	Significant
2	Ranking of B-School	The academic quality of students	0.531	0.000	Highly Significant
		Communication and soft skills	0.295	0.037	Significant
3	Reputation of B-School	The academic quality of students	0.432	0.002	Highly Significant
		Ranking of B-School	0.839	0.000	Highly Significant
4	Logistics and Infrastructure	The academic quality of students	0.308	0.029	Significant
		Ranking of B-School	0.365	0.009	Highly Significant
5	Hospitality	Work Experience of students	0.310	0.029	Significant
		Ranking of B-School	0.308	0.029	Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.533	0.000	Highly Significant
6	Placement record	Ranking of B-School	0.323	0.022	Significant
		Reputation of B-School	0.320	0.024	Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.383	0.046	Significant
		Hospitality	0.427	0.002	Highly Significant
		Coordination with the placement team	0.507	0.000	Highly Significant
7	Convenient Schedule	The academic quality of students	0.363	0.009	Highly Significant
		Reputation of B-School	0.280	0.049	Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.502	0.000	Highly Significant
		Hospitality	0.313	0.027	Significant
		Coordination with placement	0.531	0.000	Highly Significant
		Placement record	0.589	0.000	Highly Significant
8	Alumni Performance	Logistics and Infrastructure	0.324	0.022	Significant
		Hospitality	0.329	0.020	Significant
		Placement record	0.330	0.019	Significant
9	Industry visit/ Invited talk	Hospitality	0.295	0.037	Significant
		Alumni Performance	0.394	0.005	Highly Significant
10	Leadership of Institute	The academic quality of students	0.377	0.007	Highly Significant
		Ranking of B-School	0.478	0.000	Highly Significant
		Reputation of B-School	0.409	0.003	Highly Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.315	0.026	Significant
		Hospitality	0.312	0.027	Significant
		Placement record	0.335	0.017	Significant
		Industry visit/Invited talk	0.306	0.031	Significant
		Internships	0.358	0.011	Significant
11	Location of B-School	Work Experience of students	0.312	0.027	Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.332	0.018	Significant
		Industry visit/Invited talk	0.314	0.026	Significant

12	Advertisements of B-Schools	Leadership qualities	0.339	0.016	Significant
		Ranking of B-School	0.399	0.004	Highly Significant
		Reputation of B-School	0.436	0.002	Highly Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.364	0.009	Highly Significant
		Hospitality	0.375	0.007	Highly Significant
		Alumni performance	0.403	0.004	Highly Significant
		Industry visit/Invited talk	0.294	0.038	Significant
		Leadership of Institute	0.319	0.024	Significant
		Location of B-School	0.443	0.001	Highly Significant
13	Internet and social Media Presence	Ranking of B-School	0.470	0.001	Highly Significant
		Reputation of B-School	0.488	0.000	Highly Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.402	0.004	Highly Significant
		Alumni Performance	0.289	0.042	Significant
		Leadership of Institute	0.299	0.350	Significant
		Location of B-School	0.482	0.000	Highly Significant
		Advertisements of B-Schools	0.735	0.000	Highly Significant
14	PR Activities of B-School	Academic quality of students	0.302	0.033	Significant
		Work Experience of students	0.337	0.017	Significant
		Ranking of B-School	0.538	0.000	Highly Significant
		Reputation of B-School	0.529	0.000	Highly Significant
		Logistics and Infrastructure	0.509	0.000	Highly Significant
		Hospitality	0.369	0.008	Highly Significant
		Convenient Schedule	0.308	0.029	Significant
		Alumni Performance	0.462	0.001	Highly Significant
		Industry visit/Invited talk	0.293	0.039	Significant
		Internships	0.280	0.049	Significant
		Leadership of Institute	0.439	0.001	Highly Significant
		Location of B-School	0.500	0.000	Highly Significant
		Advertisements of B-Schools	0.666	0.000	Highly Significant
		Internet and Social Media	0.685	0.000	Highly Significant

Table 6 shows the correlation between the different variables used in the study. The PR activities of B-School has a high correlation with most of the variables, and they are either significant or highly significant.

Limitations of the study and Scope for Further Research

- This study was conducted in Karnataka, India's IT Hub. Thus, this study is confined to opinions taken from the B-Schools in the state only and might have the influence of a particular regional culture.

- The study is limited to recruiters and excludes the contribution of other stakeholders towards branding of B-School such as faculty, top management, alumni, aspirants, employees, society, government etc.

Suggestions and Conclusions

The analysis of expectations of recruiters provides important insights for improving the brand image in the minds of stakeholders. The analysis shows that majority of the B-Schools recruiters are private companies, and emphasis should be given to private companies because they are large employers when compared to government and public limited companies. Secondly, the B-Schools should also concentrate more on the students' communication skills and leadership qualities. It is also found that ranking and reputation and work experience of students in the B-School have an effect on the salary

packages offered to students. Finally, more efforts should be made to improve the rating and ranking of B-Schools and attract students with work experience. The results of this paper can be utilised for evaluating their goals and modifying their strategies based on the expectations of recruiters and get the desired brand image.

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