

## **The Influence of University Brand Personality on Students' Identification and Supportive Intention in Vietnam: A Mediator of University Brand Respect**

Thu Nguyen-Anh

*School of Interdisciplinary Sciences and Arts,*

*Vietnam National University, Hanoi*

ORCID: 0000-0002-8928-4614

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### **ABSTRACT**

*University branding has become a crucial strategy for attracting valuable resources and increasing student enrollment. Developing expected brand personalities can enhance institutions' appeal and students' positive behaviours/attitudes. The study employed a questionnaire survey to collect evaluations from 396 Vietnamese students regarding the relationships among university brand personality (UBP), university brand respect (UBR), student-university identification, and students' intentions to support their university after graduation. The results indicate that UBP has a positive yet modest impact on students' identification and supportive intentions. UBR has a much greater positive effect on these variables. UBR mediates UBP's influence on the other variables. The study offers recommendations for future research and managerial implications for developing brand personalities, values, and performance that resonate with students.*

**Keywords:** Higher education, student-university identification, students' supportive intention, university brand personality, university brand respect, Vietnam

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## INTRODUCTION

With growing competition among higher education (HE) institutions, university branding has become essential for attracting resources and increasing student enrolment (Judson et al., 2008; Rutter et al., 2016). A university's brand comprises specific attributes that stakeholders perceive, shaping their awareness and feelings towards the institution (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). These attributes can be tangible (e.g., tuition fees, modern facilities, and teaching quality) or intangible (e.g., fairness, friendliness, fun, and excitement) (Rauschnabel et al., 2016).

Tangible attributes of a brand can be copied more easily than intangible ones. Therefore, giving a university human-like personalities makes it unique and difficult to imitate (Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013). This uniqueness can provide the university with a competitive advantage due to its distinctive identity and appeal (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). Consequently, developing brand personalities that meet stakeholders' expectations can make universities the preferred choice for students, parents, staff, and employers (Polyorat & Preechapanyakul, 2020). This highlights the need for a deeper investigation into university brand personality (UBP) in the HE context.

Brand personality, like human personality, is influenced by context, culture, and associated fields (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). This has led to the development of various brand personality measures across fields such as automotive manufacturing, retail, IT, sports clubs, and destinations, spanning countries including China, America, and Germany (Kumar, 2018). In HE, few UBP scales exist, such as those proposed by Sung & Yang (2008) and by Rauschnabel et al. (2016). Recently, only the formal has been adopted in a study in Vietnamese HE, thereby limiting the understanding of UBP's diverse consequences in this context. Therefore, it is essential to have more research investigating how UBP affects student-university identification (SUI) and alumni support (AS). This can have both academic and practical implications for enhancing the trustworthiness and attractiveness of universities (Polyorat & Preechapanyakul, 2020).

Notably, to date, brand respect has been extensively studied in business but is underexplored in HE. Research shows it helps organisations maintain customer loyalty and encourage brand-protective behaviours (Hayuni & Sharif,

2023). As HE increasingly adopts marketing strategies to secure student enrollment and retain employees (Asaad et al., 2013), it raises the question: why is brand respect not more widely applied in university brand management? This represents a promising research gap that warrants further investigation into brand respect in HE, particularly regarding the relationships among UBP, university brand respect (UBR), SUI, and AS.

In Vietnam, HE has undergone significant transformation since the government introduced the Resolution for reform from 2006 to 2020 and the Education Development Strategy for 2011 - 2020. The aim is to enhance the quality of HE to produce graduates who can meet the needs of national industrialisation and modernisation and successfully compete internationally (Thủ tướng [Prime Minister], 2012). Therefore, the traditional influences of Confucianism and state-centralisation in Vietnamese HE have been overshadowed by internationalisation and globalisation. This has led to a broader adoption of Western-style practices in Vietnamese HE, a shift from elite to mass higher education, marked by an increase in both public and private institutions and greater university autonomy (Parajuli et al., 2020), thereby promoting the marketisation of universities. In this context, branding has become a significant strategy for Vietnamese universities. While recent academic attention has been given to university brand management, research has primarily focused on foundational aspects, e.g., a systematic approach to university branding, university brand architecture/image/identities, and communication and marketing plans for the university brand (Nguyễn Anh Thu, 2024). This national context of HE highlights the need for further research into specialised areas such as UBP and UBR and their effects on institutional training and on various stakeholder groups, especially students.

All things considered, the purpose of the current study is to address the research gap by investigating how UBP affects Vietnamese students' identification with and supportive intention toward their universities, and to examine whether UBR can serve as a mediating variable in these relationships. The findings include recommendations for enhancing UBR, SUI, and AS through appealing university personalities, thereby achieving congruence between universities' development and students' well-being.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### University Branding

Prior research claims that university brand refers to “the totality of perceptions and feelings that stakeholders associate with that particular university” (Batra et al. 2012, cited in Rauschnabel et al., 2016, p. 3077). Therefore, branding involves a two-way interaction between brand owners and their stakeholders. This means that, while universities can actively shape their brand by managing attributes, these attributes only resonate if stakeholders recognise them (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020). Thus, university branding must consider both internal and external perspectives (Davies et al., 2004). The aim is to align the university's expectations with stakeholder perceptions. To stand out from competitors, university brand managers need to understand what staff, students, parents, and employers expect from the institution's brand (Rauschnabel et al., 2016).

Previously, the university brand was defined by factors such as teaching quality, use of modern technology, tuition fees, extracurricular activities, values, and reputation (Valitov, 2014). It significantly impacts competitive advantage (Valitov, 2014), students' recruitment and co-creation (Rutter et al., 2016), and faculty engagement (Judson et al., 2008). While research on university branding has increased, there is still a gap in understanding the emotional connections between stakeholders and the university brand (Rauschnabel et al., 2016), particularly in the HE context in Vietnam (Oanh & Pham, 2026). Thus, this study focuses on the affective aspect of university branding, specifically UBP in Vietnam.

### University Brand Personality (UBP)

Brand personality is developed on the notion that a brand is like a human; thus, it possesses human personalities (Fridstrom et al., 2020). When a university is considered as a human, its personality contributes to its intangible attributes, which help describe it to stakeholders (Polyorat & Preechapanyakul, 2020). When stakeholders see a university as a friend with similar qualities, it is more likely to attract new students, gain alumni support, and create positive public perceptions. (Polyorat & Preechapanyakul, 2020).

Aaker (1997, p. 347) conceptualised brand personality as “a set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Based on this definition, the researcher also developed a brand personality scale consisting of five components: sincerity, competence, excitement, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). This scale has been used across various fields and has become the most frequently cited brand personality scale (Kumar, 2018). However, some studies have failed to provide clear support for the five-factor structure of the construct (e.g. Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013). While the concept of personality is rooted in psychology and focuses on emotion and enthusiasm, Aaker's scale also includes cognitive

characteristics such as intelligence, knowledge, and abilities, raising concerns that it does not fully capture the essence of brand personality (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003).

Azoulay & Kapferer (2003, p. 151) defined brand personality as “a set of human personality that is relevant and applicable for a brand”. This definition implies that not all human characteristics and personalities are suitable for a brand, as brand personality is affected by cultural context and product categories (Rauschnabel et al., 2016). This definition encompasses both psychological and context-oriented personalities for a brand (Kumar, 2018), which allows greater flexibility in its application within university context.

Within HE, two notable scales of UBP are widely used: the four-item scale by Sung & Yang (2008) (including friendliness, stability, practicality, and warmth), and the six-factor scale by Rauschnabel et al. (2016) (consisting of prestige, sincerity, appeal, liveliness, conscientiousness, and cosmopolitanism). Sung & Yang's (2008) items were adapted from previous research on university image. Rauschnabel et al. (2016) developed their scale through rigorous quantitative validation across four sub-studies. Notably, some factors from the latter encompass aspects found in the former scale. For example, sincerity in the latter is made up of humane, helpful, friendly, trustworthy, and fair. As can be seen, items such as friendly and warmth in the former may be embedded in sincerity of the latter. Therefore, Rauschnabel et al.'s scale was considered for use in the current study.

Prior studies have found that brand personality affects brand attitudes, brand relationship strength, and purchase intentions (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013). In HE, UBP positively influences students' and alumni's supportive attitudes/behaviour, students' commitment and identification with the institution (Rauschnabel et al., 2016; Sung & Yang, 2008). The level of student-university identification is considered a crucial factor influencing both student learning effort/outcomes and the sustainable development of the university (Balaji et al., 2016). Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the impact of UBP as a managerial strategy on enhancing university quality and student effectiveness/well-being, rather than viewing it solely as a marketing approach.

### **Student – University Identification (SUI) and Alumni Support (AS)**

The literature shows a consensus on the SUI concept. According to Pinna et al. (2017, p. 679), SUI refers to “the extent to which students perceive themselves and the university as sharing similar attributes and core values, to satisfy one or more of the student's self-definition needs”. In other words, an individual's (student's) identification with an organisation (university) reflects their sense of belonging, developed through direct interactions (Wilkins et al., 2016). The identification occurs when an individual accepts, acknowledges, and

internalises the organisation's identity, leading them to feel connected and perceive its success or failure as their own.

Research indicates that organisational identification positively affects individual happiness (Pinna et al., 2017). This is because a sense of belonging “helps students feel valued at the university” (Johns & Hawkes, 2020, p. xii) and can impact students’ academic performance and success (Kenney & O’Halloran, 2025). As a result, students who identify with their university show greater commitment and are more likely to act beyond the university's requirements (Balaji et al., 2016). At the same time, SUI encourages students to represent and support the university and share valuable insights that enhance its brand.

Looking at students’ support, Naheen & Elsharnouby (2021, p. 7) claim that support is a dimension of student citizenship behaviour which refers to “the supportive and cooperative actions a student performs toward other students or the university in a way that is appreciated and valued by the institution”. The present study surveyed students about their intentions to support their university after graduation. Thus, the term "alumni support" as adopted by Rauschnabel et al. (2016) was used to define students’ intentions in the current study.

Recent research has focused on the effects of SUI on alumni advancement, student and alumni advocacy and representational behaviours (Balaji et al., 2016), as well as on student involvement in university activities and student citizenship behaviour (Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2021). However, factors influencing students’ identification and supportive intentions, particularly in the context of university brand management in Vietnam, have received little attention.

Several studies suggest that a university's uniqueness and distinctiveness enhance SUI (Rauschnabel et al., 2016; Sung & Yang, 2008). Only a few studies have explored the relationship between UBP and SUI and have identified UBP as a precursor to students' supportive intentions (Balaji et al., 2016; Oanh & Pham, 2026). Specifically, when students perceive their university as having desirable and similar personalities, they tend to develop a stronger sense of belonging to the university and are more willing to connect with and support it (Polyorat & Preechapanayakul, 2020).

Given the limited available research, further investigation is necessary to explore the relationship between UBP and SUI/AS, particularly in the context of Vietnamese HE, where only a few studies have been conducted. Therefore, the current study has formulated two hypotheses as follows:

H<sub>1</sub>: UBP has a positive influence on SUI.

H<sub>2</sub>: UBP has a positive influence on AS

## **Brand Respect**

In the Lovemark theory, respect is essential for building strong customer-brand relationships. Brand respect reflects customers' positive attitudes shaped by

evaluations of a brand's performance, trust, and reputation (Roberts, 2004). Specifically, customers appreciate a brand's actions, love its values, trust its messages, and may even find inspiration in it (MacInnis et al., 2016). Ultimately, brand respect signifies a belief in a brand that truly cares about its customers' interests (Khan et al., 2022).

The concept of brand respect, as defined by Khan et al. (2022), includes two key factors: familiarity and preference. A preferred brand will build greater customer respect. However, no specific measurement based on this two-component construct exists. Many researchers argue for a three-factor model comprising performance, trust, and reputation (Pawle & Cooper, 2006; Roberts, 2004; Song et al., 2019), while some suggest adding brand acceptance as a fourth factor, e.g., Jahanvi & Sharma (2021). The three-factor model is more widely adopted. These components interact through a mechanism where strong performance fosters trust, enhancing reputation and, ultimately, customer respect. Despite the development of observable indicators for these three factors, brand respect has received limited attention in HE, especially in Vietnam.

Brand respect and brand love are interconnected elements that contribute to the formation of the Lovemark theory (Jahanvi & Sharma, 2021). According to Jahanvi & Sharma (2021), brand love reflects the passionate emotional attachment customers have towards a brand, while respect is a prerequisite for long-term love between customers and the brand. It is based on the reliability of products and services and is reflected in brands that maintain high operational standards and a strong reputation.

Both brand respect and brand love enhance an organisation's brand equity (Khan et al., 2022), influence brand loyalty and create brand protection behaviours (Hayuni & Sharif, 2023). Specifically, brand respect is correlated with three loyalty indicators: repurchase intention, positive word-of-mouth recommendation, and willingness to pay a premium price (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018). It also motivates customers to overcome obstacles such as price, geographical distance, and delivery time to purchase/use the brand and to maintain positive relationships even in the face of external forces, e.g., competitors' lower prices (MacInnis et al., 2016).

Given its importance in business studies, examining whether university brand respect (UBR) can predict students' willingness to engage with and identify, and to foster protective/supportive actions, is necessary and promising. As a result, the current study aims to validate two hypotheses regarding UBR in HE as follows:

H<sub>3</sub>: UBR has a positive influence on SUI.

H<sub>4</sub>: UBR has a positive influence on AS.

Brand personality is important for gaining stakeholder respect (Everett, 2016). However, research on its relationship with brand respect in HE is limited.

The Lovemarks theory provides insights into the underlying mechanisms of UBR's impact on SUI/AS and UBR's mediating role in UBP's impact on SUI/AS. Specifically, when students love their university's personality, they are more likely to trust its performance and reputation (i.e., brand respect), thereby fostering brand loyalty and ultimately increasing students' engagement/identification and protective/supportive behaviours (Hayuni & Sharif, 2023). Thus, the present study aims to explore whether a more complex mechanism underlies UBP's impact on SUI and AS via UBR. Consequently, hypothesis 5 has been formulated as follows:

H<sub>5</sub>: UBR mediates the influence of UBP on SUI and AS.

## METHODOLOGY

### Conceptual Framework

From the literature, the key constructs adopted to develop the conceptual framework of the current study are summarised in Table 1 below.

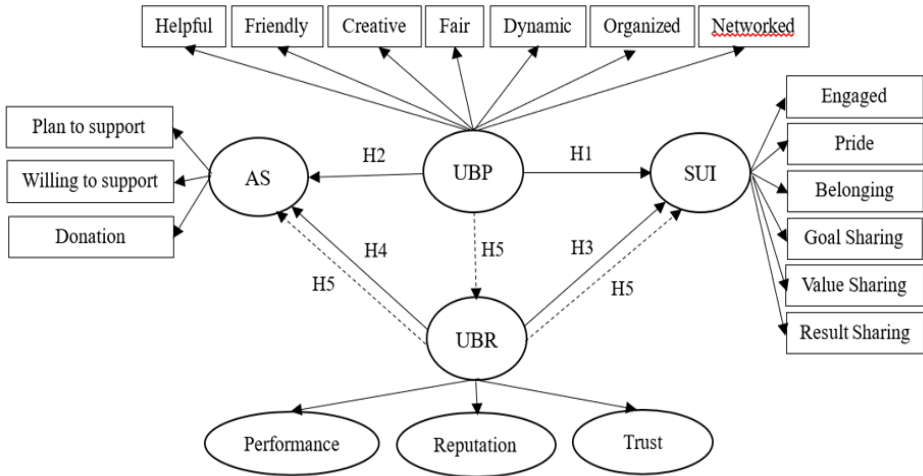
**Table 1:** *Summary of the key constructs*

Constructs	Reference
<i>University brand</i> : “the totality of perceptions and feelings that stakeholders associate with that particular university”.	(Batra et al., 2012, cited in Rauschnabel et al., 2016, p. 3077)
<i>University brand personality</i> (UBP): “a set of human personalities that are relevant and applicable to a brand”.	(Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003, p. 151)
<i>University brand respect</i> (UBR): customers' positive attitude based on evaluations of a brand's performance, trust, and reputation.	(Roberts, 2004)
<i>Student – identification</i> (SUI): “the extent to which students perceive themselves and the university as sharing similar attributes and core values, to satisfy one or more of the student's self-definition needs”.	(Pinna et al., 2017, p. 679)
<i>Students’ supportive intention after graduation</i> (Adequately considered as Alumni support (AS) in the current study): “the supportive actions a student performs toward other students or the university in a way that is appreciated and valued by the institution”.	(Naheen & Elsharnouby, 2021, p. 7)

*Source:* Author’s own work

To incorporate brand respect into university brand management in Vietnam and to explore the relationships among UBP, UBR, SUI, and AS, a conceptual framework was proposed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**



Source: Author’s own work

Note: --► Indirect

**Research Method and Instrument Design**

The current study employed a quantitative approach using a questionnaire survey. A cross-sectional self-report questionnaire was used to collect students’ opinions on UBP, UBR, SUI and AS.

As mentioned earlier, the six-factor UBP scale developed by Rauschnabel et al. (2016), including prestige, sincerity, appeal, liveliness, conscientiousness and cosmopolitan, was initially considered for the current study. However, not all factors and items were used to measure UBP in the current study for specific reasons:

- Personality is a psychological construct focusing on affection/emotion and enthusiasm/dynamic (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). Therefore, the dimensions of prestige (i.e. accepted, leading, reputable, successful, considerable) and appeal (i.e. productive, special, attractive) in Rauschnabel et al.’s (2016) The scale does not adequately and clearly reflect the human psychological characteristics and was therefore excluded. Similarly, items of the remaining factors that did not align with the nature of personality (i.e., effective and

competent within the Conscientiousness dimension) were removed from the questionnaire.

- The author held a focus group interview with five students and one linguist to discuss the meanings of 14 items from the UBP scale's remaining four factors. The students shared their challenges in distinguishing among fairness, trustworthiness, and humanity within the Sincerity factor in the context of the Vietnamese language and culture.

"I believe that fair and humane people are trustworthy, and I tend to trust those who display these qualities. Therefore, fairness and humanity are key to trustworthiness." One student expressed this, and the others agreed.

The linguist noted that in Vietnamese, it is difficult to differentiate between "organised" and "structured" because they are closely related. Similarly, "international" shares features with "cosmopolitan". These overlapping terms may confuse respondents and lead to inaccurate answers on the questionnaire, as demonstrated by five students who gave identical evaluations of confused personalities in a pilot survey.

For the Liveliness factor (including Athletic, Dynamic, Lively, and Creative), the students believe the personality Athletic is unsuitable for Vietnamese universities, as they find it hard to perceive a university as athletic. They also feel that Dynamic and Lively are similar, but Dynamic has a clearer meaning and is more fitting for a university in Vietnam.

As a result, we agreed that some items may show multicollinearity, such as fair, trustworthy, and humane; organised and structured; international and cosmopolitan; dynamic and lively. Therefore, the final UBP scale included seven items: helpful, friendly, fair, creative, dynamic, organised, and networked, which the interviewees clearly understood and expected.

The present study utilises a three-factor UBR scale, which includes the dimensions of performance, trust, and reputation, as synthesised by Roberts (2004); the SUI measure from Pinna et al. (2017); and the AS scale from Rauschnabel et al. (2016). All items used to measure the variables in the current study are detailed in Table 2. A 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used for evaluation.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

Convenience sampling was utilised for its ease of access to participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). An anonymous online questionnaire was sent to students via their school emails, and lecturers helped distribute it at Vietnamese universities. All respondents participated voluntarily. The author's university

council approved data collection for the research project to ensure compliance with academic ethics standards.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were used to analyse data in SPSS. EFA is a technique that reduces the number of observable variables by grouping them into factors to form latent constructs. The current study aimed to identify the number of factors within the UBR construct.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were used in AMOS software to examine relationships among variables. CFA is used to confirm the number of UBR factors, while SEM is appropriate and effective for evaluating relationships among the latent constructs of UBP, UBR, SUI, and AS.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Data were collected from 401 students, of whom 396 provided valid responses. The sample comprised 294 females, 99 males, and 3 participants who did not report their gender. By year of study, there were 109 first-year, 204 second-year, 40 third-year, and 42 fourth-year students, with year of study not reported by 1 student. Across fields of study, participants were enrolled in science and technology (28), social sciences and humanities (143), economics and management (194), medicine and pharmacy (9), arts (21), and other fields (1).

A Harman's single-factor test assessed Common Method Bias (CMB) in the self-report questionnaire involving 29 variables. Principal Component Analysis showed an extracted variance of 46.875% with one factor and no rotation. Since this is below 50%, it indicates no significant CMB, making the data set suitable for analysis (Cooper et al., 2020).

### **Reliability of the Variables' Scales**

To analyse the relationship among the variables, the reliability of the UBP, UBR, SUI, and AS measurements was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Reliability of the variables' scales**

Variables' components	Items in the scale	Corrected Item – Total Correlation	Cronbach's alpha
UBP	Helpful	0.87	0.96
	Friendly	0.85	
	Fair	0.88	
	Dynamic	0.83	
	Creative	0.89	
	Organised	0.86	
	Networked	0.85	
UBR – Trust	(BR1) My university is sincere with its students.	0.68	0.90
	(BR2) I totally trust this university's quality.	0.78	
	(BR3) Enrolling in this university's programs is a guarantee.	0.77	
	(BR4) Products of this university make me feel safe.	0.79	
	(BR5) The university is honest with its students.	0.73	
UBR – Performance	(BR6) The university offers good value.	0.78	0.89
	(BR7) I chose this university as a sign of consistent quality for enrolling in programs.	0.76	
	(BR8) The university fulfils the basic functions of the training products.	0.77	
	(BR9) I find this university brand durable.	0.77	
UBR – Reputation	(BR10) The university service is efficient (in terms of speed, responsiveness, etc.).	0.72	0.91
	(BR11) This university is reputable.	0.65	
	(BR12) This university brand is amongst the leading brands in the market.	0.72	
	(BR13) This university brand is easily recognisable.	0.69	
Total of UBR's items			0.94
SUI	(SUI1) I feel strong ties with this university.	0.75	0.90
	(SUI2) I feel proud to be a member of my university.	0.71	
	(SUI3) I feel a strong sense of belonging to this university.	0.77	
	(SUI4) This university has a great deal of personal meaning for me as it helps me become the type of student I want to be.	0.81	
	(SUI5) This university represents who I am.	0.80	
	(SUI6) I see this university's successes and failures as my own successes and failures.	0.57	
AS	(AS1) After graduation, I could imagine donating money to my university.	0.75	0.88
	(AS2) If I can support my university in any way in the future, I am willing to do so.	0.77	
	(AS3) As an alumnus, I am planning to support future students.	0.79	

Source: Author's own work

All Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the variables in Table 2 are over 0,7, and Corrected item–Total correlations exceed 0.3, indicating good reliability for

the UBR scale, UBP, SUI and AS (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, all variables are suitable for SEM statistics, and the UBR scale is acceptable for EFA and CFA analyses.

### Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis for UBR

For UBR, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is 0.943, indicating good sampling adequacy, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity is significant ( $p = 0.000$ ), confirming the suitability of EFA (Hair et al., 2019).

Principal Component Analysis, as the extraction method, revealed only two components with Eigenvalues over 1, cumulatively explaining over 71% of the construct's total variance, in contrast to the original scale, which identified three factors (see Table 3).

**Table 3:** *Pattern Matrix<sup>a</sup> of the UBR scale*

	Component	
	1	2
(BR3) Enrolling in this university’s programs is a guarantee.	<b>.904</b>	-.071
(BR5) The university is honest with its students.	<b>.888</b>	-.106
(BR6) The university offers good value.	<b>.867</b>	-.019
(BR4) Products of this university make me feel safe.	<b>.857</b>	.004
(BR1) My university is sincere with its students.	<b>.837</b>	-.096
(BR2) I totally trust this university’s quality.	<b>.799</b>	.037
(BR9) I find this university brand durable.	<b>.773</b>	.081
(BR10) The university service is efficient (in terms of speed, responsiveness, etc.).	<b>.695</b>	.127
(BR8) The university fulfils the basic functions of the training products.	<b>.663</b>	.222
(BR7) I chose this university as a sign of consistent quality for enrolling in programs.	<b>.644</b>	.234
(BR11) This university is reputable.	-.023	<b>.932</b>
(BR13) This university brand is easily recognisable.	.016	<b>.924</b>
(BR12) This university brand is amongst the leading brands in the market.	.098	<b>.851</b>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation.

<sup>a</sup>. Rotation converged in 4 iterations.

Source: Author’s own work

In EFA, items with factor loadings above 0.6 (in bold) indicate a strong contribution to the relevant factors (Hair et al., 2019). The Pattern Matrix in Table 3 shows that the Reputation factor still includes three items (BR11, BR12, BR13) from the original UBR scale. However, the second factor encompasses the remaining 10 items (BR1 to BR10) from the two original factors, i.e., Trust and Performance, reflecting aspects that enhance students' trust in the university, i.e.,

its characteristics and performance quality. Therefore, the label ‘Trust’ is retained for the second factor of the UBR construct in the current study.

CFA of UBR, treated as a second-order variable comprising two factors, was conducted in AMOS. The first-order variables include Trust and Reputation, while the second-order variable is UBR. The model fit indices from CFA are as follows: CMIN = 2.970 (< 3), CFI = 0.97 (> 0.95), TLI = 0.96 (> 0.95), RMSEA = 0.07 (< 0.08). These results show a fairly good fit (Hair et al., 2019). In summary, the two-factor structure of UBR has been confirmed in the sample.

**Table 4: CFA for UBR**

			Regression Weights	S.E.	C.R.	P	Standardised Regression Weights
Trust	←	UBR	1.000				<b>.953</b>
Reputation	←	UBR	1.000				<b>.733</b>
BR3	←	Trust	1.000				.862
BR2	←	Trust	.953	.042	22.693	***	.786
BR1	←	Trust	.867	.052	16.673	***	.736
BR13	←	Reputation	1.000				.908
BR12	←	Reputation	.907	.035	25.750	***	.893
BR11	←	Reputation	.911	.038	23.853	***	.857
BR4	←	Trust	1.000	.050	19.897	***	.832
BR5	←	Trust	.995	.055	18.022	***	.779
BR6	←	Trust	.983	.049	20.055	***	.835
BR7	←	Trust	1.000	.055	18.251	***	.784
BR8	←	Trust	.995	.053	18.760	***	.799
BR9	←	Trust	.942	.050	18.732	***	.799
BR10	←	Trust	.920	.055	16.835	***	.742

Source: Author’s own work

Table 4 shows that all observed and first-order variables have statistically significant regression weights ( $p = 0.000$ ). The standardised regression weights of both the first- and second-order variables range from 0.73 to over 0.95 (in bold) (> 0.5), meaning that the observed and first-order variables effectively explain their parent variables (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, the two-factor UBR construct is suitable for analysing its relationships with UBP, SUI and AS using SEM.

It is noteworthy that three factors of brand respect (i.e., trust, performance, and reputation) were confirmed in Roberts’s (2004) study; four factors (i.e., trust, performance, reputation, and acceptance) were explored in Jahanvi and Sharma’s (2021) study; only two factors were found in the current study. These differences suggest that contextual factors, such as language, culture, field of application, and

national context, may be influential. This highlights the need for further research on UBR in different contexts.

**Relationship Between UBP, UBR, SUI and AS**

Given that UBP, UBR, SUI, and AS are latent variables, SEM was used to analyse their relationships. The effects of UBP and UBR on SUI and AS (hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4) are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Impact of UBP and UBR on SUI and AS**

Model fit indices	UBP → SUI	UBP → AS	UBR → SUI	UBR → AS
Chi-square	137.434	68.441	346.750	213.901
Degrees of freedom (df)	58	31	142	96
Probability level (p)	.000	.000	.000	.000
CMIN/df	2.374	2.208	2.442	2.228
TLI	0.977	0.986	0.959	0.970
CFI	0.983	0.990	0.996	0.976
RMSEA	0.059	0.055	0.060	0.056
Regression Weights	0.282	0.184	0.848	0.614
	(p = .000)	(p = .000)	(p = .000)	(p = .000)
Standardized				
Regression Weights	0.356	0.233	0.811	0.589
Square Multiple	0.127	0.054	0.658	0.346
Correlations (R <sup>2</sup> )				

Source: Author’s own work

Table 5 shows satisfactory model fit indices (CMIN/df < 3; TLI > 0.95; CFI > 0.95, RMSEA ≤ 0.06). The Regression Weights with p = 0.000 indicates a significant and positive influence of UBP and UBR on SUI and AS, *supporting hypotheses H1, H2, H3 and H4.*

In Table 5, UBP accounts for 12.7% of the variance in SUI (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.127) and only 5.4% of the variance in AS (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.054), indicating a modest impact. In contrast, UBR explains a much larger portion of the variance: 65.8% for SUI and 34.6% for AS (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.658 and R<sup>2</sup> = 0.346, respectively), demonstrating a stronger influence than UBP’s. The current study reveals that UBR comprises two key components: brand trust and reputation. When students trust the university’s performance and values, they recognise its reputation, fostering respect and supportive behaviours (Le Tran Tu Uyen et al., 2026). For instance, university fairness fosters students’ trust, which in turn predicts members’ identification (Lianto et al., 2026). As such, SUI/AS seem to be directly affected by UBR’s components. Meanwhile, UBP shapes institutional values. When these values resonate with students, they foster students’ brand trust and love, strengthening emotional bonds that enhance SUI and AS (Le Tran Tu Uyen et al., 2026). This

transforming mechanism through university–student fit may explain the lesser influence of UBP on SUI/AS compared to UBR.

The confirmation of H1 aligns with previous findings on the positive impact of UBP on SUI. For example, Polyorat & Preechapanyakul (2020) identified sincerity and liveliness; Pinna et al. (2017) found friendliness, stability, practicality, and warmth; Oanh & Pham (2026) highlighted connection, social responsibility, respect for differences, and proactiveness as influencing students' identification. It is noted that although the literature recognises the significant effect of UBP on SUI, the specific personalities influencing SUI differ across studies. Thus, the current findings contribute to understanding university personalities that affect SUI, such as fair, helpful, dynamic, organised, and networked.

Previous research has reported that alumni giving/support is influenced by individual feelings of reciprocity, personal connections to the university, perceived need of the university, and perceived efficacy of contribution (Diamond & Kashyap, 1997), by UBP (Oanh & Pham, 2026; Rauschnabel et al., 2016), by private gains (Liang, 2026), and by SUI (Balaji et al., 2016; Oanh & Pham, 2026). As such, the confirmation of H2 in the current study reinforces the positive correlation between UBP and AS, emphasising the role of affective/emotional factors in students' supportive intentions (Balaji et al., 2016). Since the participants in the present study were current students rather than alumni, they may feel stronger connections to the university. Thus, further research on alumni in Vietnam is needed to deepen the understanding of these findings.

To explore the mediating role of UBR between UBP and SUI, as well as between UBP and AS, we tested the total model with the two-factor UBR scale in AMOS using SEM. The model fit indices are provided below:

- Chi-square = 796.707; df = 360; p = 0.000
- CMIN/df = 2.213 (< 3); TLI = 0.952 (> 0.95); CFI = 0.957 (> 0.95)
- RMSEA = 0.055 (< 0.06)

The result above indicates a good fit model for the mediating role of UBR. A Bootstrap analysis with 5,000 samples was conducted in AMOS at a 95% significance level. The standardised indirect effects of the relationships were significant: the effect between UBP and SUI was 0.615, and the effect between UBP and AS was 0.508, both with p-values = 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings highlight the significant mediating role of UBR within the relationships, supporting hypothesis H5 (Hair et al., 2019).

As noted before, the current study is the first to explore brand respect in the context of HE. Previous research has linked brand respect to brand equity, brand loyalty, brand love, and word of mouth across various fields such as e-commerce, fashion, transportation, and technology (Hariandja & Suryanto, 2021;

Khan et al., 2022), except HE. Despite the absence, the Lovemarks theory can help explain the underlying mechanism of UBR's impact on SUI/AS and the UBR's mediation. Ultimately, brand respect fosters a long-term love between customers and the brand (Khan et al., 2022). Particularly in HE, when students respect their university, they believe in its products/services and reputation, and they love the university. This leads to students' identification and willingness to support their university (Le Tran Tu Uyen et al., 2026). As such, both theoretical analysis and empirical evidence from the current study underscore the significance of UBRs in university branding.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In summary, UBP and UBR positively influence SUI and AS, with UBR mediating the relationships between UBP and SUI/AS. However, UBP's impact on SUI and AS is relatively low. Future research should explore additional variables, such as brand love, brand loyalty, and brand attractiveness, that may affect the UBP-SUI/AS relationship.

The limited research on brand respect in HE emphasises the need for further studies on UBR as a key element of university (brand) management, e.g., how UBR relates to brand attractiveness and can affect students' support for their university. Additionally, future research should validate the UBR scale across diverse samples to identify whether a universal factor-based construct exists. Furthermore, with alumni support, universities gain valuable resources for growth (Obeng-Ofori & Kwarteng, 2021). The current study focused on students' supportive intention, not their actual support after graduation. Investigating this could be a fruitful area for future research to enhance the university's development. For university managers, the findings suggest that universities should develop expected personalities that resonate with students to secure their identification and support. Conducting interviews or surveys with stakeholders can help identify the valued traits.

The findings indicate that UBR significantly affects SUI/AS. Key factors of UBR, such as stakeholder satisfaction with the university's performance and values, are crucial for building trust and reputation. As such, *university leaders can enhance stakeholders' respect by demonstrating quality and values through targeted initiatives*. For instance, implementing initiatives that foster innovative pedagogy and enhance faculty-student interaction, rooted in core organisational values/personalities such as fairness, helpfulness, friendliness, creativity, dynamism, organisation, and networking. As a result, improving university performance can enhance students' UBR, thereby increasing SUI/AS. More generally, successful branding through a strong UBP fosters a positive learning environment, enabling educators to engage students effectively in their educational

journey, including both coursework and extracurricular activities (Berndt & Pantelic, 2025).

### **Limitations**

The current study adapted the UBP scale from a Western context, suggesting that Vietnamese students may have unique personality expectations. Future research should aim to develop a UBP scale tailored specifically for HE in Vietnam.

The study used a self-report questionnaire, so the findings are limited to the participants' current perceptions and feelings. Although Harman's single-factor test shows no significant issues with this method, conducting longitudinal research is recommended to enhance the value of the findings for long-term university branding.

Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, resulting in a sample mainly of second-year students from social sciences, humanities, and economics/management. This may limit the applicability of the findings to other year groups and disciplines. Future research could use stratified sampling to address this issue.

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**THU NGUYEN-ANH**, PhD, is a lecturer at the Faculty of Management and Creative Economics in the School of Interdisciplinary Sciences and Arts, which is part of Vietnam National University, Ha Noi. Her major research interests include management and leadership, human resource management, brand management, organisational culture, and organisational behaviour. Email: [nathu@vnu.edu.vn](mailto:nathu@vnu.edu.vn)

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