

## Linguistic Landscape Analysis of Public and Private Sector University Logos in Pakistan: Investigating the Role of Language in Institutional Identity and Perception

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### Abstract

*Creating a positive image and establishing a unique institutional identity are crucial aspects of branding in the field of higher education, especially in a highly competitive world. This study aims to analyse the linguistic features of logos and mottos in public and private sector universities in Pakistan, and how they contribute to the construction of institutional identity. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) model, the study examines the role of language choice in university logos in projecting institutional values and priorities, which influence the perception of stakeholders and the wider public about the respective institutions. The findings demonstrate that the logos predominantly draw upon cultural heritage, religious beliefs, and historical civilizations to project a perceptual image of an academic institution. However, a recent trend has emerged, indicating a shift towards more progressive and scientific symbols, graphics, themes, and images that resonate with younger generations and signify a connection to the future. The findings of this research contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance of language in shaping institutional identity and perception.*

**Keywords:** Pakistani universities, branding, logo, institutional identity, perceptual image

### Introduction

Universities have traditionally held a prestigious position in society as the primary goal of higher education was to cultivate knowledge and produce accomplished scholars (ZHANG, 2017). In the past, admission to public sector universities was highly competitive, and universities were considered esteemed institutions without the need for advertising or branding strategies (Askehave, 2007). The reputation of universities relied solely on the achievements of their students in the professional world. Hence, the quality of the graduates served as a testament to the university's standing without engaging in marketing strategies or branding processes (Randall, 1997). However, the role of traditional universities has changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lynch (2006) argues that the branding of universities has its roots in neoliberalism. Hence, education is treated as bureaucratic machines where students and teachers are considered “suppliers” and “consumers” (Young, 2002).

Now, traditional promotional methods that were previously successful have lost their effectiveness. Today's students are fully engaged in digital applications and social media, making it difficult for higher education institutions to understand and cater to their needs. Furthermore, globalization has not only intensified competition within a country but also internationally as students are more willing to study abroad (Pinar et al., 2011). As a result, higher education

institutions, especially those in developing countries, must keep up with global trends and adapt accordingly. In this highly competitive market, universities turn to branding as the primary tool to differentiate them from others and gain a competitive edge.

Shahnaz (2022) opines that the higher education sector in Pakistan has been using branding strategies more than ever before as it has been facing challenges in form of intense competition due to privatization. In such competitive world, visuals play a significant role to catch the attention of students (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Hence, logos are considered a necessary part in constructing the visual identity of universities according to the current trends (Rust & Uys, 2014). D'Souza and Williams (2000) explain that logos and visual cues facilitate brand recognition and selection. Moreover, university logos serve as a tangible evidence of how corporate trends have become integrated into higher education branding. Hence, if universities aspire to build a robust institutional identity, they should offer tangible proof to substantiate their claim using visuals, logos, language, and taglines (Rust & Uys, 2014). Effective communication, especially through forms, symbols, images, words, and slogans, can create, establish, promote, and maintain a brand identity across culture, space, and time (Barabas, 2017).

There has been a growing emphasis on studying the use of language in professional and public contexts in 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly regarding the impact of market principles on discourse in higher education (Wang & Lu, 2022). However, despite the growing significance of branding marketization in higher education, previous studies on identity construction of Pakistani universities through logos and mottos are limited (Shahnaz & Qadir, 2020).

Previous studies in this field were limited to analysing online prospectuses using corpus tools to examine the frequency of specific linguistic features (Niaz, Malik, & Khan, 2021). However, the area of institutional identity construction of Pakistani higher education institutions using logos and taglines has been largely ignored, which has motivated the researcher to investigate it further. The stark difference between Pakistan's public and private sector universities' logo has sparked the researcher's curiosity to delve into this subject. Hence, this paper aims to specifically examine the impact of language choices in university logos in projecting institutional values and priorities, which influence the perception of stakeholders and the wider public about the respective institutions. By integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2020) model, this study aims to address these three research questions in this article:

1. How do the linguistic features of logos of public and private sector universities in Pakistan contribute to the construction of institutional identity?
2. What is the role of language choice in university logos in projecting the institutional values and priorities?
3. How do the linguistic features of university logos influence the perception of stakeholders and the wider public about the respective institutions?

## Literature Review

### *Branding of Universities*

Branding has a significant impact on establishing institutional identity and sets it apart from competitors (Kaushal & Ali, 2020). Hence, an increasing number of universities have been considering the concept of brand identity as an integral part to their business strategies. A university's corporate identity contributes to shaping its image, which relies on positive public perception (Miotto et al., 2020). Moreover, it is believed that in the corporate culture, logos, taglines, and the choice of colors greatly influence the perception of general public (Bresciani & Del Ponte, 2017). Hence, many studies have used semiotic analysis and critical discourse analysis to analyse the effectiveness of visual materials, such as logos and taglines (Kamalu, 2016).

The competition among universities has given rise to the concept of "promotional universities" (Drori, Delmestri, & Oberg, 2013). The style of the logo is chosen based on differentiation strategy and competition among universities (Idris & Whitfield, 2014). Logos and taglines are designed to effectively convey what the university stands for and who it caters to. Bold and realistic logo designs are employed by universities to attract students through marketing and promotions, thereby reflecting their educational services (Wu and Cheong, 2021).

### *Categories of Pakistani Universities*

There are mainly two types of higher education institutes in Pakistan: public and private sector. Mostly public sector universities were established after Pakistan came into being and received extensive support and privileges from the government (Khan and Aajiz, 2018). The establishment of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan in 2002 brought several reforms in higher education and related institutes in the past two decades (Khan and Jabeen, 2019). Due to HEC's ambitious reforms, the student-to-resource ratio increased over time, which placed strain on available resources (Riaz et al., 2017). Soon, the number of students in public sector universities surpassed the government's capacity for subsidies. The dwindling financial resources for higher education started negatively impacting the development of higher education institutions (Ashiq, Rehman, & Mujtaba, 2021). This situation left a gap that gave rise to rapid growth of private sector universities in Pakistan (Amir, Sharf, & Khan, 2020). Hence, branding of private sector universities became crucial in such competitive environment (Memon, 2007).

### *Institutional Identity Construction through Logos and Taglines*

Brand identity refers to how an organization wishes to be perceived by the public, helping it differentiate itself and be easily recognized (Iglesias et al., 2020). They use different elements of branding, out of which visual identity is the major element. Universities, as educational institutions and communities of professionals and students, are increasingly adopting these branding methods which were once used in the corporate world only (Rutter, Lettice, and Nadeau, 2017). Thus, the concept of brand identity is also significant in the university context, encompassing various aspects such as the university's nature, strategies, history, and objectives (Pringle & Fritz, 2019).

Visual identity, such as logos, mottos, and words, is a crucial component of institutional identity and typically includes the university's name, logo, slogan, colors, and typography (Compagnucci & Spigarelli, 2020). Logos and mottos play a vital role in representing universities' identity (Rutter, Lettice, and Nadeau, 2017). Words used in mottos also contribute to differentiation, encapsulating the essence and attributes of the university in a concise way (Celly & Knepper, 2010). Additionally, these logos and mottos help universities maintain their distinct position in higher education and make these universities stand out among others on the basis of the visual appeals (Goi, Goi, & Wong, 2014).

### ***Impact of Branding on Institutional Identity***

Giroux (2002) argues that students are not persuaded by logo-based identity methods and find these institutional identity management efforts exploitative when students are required to use products with university's logo. Instead of maintaining a traditional university impression to impart knowledge, universities are, now, transformed into business corporations in the race of attracting more customers (Amzat, 2016). Universities should maintain their decorum instead of adopting a corporate image (Hollowa & Hollowa, 2005). Despite ongoing arguments and debates about branding, universities continue to invest more resources in branding initiatives, including logo redesign, catchy mottos, and attractive advertising campaigns (Clark, Chapleo, & Suomi, 2020). Instead of planning and delivering quality education, universities in Pakistan stress upon their branding (Arif, Ilyas, & Hameed, 2017). Study by Zafar, Mazhar, and Ijaz (2023) concluded that universities should prioritise the delivery of high quality education complemented by effective branding instead of focusing on extensive marketing methods (p. 44).

### **Research Methodology**

This study aims to analyse the linguistic features of logos of public and private sector universities in Pakistan to explore their contribution in constructing their institutional identity. To gather the data, the researcher selected universities from various regions of Pakistan to investigate the differences in logos, taglines, and mottos between public and private sector universities. The universities were categorized between two groups: public sector universities and private sector universities.

**Table 1: Names of the Selected Universities**

	<b>Public Sector Universities</b>	<b>Private Sector Universities</b>
1	University of the Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan (Est 1882)	The University of Management and Technology, Punjab, Pakistan (Est 1990)
2	University of Peshawar, KPK, Pakistan (Est 1950)	Iqra National University, KPK, Pakistan (Est 2000)
3	University of Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan (Est 1951)	Habib University, Sindh, Pakistan (Est 2010)
4	University of Balochistan, Balochistan, Pakistan (Est 1970)	Alhamd Islamic University, Balochistan, Pakistan (Est 2005)

5	Quaid - i - Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan (Est 1967)	Hamdard University, Islamabad, Pakistan (Est 1991)
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All the universities in these two groups are situated in different regions of Pakistan and offer a diverse range of courses in STEM, arts, humanities, and business disciplines. Furthermore, all the selected universities demonstrate a significant level of research involvement across various academic programs including STEM, arts, humanities, and business disciplines. The primary goal of distributing the sample into two groups was to explore the distinct features of logos, taglines, and mottos between public and private sector universities to form their unique institutional identity.

### Theoretical Underpinning

The study incorporates Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse language use in its social context, including the use of images as a significant medium of communication. Texts, including images, contribute to the representation, action, and identification of events and social actors (Kress & Leeuwen, 2020). Identity construction is seen as a social construction through discourse, where the text produced and the linguistic choices made contribute to the creation of identity. The study uses Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework for Critical Discourse Analysis, which emphasizes the integration of textual, institutional, and discourse practices in analyzing broader social and political structures.

Following Critical Discourse Analysis, the visual analysis is carried out by utilizing insights of Kress and van Leeuwen (2020), who developed visual semiotic theory to analyse images. This framework developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) has taken inspiration from Halliday's seminal work (1978) on language as social semiotic. Based on Halliday's work (1978), multiple and differentiated interpretations of visuals are possible, so researchers can choose methods that align with their research objectives (Reavey & Johnson, 2017, p. 362). Representational meaning and compositional meaning proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) have been focused in this study, where visual meaning pertains to the characteristics of the images being represented, and compositional metafunction relates interactive and representational meanings through interrelated systems (Ly & Jung, 2015), specifically by analyzing color in logo designs. Moreover, shapes of logos were also analysed as it is one of the most important feature in interpreting semiotic meaning (Siyanbola & Adeyemi, 2021).

### Data Analysis

#### *Institutional Identity Construction through Language and Design of Logos*

Branding provides universities with an institutional identity that sets them apart from competitors. The design of university logo represents a semiotic system with a representative function, encapsulating ideas within a broader cultural framework that reflects society's culture and religious inclinations (Pringle & Fritz, 2019). The selection of colors and logos is believed to have a profound effect on eliciting emotional responses from public (Bresciani & Del Ponte, 2017). This goes beyond mere visual descriptions and plays a role in igniting curiosity, stirring interest, creating desire, and influencing preferences. Universities strategically use semiotic

resources such as colors, images, and mottos to emphasize corporate and commercial information for promotional purposes (Rutter, Lettice, & Nadeau, 2017). The semiotic connotations of brand designs are crucial in persuading and distinguishing universities, serving as their recognizable face. The logos, mottos, and slogans of each university are found to be distinct and innovative, featuring unique styles, geometric shapes, motto phrases, and color schemes.

The analysis of the logos of public and private sector universities in Pakistan reveal that all these logos endeavor to highlight their names and visual identities in elegant ways. They utilize cultural symbols, such as depictions of 'light' representing cultural and Islamic concepts towards education and knowledge. Additionally, the logos of universities often incorporate symbols that represent their cultural association with knowledge. Some logos utilize stars and books to symbolize intellectual pursuits. Furthermore, certain logos feature symbols that highlight the geographical location of the university, such as the University of Karachi's logo depicting an ocean and a ship to represent its coastal location, or the logo of the University of Balochistan, which incorporates symbols representing its geographical boundaries.

### *Elements of Logos*

A range of geometrical shapes have been used in the logos of public and private sector universities which shapes their institutional identity. Each of these geometric shapes signifies specific characteristics and function of these visuals to shape their institutional identity. For example, the use of star and crescent by public sector universities like Karachi University and Quaid-e-Azam University carry significant symbolism, with the crescent symbolizing progress and growth, and the star representing divine guidance throughout life. Some of the old public sector universities still use shield shape in their logos. The use of shield in the logo of University of the Punjab, and University of Peshawar's logo reveal that these universities stress upon their legacy by using cultural symbols to distinguish them from newer private sector universities.

Almost all of the private sector universities including University of Management and Technology and Iqra National University, Hamdard University, Habib University, and Alhamd Islamic University use circular shape in their logos. The circular shape in higher education institutions' logo symbolizes the balance and excellence provided by these universities to their students. Overall, all the shapes and symbols used in the logos convey positive and optimistic meanings, reinforcing the positive institutional identity of the universities.

### *Colours*

Colours possess an inherent impact that communicates and influences the perception of masses. Colours serve as the first element noticed by potential customers; therefore, the selection of logo colours by designers and universities is always crucial as they help to differentiate important information, elicit emotional responses, and impact memory (Hynes, 2009). Singla and Aggarwal (2016) explain that educational institutes mostly use blue colour as it is associated with security, loyalty, peace, and timelessness. Blue colour is also perceived as a symbol of intelligence. Most of the public sector universities in Pakistan have used blue colour in their logo to strength their commitment to intelligence. Some public sector universities in Pakistan have

also used green colour in their logo which represents life, renewal, and nature. White colour is used in all the logo which suggests cleanliness, freshness, and purity.

Private sector universities in Pakistan employ a diverse range of colors, including black, yellow, purple, green, white, and sky blue. This indicates a stronger inclination towards branding and emphasizes the institutional identity of these universities by utilizing distinct color schemes. Such unique color choices contribute to strengthening the individual institutional identity of each university. The effective use of these distinctive color schemes establishes a connection between the colors and the institutional identity, resulting in the formation of a distinct perception of each university in the minds of viewers.

### ***Mottos***

A motto is known as a mission statement, embodying commitment and optimistic promise (Whisman, 2009). Mottos play a crucial role in forming institutional identity. The analysis of the data reveals that all the selected public sector universities use the verses from the Holy Quran or sayings of the Holy Prophets, which are inscribed in Arabic language in their logos. By using religious mottos, these universities strengthen their affiliation with religious practices and stress on the importance of education and knowledge as suggested in Islam. These religious mottos are mostly small verses and sayings which are memorable and impactful to form institutional unique identity. For example, University of the Punjab uses a verse from the Holy Quran as the motto, which is inscribed on the logo in Arabic, translated as “And to Allah belongs the east and the west” (Verse, 2:115: sūrat l-baqarah). On the other hand, University of Peshawar and University of Karachi both use the same verse from the Holy Quran which stresses upon the importance of knowledge. This is a very common verse which most of the students in Pakistan learn by heart in early years of their education. This verse is inscribed in Arabic on the logo of University of Peshawar and University of Karachi, translated as “My lord, increase me in my knowledge” [20:119]. Similarly, University of Balochistan has also selected a religious motto as the saying of the Holy Prophet is inscribed in Arabic on the logo, translated as “Seek Knowledge from the cradle to the grave”.

On the other hand, most of the private sector universities in Pakistan create their own slogans, showcasing their distinctive position and establish a prestigious image to enhance the perception of the university and its offerings. Pakistani universities often use words like, “opportunities” and “future” to show their commitment to students’ bright future. It is worth noting that all the selected public sector universities in Pakistan typically adopt mottos derived from verses of the Holy Quran or saying of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) while almost all the selected private sector universities in Pakistan tend to invent their own mottos following corporate traditions. However, there are exceptions in private sector universities too, such as Quaid-e-Azam University, which incorporate a Quranic verse in its mottos. Private sector universities in Pakistan create their unique mottos to establish their progressive and scientific approach towards education by promising modern methods of education and research.

### **Discussion**

The research findings indicate that the early established public sector universities have not changed their logos since they are established, suggesting a lack of effort to redesign them in

response to evolving marketing strategies and branding. Conversely, new universities tend to employ more simplified and visually appealing graphic elements to appeal and grab the attention public. Shahnaz and Qadir (2020) have also made similar observations. Logos of public sector universities have not only used traditional colours, but the design of logo is also unsuitable for a modern university offering scientific knowledge.

Modern corporate branding favors clean lines, minimal bold colors, large fonts, and stylish symbols to convey a university's visual identity while meeting the expectations of public, particularly students. This approach is likely to enhance students' commitment to the institution, as the logo represents its corporate visual identity (Dennis et al., 2016). Notably, the research findings show that private sector universities in the province of Punjab, KPK, and Karachi use contemporary logo design strategies, which exhibit a modern approach and effectively communicate the institution's brand message. To reposition their educational services in the market effectively, universities should employ appropriate logos and mottos (Osman, 2008). University logos should embody the concept of globalization and the evolving landscape of higher education instead of reflecting their traditional approach towards knowledge (Ead & Saleh, 2021). Universities need to use modern logos that reflect their scientific approach towards education by emphasizing competition-driven approaches and aligning their identities with market culture (Erjansola, 2021).

The analysis reveals that the branding elements not only identify a specific university but also reflect the social context, historical background, and religious values in which the identity is established. The use of branding elements such as logos, mottos, and slogans is common in both public and private sector universities, contradicting the prevailing belief that the private sector is more inclined towards marketization. However, the exploration of the mottos used by Pakistan's leading public sector universities shows that these universities stress upon Islamic thoughts towards education and knowledge. All public sector universities in Pakistan predominantly use verses from the Holy Quran or sayings of the Holy Prophet (S.A.W) as mottos, while most of the private sector universities in Pakistan portray a progressive and modern image through self-created slogans. The logos of newly established private sector universities in Pakistan tend to be less expressive and more business-like, featuring no borders and soft color schemes with more abstract style. The branding of private sector universities specifically in the province of Punjab, Peshawar, and Karachi follows similar principles used for improving the visibility, popularity, and financial outcomes of any product, emphasizing the importance of being trendy, scientific and progressive. Universities, in general, are adopting promotional practices from the corporate world, emphasizing their resemblance to business enterprises. However, it is crucial to preserve the core objective of universities as knowledge-centered institutions and maintain a distinction between academia and businesses.

## **Conclusion**

This research focuses exclusively on the analysis of logo designs from ten Pakistani universities, which are further grouped into five public sector universities and five private sector universities. The analysis suggests that these universities have utilized their logos to project a distinct brand image, incorporating various elements such as images, designs, symbols, themes, and shapes that draw upon their cultural heritage and religious beliefs. A noticeable trend towards



modernization is apparent in the logos, mottos, and slogans of private sector universities. Notably, newer universities are beginning to adopt more progressive and scientific symbols, graphics, themes, and images, thereby connecting with younger generations and signaling a progressive and technological approach. The public sector universities convey an Islamic image through their mottos, while private sector universities project a progressive and scientific image by crafting their modern slogans and mottos. Logos, therefore, are considered to be a significant instrument employed by private sector universities to brand their institutions, highlight their programs and strengths, and engage their target audience. Future research is recommended to compare logo designs between public and private universities and to explore the historical evolution of logo designs.

The present study assessed how public sector and private sector universities in Pakistan approached their branding programs through their logos, revealing that the ten universities studied used logos as a means to reflect their institutional identity as educational establishments, employing various colors, images, symbols, and shapes in a systematic, practical, and professional manner to a significant extent. However, logos alone cannot create a positive brand image and reputation unless they align with the values they represent. The impression that the university leaves on people's minds when they encounter its name or symbol is what truly matters. Through their logos, mottos, and slogans, universities rely on branding as a means to differentiate them in a landscape where their products and practices may otherwise appear similar. Therefore, the significance and impact of logos in marketing communications, branding, and advertising within higher education institutions, particularly public universities, must extend beyond mere impressions to actual delivery. It is crucial to prioritize effectively and maintain a clear distinction between academia and the business industry. This requires strategic efforts and a stakeholder approach that enhances the quality of faculty, research, student employability, and contributions to society, the economy, and the nation. Consequently, further empirical studies are recommended to explore what public and private sector educational institutions stand for, how they achieve it, and what outcomes they deliver. It is also important to investigate the relationship between logos and brand assessment in Pakistani universities, drawing comparisons with similar cases in other countries.

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Appendix A

Table: Logos of Public and Private Sector Universities with their mottos and themes

University	Logo	Motto and theme
University of the Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan (Est 1882)		<p>Colour: Blue and white are dominant. Motto: A verse from the Holy Quran is written on the logo in Arabic which is translated as “And to Allah belongs the east and the west” (Verse, 2:115: sūrat l-baqarah).</p>
University of Peshawar, KPK, Pakistan (Est 1950)		<p>Colour: Blue and white are dominant. Motto: A verse from the Holy Quran is written on the logo in Arabic which is translated as “My lord, increase me in my knowledge” [20:119].</p>
University of Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan (Est 1951)		<p>Colour: Green and white are dominant. Motto: A verse from the Holy Quran is written on the logo in Arabic which is translated as “My lord, increase me in my knowledge” [20:119].</p>

<p>University of Balochistan, Balochistan, Pakistan (Est 1970)</p>		<p>Colour: Blue and white are dominant. Motto: A saying of the Holy Prophet is written on the logo in Arabic which is translated as “Seek Knowledge from the cradle to the grave”.</p>
<p>Quaid - i - Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan (Est 1967)</p>		<p>Colour: Green and white are dominant. Motto: A verse from the Holy Quran is written on the logo in Arabic which is translated as “And he to whom wisdom is granted receive indeed a benefit overflowing (Al-Baqara :269)</p>
<p>The University of Management and Technology, Punjab, Pakistan (Est 1990)</p>		<p>Colour: Sky blue, light blue and white are dominant. Motto: University’s name in balck and its acronym in white, while the logo uses sky blue and light blue colour combination.</p>
<p>Iqra National University, KPK, Pakistan (Est 2000)</p>		<p>Colour: Black, and yellow are dominant. Motto: University’s full name with its acronym and a motto in English saying “Defining possibilities, creating opportunities”.</p>
<p>Habib University, Sindh, Pakistan (Est 2010)</p>		<p>Colour: Purple, yellow, and white are dominant. Motto: University’s full name and a motto in English saying “Shaping Futures”.</p>

<p>Alhamd Islamic University, Balochistan, Pakistan (Est 2005)</p>		<p>Colour: Blue and white are dominant. Motto: University's complete name in English and Urdu</p>
<p>Hamdard University, Islamabad, Pakistan (Est 1991)</p>		<p>Colour: Green and white are dominant. Motto: University's complete name in English and Urdu</p>