

The Moderating Role of Senior Management Support on the Relationship between Brand Identity, Brand Positioning and Sustainable Organizational Performance: A Study of Umma University, Kenya

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Abstract

Sustainable organizational performance has become a critical concern for higher education institutions due to increasing competition, changing stakeholder expectations, and the need for long-term institutional viability. Branding has emerged as a key approach for enhancing institutional reputation, stakeholder engagement, and competitiveness. However, despite its importance, many universities, continue to experience challenges in effectively implementing branding strategies to achieve sustainable performance. This study therefore examined moderating role of senior management support on the relationship between brand identity, brand positioning and sustainable organizational performance in Umma University, Kenya. The study was guided by the Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory and Positioning Theory. A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population consisted of 104 staff members, and a census approach yielded 83 valid responses, representing an 80% response rate. Data was collected using structured questionnaires administered through Google Forms. A pilot study was conducted to test the research instruments. Validity was ensured through expert review, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with all variables recording values above 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and inferential techniques including correlation, regression, and moderation analysis, with results presented using tables. Correlation analysis revealed strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships among the study variables. Brand identity correlated with sustainable organizational performance ($r = 0.702$, $p = 0.001$), while brand positioning also showed a strong relationship ($r = 0.715$, $p < 0.001$). Senior management support recorded the strongest association with sustainable organizational performance ($r = 0.754$, $p < 0.001$). Regression results indicated that brand identity ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.001$) and brand positioning ($\beta = 0.218$, $p = 0.002$) significantly predict sustainable organizational performance. Moderation

analysis further showed that senior management support significantly strengthens the relationship between brand identity and performance ($\beta = 0.182$, $p = 0.010$) and between brand positioning and performance ($\beta = 0.176$, $p = 0.009$). The study concludes that brand identity and brand positioning jointly enhance sustainable organizational performance, while senior management support strengthens both direct and indirect effects of strategic branding. It recommends a structured branding policy, adequate resource allocation, inclusion of branding indicators in performance appraisal, stakeholder feedback systems, strengthened institutional identity awareness, improved value communication, stronger leadership support, and effective monitoring and evaluation of branding initiatives.

Keywords: Brand identity, brand positioning, sustainable organizational performance, higher education institutions, senior management support

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Introduction

The global higher education has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades, shifting from a public-service orientation toward a competitive, market-driven paradigm (Chow & Leung, 2016). Universities now operate as complex service ecosystems where institutional survival depends not only on academic excellence but on the strategic management of brand identity, market positioning, and stakeholder perceptions (Xia, 2023). Hence, branding has evolved from a peripheral marketing activity to a core strategic imperative that

shapes enrollment outcomes, stakeholder loyalty, and long-term institutional sustainability (Palav, 2024). For universities in Sub-Saharan Africa, the branding imperative is compounded by unique structural challenges such as limited public funding, intense competition from both domestic and international institutions, and the need to align institutional missions with national development agendas (Papadopoulos & Hamzaoui-Essoussi, 2015).

Sustainable organizational performance refers to an organization's

ability to achieve its objectives consistently over time while balancing economic viability, social responsibility, and long-term resilience. Richard et al. (2009) defined organizational performance as the effectiveness with which an organization achieves its goals using available resources, emphasizing both financial and non-financial outcomes. Elkington (1999) extends this view by conceptualizing sustainable performance through the triple bottom line, where organizations pursue economic, social, and environmental outcomes simultaneously. In the context of higher education, sustainable organizational performance has been defined as the capacity of universities to maintain academic quality, financial stability, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional reputation over the long term. The dimensions of sustainable organizational performance commonly identified in the literature include financial sustainability, institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, operational efficiency, and long-term growth and resilience. In service-oriented organizations such as universities, performance sustainability is increasingly evaluated using non-financial indicators alongside traditional financial measures, reflecting the sector's public-good orientation and stakeholder complexity (Kaplan & Norton, 2001).

Empirical studies demonstrate the relevance of these dimensions across organizational contexts. Kaplan and Norton (2001) found that organizations that integrate financial and non-financial performance indicators achieve superior long-term outcomes and strategic alignment. In higher education, Pinar et al. (2020) established that institutional reputation and stakeholder satisfaction significantly influence sustainable performance through student retention, alumni engagement, and funding stability.

Similarly, Chapleo and Clark (2010) showed that universities with strong reputational capital and efficient operations are better positioned to withstand environmental uncertainties and sustain performance.

Brand identity refers to the set of unique and enduring attributes through which an organization seeks to be recognized and differentiated by its stakeholders. Aaker (1997) conceptualizes brand identity as a strategic framework that defines how an organization wishes to be perceived, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements. Kapferer (2012) defines brand identity as the internal vision of a brand that guides how it communicates its values, purpose, and personality to stakeholders. In higher education, brand identity has also been described as the alignment between an institution's mission, values, culture, and visual symbols that collectively shape stakeholder perceptions. The dimensions of brand identity commonly discussed in literature include institutional vision and mission, core values, organizational culture, and visual identity elements such as logos and symbols. Chapleo (2015) found that clearly articulated mission and values significantly enhance university brand strength and stakeholder trust. Pinar et al. (2020) demonstrated that alignment between institutional culture and communicated brand identity positively influences student satisfaction and loyalty.

Brand positioning refers to the strategic process of establishing a distinctive place for an organization in the minds of its target stakeholders relative to competitors. Fayvishenko (2018) define brand positioning as designing an organization's offerings and image to occupy a meaningful and differentiated position in the target market. Ries and Trout (2001) view positioning as a perceptual concept that focuses on how

an organization is perceived rather than what it claims to offer. In higher education, brand positioning has been described as the manner in which universities differentiate themselves through academic quality, specialization, values, and market focus. The main dimensions of brand positioning include perceived quality, institutional differentiation, competitive advantage, and value proposition clarity. Mourad, Ennew, and Kortam (2011) found that perceived academic quality and differentiation significantly influence student choice and institutional reputation in Asian universities. Chapleo and Clark (2010) reported that universities with clearly defined competitive positions achieve stronger market visibility and long-term stability. In Kenya, Muendo, Kijana and Mutwiri (2024) established that distinct academic positioning enhances enrolment growth and institutional credibility.

The relationship between branding strategy and organizational performance, however, is neither automatic nor uniform. A substantial body of strategic management literature indicates that the translation of strategy into performance is contingent upon organizational enablers factors that either amplify or attenuate the effectiveness of strategic initiatives. Among these enablers, senior management support has emerged as particularly critical. Senior management support refers to the extent to which top organizational leaders demonstrate commitment, provide strategic direction, and allocate the necessary resources required for the successful implementation of organizational initiatives and strategies.

According to Kotter (2012), senior leadership plays a critical role in shaping organizational direction and ensuring that strategic initiatives are supported through clear vision and commitment. Similarly,

Yukl (2013) argues that leadership support from top management enhances organizational effectiveness by aligning institutional goals with operational activities. In higher education institutions, senior management support is particularly important because institutional leaders influence policy formulation, strategic priorities, and the allocation of resources necessary for institutional development and performance (Agwoje & Okeleke, 2023).

Scholars further note that senior management support is manifested through leadership commitment, resource mobilization, and policy direction within an organization. Leadership commitment ensures that institutional strategies receive active support and guidance from top executives, while adequate resource allocation enables institutions to implement strategic initiatives effectively (Northouse, 2021). In addition, supportive policies established by senior management create a conducive environment for implementing institutional programs and improving organizational outcomes. Studies in organizational management indicate that when leaders actively support institutional initiatives, organizations are more likely to achieve improved performance, innovation, and long-term sustainability (Ahsan & Khawaja, 2024). Aboramadan, Albashiti, Alharazin and Dahleez, (2020) found that leadership commitment and resource allocation significantly influence institutional performance and employee engagement in higher education institutions. Similarly, Ofori and Atiogbe (2013) established that policy support and leadership involvement positively affect organizational effectiveness and strategic implementation.

Umma University, Kenya, provides a compelling case for examining these dynamics. Umma University is a

private, faith-based institution of higher learning in Kenya founded in 1997 through the vision and leadership of the late Dr. Abdulrahman Al-Sumait, a renowned physician, philanthropist, and humanitarian. The institution traces its origins to the establishment of Thika College for Sharia and Islamic Studies and has since evolved into a fully chartered university with a broadened academic mandate. Guided by Islamic values integrated with modern academic excellence, Umma University was established to advance education, healthcare, and community development across Africa. Over time, the university has undergone significant transformation marked by key milestones including strategic partnerships with international institutions, relocation to its main campus in Kajiado County, and recognition by national regulatory bodies. These developments reflect a deliberate institutional journey aimed at strengthening academic credibility, governance structures, and long-term sustainability.

As a private Islamic institution operating within Kenya's increasingly competitive and regulated higher education environment, Umma University must navigate the dual imperatives of maintaining distinctive religious-ethical identity while achieving market viability and sustainable performance. Kenya's higher education sector has experienced rapid expansion, with the Commission for University Education intensifying quality assurance and accountability requirements. In this context, understanding how brand identity and positioning interact with senior management support to produce sustainable organizational outcomes is not merely an academic exercise but a strategic necessity for institutional survival and mission fulfillment. This study therefore seeks to examine the

moderating effect of senior management support on the relationship between brand identity, brand positioning and sustainable organizational performance at Umma University, Kenya.

Theoretical Review

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory was formally articulated by Jay Barney in 1991, building on earlier work by Wernerfelt (1984). The theory posits that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage and superior performance by owning and effectively deploying resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN). RBV emphasizes internal organizational resources rather than external market conditions as the primary drivers of long-term performance (Barney, 1991). In this perspective, intangible assets such as brand identity, reputation, organizational culture, and knowledge are viewed as strategic resources capable of generating sustained performance outcomes.

Over time, RBV has evolved to address criticisms of its static nature through the integration of dynamic capabilities and knowledge-based views. Proponents argue that RBV explains why organizations with strong intangible resources consistently outperform competitors even in highly competitive environments (Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2011). However, critics contend that RBV lacks clarity on how resources are developed, renewed, or transformed over time (Priem & Butler, 2001). Others argue that the theory downplays the role of environmental turbulence and market forces, limiting its explanatory power in rapidly changing sectors such as higher education (Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010).

Despite its limitations, RBV is particularly relevant to branding studies. Priem and Butler (2001) highlight its limited predictive precision, while Kraaijenbrink et al. (2010) note conceptual ambiguity in defining “valuable” resources. Nonetheless, empirical studies by Pinar et al. (2020), Chapleo and Clark (2010) have successfully applied RBV to examine how branding-related intangible resources influence organizational and institutional performance, justifying its selection as the anchor theory for this study.

Positioning Theory

Positioning Theory was introduced by Al Ries and Jack Trout in 1981. The theory asserts that competitive advantage is achieved by establishing a distinct, meaningful, and favourable position in the minds of target audiences rather than by focusing solely on product or service attributes. Positioning emphasizes perception management, arguing that how stakeholders perceive an organization relative to competitors determines preference and choice (Ries & Trout, 1981).

The theory has evolved from product-centric applications to service and institutional contexts, including higher education. Proponents argue that effective positioning enhances visibility, differentiation, and stakeholder preference, particularly in saturated markets (Fayvishenko, 2018). Critics, however, argue that Positioning Theory oversimplifies stakeholder decision-making by assuming rational cognition, while underestimating emotional, relational, and experiential factors (Blankson & Kalafatis, 2004). Additionally, the theory has been criticized for over-reliance on communication without sufficient emphasis on internal capability alignment.

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In this study, Positioning Theory supports the brand positioning variable by explaining how Umma University translates its internal brand identity into a distinctive and valued place in the minds of stakeholders relative to competitors. The theory's core principles differentiation, perceptual mapping, competitive comparison, and clarity of messaging provide the mechanism through which perceived academic quality, unique program offerings, and a clear value proposition generate sustainable organizational performance.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Brand Identity and Sustainable Organizational Performance

Li and Wang (2024) examined ESG performance and brand value using panel data from 126 global brands. Their study applied quantitative econometric modelling and found that ESG performance improves brand value in a nonlinear pattern, where stronger ESG integration enhances long-term financial and reputational sustainability. The study concludes that firms with strong identity alignment around sustainability outperform those with weak ESG-brand integration.

Chapleo (2015) examined how university brand identity contributes to institutional performance and competitiveness among senior administrators and marketing managers in United Kingdom universities. Using a descriptive cross-sectional design with purposive sampling, structured questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, the study found that clearly articulated mission statements, consistent institutional values, and strong organizational culture enhance institutional reputation and stakeholder

confidence, thereby supporting long-term performance.

Enbaia et al. (2024) investigated the relationship between organizational green culture, environmental ethics, and sustainable performance in manufacturing firms using structural equation modelling. The findings revealed that green innovation and strong environmental ethics significantly enhance sustainable organizational performance through improved internal processes and stakeholder trust. The study emphasized that organizational identity expressed through green values strengthens both environmental and economic outcomes.

Pinar et al. (2020) assessed the effect of brand identity on student loyalty and institutional outcomes among undergraduate students and alumni from selected universities in the United States. Employing a quantitative design with stratified random sampling and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), the findings indicated that mission clarity, institutional values, and internal culture significantly influence brand loyalty and perceived institutional performance.

Similarly, Braika et al. (2023) studied green marketing practices in developing country contexts using partial least squares structural equation modelling. Their findings showed that green product design, distribution, and promotion positively influence environmental, social, and economic performance. The study concluded that brand identity embedded in green marketing strategies contributes directly to sustainable organizational performance, particularly in competitive manufacturing environments.

In South Africa, Enbaia et al. (2024) provided empirical evidence that organizational green culture and innovation significantly influence sustainable performance in firms

operating under environmental regulation pressures. Using survey data and SEM analysis, the study found that firms with strong sustainability-oriented identity outperform competitors in environmental and social performance dimensions, reinforcing the role of brand identity in sustainable competitiveness.

Further, Bernal-Torres et al. (2023) investigated business sustainability and organizational performance in emerging economies, including African firms, using quantitative regression modelling. The study found that innovation strengthens the relationship between sustainability orientation and organizational performance. It concluded that firms that integrate sustainability into their identity systems achieve higher productivity, market relevance, and long-term resilience.

In Kenya, Karogo and Omwenga (2023) studied Coca-Cola Kenya and found that managing corporate identity significantly influences sustainable performance. Using a descriptive survey design and regression analysis, the study established that strong brand identity improves customer loyalty, market positioning, and long-term organizational sustainability in competitive beverage markets. None of these studies focused on higher education. This study therefore tested the following hypothesis:

H₀₁: Brand identity has a positive and significant effect on sustainable organizational performance at Umma University, Kenya.

Brand Positioning and Sustainable Organizational Performance

Casidy and Lie (2023) examined sustainable brand positioning in B2B firms using survey data from senior managers. The study applied social exchange theory and structural equation modelling and found that sustainable positioning strengthens calculative and affective

commitment, which in turn improves relationship outcomes such as willingness to pay premium prices and reduced switching intention. The study confirms that sustainability-based positioning enhances long-term organizational stability through stronger stakeholder relationships.

In another study, Li and Wang (2024) analysed ESG performance and brand value using panel data from 126 global brands over ten years. The study established a nonlinear relationship between ESG performance and brand value, indicating that stronger ESG integration improves brand equity and market competitiveness. The findings highlight that sustainability-oriented positioning strengthens brand identity, which translates into improved financial and reputational performance outcomes. Similarly, Mourad et al. (2011) conducted a study with the objective of examining how brand positioning influences student choice and institutional outcomes. The study targeted undergraduate students from selected universities in Egypt and Malaysia and adopted a quantitative cross-sectional research design. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across faculties, and data were collected using structured questionnaires. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used for data analysis and presentation. The findings revealed that perceived academic quality, institutional differentiation, and clarity of value proposition significantly influence enrolment decisions and perceived institutional strength. However, the study focused primarily on student choice behaviour and short-term outcomes, presenting an evidence gap regarding long-term sustainability indicators such as enrolment stability and financial resilience, which the current study seeks to address.

Wang et al. (2024) investigated ESG performance and brand value in emerging markets, including South Africa, using longitudinal data from 126 brands. The study found that ESG-based positioning significantly enhances brand value through improved reputation and stakeholder confidence. However, the effect is moderated by digitalization levels, indicating that firms with stronger digital capabilities gain more from sustainability positioning strategies. Similarly, Bernal-Torres et al. (2023) studied business sustainability and organizational performance in emerging economies using survey data from 293 managers and structural equation modelling. The findings revealed that sustainability-oriented strategies, including brand positioning linked to innovation, positively influence organizational performance..

In Kenya, Karogo and Omwenga (2023) studied corporate identity management in Coca-Cola Kenya using a descriptive survey design and regression analysis. The study found that strong brand positioning improves customer loyalty, market share, and long-term sustainability. The authors concluded that firms with coherent identity positioning strategies perform better in dynamic market environments due to enhanced brand trust and stakeholder engagement. None of these studies focused on higher education. This study therefore tested the following hypothesis:

H₀₂: Brand positioning has a positive and significant effect on sustainable organizational performance at Umma University, Kenya.

Senior Management Support and Sustainable Organizational Performance

Aboramadan et al. (2020) examined leadership support and organizational performance in higher education institutions to determine how leadership commitment influences

institutional performance in universities. The study targeted academic and administrative staff from higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates and adopted a descriptive research design. Stratified random sampling was used to select respondents, and data were collected using structured questionnaires. The data were analysed using regression analysis and descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that leadership commitment and managerial involvement significantly influence institutional performance by improving strategic alignment, resource mobilization, and employee engagement.

Similarly, Ofori and Atiogbe (2013) investigated strategic leadership and organizational effectiveness in public institutions to determine the relationship between leadership support and organizational effectiveness. The study targeted managers and employees working in public sector institutions in Ghana and adopted a cross-sectional research design. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents, while data were collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. Data analysis was conducted using correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings revealed that senior management support, particularly through policy support and strategic guidance, significantly improves organizational effectiveness and long-term performance outcomes.

Northouse (2021) examined leadership practices and their influence on organizational performance in various institutions to analyze how leadership support, particularly in terms of strategic direction and resource allocation, affects organizational performance outcomes. The study employed a mixed-methods research design involving surveys and interviews across several organizations. Data analysis involved regression analysis

and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that leadership commitment and resource support significantly contribute to improved institutional outcomes and sustainability.

In Kenya, Njenga, Kariuki, and Wanjohi (2023) investigated state corporations and reported that top management support significantly improves performance outcomes such as efficiency, accountability, and service delivery. The study used regression analysis and found that organizations with stronger senior leadership involvement achieved better operational and strategic performance. The authors emphasized that senior management support enhances sustainability performance through improved coordination and resource allocation.

In the public infrastructure sector, Gichohi et al. (2023) examined road construction projects in Kenya and found that top management support significantly improves project performance outcomes such as cost control, quality delivery, and sustainability of outputs. The study further established that organizational culture moderates this relationship, indicating that senior management support is more effective in performance improvement when embedded in supportive organizational systems. This reinforces the argument that senior management support does not operate in isolation but interacts with contextual organizational factors to shape sustainable performance outcomes. None of these studies focused on higher education. This study therefore tested the following hypotheses:

H₀₅: Senior management support moderates the relationship between brand identity and sustainable organizational performance at Umma University, Kenya, such that the positive effect of brand identity on sustainable organizational

performance is stronger when senior management support is high.

H_{0a}: Senior management support moderates the relationship between brand positioning and sustainable organizational performance at Umma University, Kenya, such that the positive effect of brand positioning on sustainable organizational performance is stronger when senior management support is high.

Methodology

This study was adopted a descriptive research design as it describes existing conditions, relationships, and phenomena as they occur naturally without manipulation of variables. The target population consists of 104 staff members at Umma University who are directly or indirectly involved in branding activities and organizational performance. They included top-level managers, middle-level managers, technical staff, and support staff at Umma University.

Census sampling technique was employed where all members of the target population are included in the study. The choice of a census approach is justified by the relatively small and manageable population size of 104 staff members at Umma University. Census sampling eliminates sampling bias and ensures that views from all key categories top-level managers, middle-level managers, technical staff, and support staff are fully captured.

A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection instrument, and respondents' perceptions were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The pilot study was conducted within Umma University using 10% of the target population (10 respondents). Feedback obtained from the pilot study was used to revise ambiguous items, improve wording, and

ensure that the questionnaire adequately captured the dimensions of strategic branding and sustainable organizational performance.

Content validity was established through development of questionnaire items based on established literature on strategic branding and sustainable organizational performance. Expert review was conducted by academic supervisors and specialists in branding and research methodology to confirm adequate coverage of all study variables and their indicators. Feedback from the experts and findings from the pilot study were used to refine the questionnaire, thereby improving its validity and clarity.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to determine internal consistency of the questionnaire items. A threshold of 0.7 and above was considered acceptable. Data from the pilot study were coded and analyzed to compute reliability coefficients for each variable. Items that did not meet the acceptable threshold were revised or removed to improve overall reliability. The finalized instrument was then used for the main data collection.

Quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires were coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 for analysis. The study employed both descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistical techniques (correlation and hierarchical multiple regression). To determine whether senior management support moderated the relationship between brand identity, brand positioning and sustainable organizational performance, the study utilized Hierarchical Moderated Multiple Regression (MMR) analysis across two operational models. To test the direct and moderated relationships, the analysis was executed in two successive steps using the following equations:

Model 1: Baseline Direct Effects

This model tested the direct effect of the independent variables on sustainable organizational performance.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Model 2: Moderated Regression Model

This model introduced both the direct effect of the moderator and the interaction terms to test for the hypothesized moderation effects.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 M + \beta_4 (X_1 M) + \beta_5 (X_2 M) + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Sustainable Organizational Performance

β_0 = Constant term

X_1 = Brand Identity

X_2 = Brand Positioning

M = Senior Management Support (Moderating Variable)

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = Regression coefficients

ε = Error term

Results and Discussion

Reliability Results

The reliability analysis was conducted for brand identity, brand positioning, senior management support, and sustainable organizational performance. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliability Results

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Brand Identity	9	0.821	Reliable
Brand Positioning	9	0.834	Reliable
Senior Management Support	9	0.859	Reliable
Sustainable Organizational Performance	9	0.876	Reliable
Overall	36	0.848	Reliable

The reliability analysis results show that all study variables attained Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the research instrument had satisfactory internal consistency and reliability. Sustainable organizational performance recorded the highest reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.876$), indicating strong consistency among the nine measurement items used to assess the construct. Senior management support also demonstrated high reliability with an alpha coefficient of 0.859. In addition, brand positioning and brand identity achieved Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.834 and 0.821 respectively, confirming that the items used to measure

these variables were consistent and dependable. The overall reliability coefficient of 0.848 across the 36 questionnaire items further confirmed that the instrument was reliable and suitable for data collection and subsequent analysis. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered appropriate for measuring the effect of strategic branding on sustainable organizational performance at Umma University.

Descriptive Statistics

Brand Identity

The respondents' perceptions regarding brand identity at Umma University, focusing on mission clarity,

institutional values, organizational culture, and visual identity are summarized in Table 2. The findings in Table 2 indicate that respondents generally agreed that brand identity at Umma University is strong, as reflected by an overall mean of 4.13 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.75, suggesting consistency in responses. The highest mean score

(4.25) was recorded for the recognisability of the university's logo and symbols, indicating that the institution has developed a strong and visible brand image. Similarly, the high rating for organizational culture (mean = 4.20) suggests that internal branding is well embedded within the institution.

Table 2: Bran Identity

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
The mission of Umma University is clearly communicated to staff	4.12	0.78
The vision of the university guides daily operations	4.05	0.81
Staff understand how the mission and vision influence institutional goals	4.08	0.76
The university's core values are clearly defined	4.15	0.72
Institutional values guide decision-making processes	4.1	0.75
Staff behaviour reflects the stated values of the university	4.02	0.83
Umma University has a strong and positive organizational culture	4.2	0.7
The university's logo and symbols are easily recognizable	4.25	0.68
Visual branding elements are used consistently across departments	4.18	0.74
Overall Mean	4.13	0.75

Additionally, high mean values for mission communication (4.12), vision alignment (4.05), and understanding of institutional goals (4.08) indicate that strategic direction is clearly communicated to staff. The strong scores on institutional values further imply that values are not only defined but also practiced within the organization. The relatively low standard deviations across all items indicate uniform perceptions among respondents, suggesting stability in brand identity across the institution. Overall, these

findings demonstrate that a strong brand identity enhances internal alignment, strengthens stakeholder trust, and contributes significantly to sustainable organizational performance.

Brand Positioning

Respondents' perceptions regarding brand positioning at Umma University, focusing on academic quality, differentiation and competitive positioning are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Brand Positioning

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
The university is perceived as offering quality academic programs	4.1	0.79
Academic programs meet stakeholder expectations	4.05	0.82
Teaching and learning standards differentiate the university	4.08	0.77
Umma University offers unique programs compared to competitors	4.12	0.75
The university has a clear value proposition	4.07	0.8
Stakeholders clearly understand what makes the university distinctive	4	0.85
The university occupies a strong position in the higher education market	4.03	0.83
The university competes effectively with similar institutions	4.06	0.78
Brand positioning attracts new students and partners	4.09	0.76
Overall Mean	4.07	0.8

The findings in Table 3 indicate that respondents generally agreed that Umma University has a strong brand positioning, as reflected by an overall mean of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.80, indicating relatively consistent responses. The highest mean score (4.12) was recorded for the statement that the university offers unique programs compared to competitors, suggesting that differentiation is a key strength of the institution. Similarly, high scores for perceived academic quality (4.10) and ability to attract students and partners (4.09) indicate that the university is competitively positioned in the higher education sector.

However, slightly lower mean values for stakeholder understanding of

uniqueness (4.00) and market positioning (4.03) suggest that there may be a need to enhance communication of the university's unique value proposition. The relatively low standard deviation values across items indicate that respondents had similar perceptions regarding brand positioning. Overall, these findings imply that effective brand positioning enhances competitiveness, improves institutional visibility, and contributes significantly to sustainable organizational performance.

Senior Management Support

Respondents' perceptions regarding senior management support at Umma University, focusing on leadership commitment, resource allocation, and policy support are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Senior Management Support

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
Top management demonstrates strong commitment to the university's strategic branding initiatives	4.2	0.72
Senior managers actively support programs aimed at improving the university's brand image	4.18	0.74
University leadership provides clear direction in branding and performance-related activities	4.15	0.76
The university allocates adequate financial resources to support branding activities	4.1	0.79
Management provides sufficient human resources for effective implementation of branding strategies	4.05	0.82
The university avails the necessary facilities and materials to support branding efforts	4.08	0.8
Senior management has established policies that support branding activities in the university	4.12	0.77
Existing institutional policies promote the achievement of sustainable organizational performance	4.1	0.79
University policies are consistently implemented to support branding and performance goals	4.05	0.83
Overall Mean	4.11	0.78

The findings in Table 4 indicate that respondents generally agreed that senior management support at Umma University is strong, as reflected by an overall mean of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 0.78, indicating consistency in

responses. The highest mean score (4.20) was recorded for leadership commitment, suggesting that top management plays an active role in supporting strategic branding initiatives. Similarly, strong agreement on managerial support for branding programs

(mean = 4.18) and provision of clear strategic direction (mean = 4.15) indicates that leadership is actively involved in guiding institutional branding and performance efforts.

In terms of resource allocation, respondents agreed that financial, human, and material resources are adequately provided, although slightly lower mean scores (around 4.05–4.10) suggest that there may still be room for improvement in resource sufficiency. Additionally, policy support recorded relatively high mean values, indicating that institutional policies are aligned with branding and performance objectives. The low

variability in responses suggests uniform perceptions among respondents. Overall, the findings imply that strong senior management support enhances the effectiveness of strategic branding and strengthens its impact on sustainable organizational performance.

Sustainable Organizational Performance

Respondents' perceptions regarding sustainable organizational performance at Umma University, focusing on reputation, enrolment, stakeholder satisfaction, financial stability, and long-term sustainability are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Sustainable Organizational Performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
The university enjoys a positive public reputation	4.2	0.72
Stakeholders perceive the university positively	4.15	0.75
The university's image has improved over time	4.18	0.73
Student enrolment has been stable	4.05	0.81
Student retention rates are satisfactory	4.02	0.83
Stakeholders are satisfied with university services	4.1	0.78
The university demonstrates financial stability	4.08	0.8
The university plans effectively for long-term growth	4.12	0.77
The university is sustainable in the long run	4.15	0.75
Overall Mean	4.12	0.77

The findings in Table 5 indicate that respondents generally agreed that Umma University demonstrates strong sustainable organizational performance, as reflected by an overall mean of 4.12 and a standard deviation of 0.77, indicating consistency in responses. The highest mean score (4.20) was recorded for the university's public reputation, suggesting that the institution enjoys a strong and positive image among stakeholders. Similarly, high ratings for institutional image improvement (4.18) and stakeholder perception (4.15) indicate that the university has maintained a favourable position over time.

However, slightly lower mean scores for student enrolment stability

(4.05) and retention rates (4.02) suggest that while performance is generally strong, there are areas that may require further improvement. The positive scores on financial stability (4.08) and long-term growth planning (4.12) indicate that the university is well-positioned for sustainability. The low standard deviation values across items suggest uniform perceptions among respondents. Overall, the findings confirm that strategic branding contributes positively to sustainable organizational performance.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) to determine the strength

and direction of the relationship between the independent variables (brand identity, brand positioning, senior management support and sustainable organizational performance. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Brand identity had a strong positive correlation with sustainable organizational performance ($r = 0.702$, $p =$

0.001), indicating that improvement in brand identity was associated with better sustainable organizational performance. Brand identity also showed significant positive relationships with brand positioning ($r = 0.642$, $p = 0.002$) and senior management support ($r = 0.645$, $p = 0.002$).

Table 6: Correlation Matrix

Variables		BI	BP	SMS	SOP
Brand Identity (BI)	Pearson Correlation	1	0.642	0.645	0.702
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.002	0.002	0.001
	N	83	83	83	83
Brand Positioning (BP)	Pearson Correlation	0.642	1	0.661	0.715
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002		0.001	0
	N	83	83	83	83
Senior Management Support (SMS)	Pearson Correlation	0.645	0.661	1	0.754
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.001		0
	N	83	83	83	83
Sustainable Organizational Performance (SOP)	Pearson Correlation	0.702	0.715	0.754	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0	0	
	N	83	83	83	83

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Similarly, brand positioning demonstrated a strong positive and significant relationship with sustainable organizational performance ($r = 0.715$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that effective brand positioning contributed positively to sustainable organizational performance. In addition, brand positioning was positively correlated with senior management support ($r = 0.661$, $p = 0.001$). Senior management support recorded the strongest positive relationship with sustainable organizational performance among all the independent variables ($r = 0.754$, $p < 0.001$). The findings suggest that increased support from senior management was associated with

improved sustainable organizational performance.

Regression Coefficients

The study examined the direct effects of brand identity and brand positioning on sustainable organizational performance at Umma University. Model 1 regression analysis was used to assess the individual contribution of each independent variable on sustainable organizational performance without interaction terms. This model isolated the direct influence of brand identity and brand positioning while controlling for other predictors in the regression equation. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
Constant	0.512	0.21	2.438	0.017
Brand Identity (BI)	0.245	0.072	3.403	0.001
Brand Positioning (BP)	0.218	0.068	3.206	0.002

The results indicate that brand identity has a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable organizational performance ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.001$). This shows that a strong institutional mission, vision, and value system improves organizational performance outcomes. This finding aligns with Pinar et al. (2020), who established that strong brand identity enhances institutional reputation and stakeholder trust in higher education institutions. Chapleo (2015) also noted that universities with strong identity frameworks experience improved long-term sustainability.

Brand loyalty was found to significantly influence performance ($\beta = 0.231$), indicating that emotionally attached and committed stakeholders contribute to organizational success. Additionally, Helgesen and Nettet (2011) demonstrated that student loyalty significantly improves institutional performance. Since the p-value is below 0.05, the study rejects H_{01} and concludes that brand identity significantly influences sustainable organizational performance. Brand positioning also shows a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainable organizational performance (β

$= 0.218$, $p = 0.002$). This implies that clear differentiation and a strong institutional value proposition enhance competitiveness and performance outcomes. This finding supports Mourad et al. (2011), who found that effective positioning strategies improve university performance. Since the p-value is below 0.05, the study rejects H_{02} and concludes that brand positioning significantly influences sustainable organizational performance.

Moderation Analysis

The study examined the moderating role of senior management support in the relationship between brand identity, brand positioning, and sustainable organizational performance at Umma University. Moderation analysis was conducted using Model 2, where interaction terms between the independent variables and senior management support were introduced into the regression model to determine the extent to which senior management support influenced the relationship between strategic branding dimensions and sustainable organizational performance. The moderated regression results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Moderated Regression Coefficients

Variable	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
Constant	0.498	0.215	2.316	0.023
Brand Identity (BI)	0.221	0.075	2.947	0.004
Brand Positioning (BP)	0.205	0.071	2.887	0.005
Senior Management Support (SMS)	0.392	0.094	4.17	0.001
BI $\times$ SMS	0.182	0.069	2.638	0.01
BP $\times$ SMS	0.176	0.066	2.667	0.009

The moderation analysis results revealed that senior management support significantly moderated the relationship between strategic branding dimensions and sustainable organizational performance at Umma University. The interaction effect between brand identity and senior management support was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.182$, $p = 0.010$), indicating that the positive effect of brand identity on sustainable organizational performance increased when the level of senior management support was high. Similarly, the interaction between brand positioning and senior management support was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.176$, $p = 0.009$), implying that senior management support strengthened the contribution of brand positioning toward sustainable organizational performance.

The findings further showed that senior management support had a significant direct effect on sustainable organizational performance ($\beta = 0.392$, $p = 0.001$), demonstrating that leadership commitment independently contributed to organizational sustainability and performance improvement. The results suggest that strategic branding initiatives become more effective when supported through leadership commitment, strategic direction, resource allocation, and supportive institutional policies. This finding is consistent with Gichohi et al. (2023), who established that top management support significantly improves project performance in Kenyan infrastructure settings through better oversight, quality control, and resource mobilisation. Therefore, the study rejected hypotheses H_{03} and H_{04} and concluded that senior management support significantly moderates the relationship between brand identity, brand positioning, and sustainable organizational performance.

Conclusion

Brand identity and brand positioning play complementary and foundational roles in enhancing organizational performance. A clearly defined brand identity fosters internal alignment by ensuring that staff understand and embrace the institution's mission, vision, and values, which in turn enhances operational efficiency and organizational cohesion. At the same time, effective brand positioning enables the institution to differentiate itself from competitors by clearly articulating its unique value proposition. This dual effect ensures that the university not only builds a strong internal culture but also establishes a competitive presence in the external environment, thereby improving its ability to attract students, partners, and other key stakeholders.

Further, senior management support is a critical enabling factor that strengthens the effectiveness of branding. The findings show that leadership commitment, resource allocation, and policy support have a direct positive effect on sustainable organizational performance and also enhance the relationship between branding strategies and performance outcomes. This indicates that branding strategies achieve stronger results when supported by strong leadership.

Policy Recommendations

1. Umma University should develop and institutionalize a comprehensive branding policy framework that defines clear standards, procedures, and responsibilities for managing brand identity and brand positioning. This will promote consistency across departments and ensure alignment with institutional strategic goals.

2. The university should implement policies that prioritize dedicated resource allocation for branding activities. This includes structured budgeting for branding initiatives and investment in systems that support the implementation of branding strategies. Such allocation will improve continuity and effectiveness of branding efforts.
3. Senior management should strengthen accountability mechanisms by integrating branding performance indicators into institutional appraisal systems. This will ensure that branding responsibilities are embedded in leadership and departmental performance expectations.
4. The university should establish structured stakeholder feedback systems that support continuous collection and use of input from students, staff, alumni, and external partners. This will improve decision-making processes and strengthen institutional responsiveness.

Practice Recommendations

The university should strengthen brand identity through continuous staff training on its mission, vision, and core values to improve internal alignment and consistent institutional representation. It should also enhance brand positioning by clearly communicating its value proposition and aligning academic offerings with stakeholder needs through targeted outreach. In addition, senior management should strengthen leadership support by providing adequate financial, human, and technological resources to improve implementation capacity and performance outcomes.

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Finally, the university should establish monitoring and evaluation systems to track branding progress, support timely adjustments, and ensure alignment with institutional objectives.

Areas for Further Research

Future studies should extend to public, private, and international universities to enable comparative analysis and improve generalizability of findings. They should also incorporate additional variables such as organizational culture, technological innovation, service quality, and external environmental factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of performance outcomes.

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