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UNIVERSITY BRAND MANAGEMENT IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS: THE ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE VALORIZATION CENTRES

University brand management in digital environments is increasingly understood as a governance process shaped by knowledge flows, digital traceability, and distributed stakeholder participation. Under these conditions, the university brand no longer functions as a communicative layer added to institutional activity but emerges as an infrastructural outcome of how value is created, documented, and made visible. The establishment of Knowledge Valorization Centres (KVCs) within the Impact Campus initiative provides an illustrative case, as the project architecture explicitly links valorization, ecosystem engagement, and dissemination through coordinated work packages (WP2 and WP5).

This approach aligns with contemporary branding theory that conceptualizes brand value as co-produced through interaction rather than transmitted through one-directional messaging (Ind et al., 2017). Accordingly, KVCs can be interpreted as institutional mechanisms that convert distributed engagement into stabilized reputational signals. Recent research on digital university branding supports this shift, emphasizing that brand management increasingly relies on data-driven visibility, platform logic, and evidence-based value delivery rather than symbolic representation (Cherniavska, 2023; Cherniavska, 2024).

Digital brand identity is therefore not merely expressed online but governed through the interaction of digital infrastructures, organizational routines, and stakeholder agency. Studies in higher education branding demonstrate that institutional reputation depends on the coherence between declared values and observable practices (Melewar & Akel, 2006; Pinar et al., 2020). Digital environments intensify this dependency by exposing inconsistencies and rewarding traceable performance, transforming brand management into a core governance function. In this context, Cherniavska's

(2024) adaptation of the PCDL model (Positioning–Communication–Delivery of Value–Leveraging Value) reframes brand value as an operational construct shaped by digital metrics and platform analytics rather than as an image variable. Her comparative analysis further shows that effective digital brand management depends on aligning digital transformation with entrepreneurial orientation and stakeholder participation (Cherniavska, 2025a).

KVCs function as digital branding infrastructure by translating knowledge production into publicly legible value propositions. Rather than broadcasting identity, they stabilize the conditions under which identity becomes observable and comparable. Through stakeholder mapping, co-creation workshops, sensemaking sessions, and the codification of outcomes in digital platforms, KVCs generate repeatable traces of participation and value creation. These traces redefine brand signals as documented engagement, validated outputs, and sustained collaboration patterns. Cherniavska's value-driven analysis of the VEHUB4YOU initiative conceptualizes such arrangements as semantic infrastructures, where institutional values are embedded into digital artefacts and ecosystem design rather than articulated through promotional discourse (Cherniavska, 2023).

At the level of branding dynamics, KVC networks facilitate a shift from broadcast identity to co-generated identity. Branding scholarship highlights that brands are increasingly shaped through interactional arenas where multiple actors participate in meaning production (Ind et al., 2017). In the university context, KVCs institutionalize such arenas through recurring activities—innovation workshops, mentorship programmes, and collaborative projects—that leave persistent digital residues. These residues accumulate into an institutional narrative grounded in participation and performance rather than declarative messaging. In line with the concept of evidence-based identity (Cherniavska, 2024), KVCs systematically generate brand-relevant evidence through startup development trajectories, co-created learning outputs, regional innovation initiatives, and verifiable digital artefacts. Empirical research confirms that visible institutional practices significantly influence university brand positioning and trust (Castro-Gómez et al., 2024).

From a governance perspective, KVCs contribute to a transition from centralized public relations toward distributed brand governance. Brand

authorship is shared among students, academic staff, innovation units, and external partners, while managerial attention shifts toward ensuring coherence, accountability, and strategic alignment. This model corresponds with stakeholder-based approaches to valorization, which define university identity through contributions to regional innovation systems and societal engagement (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010). Cherniavska's comparative analysis (2025a) further indicates that such distributed governance requires managerial frameworks capable of rendering participation strategically legible, particularly in international and EU-funded project environments.

In conclusion, Knowledge Valorization Centres reorient university brand management in digital environments from message-centred marketing to evidence-centred governance. By embedding valorization practices into infrastructures that generate traceable outputs, KVCs transform the university brand into an outcome of knowledge transformation, stakeholder engagement, and digitally mediated value delivery. This conclusion is supported by Cherniavska's four brand-focused contributions (2023; 2024; 2025a; 2025b) and by established research on university–industry engagement and practice-based brand positioning (Perkmann et al., 2013; Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010). In digital environments, university brand management is thus best understood as the governance of infrastructures that make institutional value observable, comparable, and credible.

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