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Institutional identity in Mexican state public universities: an analysis from its projection using web pages

Identidad institucional en universidades públicas estatales de México: un análisis desde su proyección usando páginas web

Identidade institucional em universidades públicas estaduais mexicanas: uma análise a partir de sua projeção por meio de páginas da web

Abstract

Introduction: institutional identity in universities can elicit a range of affective responses among stakeholders, including feelings of belonging, appreciation, and pride. Through electronic media, institutional identity also functions as a channel for disseminating and enhancing recognition of an institution's prestige. **Objective:** to characterize the elements that constitute university identity, using the construction of a purpose-built evaluation model as the analytical basis. **Method:** the study was grounded in the qualitative paradigm and employed content analysis carried out in two phases: (1) documentary research to identify recurrent traits of institutional university identity; and (2) a review of the websites of the 34 Mexican state public universities. **Results:** according to the initially proposed model, the constitution of university identity comprises elements that are unevenly distributed across the institutions evaluated; consequently, there is no consistent structure that characterizes educational processes. **Conclusion:** a marked absence of uniformity and standardization in the promotion of university identity was observed among the participating institutions. The study therefore proposes the establishment of public policies that define the basic elements to be included in the website structure of higher education institutions, particularly public universities.

Keywords: university identity, institutional culture, public universities, Mexico

Resumen

Introducción: la identidad institucional en universidades puede generar diversos aprecios entre las personas involucradas, las cuales van desde sentimientos de pertenencia, aprecio y orgullo; además, con el uso de los medios electrónicos, se convierte en un medio que propicia la difusión y el reconocimiento de su prestigio.

Objetivo: caracterizar los elementos que constituyen la identidad universitaria, tomando como base la construcción de un modelo de evaluación ex profeso. **Método:** se sustentó en el paradigma cualitativo tomando como referencia el análisis de contenido, llevado a cabo en dos fases: (1) usando la investigación documental para identificar rasgos recurrentes de identidad institucional universitaria; y (2) revisión de páginas web de las 34 universidades públicas estatales mexicanas. **Resultados:** de acuerdo al modelo inicial propuesto, la constitución de la identidad universitaria se compone de elementos dispersos en las distintas instituciones evaluadas, por lo que no se sigue una estructura constante que caracterice los procesos educativos. **Conclusión:** se observa una marcada ausencia de uniformidad y estandarización en la promoción de la identidad universitaria entre las instituciones participantes. Así, se propone el establecimiento de política públicas que definan los elementos básicos que debe comprender la estructura de las páginas web de entidades educativas de nivel superior, especialmente las de carácter público.

Palabras clave: identidad universitaria, cultura institucional, universidades públicas, México

Resumo

Introdução: a identidade institucional nas universidades pode gerar diferentes apreciações entre os atores envolvidos, que vão desde sentimentos de pertencimento, apreço e orgulho. Com o uso dos meios eletrônicos, a identidade institucional também se torna um meio para a divulgação e o reconhecimento do prestígio institucional. **Objetivo:** caracterizar os elementos que constituem a identidade universitária, tomando como base a construção de um modelo de avaliação ex profeso. **Método:** o estudo apoiou-se no paradigma qualitativo e utilizou a análise de conteúdo realizada em duas fases: (1) pesquisa documental para identificar traços recorrentes da identidade institucional universitária; e (2) revisão das páginas web das 34 universidades públicas estaduais mexicanas. **Resultados:** de acordo com o modelo inicial proposto, a constituição da identidade universitária é composta por elementos dispersos nas diferentes instituições avaliadas; por isso, não se observa uma estrutura constante que caracterize os processos educativos. **Conclusão:** observa-se uma marcada ausência de uniformidade e padronização na promoção da identidade universitária entre as instituições participantes. Propõe-se, assim, o estabelecimento de políticas públicas que definam os elementos básicos que devem compor a estrutura das páginas web das instituições de ensino superior, especialmente as de caráter público.

Palavras-chave: identidade universitária, cultura institucional, universidades públicas, México

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Introduction

Studies on institutional identity are often associated with commercial or industrial organizations that utilize such strategies to achieve positioning within various social spheres, typically seeking commercial recognition for their products and services. This perspective has become limited, particularly in contemporary times, given the pervasive presence of social media. The application of promotional and institutional recognition processes is increasingly relevant to educational sectors, including public higher education institutions.

Defining the term 'identity' is complex, as it encompasses multiple facets that may be viewed through different scientific disciplines such as psychology, sociology, or interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate elements from both fields. This application is relevant in any institutional context. Higher education institutions serve as an ideal setting for constructing identities, whether individual, collective, or even social (Covarrubias, 2024; Shukla & Srivastava, 2025). Notably, universities often facilitate the symbolic construction of identities associated with ideological profiles, interpersonal relationships, and group connections, which solidify in relation to a specific space and achieve enduring recognition (Carvalho & Freeman, 2022).

The specificity of the concept of institutional identity pertains either to the individuals or the groups represented by institutions distinguished by their type, size, or functional activity. This implies that each organization is unique (Knorr & Hein-Pensel, 2022). The identity of organizations can manifest in various forms, both individually and collectively, particularly through perceptions, feelings, and thoughts that, while intangible, delineate entities through other tangible expressions such as symbols, objectives, goals, and the articulation of values and purposes (Knorr & Hein-Pensel, 2022; Bracho-Fuenmayor et al., 2023; Petrovska & Partyko, 2024). When a consolidated identity is achieved, it is regarded as a strength for the institution, especially when reflected in the actions of its members within that particular community.

It is undeniable that the projection of university identity can become an educational ethos through which institutions attain significance and secure a basis for enduring recognition and distinction among others (Dorado Martínez et al., 2024). Moreover, institutions strengthen not only through their permanence but also by distinguishing themselves from similar entities, especially as they strive to implement best practices that project elements ensuring academic success (Steiner et al., 2012).

It is important to note that the construction of a robust university identity does not always occur with similar objectives across educational entities. Some initiatives may focus on producing concrete outcomes related to specific interests, such as: (1) financial issues, sometimes regarded as part of a profitable cultural industry, which can also be viewed as an academic or scientific industry; (2) the development of a heritage through public policies and institutional strategies that conserve, restore, or utilize cultural assets for economic benefit; and (3) human relationships as a means of integrating power groups under conditions of social cohesion that, in turn, influence historical memory and the self-esteem of their members (Gusman & Sandry, 2022). While each focus or interest of individuals and

organizations holds significance, two important considerations emerge: first, over time, each focus or interest can be conceptualized and prioritized differently; and second, it is anticipated that universities would adopt a more human-centered perspective (Carayannis & Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022; Mielkov & Pinchuk, 2024).

Critically examining previous perspectives, it is inappropriate to view the construction of an institutional image solely for material purposes, as universities are fundamentally considered cultural institutions. Their primary aim is to cultivate attitudes, encourage the analysis of beliefs, and promote the generation of values rooted in sentiment towards the organization. This construct is also embedded in how the institution defines itself and behaves within a specific context, encompassing its institutional values, organizational rules and laws, along with its traditions, culture, and history (Mutch, 2018; Díaz-Romero et al., 2025; Kola & Molise, 2025).

To study the subject of university identity, we begin with the assumption that most universities value different elements that they believe best promote enhanced conditions of institutional identity. In line with this reasoning, the current proposal aims to characterize university identity based on an analysis of the elements presented on the websites of public higher education institutions in Mexico. These institutions display a widespread and equitable presence across the national territory, suggesting that they exert a direct and profound influence on mass higher education.

The research objective focuses on the potential to characterize the elements constituting university identity in state public universities in Mexico, differentiating those traits that influence educational processes and institutional strengthening. This analysis will encompass the elements exhibited on the websites of the institutions themselves. Additionally, it includes the following specific aspects: (1) the development of a taxonomic model of dimensions and indicators related to university identity; (2) identification of recurring elements of university identity; (3) assessment of the identity elements in public state higher education institutions in Mexico; and (4) definition of factors that impact the formation of university identity, as well as their influence on aspects related to educational processes.

University identity as a means of institutional positioning

The elements that constitute university identity have a significant impact on individuals during two critical phases: as students and as graduates. These phases present a greater likelihood of fostering a sense of belonging to the institution, thereby enhancing its status. This is particularly important when considering that a sense of belonging manifests as an individual's identification with a group of people or specific physical spaces, leading to the formation of emotional bonds, symbolism, and positive attitudes that become part of their personal and collective memory (Pedler et al., 2021; Mellinger et al., 2023).

Recognizing graduates as key stakeholders in the integration of university identity processes is crucial, especially in relation to their labor market positioning. It is presumed that the positive actions graduates undertake will be linked to their prior education and will be reflected in behaviors, practices, and actions that

highlight the quality of the institution from which they graduated (Pedler et al., 2021; Githinji & Nyangoma, 2025). The human needs addressed in this context are closely related to psychological and security needs, as well as the pursuit of their possible fulfillment, where the needs for love, affection, and a sense of belonging emerge (Gimeno-Bayón, 2020).

Institutional identity must be both sustainable and continuous, encompassing students, teachers, administrators, and staff. Therefore, there must be a commitment from the institution itself to motivate and maintain this connection, developing innovative strategies for its enhancement (Borja-Gil et al., 2024). University identity is an essential resource for driving placement actions, marketing efforts, and competitiveness within higher education institutions (Yaping et al., 2023; Dwitasari et al., 2025).

It is posited that studying university identity is valuable, as understanding the predominant identity factors in state public universities in Mexico allows for differentiation among those that hold greater significance for institutions, based on the importance attributed to them on institutional websites. This approach will provide pertinent information for developing strategies and activities aimed at strengthening university identity, which influences important issues such as dropout rates, appreciation for institutions and their infrastructure, sense of belonging, and the perception of this topic as significant in promoting institutional prestige.

Although this topic has been studied previously, the current research seeks to enrich existing studies. Through the development of a documentary investigation, it has become clear that there is considerable interest in building a university identity not only in state public higher education institutions but also in major universities (referred to as federal public universities), such as the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), and the National Pedagogical University (UPN), among others (Jiménez Moreno et al., 2020; Ortiz Barrera, 2023). However, no sources of information have been identified that specifically address the analysis of state public university websites regarding this topic.

An important finding in the context of documentary research on university identity is that it remains a relatively understudied area, particularly from a pedagogical or educational perspective. Nevertheless, it can also be inferred that the existence of such media supports educational innovation. For instance, in light of this proposal, Mexican universities may consider substantial changes to their current practices with a view toward continuous improvement, incorporating elements linked to transdisciplinary approaches, power analysis, and contributions to both social cohesion and division. Furthermore, the connections among individuals and groups based on behavioral patterns and discourse construction generate a certain identity, as distinctive traits emerge that foster social recognition and a sense of belonging, particularly prevalent in educational environments (Pach et al., 2025).

Access to information through content provided by educational institutions via their websites is a necessary, attractive, and functional source of consultation. The design of a website in all institutions has transformed into a digital marketing medium, where the information structure (tabs, links, and content) must fulfill its

objectives (Resmini, 2025). Websites have become the calling card of any institution, especially under current conditions where virtual engagement has reached unprecedented levels compared to previous years. The primary goal of website access is to reach the widest audience possible, regardless of academic background, skills, or capabilities, and it is not limited by individuals' levels of knowledge or technical skills (Barrientos Oradini, 2022). Thus, it serves as a strategy for disseminating educational offerings, content, and services, as well as enhancing institutional prestige.

Websites and their importance in promoting university identity

Technological advancements and the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into education have facilitated the incorporation of educational settings into a global arena that operates online. During this process, websites have emerged as the most effective means to showcase the potential of each educational institution. They serve as promotional tools for various centers, presenting their content, services, and notable areas to diverse audiences.

Websites are synonymous with digital pages, electronic pages, and, less commonly, cyber pages. They are defined as electronic information or representations of documents constituted by texts, sounds, videos, moving images, still images, and hyperlinks, all accessible through computers or similar devices using web browsers. The existence of these electronic windows is critically important for any organization or institution. Consequently, nearly all higher education institutions now have websites through which they connect with information users, addressing their specific needs (Mutimukee et al., 2025).

As institutional portals, websites should consistently offer relevant information that benefits both members of the academic community and external agents seeking insights about the institution (Campoverde-Molina et al., 2021). A school website is functional when it meets its objectives of introducing the institution—providing clarity on its educational mission at any level (Konopyanova et al., 2023)—while supplying useful and relevant data, offering publishing opportunities for students, providing familial information on organizational matters and educational projects, and keeping teachers informed. Furthermore, it must address various dimensions related to content (texts), document architecture, clear accessibility, aesthetics, differentiation from similar pages, swift identification and localization, as well as practicality for resolving everyday informational challenges (Gharibe Niazi et al., 2020).

Websites play a fundamental role in enhancing institutional image, which has gained significant importance for organizations today and serves as an identification tool that can confer competitive advantages. The current dynamics of the market compel every institution to consider its attributes and defining characteristics to strengthen its position against competitive pressures (Xu & Sit, 2024; Irshad, 2025).

This is where websites are recognized as marketing strategies, which should not be underestimated given the significance of technology and digital media today. For universities, they act as crucial vehicles for promoting institutional image, as

these media have become the most effective channels for disseminating information and are the most commonly used mechanisms for information retrieval by the general population, characterized by their attractive and accessible designs (Jasmine & Kissvar, 2025).

The image perceived by audiences may or may not correlate with the intended projection, hence it is essential to generate effective and coherent communication if specific institutional conditions are to be made known (Singun, 2025). Particularly in the current context, where universities not only require updated curricula and innovative teaching methods but also fundamentally need extensive institutional communication. Communication can no longer rely solely on traditional methods; it must leverage technological tools capable of reaching the target audience. The use of institutional portals allows for the incorporation of a wide array of possibilities and strategies to disseminate institutional prestige and identity.

One of the primary communication tools for universities is their websites, which serve as efficient vehicles for disseminating institutional components. They provide information on curricula, mission, vision, history, values, key figures, services, contact details, publications, as well as cultural and athletic aspects, representing the most significant features of the university community (Segura-Mariño et al., 2020; Campoverde-Molina et al., 2021; Konopyanova et al., 2023). They offer users the opportunity to engage with information at any time of day. The content can be easily tailored to meet the needs and interests of individuals, presenting information attractively to all site visitors.

University identity is an indispensable element for establishing a consolidated sense of belonging that enhances the development of higher education institutions in all areas related to their mission (Pedler et al., 2021). For a strengthened university identity to exist, it is essential to enhance academic, linguistic, symbolic, intangible, infrastructural aspects, as well as human relationships (Ahn & Davis, 2019). Nowadays, where technology has permeated all aspects of human activity, it is crucial for universities to leverage their electronic windows to display their distinctive features, setting them apart from others and thereby fostering robust institutional development (Konopyanova et al., 2023; Yaping et al., 2023; Gharibe Niazi et al., 2020; Xu & Sit, 2024; Irshad, 2025).

Methods and materials

Regarding the characteristics of the research, it was classified as basic research, as the aim was not to generate a specific action proposal but rather to diagnose a topic that has been largely overlooked in educational and scientific perspectives, serving primarily as a means to facilitate decision-making. Additionally, given its characteristics, the study was developed within a qualitative paradigm, which allowed for the identification of perspectives focused on describing phenomenological elements for the subsequent interpretation of the university identity aspects expressed by universities through their websites.

In terms of methodology, the research employed a non-experimental design

that was both exploratory and descriptive, meaning that data collection occurred at a single point in time. The primary characterization involved thematic analysis, enabling the identification and organization of major themes corresponding to institutional identity as the central meaning within the narratives, followed by the coding and grouping of data into themes and subthemes.

Although the population of interest for this research was state public universities, it is important to emphasize that the public higher education system in Mexico is exceptionally complex, comprising various groups and types of institutions, including federal public universities, technological institutes, teacher training colleges (normal schools), technological universities, polytechnic universities, intercultural universities, and public research centers, among others. This complexity leads to a considerable diversity of less prominent educational categories (Secretaría de Educación Pública [SEP], 2025).

From this context, the research sample considered state public universities in Mexico as the working domain, with the websites of each participating institution serving as the primary data source. The sampling method employed was non-probabilistic and convenience-based, reflecting the operational capacity for data collection from the selected units of analysis, the number of cases being studied, and the accessibility of information. The samples were classified as homogeneous since these units share similar characteristics.

Websites were specifically chosen because these electronic windows are instrumental for higher education institutions, primarily to promote their university identity. This choice is justified by the essential role these sites play in disseminating information and managing processes. The study focused on the 34 state public universities, which are distributed across all Mexican states, allowing for a broader analysis of the subject from a regional perspective, especially given that these institutions are recognized in most states as the premier centers of higher learning.

The process of data collection from the identified scientific literature enabled the analysis, synthesis, and clarification of existing information and the construction of a framework connecting various dimensions, leading to the development of a conceptual matrix on university identity. The integration of dimensions based on characteristic concordance allowed grouping into six overarching categories:

a) Academic dimension: this dimension is regarded as the most intellectually enriching aspect of higher education institutions, encompassing educational, pedagogical, and scientific research elements (Pino-Vera et al., 2019; Jiménez Moreno, 2020). The outcomes of this dimension are manifested through academic achievements, successful experiences among students and alumni, among various elements linked to educational processes (Githinji & Nyangoma, 2025).

b) Linguistic dimension: the use of language in promoting university identity is crucial, as it conveys feelings, ideas, and emotions through both oral and written communication (including formal alphabetic and sign language). Moreover, employing a distinctive language fosters group identity, encourages unity, and highlights unique characteristics (Woltran & Schwab, 2025). The principal attributes

of the linguistic dimension include: (1) its role as the most representative symbolic element in human communication; (2) its various modes of expression, including articulated or formal language, gestures, artistic representations, and expressions through diverse cultural codes among participant groups, allowing individuals to recognize and identify with how others convey their knowledge, skills, and experiences (Tenzer et al., 2021; Woltran & Schwab, 2025).

c) Human relations dimension: while language is the most viable medium for establishing human connections, this dimension requires consideration from a different perspective, focusing on human capital conditions, including potentialities, innovation capabilities, and idea expression forms, all aimed at constructing and subsequently strengthening university identity (Valtonen et al., 2023; Wolniak, 2023). Another form of capital involved in this dimension is relational capital, which encompasses interactions within and beyond educational institutions, integrating groups identified by specific characteristics—be they formative, academic, intellectual, or research-oriented—thus facilitating the generation of epistemic communities, working groups, academic bodies, or collegiate groups. The levels of interaction vary in characteristics and intensity, ultimately fostering a sense of belonging.

d) Infrastructure dimension: while this dimension may appear to consist only of tangible elements, university infrastructure is pivotal in defining identity and represents, beyond physical elements, the construction of organizational or structural capital. This involves not just artifacts but a strong connection to organizational knowledge utilized internally and projected externally through processes and organizational culture. For instance, the scientific knowledge generated by higher education institutions significantly enhances social recognition, positioning entities favorably due to their role in producing not isolated acts but rather systematic new scientific knowledge, which formulates one of the prestigious elements associated with knowledge entities (Larregue & Pavie, 2025).

e) Symbolic dimension: universities typically possess distinctive symbols, including at least a logo, distinctive colors, a motto, or a mascot, which help differentiate them from others. There are two types of symbols: (1) diachronic symbols, associated with institutional history and developed over time, including frequently found elements such as coats of arms, flags, and anthems; and (2) synchronic symbols, tied to specific eras, which include notable individuals connected with the institution, such as teachers, artists, intellectuals, and recognized cultural figures, especially those who contributed to knowledge during their time at the university (Deng & Feng, 2022).

f) Intangible elements dimension: this dimension often overlaps with the linguistic dimension but can be distinguished depending on the situation. One of its primary characteristics is its imperceptibility through touch; for example, elements such as the institutional mission, vision, and values, as well as the institutional history, are primary aspects. This dimension includes elements related to relationships and developmental networks (academic, scientific, social, and political), allowing for the creation of power and influence groups (Miotto et al., 2020; Aldosari, 2021).

The comprehensive categorization identified allowed for the specification of

sub-dimensions and specific indicators, transitioning from a free-form language to a standardized one, thereby providing a basis for analyzing the websites of participating universities, classifying results based on their frequency of occurrence in a matrix that integrates a taxonomy of the identified elements for constructing a model of university identity.

Results and discussion

The results obtained from the websites of state public universities in Mexico concerning their institutional identity are presented as follows: (1) divided into six dimensions; (2) each dimension containing respective subdimensions; (3) each subdimension further divided into indicators. The number of subdimensions and indicators varies according to the elements identified in the evaluation model's construction. Additionally, the description of the results includes brief theoretical elements and an assessment of traits according to levels of presence: high, medium, and low; absences are also noted.

Before detailing the results, it is important to clarify that the identification of presence or absence of elements maintained congruence with the research objectives. An abundant presence of information was identified, dispersed across multiple elements, thus initially supporting the application of the proposed evaluation model without achieving specific contrasts with the results, leading to only a data systematization characterized by descriptive analysis. Although this remains a documentary-descriptive investigation with a qualitative focus, subsequent analyses are required to ensure the evaluation of institutions under a tangible perspective regarding their institutional identity, wherein precise present elements are equated with absences, supplemented by concrete action proposals for improvement.

1. Academic dimension

This dimension is divided into five subdimensions (teacher competence; academic management; teaching and learning strategies; curriculum; and competency development) and comprises 11 indicators. It is the most comprehensive dimension in terms of the breadth of subdimensions and indicators. The most notable results from 31 of the 34 evaluated entities are as follows:

a) High presence activities: A significant number of recognized researchers; presence and structure of academic bodies and research groups; generation of scientific publications; funded research projects; precise definition of research lines; thesis supervision; research laboratories; scholarship systems; comprehensive training; medical services; professional development; academic procedures; educational offerings; alumni tracking programs; graduation and degree certification processes; curriculum development; certification of educational programs; and programs for integral training.

b) Medium frequency activities: Departments, sections, or bodies linked to research; collaboration with national science organizations; quality postgraduate programs; internally generated scientific journals; development of scientific

dissemination events (congresses, symposia, forums, etc.); patents; labor market relations; programs to cultivate a sense of belonging; and language training and ICT programs.

c) Low frequency activities: Awards and recognitions; doctoral training processes for the institution's teachers; interactions among academic bodies; student mobility programs; tutoring programs; engagement with social sectors; creation of institutional repositories; citations of researchers' publications; visiting professors; internationalization of teaching programs; scholarship systems; comprehensive training; medical services; and professional development.

2. Linguistic dimension

The analysis of this dimension identified various evaluation criteria, such as historical data, institutional activities, university identity elements, student messages, and expressed opinions and distinctive words. The results obtained regarding this dimension were minimal, largely due to limited presence across most participating state public universities.

The collected data for this dimension is as follows: (1) historical data of the institution (5 of 34 include information); (2) activities undertaken by the institution (2 of 34 present this criterion); (3) elements that identify the university (4 of 34 consider these); (4) expressed opinions and distinctive words (6 of 34 universities mention them briefly); and (5) welcome messages to students (7 entities provide these messages, while 27 do not).

3. Intangible elements dimension

This dimension encompasses elements related to the forms and purposes of the institutions, as well as their values and principles, mission and vision, and history and traditions. The behaviors identified are as follows:

a) Institutional values: (17 of 34 universities) High frequency values include responsibility, honesty, justice, freedom, respect, equity, and solidarity; medium frequency values encompass integrity, tolerance, commitment, non-discrimination, social responsibility, dignity, equality, and ethics; and low frequency values identified comprise 47 linguistic terms.

b) Principles: Understood as the ethical parameters guiding life and actions at the university. Six of the analyzed websites contain institutional principles, while 28 do not provide this information. The behaviors noted are: high frequency (autonomy and quality); medium frequency (inclusion, creativity, innovation, relevance, pluralism, transparency, legality, and efficiency); and low frequency (freedom, justice, equity, service, social commitment, critical spirit, regionalization, sustainability, linkage, multidisciplinarity, gender equality, flexibility, humanism, solidarity, environmental protection, and coherence).

c) Institutional mission and vision: Among the universities studied, 28 describe their mission and vision on their websites, while six do not present such information. According to the frequency with which these are declared online, they are categorized as follows: high frequency (generate, disseminate, and apply knowledge; quality; socially responsible actions; technological development; human capital; linkage; and scientific research); medium frequency (sustainable

development; cultural promotion; integral training; sense of social responsibility); and low frequency (teacher training; proactivity; social inclusion, diversity, and human rights).

d) Institutional history: The websites of 30 of the evaluated institutions provide sections aimed at sharing their history, while four do not present such information. The content typically includes background, foundation, significant events, and historical elements.

e) Traditions recognized and represented by institutions: Twelve of the 34 universities studied reflect practices carried out through their websites to preserve traditions and customs. Notable traditional activities include: festivals; university fairs; folk ballet; anniversaries; raffles; and welcome events for new students.

4. Symbolic dimension

Symbolic elements are divided into four types: diachronic, synchronic, properties that confer value and recognition to the institution, and elements of virtual identity, as described below:

a) Diachronic elements: These are understood as official symbolic elements and figures, with 25 of the 34 participating entities promoting them. Presence levels vary: high (motto, anthem, and coat of arms); medium (logo and mascot); and low (cheer, heraldry, university marks, banner, flag, official colors, and sports team crest).

b) Synchronic elements: This category refers to the recognition of individuals' trajectories, with 15 of the 34 universities mentioning such elements. They include honored personalities, medals and awards, recognition of founders, benefactors, rectors, and acknowledgments of academic trajectories.

c) Visual identity elements: These are related to institutional image, with 11 out of 34 universities demonstrating presence. Considered elements include university identity or graphic identity manuals, images of sports teams and official mascots, stationery, uniforms, vehicles, and promotional items.

d) Properties that add value and recognition to the institution: These are present in 15 of the 34 universities. Elements promoted here include notable buildings, museums, historical structures, artistic groups, sports teams, art works, and media outlets.

5. Infrastructure dimension

This dimension was noted to have the least prominence among the participating universities. The data collected regarding subdimensions with presence is characterized as follows:

a) Architectural profile: Presence in only 2 of 34 studied university websites. It encompasses various symbolic elements in sculptures, paintings, and murals.

b) Functionality of physical plant: Eight out of 34 participating universities reference this subdimension, mentioning libraries, buildings, maintenance services, educational facilities, computer centers, laboratories, sports facilities, and

technological advancements. The analysis generally focuses on the sufficiency of spaces and facilities.

c) Spaces for social interaction, leisure, and cultural and sports activities: Twenty-three universities refer to this aspect. Among the highlighted features are sports facilities, spaces for cultural and artistic development, and recreational areas such as parks, botanical gardens, and cafeterias.

d) Furniture and equipment conditions: Information regarding this subdimension is provided on the websites of six public state universities in Mexico, while 28 do not offer such details. Analysis indicates conditions such as enhancement of technological infrastructure through new equipment, classroom equipment and conditions, and academic spaces with internet access and use of digital resources.

e) Orientation and communication systems: Nine of the 34 analyzed university websites mention the existence of digital maps and layouts that provide the university community or visitors with exact locations of all buildings within the institution. In contrast, 100% of the analyzed units have elements that facilitate internal and external communication, utilizing various channels such as institutional email, internet services, and telecommunication networks.

6. Human relations dimension

This dimension is characterized by how participating higher education institutions document the relationships among their various actors (students, teachers, and moments of interaction), which they consider important for their positioning in electronic media. The indicators displayed the following behaviors:

a) Evidence of interaction through sports, artistic events, and student societies: Evidence of interaction among university community members is represented on the websites of 29 of the 34 state public universities. These social relationships are manifested through cultural, artistic, student, sporting, and community activities.

b) Effective communication channels among members: All 34 university websites present means of communication to keep community members informed; these serve as vehicles for effective communication. The media utilized include updated news, newsletters, institutional newspapers and magazines, radio and television channels, digital spaces, institutional email, directories, and social media.

c) Perception of student-student and teacher-student relationships: Based on the information provided by the websites of state public universities in Mexico, it becomes evident that students engage with their peers and instructors through cultural, sports, community, academic, and research activities. However, the data provided do not constitute sufficient tools to identify the level, quality, and depth of these relationships.

While the research process facilitated the generation of a taxonomy derived from the documentary analysis of scientific literature, potential biases may exist in its construction due to disparities in perspectives based on the interests of higher education institutions, defined goals, the characteristics of the studied population, and data collection instruments.

This variety of interests in defining elements of university identity can be attributed to various methodological axes focused on community organizational culture and infrastructure as the more tangible elements. However, intangible elements such as symbols, history, culture, and social responsibility are also considered (Pérez-Ribera et al., 2020). Other perspectives may assign greater importance to human relationships, curricular structure, affinities, institutional projection as a unit, past school experience, territoriality, regulations, connections, and even challenges related to admission, symbolizing prestige (Barrow et al., 2020; Marques et al., 2024). Additionally, some proposals emphasize the role of language in building university identity, considering the constant use of semantic fields (Philippczyck et al., 2025). Thus, factors such as social, emotional, academic, organizational, and physical interactions among individuals are seen as ideal elements (Crocetti et al., 2022).

The elements that constitute university identity have a significant impact on individuals involved or interested in the disseminated content at two critical moments: first, when one is a student, and second, as an alumnus. This fosters institutional enhancement and a personal identification with a specific group or place, leading to long-term emotional bonds and encouraging interest in participating in the development and construction of meanings within a collective memory (Mora & Laporte, 2024). Additionally, this will guide actions, behaviors, and daily practices both within and outside educational organizations. The human needs addressed here are closely associated with psychological and safety concerns, as well as the pursuit of possible fulfillment, where the need for love, affection, and belonging emerges (Gimeno-Bayón, 2020).

The construction of university identity involves multiple stakeholders, not only students but also teachers, administrative staff, and management. Collectively, these groups contribute to developing commitments to the institution and motivate the construction and application of strategies aimed at strengthening it (Navarrete Cazales, 2024).

University identity is a crucial resource for enhancing placement, marketing (often referred to as digital marketing), and competitiveness in higher education institutions (Yaping et al., 2023). This condition is typically associated with private institutions; however, the promotion of university identity is also gaining traction in public universities, which recognize the potential of their websites as an effective means to communicate the importance of their organizations using relevant information. This encompasses institutional appreciation, infrastructure, a sense of belonging, and institutional prestige (Ocasio, 2023).

The use of websites in promoting university identity is grounded in the following elements: (1) these tools have become the calling card for all higher education institutions, achieving unprecedented significance compared to previous eras; (2) their accessibility allows a greater number of individuals to obtain accurate information, regardless of their knowledge level, personal abilities, or technical competencies; and (3) these tools have transformed into mediums for disseminating educational offerings, academic content, and educational services, thereby focusing on projecting institutional prestige (Yaping et al., 2023; Astleitner, 2024).

Conclusions

The positioning of universities through the construction of their institutional image significantly influences their visibility processes and social recognition, distinguishing them from similar institutions, particularly through websites as a contemporary means for this purpose. The findings observed from the conducted research are as follows:

The derivation of a taxonomy of dimensions, subdimensions, and indicators for an evaluation model of institutional identity from the literature review is, in itself, a contribution. Nonetheless, the generation of this product may exhibit biases in its construction based on the information available, revealing inequalities in how elements are constructed.

Data collection showed that Mexican state public universities do not offer a uniform structure regarding the elements representing their institutional image on their websites, with high presence in some areas while in many cases displaying vague, dispersed data, or even having no presence at all.

These findings allow for the identification of the following: (1) the need for generating an educational policy regarding the uniform construction of elements of university institutional image, particularly across various effective and current electronic media for instant and broad promotion; (2) the proposed taxonomy, due to its breadth, needs adaptation to the requirements and interests of each educational sector; and (3) future research is required concerning more precise measurement methods for the criteria involved in constructing institutional images, which should go beyond merely recording the presence of each criterion to include quantitative and qualitative evaluations that specify comparative conditions and areas for improvement.

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Declaration of author responsibility

Jesi Pérez Rivera: 1: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Research, Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation/Verification, Visualization, Writing/original draft and Writing, review and editing.
Javier Tarango 2: Supervision, Validation/Verification, Visualization, Drafting/Original Draft, and Writing, Review and Editing.
Juan D. Machin-Mastromatteo 3: Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation/Verification, Visualization, Original Drafting, and Writing, Review and Editing.

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