

IRSTI 14.35.07

UDC 372.87.4

<https://doi.org/10.52269/SRDG2612260>

EDUCATION ON THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF NATION BRANDING USING MASCOTS

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The relevance of the study lies in the need to teach students the theoretical and practical aspects of national branding through the creation of amulets that facilitate the integration of traditional symbols into the visual identity of educational institutions. The aim is to study the fundamentals of national branding based on traditional Kazakh symbols and their application in educational practice. The objectives include substantiating the role of traditional symbols in shaping the visual code of national identity, analyzing institutional experience with national branding, and developing practice-oriented approaches to branding education. The essence of this scientific research is to determine how traditional ethnocultural images can be transformed into contemporary visual forms. The research's scientific and practical significance lies in establishing interdisciplinary links in teaching the theoretical and practical aspects of national branding using amulets. The history of the origin of symbols, their use, data collection, questionnaires, and statistical methods were used. The main result: the development and testing of a methodology for teaching national branding through the creation of amulets based on traditional Kazakh symbols within the framework of the "Visual Identity" course. The value of scientific research lies in the combination of theoretical and practical aspects. The research findings can be applied in scientific, pedagogical, and applied fields, contributing to theory development and the formulation of new knowledge, informing educational programs and teaching methodologies, and addressing specific practical tasks, thereby demonstrating the theoretical and practical significance of the study.

Key words: education, brand, talisman, mascots, cultural values, totemism, image.

МАСКОТТАР АРҚЫЛЫ ҰЛТТЫҚ БРЕНДИНГТІҢ ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ ЖӘНЕ ПРАКТИКАЛЫҚ АСПЕКТІЛЕРІН ОҚЫТУ

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Зерттеудің өзектілігі дәстүрлі рәміздерді білім беру мекемелерінің көрнекі тұлғасына біріктіруге ықпал ететін тұмарлар жасау арқылы студенттерге ұлттық брендингтің теориялық және практикалық аспектілерін үйрету қажеттілігінде. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – дәстүрлі қазақ рәміздерінде ұлттық брендингтің негіздерін және оларды білім беру тәжірибесінде қолдануды зерттеу. Зерттеудің міндеті – ұлттық бірегейліктің визуалды кодын қалыптастырудағы дәстүрлі рәміздердің рөлін негіздеу, ұлттық брендингпен байланысты институттық тәжірибені талдау және ұлттық брендингті оқытудың тәжірибеге бағытталған тәсілдерін әзірлеу. Ғылыми зерттеудің мәні дәстүрлі этномәдени бейнелерді заманауи визуалды формаларға (мысалы, тұмарлар) қалай өзгертуге болатынын анықтау. Зерттеудің ғылыми және практикалық маңыздылығы тұмарларды қолдану арқылы ұлттық брендингтің теориялық және практикалық аспектілерін оқытуда пәнаралық байланыс орнату. Таңбалардың шығу тарихы, қолдану жолдарын талдау, деректер жинау, сауалнама жүргізу және статистикалық әдістер қолданылды. Маскоттар арқылы ұлттық брендтің теориялық және практикалық аспектілерін оқыту жолдары да қарастырылды және сынақтан өткізілді. Негізгі нәтиже: «Айдентика» пәні аясында қазақтың дәстүрлі рәміздері негізінде тұмарлар жасау арқылы ұлттық брендингті оқыту әдістемесін әзірлеу және сынақтан өткізу. Зерттеудің құндылығы дәстүрлі рәміздерді білім беру ұйымдарының көрнекі тұлғасына біріктіруге ықпал ететін және олардың мәдени бірегейлігін күшейтетін педагогикалық әдістемені құру. Алынған зерттеу нәтижелері ғылыми (теорияны дамыту, жаңа білімді тұжырымдау үшін), педагогикалық (оқу бағдарламаларында, оқыту әдістерінде) және қолданбалы (тәжірибедегі нақты мәселелерді шешу үшін) қызмет салаларында пайдаланылуы мүмкін, бұл жұмыстың теориялық және практикалық маңыздылығын сипаттайды.

Түйінді сөздер: оқыту, бренд, тұмарлар, маскот, мәдени құндылықтар, тотемизм, имидж.

ОБУЧЕНИЕ ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКИМ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКИМ АСПЕКТАМ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО БРЕНДИНГА С ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ МАСКОТОВ

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Актуальность исследования заключается в необходимости обучения студентов теоретическим и практическим аспектам национального брендинга посредством создания амулетов, способствующих интеграции традиционных символов в визуальную идентичность образовательных учреждений. Цель исследования – изучение основ национального брендинга на базе традиционных казахских символов и их применения в образовательной практике. Задачи исследования – обоснование роли традиционной символики в формировании визуального кода национальной идентичности, анализ институционального опыта национального брендинга и разработка практико-ориентированных подходов к обучению национальному брендингу. Суть научного исследования заключается в определении того, как традиционные этнокультурные образы могут быть трансформированы в современные визуальные формы (на примере амулетов). Научно-практическая значимость исследования заключается в установлении междисциплинарных связей в обучении теоретическим и практическим аспектам национального брендинга с использованием амулетов. Используются история происхождения символов, их использование, сбор данных, анкетирование, статистические методы. Основной результат: разработка и апробация методики обучения национальному брендингу через создание амулетов на основе традиционных казахских символов в рамках предмета «Айдентика». Ценность исследования – в обучении национальному брендингу через маскотов, объединяющему теоретические и практические аспекты. Полученные результаты исследования могут быть использованы в научной (для развития теории, формулирования новых знаний), педагогической (в учебных программах, методиках преподавания) и прикладной (для решения конкретных задач в практике) сферах деятельности, что описывает теоретическую и практическую значимость работы.

Ключевые слова: обучение, бренд, талисманы, маскот, культурные ценности, тотемизм, имидж.

Introduction. Brands and their visual symbolic elements, including mascots, play a key role in shaping the unique identity of companies, territories, and countries. In the national branding system, mascots act as an effective visual communication tool, fostering an emotional connection with the audience, increasing loyalty, and raising national image recognition. In a globalized and highly competitive environment, mascots not only enhance the impact of advertising and image campaigns but also influence the perception of a country's brand, cultural identity, and the behavior of target audiences.

Despite the active use of mascots in national and territorial branding practices, theoretical and practical models for teaching the creation and use of mascots, taking into account cultural codes, national symbols, and visual identity, are underdeveloped in the educational and scientific community. The lack of a systematic approach to teaching these aspects leads to the fragmented use of mascots, a decrease in their communicative effectiveness, and a loss of their connection to national values. This contradiction between the practical relevance of mascots and the insufficient methodological development of educational approaches constitutes the scientific problem of this study.

The study's hypothesis is that targeted instruction in the theoretical and practical aspects of national branding using mascots, based on an interdisciplinary approach (design, marketing, and cultural studies), contributes to the development of students' professional competencies in creating visual-symbolic images that enhance national identity and the effectiveness of brand communications.

A study of the evolution of branding, the role of mascots, and methods for integrating them into the educational process substantiates the relevance of this topic and identifies the prospects for using mascots as a national branding tool in the modern sociocultural and media environment.

Purpose and objectives. The purpose of this study is to analyze the theoretical foundations and practical aspects of using mascots in branding. The study aims to study the role of mascots in creating and promoting brands, as well as their impact on the perception and emotions of the target audience. Particular attention is paid to the historical context and evolution of branding, as well as the significance of mascots in various fields. Objectives:

- To examine the historical development of branding and highlight the main stages of its evolution, including the use of mascots as a brand element.
- To study theoretical approaches to branding, including the concepts of unique selling propositions and emotional branding.
- To analyze the role of mascots, their influence on the audience and their commercial success.
- To evaluate the role of mascots in corporate culture and their influence on brand perception in different countries and cultures.

Literature review. The study of the theoretical foundations of branding begins with an analysis of its historical development. S. N. Sologubov, N. V. Kalenskaya, and M. Lidstrom identify four stages in the development of branding: from the first brands, which served a primarily informational function, to the formation of comprehensive brand management systems. The authors note that a qualitatively new stage in the development of branding began in the 1950s, when brands began to be viewed as carriers of a unique selling proposition and emotional values. By the end of the 19th century, many well-known brands, such as Sberbank and Coca-Cola, had been established [1, p.30], demonstrating the long-term evolution of branding as a socioeconomic and cultural phenomenon.

Scientific studies by Russian and foreign authors examine modern approaches to the use of mascots in educational institutions and analyze their influence on brand perception among students and teachers [2]. In particular, the role of mascots in increasing student motivation and engagement, as well as in fostering a positive attitude toward the educational environment, is being studied [3, p.233]. A number of authors have emphasized the symbolic role of mascots and visual identity design at major sporting events, focusing on their cultural expression and managerial value. [4]. Mascots are also considered as symbolic images that influence school spirit, collective identity, and the personal development of students [5, p.56]. Separate studies are devoted to the psychological impact of mascots, including an analysis of successful international practices of their use in the branding of educational organizations [6, p.144].

Brands are often associated with mascots, which act as characters personifying nations or cultural communities. Researchers emphasize that the foundation of a country's brand is not so much a visual symbol as the national identity and image formed by all its citizens [7, p.4]. National identity is viewed as a dynamic process that forms and maintains a shared sense of conscious belonging to a nation-state [8, p.595].

The phenomenon of authenticity, associated with the perception of mascots, is also analyzed in the scientific literature. The desire for authenticity is defined as consumers' search for marketing and symbolic offerings that align with their inner values and self-concept. Authenticity is closely linked to identity and reflects the basic human need for self-expression and fidelity to one's existential nature [9, p.301]. In this context, a mascot can be not only an image of an animal or a person, but also a fictional character, such as the mascots of the FIFA World Cup, which have demonstrated high commercial effectiveness.

The practice of using mascots is also widespread in Kazakhstan. For example, the leopard cub Irby became the symbol of the Asian Winter Games, and for the EXPO-2017 international exhibition, mascots Saule, Kuat, and Moldir were developed, reflecting the national culture, natural resources, and energy resources of the country [10, p.5]. These examples demonstrate the desire to integrate elements of national identity into modern branding.

The works of F. Kotler and K. Keller emphasize the influence of brands and their symbolic elements, including mascots, on the perception, trust, and purchasing behavior of the audience, confirming the need for a scientifically grounded approach to their use in marketing and communications strategies. The researchers also note the role of anthropomorphism—the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects, animals, or abstract concepts—as one of the key mechanisms for perceiving mascots. Anthropomorphism allows people to simplify their perception of a complex world and emotionally engage with symbolic images.

The origins of anthropomorphism can be traced to totemism, where ancient communities associated themselves with animals or plants, perceiving them as spiritual patrons and protectors. In totemic beliefs, humans and animals were considered equal elements of the universe, symbolizing their unity with nature. In philosophical and cultural contexts, a totem can be an animal, a plant, a natural phenomenon, or a mythological image associated with the life of a social group or an individual.

In Kazakh culture, symbols, including talismans and amulets, have deep historical and sacred roots. The State Emblem of the Republic of Kazakhstan draws on ancient symbols such as the tamga, which symbolizes strength, continuity, and the cultural heritage of the Saka era. The emblem's geometry, particularly the circle and shanyrak, reflects ideas of harmony, unity, and family well-being. Traditional symbols of the Kazakh people—the sun, the eagle, the yurt, and its elements—have retained their significance throughout the centuries. The eagle symbolizes freedom and independence, and the yurt embodies the integrity of the world and man's connection to the cosmos and nature. Totems such as the wolf played the role of sacred patrons of the Turkic tribes, symbolizing strength, protection, and spiritual unity [11, p.425].

However, an analysis of scholarly sources reveals that most studies are primarily descriptive in nature and focus on specific aspects of branding or mascot symbolism. Comparative and critical approaches that allow for identifying differences in the interpretation of the role of mascots in national branding and systematically comparing the positions of various authors in the context of educational and cultural practices are insufficient. This circumstance points to the need for a more in-depth analytical understanding of existing scholarly concepts, which determines the research focus of this paper.

Materials and methods. This study utilizes a combination of theoretical and empirical methods to provide an interdisciplinary approach to studying national branding and the use of mascots. The theoretical methods utilized included a review and analysis of specialized scientific literature, as well as methods for analyzing and synthesizing information.

To study branding and the use of mascots, historical-analytical, comparative, cultural-symbolic, psychological, content-analytical, and ethnographic methods were used. The historical-analytical method

allowed us to trace the evolution of branding and mascots from their earliest forms to modern practices, based on a chronological analysis of the works of researchers such as S. N. Sologubov. The comparative method was used to compare different approaches to branding, particularly in analyzing the mascots of the FIFA World Cup and the Asian Games. The cultural-symbolic analysis aimed to identify the reflection of cultural, mythological, and national characteristics in mascot images, such as the symbolism of the snow leopard in the Kazakh context. The psychological method allowed us to examine the influence of mascots on the emotional perception and behavior of the audience, drawing on the concepts of sensory branding presented in the works of M. Lidström. Content analysis was used to evaluate the effectiveness of mascots in advertising and sports communications through the analysis of visual images, advertising materials, and media content. The ethnographic method examined mascots as elements of cultural tradition and mythology, linked to folk beliefs and symbolic practices.

Data analysis methods included classifying mascot types (anthropomorphic images, animals, objects, fictional characters), analyzing the geographic distribution and temporal dynamics of their use, and conducting surveys among fans and educational participants to identify preferences in sports and national branding.

The quantitative portion of the study was conducted through a questionnaire survey, which involved N respondents (pupils and students aged X to Y, as well as teachers and fans). The sample was purposive and was formed based on age, educational level, and level of involvement in cultural and sporting events. The ratio of men to women in the sample was approximately X% and Y%, respectively.

Statistical data processing was performed using descriptive statistics, including calculating absolute and relative frequencies, means, and percentage distributions. Comparative analysis methods, including ranking and comparison of means, were used to compare group indicators. Survey results were visualized in tables and charts, allowing for a clear presentation of identified trends and audience preferences.

The study on art history teaching utilized primarily qualitative data collected during classroom sessions, including interviews, teacher observations, and analysis of teaching and methodological documentation. Quantitative and statistical analysis were used to describe and compare individual variables (frequency of use of visual symbols, level of student engagement), while qualitative methods allowed for the interpretation and generalization of the quantitative results, revealing their pedagogical and cultural significance.

Results and discussion. The art history class examined different types of mascots, including human characters, which are the most commonly used. An analysis of over 1,150 mascots revealed that 21% of all mascots are human, making it the largest category. It was discussed that real-life mascots are effective for promoting a personal brand, as in the case of Colonel Sanders, the founder of the KFC chain. The use of superheroes was also addressed, as they can highlight a powerful feature of a product or service, as seen with Mr. Clean, who symbolizes speed and efficiency in cleaning. Another type of mascot analyzed during the class was characters made up of objects with human features. This is an appealing choice for companies that sell products with distinctive shapes. These points were discussed in terms of their artistic expression and significance within the context of design and marketing.

Animals are the next most popular category. Many brands use animal archetypes to reflect the values and characteristics of their products. For example, the Jaguar brand associates its cars with strength, grace, and speed, using the jaguar as a symbol. Tony the Tiger, the breakfast cereal mascot, was chosen for his energy and strength, which align with how consumers feel after eating. Mascots with direct meaning, such as the symbols used by the dairy industry, are often animal-based. However, in some cases, like the Geico mascot, the choice of mascot has no obvious connection to the product. In this case, the gecko was chosen after marketing research revealed that people often misspelled the brand name.

Choosing a mascot depends on many factors and requires careful consideration. Deciding which type of mascot to use is not always obvious for every business. Below is a decision tree showing when to use a mascot and when to avoid it (Figure 1).

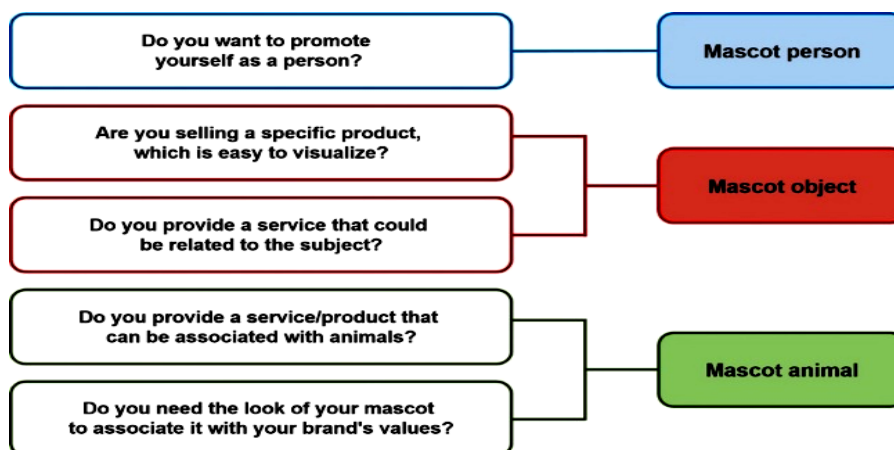


Figure 1 – Decision Tree: "How to choose a Mascot" (Compiled by the authors)

Research shows that people tend to sympathize with characters that share similar moral and ethical characteristics. The most popular mascots are people (21%), birds (19%), and pets (16%). The least popular are mythical creatures, aquatic animals, and insects [12, c.212].

The popularity of mascots also depends on time trends. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, aliens were popular due to *Star Wars*, and in the 1990s, dinosaurs became popular following the release of *Jurassic Park* films.

In Kazakhstan, the revival of national symbols has become an important part of state policy aimed at strengthening cultural identity. This is expressed in art and folk traditions, such as the state emblem, where the shanyrak symbolizes the hearth and home, and winged horses and stars represent unity and sovereignty. These elements are inspired by Saka culture and express the continuity of generations. The light blue color of the flag symbolizes the unity of the earth and sky.

As part of the study, a survey was conducted among students in Kazakhstan to assess their perception of national symbols and interest in branding. The questions asked of the participants aimed at identifying their interest in branding and their perception of national symbols.

The questions were designed to explore the perception of branding and its connection with ethnic and cultural traditions, as well as to assess the preferences and interests of students. To analyze the data obtained, key questions were selected, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Analysis of Responses to Key Questions

Questions	Yes	No
Do you know why branding elements such as symbols, mascots, or charms are used, often reflecting the traditions and culture of the people of Kazakhstan?	77,8%	22,2%
How often do you see advertisements using mascots that reflect national identity?	72,2%	27,8%
Do you pay attention to a mascot if it is associated with national symbols or cultural motifs?	50%	50%
Which of the suggested options, combining ethnic and modern elements, would you prefer?	70,4%	29,6%
Is a mascot necessary in a higher education institution if it reflects Kazakhstani culture and national identity?	77,8%	22,2%

According to the data presented in the table, most respondents are familiar with the purpose of branding. Regarding the frequency with which they see advertising that uses mascots reflecting national identity, 154 responses were given: 48.1% said "yes, whenever possible"; 31.5% said "yes, often"; 14.8% said "only on TV"; and 5.6% said "not interested" (Diagram 1).

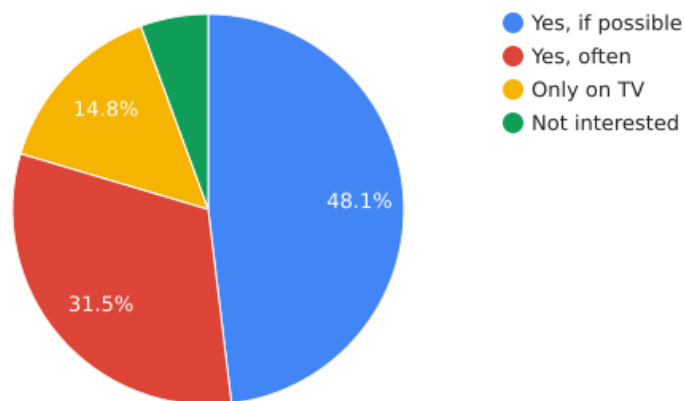


Diagram 1 – Percentage of use of mascots reflecting national identity (Compiled by the authors)

Another issue is the purchase of paraphernalia. Most responses argue that the price of any souvenir is too high and not very accessible, and the design of the paraphernalia also plays a role. At the same time, respondents notice the mascot in pre-match performances, which has a positive effect on the viewers' mood. When asked whether they believe in omens and whether the mascot brings luck to the team, 46.3% of respondents answered that they do, 48.1% that they do not, and the remaining 5.6% said that they have not thought about it (Diagram 2).

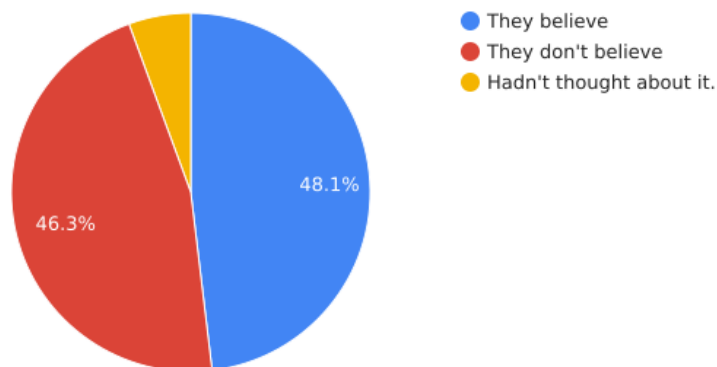


Diagram 2 – The influence of attributes and mascot on the perception of viewers (Compiled by the authors)

When asked about their preference for the proposed options, 63% would choose a mascot in the form of an animal, 33.3% would choose a stylized object, and the remaining 3.7% would choose a person. Thus, we can agree with the findings of other studies that confirm that animal mascots are one of the most popular and widely used types. However, is it correct to support the opinion that a person as a mascot is also a common choice? In the context of branding, the answer is yes, as the results show. In the case of a brand, yes (Diagram 3).

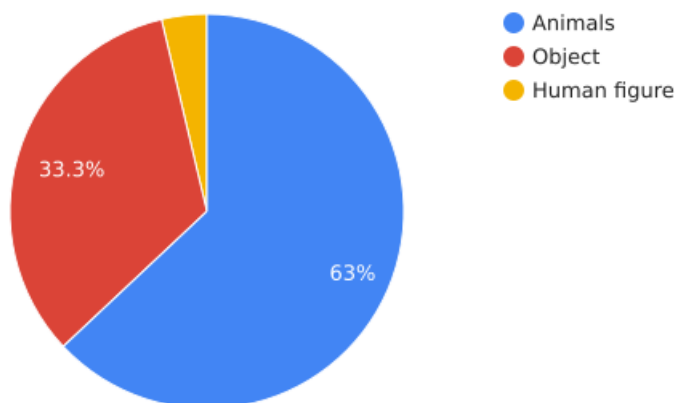


Diagram 3 – Viewers' preferences by mascot type (Compiled by the authors)

Comparing the obtained results with data from similar studies allows for a more thorough interpretation. The prevalence of animal mascots (63%) identified in this study is consistent with the findings of international authors who point to the high effectiveness of zoomorphic images in sports branding due to their archetypal versatility and ability to evoke lasting emotional associations. Similar trends have been documented in studies examining mascots in North American and European sports leagues, where animal symbols also predominate over anthropomorphic characters.

At the same time, the obtained data partially diverge from the results of general marketing research, which considers human mascots to be the most common category. This discrepancy supports the hypothesis that, in a sports context, audience preferences differ significantly from those for general product and service branding. This is confirmed by a comparative analysis of the practices of professional sports leagues: the low representation of human mascots in the Kontinental Hockey League and football championships indicates a higher demand for symbolic images of animals associated with strength, speed, and endurance.

The survey results also correlate with the findings of studies on the emotional perception of sporting events. The high percentage of respondents who noted a positive impact of mascots on their mood during matches (70.4%) confirms data showing that visual and interactive elements of sports shows enhance fan engagement and create additional event value. However, the relatively low rate of merchandise purchases indicates a gap between the emotional perception of mascots and their commercial implementation, a phenomenon previously noted in studies analyzing the impact of design and pricing on consumer behavior.

Of particular interest is the comparison of the obtained results with mascot usage practices in Kazakhstan and abroad. Unlike countries with developed sports industries, where mascots are an integral element of a club's marketing strategy, in Kazakhstan this tool is used sparingly and fragmentarily. This explains the high recognition of certain images, such as the mascot of the Barys hockey club, compared to the lack of mascots for most national teams. Similar conclusions are presented in studies examining the role of institutional support and regulation in the marketing activities of sports organizations.

Thus, a comparison of the empirical data from this study with the results of similar scientific studies suggests that the effectiveness of a mascot as a brand communication tool is determined not only by its visual form but also by the degree of integration into the cultural and organizational context of the sports industry. This confirms the need for a systematic and scientifically based approach to the development and implementation of mascots in sports organizations.

This is confirmed in the practice of brand creation. For example, the importance of mascots in branding is recognized at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University. They play a key role in forming the university's unique image, emphasizing its values and creating associations with its most important projects, both at the national and international levels. Mascots become symbols of the university and its initiatives, strengthening its position in the educational sphere.

ENU branding is crucial for attracting students, faculty, and partners, as well as for building trust in the quality of education. The branding process includes several stages aimed at developing the university's unique identity.

The first step is to define the university's mission and values. ENU focuses on training highly qualified specialists in the context of globalization, studying the Eurasian region, and honoring the name of L.N. Gumilyov. Its core values include innovations in education, scientific achievements, and openness to international partnerships.

A key element of branding is the visual identity, including the logo, colors, and fonts. The logo should combine modernity with historical heritage, symbolizing both the university's scientific traditions and its future. Design elements related to Eurasia highlight the uniqueness of the institution.

The university mascot embodies its spirit and connection with the region's culture, symbolizing intellectual achievements. It is actively used at events, on social networks, and in marketing campaigns, promoting community cohesion and attracting attention to the university.

For successful brand promotion, an active online presence is essential. The university's website, social networks, and other digital platforms serve as the primary channels of communication with its audience. The marketing strategy includes various types of content, such as interviews with faculty, scientific achievements, and online courses, to attract students both from Kazakhstan and abroad.

One of the main aspects of the university's branding is the development of international partnerships with foreign universities and research centers. This helps strengthen the university's reputation and facilitates the exchange of knowledge, improving the quality of education and research. Active cooperation with international institutions aids the university's integration into the global educational network.

University branding goes beyond visual and marketing elements. It also involves shaping a unique university culture. This includes maintaining high academic standards, developing student initiatives, and participating in cultural life. The university should be an inclusive community where every student feels valued and can contribute to the development of the educational and scientific environment.

The university mascot is an important element of its image, contributing to increased brand recognition. It helps create a bright and memorable face for the institution and is actively used at sports and cultural events, fostering unity and support. The mascot can also be featured on merchandise (such as plush toys, T-shirts, and magnets), which makes it popular among students and visitors.

To strengthen the university's identity and image, mascot sketches have been developed to reflect these goals and functions (Figures 2-3).

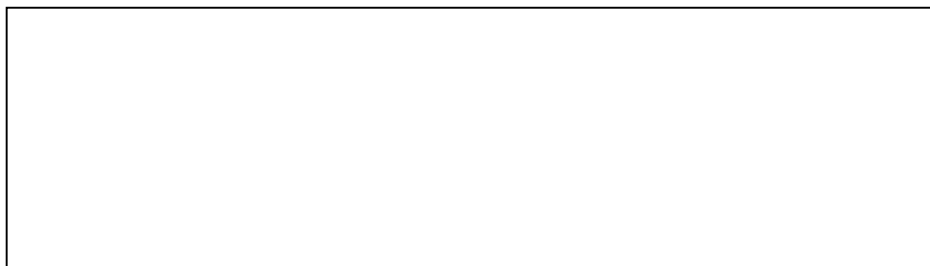


Figure 2 – Sketch of the ENU mascot design. L.N. Gumilyov (Photos by the authors)

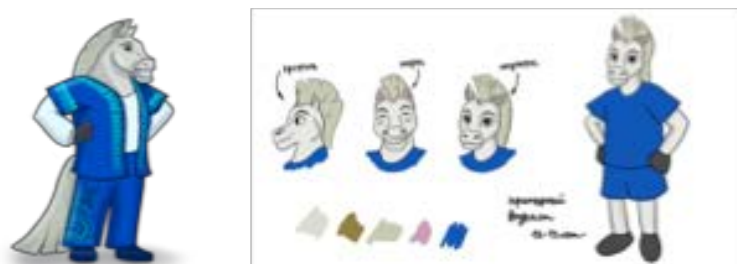


Figure 3 – Final version of the ENU mascot. L.N. Gumilyov (Photos by the authors)

The university mascot was chosen to be a horse, which symbolizes strength, freedom, and respect in Kazakh culture. This image reflects the spirit of the university, linking it to the traditions of the steppe and the desire for success. The horse, as a symbol of dynamism and forward movement, perfectly aligns with the mission of the Eurasian National University. An additional element – a rider, present in the university logo, emphasizes the mascot's connection to the region's cultural heritage.

The color palette of the mascot includes blue, gold, and white. Blue symbolizes wisdom, knowledge, and stability, and is also associated with the sky and the endless steppes of Eurasia. This color helps to enhance the university's competitiveness on the international stage. Gold represents achievement and prestige, while white signifies purity and openness, reflecting a commitment to innovation and global knowledge exchange.

The combination of these colors creates a harmonious and appealing visual identity that underscores the university's role as a cultural and educational center. These colors can be integrated into various brand elements, including merchandise and the design of university events.

The mascot plays a strategic role in shaping the university's image, creating a unique identity, and maintaining a cohesive atmosphere at events. It becomes a source of positive emotions, uniting students, faculty, and visitors. Its bright and memorable image helps distinguish the institution from others and strengthens its position in the educational arena.

By appearing on souvenirs such as soft toys, T-shirts, mugs, and badges, the mascot reinforces the connection between students and alumni and serves as a reminder of student life and belonging to the university community.

The mascot is also a powerful marketing tool that significantly boosts brand awareness both domestically and internationally. It can participate in advertising campaigns, exhibitions, and cultural events, and be part of online sales of university-themed merchandise. The mascot's positive visual image, perceived well across different cultures, can play an important role in attracting international students and strengthening the university's global strategy.

The Use of Mascots as Visual Symbols Representing the Values, Identity, and Mission of Educational Institutions in the Context of National Branding. The utilization of mascots as visual representations embodying the values, identity, and mission of educational institutions represents a significant trend in contemporary national branding. Amidst the increasing competition in the educational sector and the need to establish a consistent visual image for universities, mascots are becoming not only marketing tools but also meaningful cultural and pedagogical phenomena. This approach is particularly relevant in the training of design specialists, where visual symbolism and brand communications are considered key professional competencies.

Incorporating mascots into the educational process enables the teaching of both theoretical and applied aspects of national branding. Within the curriculum for the "Design" discipline, the use of mascot imagery is appropriately integrated into subjects related to design theory and history, branding, visual identity, project graphics, and digital media. The mascot is treated as a contemporary visual archetype, which develops the ideas of traditional symbolism in the context of modern forms of cultural communication.

In the discipline "Identity" (5th semester, 5 credits), covering the topics of brand identification of territories, redesign, restyling, tourist identity, promotion tools and methodology for forming a territorial image, it is advisable to integrate work with the image of a mascot as a modern visual archetype that develops traditional symbols in the context of current forms of cultural communication [13, c.24]. The course "Identity" focuses on equipping students with a comprehensive understanding of the processes behind developing, shaping, and communicating brand identity, including at the territorial and national levels. Special attention is given to the visual, symbolic, cultural, and emotional dimensions of branding, including the use of mascots as instruments of emotional and visual identity. The course explores the concepts of brand identity, brand system structure, external audience perception of territories, as well as participatory practices involving local communities in the branding process. Mascots are viewed as effective mediators between the educational institution and its target audience, helping to establish a strong visual presence, engagement, and loyalty.

The teaching methodology naturally combines theoretical lectures with practice-oriented tasks. The theoretical component includes the study of academic sources, international case studies, and scientific concepts of visual branding. The practical component involves creating visual identities and mascots, developing brand books, digital animations, promotional materials, and presentations. Students develop branding projects for territories or organizations, which include mascot imagery, stylistic design, merchandise elements, digital media formats, and strategies for their use in brand communications. An example is the creation of the "Bear" mascot for the 2014 Sochi Olympic Games. The polar bear was developed as an image that unites the cultural symbols of Russia – strength, goodwill and natural purity. It was used in official identity, advertising materials, souvenirs and animated videos, performing a communicative function in the international tourism and business environment. This case demonstrates how a mascot can convey the values and image of a territory, influencing rational and emotional channels of perception.

The educational process can hold lectures on the analysis of the typology of visual identity and methods of mascot formation, the features of their integration into territorial marketing strategies, as well as consider international examples of mascots used at forums and in B2B communications. Practical tasks can

include developing a mascot concept for a specific region taking into account its cultural, natural and historical features, creating a visual image, illustrations and adapting the character to various promotion channels, including digital media and souvenirs. Students can also conduct sociocultural analysis, organize focus groups, and test the perception of the image by target audiences. This use of the mascot develops students' skills in project graphics, storytelling, cultural analysis, and brand management, and also helps to form sustainable loyalty to the territorial brand among the population and external audience.

The scholarly significance of this approach lies in its exploration of the multi-layered semiotic nature of mascots, which are closely tied to national culture, mythopoetic imagery, and visual codes. A notable example is the mascot of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, designed in the form of a horse. This symbol reflects values essential to Kazakh culture—strength, freedom, motion, and respect for tradition. Within the educational context, it acquires additional meaning, allowing students to analyze culturally embedded visual metaphors and transform them into tools of brand expression.

A practice-based approach to training designers involves incorporating the theme of mascots into the system of project assignments. Students can develop conceptual representations of mascots, select color palettes and visual styles, and adapt characters for the digital environment by creating animations, social media stickers, and web design elements. This also includes the development of souvenir products, event designs featuring mascots, and the final presentation of a brand image within the institutional positioning of the university.

Thus, teaching the theoretical and practical aspects of national branding through the use of mascots within design education functions as an effective pedagogical strategy. It enables students not only to acquire professional skills but also to develop cultural reflection, critical thinking, and the ability to integrate visual imagery into the framework of national identity. The example of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University illustrates how a mascot can serve not merely as a decorative visual element but as a deeply meaningful cultural symbol that unites students, faculty, and the public image of the university.

Conclusion. The integration of mascots into the teaching of national branding enables students to master theoretical knowledge and apply it in practice by creating visual images that reflect the cultural values and identity of educational institutions. Mascots become essential tools in shaping public perception, as they embody the symbolism, significance, and uniqueness of an institution—an aspect especially critical in the context of global competition in education.

The example of the Eurasian National University demonstrates how a horse-shaped mascot not only serves as a visual branding element but also carries deep cultural meaning, reflecting the traditions and values of the Kazakh people. Within the educational process, students are taught to develop mascots, brand strategies, and related materials, helping them integrate cultural and visual codes into the creation of a strong and unique university identity.

Hands-on work on mascot projects fosters the development of students' creative and critical thinking, as well as their ability to effectively apply acquired knowledge in building successful brands. Mascots become not only components of visual identity but also vital instruments for establishing connections within the university community and with external audiences, therefore strengthening its brand at both national and international levels.

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МРНТИ 77.29.19

УДК 796.325

<https://doi.org/10.52269/SRDG2612269>

ФИЗИЧЕСКАЯ И ТЕХНИЧЕСКАЯ ПОДГОТОВЛЕННОСТЬ СТУДЕНТОК ВОЛЕЙБОЛИСТОК В КАЧЕСТВЕ ФАКТОРОВ СОВЕРШЕНСТВОВАНИЯ СТУДЕНЧЕСКОГО СПОРТА

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Актуальность исследования связана с имеющимися проблемами в студенческом спорте (недостаточное внимание администрации вузов вопросам спорта, неадекватная физическая и техническая готовность студентов и т.п.). Конечной целью исследования было экспериментальное доказательство методических подходов по повышению уровня физической и технической готовности девушек сборной команды по волейболу. Для ее решения мы попытались обозначить доминирующие вопросы в развитии спортивных навыков у студентов; выявить степень физической и технической готовности волейболисток, а также связь корреляционного типа между ними. На основе этих результатов предложена методика улучшения физической и