Brand Reputation Management and Brand Experience towards Reputation of Malaysian Polytechnics

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ABSTRACT

In higher education, reputation management is essential to ensure the higher education institutions continue relevant and significant in the eye of the shareholders worldwide. There are many efforts to increase reputation by improving the ranking in the world level. Currently, the brand reputation (BR) of higher institution cannot be proud of yet as BR management is critical in growing a business or service. The research aim to identify the relationship between brand culture (BC), brand expression (BE) and brand experience (BEX) regarding polytechnic BR among polytechnic students of the northern region in Malaysia. In addition, this research also aims to identify which of the variables has the strongest relationship with BR among polytechnic students. The study employs a quantitative method. 378 questionnaires were distributed to polytechnic students of the northern region. The study resulted a significant relationship between BC, BE and BEX in the BR of polytechnic's students. Based on these results, it is found that BC has the strongest relationship with BR among polytechnic's students of the northern region in Malaysia. The findings from this research can be used by next researchers, practitioners, government, university authority as well as academician, as guidance for them to manage well their BR.

Keywords: Brand reputation, Quantitave, Polytechnic

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade most organizations have been able to increase their investment in brand development (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015; Mourad, Ennew & Kortam, 2011; Varela, Vazquez & Iglesias 2010; De Chernatony & Mc Donald, 1992). Brands are used to build a person's image and identity, acceptance and recognition in society. In addition, BR is an important element of national well-being. In order to measure the brand's reputation, it must be associated with the brand's culture, expression and experience. According to the current Education Minister, Dr. Maszlee Malik stated that Polytechnic is a leader in Malaysian Technical and Vocational Education (TVET). In his 2019 education mandate, he does express that Polytechnics and Community Colleges will not be overlooked especially in improving the quality and delivery of TVET programs to improve the marketability of graduates that in lines with Polytechnics and Community Colleges goals which is promoting Polytechnic as a leading institution of education and vocational training at the diploma level. Thus, he said the Polytechnic alumni are encouraged to contribute in the form of knowledge sharing, industry training opportunities, entrepreneurship career opportunities, financial aid or financial support to students and contribute their expertise in the areas of their profession in building a BR in Polytechnics.

Polytechnic needs to manage their brand to be believable and trusted, making them different from others. In fact, Polytechnic brand is the perception that creates reputation that develops in people mind. It will reflect perception of people when they see or hear the name, logo or symbol. Currently, the brand reputation (BR) of higher institution cannot be proud of yet as BR management is critical in growing a business or services, therefore this study need to be done in order to achieve good reputation for Malaysian Polytechnics.

Therefore, it is important for Polytechnic to have the ability to manage its reputation through Polytechnic brand management. Nowadays, in Malaysia, BR management through corporate brand management have gained a lot of attention from various parties in every level to enable the Polytechnic to position itself in the highest position in the maps of world education. Although the literature regarding brands and branding has grown considerably in recent years, very few studies have focused on brands and branding services (Moorthi, 2002; Hemsey-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen & Wilson 2016). Even until now, the research on BR management is still limited and few (Moorthi, 2002; Hemsley-Brown et al, 2016). Due to the increasingly competitive landscape in the international higher education marketplace, colleges and universities have much to gain from the benefits of successful branding. In the commercial realm, the knowledge base on branding topics is extensive; in the realm of non-profit higher education institutions, however, more research is needed (Hemsey-Brown, Melewar, Nguyen & Wilson 2016).

It is necessary to conduct a study on BR management in order to fulfill this knowledge gap. The objective of this study is to determine the relationship between the components of brand identity mix such as BEX, BE and BC toward BR. The outcomes from this study can contribute new finding and adding to the body of knowledge that fulfills the existing knowledge gap. In addition, this study could help the Polytechnic to position itself the academic world and help the Ministry of Education to realization Malaysia as a hub for world education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Reputation Management

Globalization has created many opportunities and challenges for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions. To compete, these institutions need to adopt innovative ways of branding their institutions (Mona, 2016). BR management is critical to growing a business. A positive BR builds loyalty and increases customer confidence in your brand and product, ultimately driving sales and bottom-line growth. Perceived quality refers to students' and graduates' judgments about a higher education institution's overall excellence or superiority, while reputation is the overall value, esteem, and character of a brand as seen or judged by people in general (Dennis, Papagiannidis, Alamanos, & Bourlakis, 2016). In the research of "The Role of Brand Attachment Strength in Higher Education," by Dennis et. al (2016), it highlighted the increasingly competitive higher education sector where universities face significant challenges when it comes to recruiting new students. Students form their perceptions of brand image, identity, and meaning before enrolling at a university and they continue evolving during their study and even after graduation (Dennis et al 2016). While university reputation has traditionally been the main indicator for the uniqueness of a higher education institution, with the emergence of branding, the adoption of concepts such as brand identity, meaning, image, and reputation are becoming increasingly important, as organizations and managers alike are eager to develop distinctive university identities, understand multiple meanings held by stakeholders, improve images, and enhance reputation in this highly competitive global environment (Hemsley-Brown, et al., 2016).

Brand Experience

BEX include visual identity, corporate messages, and physical or virtual presence. It is important to note that changes to visual identity, corporate messages, and physical or virtual presence can be driven relatively quickly by an organization. According to Brakus (2009), BEX are conceptualized as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses generated by brand-related stimuli that are part of the design and identity, packaging, communication, and brand environment. BEX is about delivering brand promise and providing consistent action (Andreini, Pedeliento, Zarantonello & Solerio, 2018). It has been suggested that brands are able to convey unique experiences by managing both functional and emotional elements of performance (Chen, Wan, & Levy, 2017) and ensuring consistency in all touchpoints between brands and their customers (Andreini, 2018) can build brand loyalty as well as generate evangelism (Iglesias, Markovic & Rialp, 2019). Product experience occurs when a user interacts with a product for example when a user searches for a product and examines and evaluates it (Coelho, Bairrada & Matos, 2019). Product experience can be direct when there is physical contact with the product (Coelho et al 2019).

Brand Expression

BE is the brand as termed and articulated by the organization. This integrates brand strategy and brand identity to express a multi-sensory brand experience through a portfolio of Brand Signals. (Navaneethakrishnan, 2017). Expression is the degree to which a community member feels that the community provides them with a forum where they can express their true interests and opinions (Baldus, Voorhees & Calantone 2015). On Facebook, consumers engaging with brands, state they "like" them to build part of their online self-expression. Such self-expressive brands are defined as "the customers' perception of the degree to which the specific brand enhances one's social self and/or reflects one's inner self (Wallace, Buil & Chernatony 2014). If the brand "liked" facilitates the consumer's self-expression, they may experience greater brand love (Wallace et al 2014)

Brand Culture

Brand is culture. Brands possess the culture in which they originated. Brand is a representative of its culture, including communication. From this perspectives culture entails a lot of values that provide brand inspiration. Cultural features a correlation with external principles of brand management (a good and communication). Brand culture is open-ended in several senses: participatory meaning-making, the capacity of bodies to affect one another, and non-human machine judgments (Carah & Angus 2018). The opportunity for voice empowers the individual, but loyalty, entry and exit are functionally oriented towards the organisation and therefore quite limited in providing insight on how online community members build brand culture. (Schembri & Latimer 2016). From a brand culture perspective, the term brand does not only refer to a firm or organisation, but also to material and symbolic forms of communication. For example, brands can embody cultural values, ideology and personal identity. (Schroeder, Borgerson & Wu 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative method, which adapted questionnaire and was conveniently collected using non-probability sampling method. A 378 questionnaires were distributed to polytechnic's students of the northern region. The study resulted that there is a significant relationship between BC, BE and BEX in the BR of polytechnic students. Several literature studies had suggested the optimal scale should fall between 4 to 7 points (Krosnick & Fabriger, 1997; Masters, 1974; Mc Kelvie, 1978). It was argued that lesser points may compromise the information gathered. The measurement of this study does not introduce the mid-point or neutral point to avoid the respond from taking an easy choice in answering with the neutral point, which requires little effort and easy justification. The justification for not using this midpoint is based on the argument by Krosnick (1991) which is respondents have two types of behavior: survey optimizing and survey satisficing. The questionnaire was divided into sections which are section A and section B. Section A questioned on respondent`s factors influence brand reputation. Section B consists of demographic factors whereby the questionnaire is self-constructed. These demographic factors include gender, age, race and polytechnics. The data was gathered and analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

FINDINGS

The samples were selected from northern region polytechnics namely Polteknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS), Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Muad'zam Shah (POLIMAS), Politeknik Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah (PTSB), Politeknik Seberang Perai (PSP) and Politeknik Balik Pulau (PBU). A total of 378 respondents anwered the questionnaires.

Table 1: Number of Students in the Northern Zone Polytechnic in 2019

Polytechnics	Total of students
PTSS	3,967
POLIMAS	4,532
PTSB	3,534
PSP	4,520
Total	**16,553**

Source: Student Affairs Department for each Northern Polytechnic (2019)

Based on the above, the population of each Polytechnic studied totaled to sixty thousand five hundred and fifty-three (16,553) students. For a population size of 16,553, a sample size is three hundred and seventy-five 375 (S = 375) as referred to Krejcie and Morgan (1970).

Data collection for this study utilized a quantitative research technique. There are several measuring tools used to get information from respondents, one which is online questionnaire. The instrument was used to obtain the data in this study as it is stronger and more convenient for distant respondents to answer.

Table 2: Frequency Table (1)

Frequency														
Gender		Age					Race			Polytechnic				
Male	Female	18	19	20	21	22	Malay	Chinese	Indian	PTSS	PBU	PTSB	POLIMAS	PSP
101	277	49	80	217	25	7	350	7	21	128	36	26	83	105
Total : 378														

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents by gender had divided into two scales by male and female.

There are 277 female students (26.7%) and 101 male students (73.3%). The frequency table above shows the distribution by age. The frequency of 18 year old is 49 (13%), 19 year old is 80 (21.2%), 20 year old is 217 (57.4%), 21 year old is 25 (6.6%) and 22 year old is 7 (1.9%).
This table also shows the distribution of respondents by race. The 378 respondents consist of 350 Malay students (92.6%), Chinese 7 students (1.9%) and 21 Indian students (5.6%). Next is the distribution of respondents by institution where from the 378 respondents, 128 students (33.9%) are from Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS), 83 students (22.0%) from Politeknik Sultan Abdul Halim Muadzam Shah (POLIMAS), 26 students (6.9%) from Politeknik Tuanku Sultanah Bahiyah (PTSB), 36 students (9.5%) from Politeknik Balik Pulau (PBU) and lastly 105 students (27.8%) from Politeknik Seberang Perai (PSP).

Table 3: Frequency Table (2)

Frequency											
Programme											
DAT	DPM	DSK	DUP	DIB	DHF	DDS	DTP	DET	DDT	DEV	DLS
99	14	24	9	33	14	6	41	29	14	28	51
Total : 378											

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents by programme of study: 99 students (26.2%) from DAT, 14 students (3.7%) from DPM, 24 students (6.3%) from DSK, 9 students (2.4%) from DUP, 33 students (8.7%) from DIB, 14 students (3.7%) from DHF,6 students (1.6%) from DDS, 41 students (10.8%) from DTP, 29 students (7.7%) from DET, 14 students (3.7 %) from DDT, 28 students (7.4%) from DEV. Meanwhile,51 students (13.5%) from DLS. The results of reliability analysis have indicated that all variables exceeded the minimum acceptable level of cronbach alpha of .70.

Table 4: Correlation between BR and BC, BE and BEX

		Brand Reputation	Brand Culture	Brand expression	Brand experience
Brand Reputation	Pearson	1	.924**	.891**	.875**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	378	378	378	378
Brand Culture	Pearson	.924**	1	.935**	.925**
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	378	378	378	378
Brand	Pearson	.891**	.925**	1	.927**

expression	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	378	378	378	378
Brand experience	Pearson	.875**	.925**	.927**	1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	378	378	378	378

Table 4 shows the overall finding that BC (Pearson correlation = 0.924) is the main factor affecting BR among polytechnic students of northern regions compared to the effect of BE (Pearson correlation = 0.891) and BEX (Pearson correlation = 0.875)

IMPLICATIONS TO PRACTICE

The findings from this research can be used by next researcher, practitioners, government, Malaysian Higher Education Institutions authority as well as academician, as a guidance for them to manage their BR well and to increase awareness of the importance of brand management in higher education institutions. This study represents a step in bringing together aspects of the brand management and brand reputation in a theoretical framework that is empirically tested. There are few contributions provided by the study. First, the outcomes of this study demonstrate that it is possible see the influence of aspects of brand culture, brand expression and brand experience on brand reputation.
This outcome provides evidence for the value the activities in developing brand reputation in higher education institutions. Next, the results provide evidence of the relative importance of these brand management activities. In the context of existing customers/students of the higher education institutions, the findings indicate that brand culture has a bigger influence on brand reputation than the brand expression and brand experience.
The result may be different for relationships at different stages of development or different levels of maturity. In practical terms, researchers and practitioners can use the theoretical framework and method in this study to establish the relative importance of these different elements in different situations. That is, how, when and under what conditions are factors such as the brand culture, brand expression and brand experience most salient in building on brand reputation. The measures and methods by which they are derived may be of use to future researchers seeking to further bridge the gap between the study of brand management and brand reputation.
From the overall results, there are many factors that can influence a brand reputation. The findings from this research can be used by next researcher, practitioners, government, higher education institutions authority as well as academician to guide them to manage well their brand reputation and to increase awareness of the importance of brand management in higher education institutions. On the other hand, forthcoming research could combine both qualitative and quantitative measures to prove and strengthen the current findings for the purpose to improve generalizability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The hypothesis in the study is to determine whether Brand Expression influence Brand Reputation. This finding which is supported by Casidy and Wymer (2018) shows that investments made in the brand expression can thus be justified in terms of the impacts that these have on brand culture and the consequent impact on brand reputation. These results are in line with previous research findings (Sujchaphong, Nguyen & Melewar, 2017) through operationalizing the dimensions of body, voice, soul and mind, and show these aspects of brand expression have a significant impact on brand reputation. Brand experience activities are more substantial in terms of their contact with customer and have long-

established record of affecting reputation (Lim, Jee & De Run, 2018). Money et al. (2010) suggested the finding reinforces the view that organizations should spent considerable effort managing operations associated with brand experience in a consistent manner with branding activities and look for ways to work collaboratively across the marketing and operational functions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research questions for this study were answered and the purposes of the study were met. In general, this study has shown how aspects of student experience play an important role in managing a Polytechnic brand. The purpose of this study is to determine the correlation between BC, expression and experience of the Polytechnic BR. The measuring tools used to get information from respondents is online questionnaire. This instrument was used to obtain the data in this study as it is stronger and easier to answer by distant respondents. Data analyzed by "Statistical Package for Social Science" (SPSS Windows) Version 21. BC has the higher effect on BR. This indicate that BC is the dominant factor influencing the BR of the Polytechnic students. These findings show that the related factors should be given attention to better manage Polytechnic brand management. The findings can be used to support those who are managing higher education institution branding or intending to develop a higher education institution brand. As the stiff competition among higher education institution increase, there is a probability that the higher education institutions to spend a large amount of fund on branding activities to attract students. Nowadays, branding in higher education institution has become accepted practice. Some recommendations have been offered to benefit organizations and future research.

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