

Corporate Image Understanding among University Students: A Case of Malaysian Public University

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the level of understanding on corporate image among university students in Malaysian public university by using a cross-sectional personal-administered questionnaire. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed for this purpose to the students from every level of their studies study in Universiti Utara Malaysia. Systematic random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample for this study and data obtained was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0. Judging from the mean scores, the study suggested the overall score of the level of understanding about the corporate image in the university among the students were high importance. Finally, implications and some suggestions for this study have been provided and it can be very useful information for both academic and managerial purposes for the higher educational institution.

Key words: Corporate image • Malaysian public university

INTRODUCTION

Higher education industry is one of the fastest growing industries in Malaysia. As mentioned by [1], institutions of higher learning have shown phenomenal growth in Malaysia during the early 90s'. [2] stated that higher education in Malaysia has experienced increasing competition among universities and higher education institutions to attract students both locally and internationally. This is due to the globalization which resulted in the rapid development of the higher learning institutions in its mission to become a regional center of excellence for higher education by the year 2020.

Malaysia in its efforts to become a regional center of excellence for higher education by the year 2020, gained supports from other agency which is Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) that is a sole body which oversees and coordinates quality assurance and accreditation of higher education. Besides that, Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) also gained supports from Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional (PTPTN) in which it is a body that manages the financing for higher education.

Therefore, it is important for the higher education sector to give focus on having a good corporate image in order to attract students both locally and internationally

to study in Malaysia. The suggestion on sustaining a good corporate image was made based on the statement claimed by [3], the European Customer Satisfaction Index which stated that the elements that have effect on the creating of brand loyalty are corporate image of the business, customer satisfaction, customer expectations, the product or the service quality that is perceived. By having a good corporate image it can, make a satisfied customers to stay loyal with the business in the future. It has been supported by [4-8], the most significant contribution that satisfied customers make to a business is becoming a loyal customer.

Setting from this purpose, this study analyzes the level of understanding on corporate image among university students in Malaysian public university. Thus, the result obtained from this study is very useful for both academic and managerial purposes.

Literature Review: The higher education institutions need to maintain or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market [9-11]. The corporate image would be an asset of a firm in the service industry [12]. In the studies of university image, [9-11] found that higher education institutions need to maintain or develop a distinct image to create a competitive advantage in an increasingly

competitive market. The corporate image of a university might be the influence of students' willingness for enrolment.

Corporate image has a direct relationship with the students' satisfaction where the university's image has a significant influence in the formation of the students' expectations in higher education. The corporate image also has a direct influence in the formation process of satisfaction, so the loyalty of the students toward the institution. If higher education has to compete through its image, the first step to take is to measure the university image held by his students [13-17]. The second step should be to know how the construct image is formed and how it can be modified in order to reflect the intended image [18].

As mentioned by [19], an image is an overall impression that a person has about an object. In this sense, the university image can be defined as the sum of all the beliefs an individual has towards the university [10, 20]. While [21] had defined corporate image as the "overall impression" of a firm left on the minds of customers after experiencing its product or service. In other words, corporate image reflects the firm's superiority, trustworthiness, strength, reliability and efficiency of its delivery system in the eyes of its customers.

[22] stated that image has a significant effect on student satisfaction and loyalty. Besides that, [18] claimed that an image is one of the most important determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty. However, it has been argued by [23] that an image is overall impression made on the minds of the public about a firm, added by [24], the corporate image is related to the various physical and behavioral attributes of the firm, such as business name, architecture, variety of products/services, tradition, ideology and to the impression of quality communicated by each person interacting with the firm's clients.

[25] defined the corporate image as an attitude must affect behavioral intentions such as customer loyalty. Therefore, if it happened to be any good reputation or falls of an institutional image by an organization, it will affects the satisfaction either it increase or decrease by same proportion.

As mentioned by [26], the academics component of image reported to consist of the perceived worth of degree when entering the job market, characteristics of the student body and degree-program characteristics. According to [27-31], the factor controlled by the university itself, such as existence of particular program, strengths of academic progress, libraries and technical facilities, had a stronger influence on the overall university image.

[33] stated that the higher education institutions should make a concerted effort to evaluate the university image held by its students (current, or alumni students). Apart from that, [34] mentioned that, the image can be formed through symbols, media, circumstance and events. Thus, the image of a university should be able to give satisfaction to the students, so that student trust can improve as well [35].

According to [36], an image can generate value in terms of helping customer to process information, differentiating the brand, generating reasons to buy, give positive feelings and providing a basis for extensions. In addition, [37] stated that the corporate image thus impacts a customer's evaluation of service quality, satisfaction and loyalty [38-40].

Thus, [41] mentioned about the customers who are loyal to certain brand will recommend it to other people and not easily influenced by competitors to make purchases. It can be assumed that, when a customer is satisfied with the service, the image of the company in his/her mind is improved and this upgraded image will directly influence satisfaction, thus making the relationship between those two constructs reciprocal [37, 42].

Thus, it can be conclude that it is important for companies to measure customers' satisfaction in order to analyze their product or service image performance and whether their satisfied customers are willing to recommend their branded product to others as well as having the intention to purchase their product/services in the future [43].

Methodology: This research was designed to study the level of understanding on corporate image among university students in Malaysian public university. The data were collected using a cross-sectional personal - administered questionnaire, developed specifically for the students from every level of their study. Likert scale is used to determine how strongly agree and strongly disagree with the statement.

In this study, the Likert scale of 5-point scale is used from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5). The internal consistency score (Cronbach's alpha coefficient) for this scale is 0.984. Systematic random sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample. This procedure will provide better in terms of equality and precision in selecting the respondents as the values within the strata are homogenous.

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the university students from different level of study in Universiti Utara Malaysia and 343 questionnaires were

returned. On top of that, the application used of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 21.0 was used to generate descriptive statistics for this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the frequency genders of the respondents were 44.3% (male) and 55.7% (female). It was recorded 45.8% of the respondents under the age of 20 years, 49.0% were 21 to 25 years, 2.9% were 26 to 30 years and 2.3% were more than 31 years. On top of that, about 54.8% of the students were in first year, 16.9% were in second year, 13.1% were in third year and 15.2% were in fourth year of their studies.

It has been identified that there is 7.3% of the respondents obtained scholarship from JPA, 40.2% obtained financial sponsorship from PTPTN fund, 1.2% from the state agency, 4.1% get financial sponsorship from parents or own private source and 47.2% obtained financial sponsorship from others. A profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 2 had indicated both the mean and standard deviations of the level of understanding on the corporate image of the university. According to [44, 45], the authors suggested the ranking of importance as a reference in determining the level of quality management practices. The authors suggested that the following four categories based on rank of importance; mean value of 2.59 and below is indicating as *less important*, mean value between 2.60 to 3.40 is indicated as *moderate importance*, mean value ranging from 3.41 to 4.20 is indicated as *high importance* and a mean value of 4.21 and above is indicated as *great importance*.

Hence, based on the findings, it has been identified that all items which scored mean value high importance. The items were *I selected this university because it has a strong brand name*, *This university makes a lot of contribution to the society*, *Media reports on the university are generally positive*, *Employers have a positive perception towards this university*, *The university conserves the environment*, *I choose this university because it has good reputation*, *I selected this university because it has superior technology*, *I selected this university because it has qualified lecturers*, *I selected this university because it has better infrastructure*, *A relative referred me to the university*, *I was introduced to the university by an alumni*, *The university fee is equal to the quality of service I receive*, *The university appearance is attractive to me*, *The university location is conducive for me*, *This university is preferred by my peers (friends and relatives)*.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Respondent's Profile		Frequency	Percent (100%)
Gender	Male	152	44.3
	Female	191	55.7
Age	Under 20 year	157	45.8
	21-25 year	168	49.0
	26-30 year	10	2.9
	More than 31 year	8	2.3
Study Level	First year	188	54.8
	Second year	58	16.9
	Third year	45	13.1
	Fourth year	52	15.2
Scholarship/Financial	JPA	25	7.3
Sponsorship	PTPTN fund	138	40.2
	State agency	4	1.2
	Parents/own private source	14	4.1
	Others	162	47.2

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Corporate Image

	Mean	SD
I selected this university because it has a strong brand name	3.743	1.249
This university makes a lot of contribution to the society	3.647	1.280
Media reports on the university are generally positive	3.703	1.277
Employers have a positive perception towards this university	3.671	1.242
The university conserves the environment	3.653	1.261
I choose this university because it has good reputation	3.720	1.206
I selected this university because it has superior technology	3.682	1.241
I selected this university because it has qualified lecturers	3.639	1.292
I selected this university because it has better infrastructure	3.604	1.204
A relative referred me to the university	3.604	1.216
I was introduced to the university by an alumni	3.633	1.272
The university fee is equal to the quality of service I receive	3.554	1.276
The university appearance is attractive to me	3.586	1.239
The university location is conducive for me	3.650	1.280
This university is preferred by my peers (friends and relatives)	3.854	1.321

The findings revealed a high mean value among the students in the Malaysian university and by looking at the score, there is a moderate mean concentration. Thus, it can be assumed that the student in the Malaysian public university does not really understand on the importance of corporate image for the university. The low level of understanding on the corporate image of a university have been showed by the respondents of all genders, age, level of studies also different scholarship or financial sponsorship for their study.

Might be due to the several factors such as lack of exposure on the importance to sustain a good relationship with the alumni of the university, the relationship of the university with the mass media to build a good image can be the reasons why not all of the students aware on the importance of the corporate image of a university. Another possible reason can be due to the lack of the quality of the services experienced by the students when they are dealing with the staff of the university.

Since the students are paying for high fees thus, they expect the services to be delivered to them is in good quality. Therefore, the university should continuously give focus on having a good corporate image in order to make the students in the university satisfy with the services provided to them and stay loyal with the university in the future.

CONCLUSION

The results show the university's students in the Malaysian public university have shown rather moderate understanding on the importance of having good corporate image of a university. This means that the student does not really capture on the importance of corporate image for the university. Several factors such as there is no close relationship between the university with the alumni, the relationship between the university with the mass media is not good and the services provided to the students is not good can be the reasons of why there is still some students does not have a better understanding on the importance of the corporate image towards the university.

Thus, the fruitful findings in this study would gain a deeper understanding into the importance of corporate image in the context of public universities in Malaysia. Since the present study only measure the level of understanding among the students who is still not yet complete their industry attachment, so it might be difficult for them to evaluate on the importance of corporate image for an organization. Thus, it is suggested that the future research should be conducted to those who have finished their industry attachment so that they can give a good perception on the importance of having a good corporate image.

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