

Business School Corporate Brand Identities

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ABSTRACT

The escalation in the number of business schools in Malaysia has created a competitive pressure to attract the best students and lecturers from both the national and international arenas. These business schools have, and, are developing competitive marketing strategies to augment their brand images in terms of university rankings as well as be seen as the top business school in the country. However, little is known to understand how these business schools position their brand images in order to be seen as such. Most of previous studies that surrounds this area mainly focused on external stakeholders, making our understanding of how the internal stakeholders namely the employees contributes or shaping the school's identity very limited. Thomson et al. (1999) suggest that employees play specific role in building the service brand in order to make the brand 'come alive'. Furthermore, employees can have a positive influence on consumers' perception regarding the service brand (Martin et al., 2004). Employees are thought to play a crucial role in building their company brands through their brand loyalty and commitment towards their organisation and thus, should remain as top priority among the top management when designing the company brand identity (Kimpakorn and Tocquer, 2009). Mitchell (2002) suggests that in order to gain a strong brand position of one product or service, it is vital to build internal branding as a process to align staff's behaviour with a corporate brand's identity. This is consistent with a view that brand-consistent behaviour often supports the development of a coherent brand image and is considered as one of the crucial success factors in corporate brand management (de Chernatony and Vallaster, 2005). Hence, while branding strategies focus on the enhancement of such corporate image, corporate identity on the other hand, is seen as part of the overall corporate brand. Thus, the current study examines a business school brand identity from an internal stakeholders' perspective in the East (Malaysian's business school).

The study has adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches (in-depth interviews, focus group discussion-FGD and survey). The measures developed by Davies *et al.* (2004) known as 'Corporate Character Scale' was used alongside with the semi-structured interview and FDGs in order to measure the institutional brand identities among employees of the business school. Institutional or corporate brand identities are commonly measured by human personality traits to portray the brand identity or image of a company or institution and, recently, increasing attention has been given to the understanding of the more abstract, intangible aspects of consumer brand knowledge (such as brand personality or corporate brand image). By using metaphorical expressions, specifically the personification approach (i.e. by viewing the company or institution as a person), these studies have examined corporate brand images or brand personalities in various settings such as retailing, cars and books but little has been done to understand the positioning in the context of higher education.

The study reports its qualitative findings from 25 in-depth interviews ranging from the academics, management as well as the administration of a business school. Content analyses were used to analyse the results and the employees appear to express business schools as

prestigious, tough, associate the school with the overall institutional brand/long standing reputation, new building and updated facilities (tangible attributes). The present study enhances this understanding by providing empirical evidence in the context of higher education among employees. The practical contribution of the study and its managerial implications can be seen in the context of defining strategy and positioning the business schools in a higher education context.