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Name : NOORDINI ABDULLAH

Title : MODELING THE RELATIONSHIP OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITY BRAND IMAGE ON STUDENTS' SATISFACTION AND ITS EFFECT ON BRAND LOYALTY

Supervisor : ASSOC. PROF. DR. NOORAINI MOHAMAD SHERIFF (MS)
ASSOC. PROF. DR. ANIZAH ZAINUDDIN (CS)
PROF. DR. SOFIAH ABD RAHMAN (CS)

The role of universities in attracting postgraduate students to achieve a research university status has attracted the attention of scholars. While there is growing consensus that branding and internationalization is important, the relationship between a university's research status, its strategy and its ability to attract postgraduate students is still unclear. Furthermore, on closer inspection, empirical studies that assess the impact of both brand image and students' satisfaction on postgraduates' brand/institution loyalty are lacking. Hence, this study aims to address this knowledge gap and attempts to extend previous studies on brand image by integrating satisfaction constructs into the framework. The main objective of this research is to develop a model of Research University brand image which is capable of delivering students' satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, this research examined and identifies key dimensions or indicators and analyse the perspectives of postgraduate students on the dimensions and indicators necessary to evaluate Research University brand image. The respondents were postgraduate students at Research Universities in Malaysia. Out of a total of 1000 questionnaires distributed, 244 usable questionnaires were returned, representing a 24.4% return rate. Structured questionnaires and pilot study were administered to refine the items in the scales using SPSS version 14. For the final study, to ensure

a more rigorous analysis, structural equation modelling using AMOS 18 was employed to empirically test the effects of the respective predictors on latent variables. Results indicated that out of ten hypotheses formulated, seven hypotheses were supported at five percent significant level. A significant finding is that information on source of institutions were the most important predictors of satisfaction thus loyalty. A major contribution to the advancement of new knowledge is that the results also emphasized that satisfaction, is a significant mediator in the relationship between Research University brand image with brand loyalty. The current research contributes to knowledge in the field of higher institutions research. It demonstrated that Research University image perception, as a multi-dimensional concept, plays an important role in the brand image context. It also demonstrated that the modified model of Service Branding Model established in the business culture can be transferred to a non-business culture with varying degrees of explanation power.