ORIGINAL ARTICLES

An Analysis on The Perception and Image of Prestigious Public Higher Learning Institutions (IPTA) in Malaysia From Development Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In today’s era of information technology, each and every organization must have the element of competitive edge. Image, which plays a vital role in marketing activities, is clearly an added advantage, one that is strongly needed by such organization. Hence, this study intends to measure the image of Public Higher Learning Institutions (IPTA) from the students’ point of view, the possible influence of such image towards the decision made by the students in choosing their respective IPTAs and how that particular image plays its significant role in terms of marketing perspective for non-profit organizations. Respondents were selected among the final year Economics students from the University of Malaya. The Statistical Package for The Social Science program had been used to analyse the data through percentage, frequency distribution and Multidimensional Scaling approaches. These methods were utilized since they enable the gathering of the findings. Results from this study show that a distinctive image of an IPTA, such as a well-known prestigious university, strongly influences the decision made by the students in choosing their respective places of study. The image has also contributed greatly towards marketing activities for non-profit organizations like IPTAs. In conclusion, IPTA should retain their existing image to compete with the IPTS while maintaining their image of being the pioneer in the education field.

Key words: Public Higher Learning Institutions, Perception, Image, Malaysia

Introduction

In this era of information technology, information has become very easy to access. The convenience of obtaining information has definitely exposed the individuals or even organizations to the public. Such an exposure will lead to the formation of image and perception towards the organization. For Public Higher Learning Institutions (IPTA), the construction of image has not really been given special emphasis. This is explained through the assumption that the IPTA does not have to appeal to the public the way the Private Higher Learning Institutions (IPTS) are, simply because the former does not place priority on profits.

Despite this condition, image has become gradually more and more significant to organizations. Various terms have been used by these organizations, like corporate image, company image, manager image and the like. Through a good image and high level of perception among the public, the IPTA or Public Higher Learning Institutions will become the target to further their studies at an advanced level. Through these image and perception, IPTA will easily pursue their marketing activities as they will be known as having an image of being prestigious institutions. With this in mind, this study seeks to analyse the perception of the students in the University of Malaya (UM) towards the image reflected by the IPTA.

The Concept Of Image:

Image normally signifies a reflection or position adopted towards someone or an organization. A consumer will be easily influenced to choose a particular brand or service, if they are familiar and comfortable with the image of the brand or organization related to the brand or service. Most companies will construct a clear mission and which could depict the image of their businesses. This aims to attract attention and exude its appeal to their companies. To exemplify this, the image that the UM attempts to expose to the society is one that forms a mission, which is to stand prominently as a prime university that moves towards excellence, in developing and spreading knowledge, as well as shouldering the nation’s aspirations and nobility of ambitions.

According to Kotler and Fox (1995), the image for non-profitable organisations lies in the belief, idea and the presumption towards an object. These values indicate the way of thinking or feelings of an individual about something. In the meantime, Mullet in Keith dan Gerald (1996), has defined ‘image’ as a scheme that refers to the description of the senses or conceptual knowledge. Mullet also has the opinion that an image can be divided.
into three stages which are the projection of an image that is formed by an institution, the broadcasting of an image through the mass media and the image response that is accepted by the public.

Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the image is defined as the opinion one holds over an object, based on the image shaped by the particular object. For instance, the IPTA carries the image that the rate of the study fees is lower than that of the IPTS, therefore the image that it is trying to create would be low rates of study fees.

Measuring Image:

There have been various methods that can be adopted to measure image. This study will use a method to measure image by way of measuring how the image of the institution is known and favoured. (Kotler dan Fox 1995). The method can be elaborated through Diagram 1 below:

Inclination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less familiar</th>
<th></th>
<th>Very Familiar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the diagram above, institution A has the best image, in the way that most people in the society like and know about it. This is because this institution is placed in the group of people who like the institution and where most people are familiar with. The second institution, Institution B, is less known but is equally favoured since it is placed in the group where people like it but it remains unfamiliar to many people.

Institution C on the other hand, has a negative image for those who know it but this institution is not known by many people. This is because institution C is placed in a group suggesting that not many people favour it and also not many people know much about the institution’s image. Institution D has a negative image as well, and a lot of people are well aware of its poor performance. This is explained by the fact that institution D is placed in the less favourable group and most people tend to know about it.

Through the elaboration given on Diagram 1 above, institution A must retain a good image and reputation. Institution B needs to make some promotion that it is a good institution. Meanwhile, the third one, Institution C needs to find out why it is not favoured by the public and institution D should prevent itself from being portrayed in a negative light.

Deborah (1991) has taken some time to study this situation concerning the public understanding and measurement of image on the community colleges in the United States. She discusses college image from the perspective of marketing. Her study segregates the colleges in certain groups like the best, the average and the worst image, taken from the perspectives of the public.

The Importance Of Image To The Ipta:

First off, through image, the IPTA will be better known among the people in the society. As an example, University of Malaya (UM) strikes out as one of the best universities in the world, and thus, this situation will contribute to the UM being highly regarded and well-established.

The second of all, image is a concept that will lead the IPTA to become the first candidate for students to advance at a higher level of their studies as the competition is rife against the IPTS. The likelihood is that students will tend to choose the universities that will prepare them with occupations right after they finish their studies.

Thirdly, through image, marketing strategies can be more easily conducted. This is due to the fact that if the IPTA already has a good image in producing high quality graduates, then of course the institutions will be those that appeal to the students.
As the fourth point, it is through image that one is able to know the positioning and the status of a particular university. This is learning on the study whereby a university has a certain image and its respective role in terms of its position and status in the society.

Factors That Contribute Towards Image Formation:

The theory on image determination will assist an institution by means of identifying the factors that can contribute to the formation of the current image and how the image is shaped. Following Kotler and Fox (1995), in an image formation, its dependency lies on, the first would be when we regard the image determined by the object, namely the public who can easily accept the claim over the actual condition of the object. Such regards are normally based on the condition that people tend to have experiences on the object in question.

Secondly, people are able to obtain some reliable data from the object. Thirdly, the people would process the data the same way, although they come from various backgrounds and personalities. These factors demonstrate that an institution may not be able to formulate the latest image that it requires, especially for those who have already known about the image of the institution through past experiences and existing information.

As mentioned by Alan Howarth (1991), the image formation of non-profitable organizations is realized through several factors which motivate students to opt for a college in particular, namely the quality of teaching, educational facilities, fees and some other factors.

Changing The Image:

Institutions that work at changing their image may find this pursuit time-consuming as the present condition has become stereotyped and sustained despite the changing realities that surround the institutions. It is a possibility that the teaching quality of some well-established institutions can begin to wane, yet through a sustained image, these institutions can still be seen as prestigious to the eyes of the society.

Despite some difficulties that plague the image change, it can normally be explained through facts, whereby for those who already have developed a certain image on the data that they have obtained, therefore they will naturally become more selective of the data that comes next. Their perception, are therefore oriented on their anticipation.

Absher and Crawford in Keith and Gerald (1996) have also done a similar study where students are prone to choose a university based on what they have experienced previously and following the students’ own needs and requirements. For instance, if the university’s academic achievement is good, then the students will think of the university as good.

The Concept Of Perception:

Based on Forgus (1966), a perception is a process whereby something that is observed will become the basic information to the assessment one has, over the object perceived. He adds that a perception can be viewed in the following five characteristics:

i. A perception can be formed almost instantly, that is as soon as human can see or listen.
ii. A perception occurs in a structure, which is our acceptance of the object as a whole, and not dissecting it to sections or parts.
iii. A perception has a stable element, whereby we accept the object in the same form from time to time, except for any possible changes in terms of position and circumstances.
iv. A perception carries a meaning, where we accept the object in the sense that we are related to it in some way.
v. A perception experiences a selective process because we only tend to reject certain objects and it is only limited to one thing in particular.

Meanwhile, if we are to refer to the concept of perception by Good (1973), he states that a perception is a presumption on one’s own experiences. Apart from that, as one experiences something or any event or incidences, these experiences will become a turning point for him or her to face something similar in the future.

Thus, for the purpose of this study, a perception serves as an observation and presumption held by someone on an object. The presumption may vary from one another based on different past experiences. In this context, the perception remains an aspect that is very important to the IPTA, as it is generated from the scholars’ image of the IPTA itself.

The Importance Of Perception To The Ipta:

In this case, students’ perception towards the IPTA will provide an advantage to the IPTA in a way that it will attract the students to enroll in the institutions. A good perception will also leave a long-term impact to the
IPTA. When one has a good perception on the IPTA, this will be marked as a stereotype among the society. This is hard to alter because it will take a long time to have the perception changed.

Creating A Perception:

Multiple strategies can be adopted towards creating a perception, either through advertising, public relations, spokesperson, telephone, magazines, letters and so on. Therefore, to create this, an organization need not give overly extensive information that is thought to enable the public to remember or recall the information. This is because, with too-generous information, it can provoke various public perceptions on the organization (Marconi 1996).

Retaining The Perception:

It is only plausible that the success of creating an image as desired by the organization and how the perception is to retained must undergo an ongoing process. This can be performed through long-term or short-term sponsoring for any programme organized, lending support to activities like sports, participating actively in social, welfare and environmental education agenda (Marconi 1996).

Altering The Perception:

If any of the perception needs to be changed, then it has to start with changing the manner in which the institution does something, towards producing its required outcome. The changes can come in the form of advertisement, institutional policy and personality. However, this change will not influence the public perception, if the public has been informed, or happen to know of the institution’s negative image.

The first step in changing the perception is to listen to, and analyse the public’s perception towards the institution. The next step would be to change what is heard from the people to any strategic plan that can change the perception. Such a plan will subsequently be able to assess the most effective, practicable way as well as its potential success (Marconi 1996).

The Use Of Image And Perception In Marketing:

Image and perception have important roles in marketing activities. Therefore, a lot of organizations have tried to create their images and generate some good perceptions as for their organizations to be better known. In a study done by Kotler (1996), he has stressed on the image development for marketing purposes. This is thought to be substantial for an organization to construct its image amongst the public and how important it is for the organization to have a good image for better product or service marketing. He also postulates that image is difficult to change and it is also time-consuming to change.

If we refer to the principle of marketing which are product, placement, pricing and promotion, all these four principles involve image and perception. As an example, if an organisation is able to construct a good image towards the product in terms of its safety and quality, then this good image should be able to attract customers. In turn, customers have formulated the perception that the product has quality and is safe to use, and this will definitely benefit the organization. In this aspect, if the courses offered by the IPTA have quality and fulfill the job market, then it will give a good image in terms of the courses offered.

As far as the placement is concerned, image and perception will demonstrate a very useful role. To quote an example, with a good image and perception from the public, certainly the product will be seen as a good and quality product. The IPTA for instance, will be able to compete with the IPTS as the IPTA is placed to be better. This will contribute to the IPTA being the main choice of the students to further their studies.

In terms of pricing, when an organization succeeds in creating the image that the product’s price is low and caters to customers’ money value, automatically it will become interesting to the customers. This will then create the perception among the customers on the product. This is evident when we compare the rates of study fees between the IPTA and the IPTS, where the former’s fees are far cheaper. Again, this will attract more students to the IPTA.

In the principle of promotion, the image creation towards a product is integral. This is because, as the promotion takes place, a good image needs to be built because customers will make the first perception based on the product image promoted. For instance, when the IPTA offers a new course to the public, the course needs to project an image that it will be able to cater for the job market. When the image has already been constructed, then the IPTA has successfully built the image among the public that the course is able to fulfill the job demand, simultaneously making the promotion process easier and more successful.
The Study Objectives:

The objectives for the study are as follows:

i. To study the image of the IPTA from the perception of the undergraduates of the Economic and Administration Faculty, UM.
ii. To study how the image of the IPTA influences students’ applications to study in the IPTA.
iii. To examine the image and position of prestigious IPTA from the marketing perspective.

The Significance Of Study:

The significance of the study that needs to be highlighted is as follows:

i. To see the image and position of the IPTA from the students’ perspective.
ii. To see the influence of image in the non-profitable organisations’ marketing field.
iii. As reference and inspiration to the IPTA in creating an image as a prestigious IPTA.
iv. To know how the image of the IPTA can motivate the students to choose a prestigious IPTA.

Study Methodology:

This study only involves some third year students from the Economy and Administration Faculty, UM. It adopts the case study approach concerning the perception of these particular students on the IPTA image through the survey distributed. The respondents (80 students) have been used in the stratified random sampling method which is following the ratio of 10:15:15:20:20 from every Statistics Department, Development Department, Administration and Politics Department, Economic Analysis Department and Department of Applied Economics. Data from the survey will be analysed using the programme namely Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

Data Analysis:

Table 1 highlights the factors’ profile that influences students’ enrolment in the IPTA which is as many as 61.3% respondents choosing the factor of ‘university’s reputation’, followed by ‘programme offered is thought to be suitable’ as picked by 48.8% respondents, ‘good teaching quality’ by 35% and so on as shown in Table 1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The profile of factors that influence the students’ enrolment in the IPTA</th>
<th>Number (N)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Well-established reputation</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmes offered are suitable</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good teaching quality</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible academic staff</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable study fees</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement from teacher/counsellor</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The university being the parent’s choice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun campus lifestyle</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to parents’ home</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinion from siblings/friends</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other factors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting campus design</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of friends study at the IPTA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2, the reputation of the university (by sequence) is based on the data obtained for each university. The arrangement for the first university’s reputation and it goes right to the tenth university’s reputation. This is compiled, based on the lowest to the highest mean. The outcome is illustrated in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IPTA</th>
<th>Reputation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Malaya (UM)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (Malaysian National University-UKM)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysian Science University-USM)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (Malaysian Technology University-UTM)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (International Islamic University-UIA)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Putra Malaysia (UPM)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Utara Malaysia (Malaysian Northern University-UUM)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diagram 2 displays the map of MDS. There are several factors that have influenced the map of the MDS produced and the analysis done. These factors make close reference to the respondents’ backgrounds. This data analysis is based on the number of respondents, which is 80, confined only to the students from the Faculty of Economy and Administration, UM, from the third year of enrolment. The number of female respondents exceed the male, the number of respondents originating from the Malaysian Peninsula is more than 90% and the number of Malay respondents makes up the majority, which is 48.8%.

There are several analyses that have been done from Table 2 where all universities that have been examined can be divided into four groups, in terms of the perception of the students. The first group comprises of those from the UKM and UTM, the second group is from the UIA, UITM, USM and UPM, the third from the UMS and UUM and the fourth is from the UM and UNIMAS. The second analysis looks at the distance from the university, demonstrating that every university has its own perception. The third analysis reveals that there is an image resemblance in the same group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Teknologi MARA (MAKA Technology University-UiTM)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Malaysia Sabah (UMS)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study Findings:**

The findings obtained from the data analysis has shown that 70% of respondents are female and almost half of the 48.8% comprise of the Malays, followed by Chinese (32.5%), Indians (13.8%) and other races like Kadazan and Iban totalling 5%. This shows that the IPTA’s image is more perceived by the females and of the Malay race. The analysis also goes to show that the states where the parents of the respondents live throughout the country and the states with most respondents are Perak, Johor and Selangor. This elaborates on the fact that that the factor of living in close proximity with the parents does not become the main factor for students to apply for their place at the IPTA.

From Table 1 the factors aforementioned have become the main reasons for students to apply for a place at the IPTA. This is due to the fact that these factors become the main reasons, which is exceeding 25%. Meanwhile, other factors have not been selected by the respondents as they are selected by less than 15% of respondents. This also serves as evidence that the IPTA has a reputation of established universities. IPTA juga also has suitable programmes because it is able to cater for the demanding job market and that it is in line with the students’ interests compared to the IPTS which only provides programmes that can fulfill the job market.

Good teaching quality also serves as part of the IPTA’s image. Students see this through the IPTA’s complete infrastructure for teaching purposes like the library, laboratory, comfortable lecture theaters and many more. This is added with lines of academic staff that have the credibility, consisting of professors, and a lot of PhD holders who often make researches and publications.
Reasonable study fees are also perceived to be the image of these institutions. Students are aware that the IPTA is a government body that is not set up for profits. Next, the IPTA’s image is admitted by the teachers and councillors where they play an important role in influencing the students to choose their IPTA of choice.

From Table 2, the study findings show that the UM has the first reputation which is 91.3% as selected by the respondents. The UKM and USM become the next choices as having the second and third reputation, respectively. This is followed by UTM, UIA, UPM, UUM, UiTM, UNIMAS and UMS. This is based on the university that had long been established like the UM as compared to the UMS that is newly built. From the finding in Table 2 it shows the MDS Map produced from the data analysis. Several findings have been gathered, along the line whereby all universities examined can be divided into four groups with their own similarities and differences in terms of the students’ perception. These four groups show that every university is established with its own image based on the age of its establishment, that there are universities that specialize on a particular field and the initial objective of the IPTA. Therefore, in this situation, every IPTA is able to market their product based on their own image leaning on the good reputation of the university, suitable programmes, good teaching quality, credible academic front and reasonable study fees. This image can subsequently be applied in the product marketing of the IPTA to reach the public.

Conclusion:

Recalling the analysis that has been done, it is apparent that the perception of the would-be graduates lies in that the IPTA has a prestigious image. The image that has become the main reason for the students in influencing their enrolment in the IPTA is its well-established reputation, the programmes offered are suitable, credible academic staff, and reasonable study fees. It is these factors that have influenced the students to apply for their place in the IPTA. At the same time, this image is useful in the marketing process as to face the challenges from the IPTS.

Reference

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