Students' Perception as a Customer Concept on University Image

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ABSTRACT

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Due to the increasing of number of universities in Thailand might lead to high competitive environment. Therefore, the university image and brand play an important role for student's intention to study at each university. This research aims to identify the factors that influence an individual's perception on image and brand at a practice engineering school. The sample group of 420 high school students who applied for technological university was collected. The descriptive statistics and factor analysis were used to examine the students' perception on university image. The results showed that students' perception on image can be categorized into 3 factors: external characteristic factor, emotional factor and taste and intention Factor.

1. Introduction

The overview of higher education has been increasingly competitive as the students are also customer (hanover research, 2015). Universities are recently doing more like commercial businesses and assessing their corporate brands and images has become important (Purolinna, 2016). The competition drives the universities to build strongly their image and also focus on their brand (Hemsley – Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). In Higher education sector, the image perceived by stakeholders are important (Helgesen and Nettet, 2007). The students and the parents search for various sources of information in order to choose the suitable university (Moogan, 2011). Kardes et al (1993) also mentioned that prospective students may form brand or image consideration sets for the universities for the most appropriate for them. Universities are able to differentiate themselves by creating strong brand images are recognized by prospective students (Plungpongpan et al, 2016). The uniqueness of higher education is that the university reputation has been traditionally the main indicator together with emergence of branding, the adoption concepts such as brand identity and image are becoming increasingly important (Hemsely – Brown et al, 2016). Due to the increasing of number of universities in Thailand might lead to high competitive environment. Therefore, the university image and brand play an important role for student's intention to study at each university. This research aims to identify the factors that influence an individual's perception on image and brand at a practice engineering school.

2. Literature Reviews

There several researches on students' intention to study based on major or specific fields. (Mazzarol and Soutar 2002, Keshishian et. al 2010, Carnasciali and Thomson 2013, Al-Rfou 2013, Tang and Seng 2015 and MacEachern and Yun, 2017) And some study on important factors to attract and retain the students (Helgesen and Nettet 2007, Nguyen and LeBlanc, 2001). For students, the image of an educational institution is important for the realization and decision making of their studies; it gets the loyalty of the students and it is a means to attract other students (Brown and Mazzarol, 2009, Perez and Torres, 2016).

1.1 University Image

Barich and Kotler (1991) describes the institutional image as the impression of the public related to various physical and behavioral attributes of the institution. It is also supported by Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) defined university image as the perceived image of the public on university based on their thought, idea, interest and also their own personnel experience. The image perception can be incongruent and favorable counteract impression, hence, the harmonization of activities is consequently important. The symbol, value and the building of university image is a length of process that can be improved by technology, sudden achievement or destroyed by neglecting the expectations of the stakeholders (Herbig et. al, 1994). Image sometimes refers to schema. The self- schema (Markus, 1977) refers to a long lasting and stable set of memories that summarize a person's beliefs, experiences and generalizations about the self, in specific behavioral domains. A person may have a self-schema based on any aspect of himself or herself as a person, including physical characteristics, personality traits and interests, as long as they consider that aspect of their self-important to their own self-definition.

1.2 Student as a Customer Concept

Lots of universities increased the number admitted as a means of increasing their incomes while admitted students are considered as "customer" (Watjatrakul, 2014). Several universities has adopted many international quality assurance approach such as ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology), AUN-QA (ASEAN university network QA) and TQM (total quality management). AUN – QA approach counts students as the key stakeholder whom provide feedback related on their satisfaction based on what university or program provide (ASEAN University Network, 2016). TQM approach has been widely used in business sector in order to improve their business performance and gain more profitability and competitive advantage over the others. These are some example of quality assurance applied in the universities in order to improve their performance and provide better services. Universities are in a competition to attract and retain their students with image, branding and advertisement. The management practice should be considered an organizational image based on consumer orientation. Applying the concept of customers to students might improve educational process, gain more reputation and enhance the students' perception based on the institutional image. A strong image might be easy for the consumer to choose and purchase the product or service which match their need (Hsieh et. al, 2004).

3. Method and Sampling

The questionnaires were distributed to the sample group of 420 high school (Mattayom 6) who applied to study at College of Industrial Technology (CIT), King Mongkut's University of Technology North Bangkok. The random sampling method was applied and the sample size indicate based on Yamane (1973)

The data presented in this paper were collected through a structured questionnaire. It was designed into 2 parts; the first is demographic data of participants such as gender, education, GPA and intention to study. The second part contained 19 statements measuring students' perception on CIT image which adapted from Saenmueang (2011). The completed data were analyzed using various statistics tools and techniques which were frequency, means and standard deviation and factor analysis in order to determine significant factors on students' perception on image.

The preliminary analysis consists of Cronbach's α was analyzed for reliability analysis. The Cronbach's α coefficient for the total score was 0.909. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy were employed to indicate whether factor analysis is feasible or not. The statistical result of Bartlett's and KMO of students' intention and students' adaptation are shown in Table I

Table I KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	df	Sig.
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The KMO and Bartlett's Test was analyzed to examine the appropriateness of Factor Analysis. The approximate of Chi-square is 3323.552 with 171 degrees of freedom which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. The KMO statistic of .915 was also large (greater than 0.60). Hence Factor Analysis is considered feasible.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table II presents the cross-tabulation between respondents' gender and school. The result consisted of 304 males, accounted for 73.6 percent of the total students surveyed, and 109 females, accounted for 26.4 percent of the total students surveyed. The result also shows that the students mostly are from public school.

Table II cross-tabulation between gender and school

		Public	Private	Technical	Occupational	Total
Gender	Male	203	34	55	11	303
	Female	84	20	3	2	109
Total		287	54	58	13	412

The students' perception on image was collected and presented in table III to see the how they think about CIT as a person.

Table III students' perception on image

Image	Means	S.D. Image
Inert	3.98	0.72 Active
Image	Means	S.D. Image
Expensive	3.32	0.79 Cheap
Foolish	3.98	0.83 Clever
Indecisive	4.07	0.86 Desicive
Rural	3.85	0.92 Urban
Simple	3.18	0.84 Luxurious
Easy	3.41	0.92 Difficult
Childish	4.01	0.80 Adult

Ancient	4.02	0.87 Modern
Old	3.99	0.87 New
Wild	3.69	0.91 Mild
Rude	3.77	0.89 Polite
Serious	3.67	0.94 Relax
Dirty	3.92	0.84 Clean
Aggressive	3.87	0.89 Peaceful
Hurry	3.60	0.94 Unhurried
Unhappy	4.11	0.82 Happy
Slow	3.91	0.81 Fast
Fun	3.67	1.00 Determined

Table III shows that the average of all items were higher than 2.5 which means the perception of the students tend to be positive as shown in figure 1.

Figure I shows average of all image items

4.2 Factor Analysis

Principal component analysis was used to determine and identify students' perception on image. An eigenvalue of 1.0 was used to determine the number of factors with those having a value greater than 1.0 being seen as significant. Table VI present factors extraction with Varimax rotation method on students' intention and students' adaptation respectively.

Table VI present factors extraction

Factors	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.209	22.154	22.154
2	3.654	19.232	41.387
3	2.354	12.387	53.773
4	1.260	6.632	60.406

Items were arranged into factors based on the size of loading with respect to statistical analysis. The first factor consisted of seven items (peaceful, relax, polite, mild, unhurried, clean and happy) and was named external characteristic factor. The second factor comprised of

another 7 items (adult, modern, new, active, decisive, clever and fast) that were mostly associated with the factor entitled emotional factor. The third factor was classified with four items (luxurious, difficult, urban and determined) and labeled as Taste and Intention Factor. The last factor was one item so it could be eliminated.

Table V present factors extraction

	Factor Loading
Factor 1: External Characteristic Factor	
Peaceful	.755
Relax	.751
Polite	.706
Mild	.688
Unhurried	.682
Clean	.681
Happy	.604
Factor 2: Emotional Factor	
Adult	.693
Modern	.690
New	.637
Active	.625
Decisive	.617
Clever	.608
Fast	.584
Factor 3: Taste and Intention Factor	
Luxurious	.762
Difficult	.755
Urban	.552
Determined	.478

The result of exploratory factor analysis for students' perception on image of CIT shows that there are 2 keys on decision making toward institutional image; external appearance (external characteristic factor) and affective links (emotional factor and taste and intention). External appearance may refer to brand image. A place branding is basically focused on attractions and location image that might attract events, investors, visitors (e.g. students or professionals), trade and the category of people termed "influencers" (Anholt, 2010). A strong brand image provides the firm with a sustainable competitive advantage that drives loyalty (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2003). It is commonly known that branding influences on individual's perception and decision making to purchase or choose the product of service. Affective links means emotional factor, including taste and intention which effect psychologically on individuals. The influences of individual's emotion usually express in some way. The taste and intention may be a driven force for the students to choose to study at the suitable institutional education.

5. Conclusion

This research investigate the students' perception factor on institutional education image by using exploratory factor analysis. It was found 3 factors regarding both external outlook of the university and emotional – affective image. The paper showed that the external characteristic factor is the most influential factors that affect students' perception which mean the appearance draws an attention to students. This research revealed some traced evidence of student-as- customer concept in education. The students (service receiver) tend to make a decision based on the publicity from school (service provider). Pinkaew and Speece (2001) mentioned that university education is a high – involvement service in Thailand. High-involvement product and services such as education, mat not have frequent repurchase, but they can have substantial word-of-mouth that is also supported by brand and image.

The influence of brand and image directly affect students' decision to

choose where to study. The organizational image is important in a present day. The management leader or executives should be aware of this image as marketing awareness. To be able to be in a strong competitive situation, the universities executives should maintain a well – defined branding and image of its institution. The business tools such as VRIO analysis may also apply to enhance and gain more competitive advantage in the field.

This findings are presented from a certain area therefore further exploration and research is required to determine applicability to other institution.

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