Corporate Identity Management (CIM) Model in Malaysian Higher Education Sector: Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

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Abstract

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Corporate Identity Management (CIM) in universities has been acknowledged in marketing literature as an important area of research. Research within the current spectrum of CIM indicates some ambiguities surrounding corporate identity in higher education. However, very few studies are available in the field of corporate identity within universities. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to examine the relationships between university's CIM and organizational performance, and also identify the relevant underlying mechanisms in Malaysian higher-education sector. Based on a review of the existing literature in a range of areas, this study proposes a conceptual model of the positive relationships between CIM activities in universities with internal brand, transformational leadership and organisational culture. The proposed conceptual model is developed based on three main theories--social identification theory, transformational leadership theory and social learning theory.

Keywords: corporate identity; internal brand; leadership; culture.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the interests on corporate identity have increased significantly among academics and businesses. They realised that strong identity helps them to align businesses with the marketplace, attract investors, motivate employees and distinguish their products and services from competitors. As a

result, many organizations are struggling to develop a different and identifiable identity. According to Einwiller and Will (2002), a successful corporate identity characteristic includes a reputation for strong financial performance, high-quality goods and services, a reputation for social and a pleasant workplace environment, and environmental responsibility.

Furthermore, the world rapid business expansion has finally been encompassed by the higher-education sector in which education is realized as a service that could be marketed globally (Melewar and Akel, 2005). The increased competition in the higher-education market has been realized as the key driver of higher-education marketisation over the world (Maringe, 2010). For instance, the competition among higher-education institutions to attract high-quality students and academicians at an international level became a new trend. The development poses challenges for universities, especially in improving their customer-oriented service approach to education and at the same time emphasizing their identity.

Second, the higher-education institutions are forced in some sense to become more independent and self-funded. The government interference is felt more strongly by universities and colleges as compared to businesses and industries (Adcroft et al., 2010). In Malaysia, the government controls higher-education institutions through legislation and administrative regulations, court decisions and the actions of the executive branch of government such as the Ministry of Higher Education. This situation encourages universities to build up competent systems (Judson et al., 2006) to support academics to increase their performance. Consequently, this enhances the quality and competency of the service offered by the university.

Third, the ranking systems have come to light in a number of countries (Stensaker, 2005; Salmi and Saroyan, 2007). The ranking system will guide students in choosing the best institution for undergraduate courses. The university ranking also provides a background of information for funding decisions (Stensaker 2005) and is used as policy mechanisms for evaluating and comparing university performances (Salmi and Saroyan, 2007). The league tables and ranking systems such as Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings significantly affect higher-education decision making by helping universities to set goals for their strategic planning and assessing their performance, as well as supporting their representation.

In the Malaysian context, the higher-education sector has progressed rapidly since 1990. Currently there are 20 public universities and hundreds of private universities, which offer a variety of courses for students. Understanding the global and regional current market for higher education, the competitive advantages of the universities need to develop based on their unique characteristics. Therefore, the unique characteristics of universities should be communicated to the relevant stakeholders in an effective and consistent ways (Mohamad et al., 2009). Managing corporate identity strategically, will help universities to develop a competitive edge over competitors (Olins, 1995).

2. Objectives

The objective of this study is to develop a model, which explains the antecedents of CIM. Therefore, this research hopes to identify and examine the determinants of CIM such as internal brand,

transformational leadership and organizational culture. The research expects to contribute toward advancing the current knowledge of CIM and offer new practical insights in managing higher-education institutions and policy makers.

3. Corporate Identity Management (CIM)

Corporate identity is defined as internal and external strategic plan and operational self-presentation of an organization (Cornelissen and Elving, 2003). It is based on long term organization goals, an agreed philosophy, and a particular desired image, that combined, will employ all organization instruments such as behavior, communication and symbolism as one unit. With regards to this situation, university is highly sensible in its effort to achieve a positive identity.

Olins (1995) delineates four stages in building an identity program. Firstly, investigation where analysis and suggestions are conceded internally to identify a corporate entity should represent. Universities are more affected with factors such as its market share, position, central idea, core values, growth patterns, corporate culture, size, profitability and competitiveness in setting its goals.

Second, is a stage of developing the identity by identity structure, behavioral change, and name and visual styles such as the creation of an organizational logo. With regards to visual style, universities should utilize different colours in their logo. The logo is a symbol of an organization to display the principal idea with impact, brevity and immediacy, and it portrays a central idea which describes the university as an innovative organization instituted upon healthy philosophies and governance.

The third stage, corporate identity formation, which communicate a corporate vision. Therefore, the university's identity must be communicated through the mass media or another medium of identity formation. Implementation is the fourth stage in identity formation that involves an alignment of mission statement and university marketing strategy. In ensuring that a university is the first choice among potential students, it should work together with other institutions in its mission to promote awareness (Mohamad et al., 2007).

Specifically, Simones, Dibb and Fisk (2005) definition gives a more systematic explanation of the most fundamental CIM. Their definition takes a comprehensive view of the corporate identity dimensions that need to be managed internally. CIM included; (1) the implementation, support, and maintenance of visual systems; (2) the expression and pursuit of brand and image consistency through global organizational symbols and forms of communication; and (3) the endorsement of consistent behavior through the diffusion of a company's mission, values, and goals. More importantly, in the context of this study, CIM "considers all forms of communication that convey an image and seek an integrated approach to articulate identity in coherent and harmonized messages through internal and external forms of communication" (Simones, Dibb and Fisk, 2005, p158).

4. Antecedents of CIM

Internal brand is the level of employees understanding toward brand and organization intrinsic values in order for them to deliver the brand's promises to the consumers in daily operations (Urde, 2003). For instance, employees of higher-education institution are important as they represent the university to the public, especially in the areas of quality teaching and staff reputation (Ivy, 2001). The

less understanding the employees have about the institution's brand values can reflect their own values more than the university's brand values (Jevons, 2006). Scholars also emphasize this idea and believe that brand message will lose its credibility if it is not supported by aligned employee behavior (Schiffenbauer, 2001).

Nonetheless, universities also need to align their employees' attitudes and behaviors with the corporate brand values. As noted by Melewar and Jenskin (2002) and Mohamad et al., (2009), corporate behavior and employee behavior are the corporate identity dimensions. Although, the concept of internal branding is recognized as a new phenomenon which has become important for universities in the increasingly competitive markets (Judson et al., 2006), very few studies have acknowledged the relationship between internal branding and CIM in universities. To date, there is no specific relations between the variables has been discussed by scholars. One of the closest researches that had been conducted by Vallaster and de Chernatony (2005), emphasized the integration between corporate identity structures and internal brand. Corporate structures have been identified as a driving force to enable employees behaves in a manner, which achieves strategic goals (Hatch and Schultz, 2001). Structures are defined as the resources and rules' employees draw upon every working day (Giddens, 1979).

Transformational leadership is strong role models for the followers which provide a clear vision and sense of mission. A leader is a person who has the ability to motivate, inspire, and create commitment to common goals (Bass, 1997) that can enhance the identity of the university. Transformational leadership shows a passion to take risks and to accept occasional failures as being natural (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). For example, in the context of higher-education, a leader has an obligation to build trust among the organization's employees, which can be demonstrated through internal and communication.

In general, a significant relationship between transformational leadership and organizational functioning has existed (Waldman and Bass, 1987). For instance, leaders play a significant role as an information provider to the subordinates at different levels. Leaders have to ensure that corporate identity (i.e.vision) of the organization is achieved. In realizing the vision of corporate identity, a transformational leader should have good communication skills in building trust and enthusiasm within the organization. As highlighted in the theory of transformational leadership, emotions and values (Yukl, 1998) imply that "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (Burns, 1978).

Organizational culture has been conceptualized in many ways. It contains multiple sets of dimensions such as behavior (Kotrba et al., 2012), beliefs (Chapman et al., 2011), values (Schneider et al., 2013). These dimensions work as a substructure for organization management practices, management systems and behavior. It also contains ideas that guide organizational viewpoints towards employees and customers (Jin and Drozdenko, 2010). Moreover, organizational culture as the pattern of belief and shared values helps employees to understand the function of the organizational, and thus provide norms for behavior in the organization (Deshpande and Webster, 1989).

There are two main foundations that link this paper. Firstly, culture should be a pillar of communication in cascading a message to employees. Second, culture produces a positive attitude among members when dealing with problems.

CIM and organizational culture lie close to each other. The elements of culture can also be influenced and changed over time, and are similar to the element of communication (Smith, 1966). This study seeks to understand such interrelationships and mutual dependence in greater detail, to sufficiently account for the impact of organizational culture on CIM, because strong interest in culture is one of the most significant trends in contemporary communication studies.

Organizational culture strengthens the significance of CIM, and is likely to inspire better organizational communication systems at all levels (individual and group) based on beliefs, values, and behavior in initiating a fundamental identity for the organization. Moreover, the link between CIM and organizational culture can be understood in corporate and organizational behavior such as negotiating, motivating, problem-solving, leading, decision making and exchanging information and ideas. From the macro perspective, successful CIM depends on the capability of employees and managers from one culture to understand other cultures. Taking into account the above discussion, thus far, it is proposed that:

- Proposition 1: Internal brand will have a positive impact on Corporate Identity Management (CIM)
- Proposition 2: Transformational leadership will have a positive impact on Corporate Identity Management (CIM)
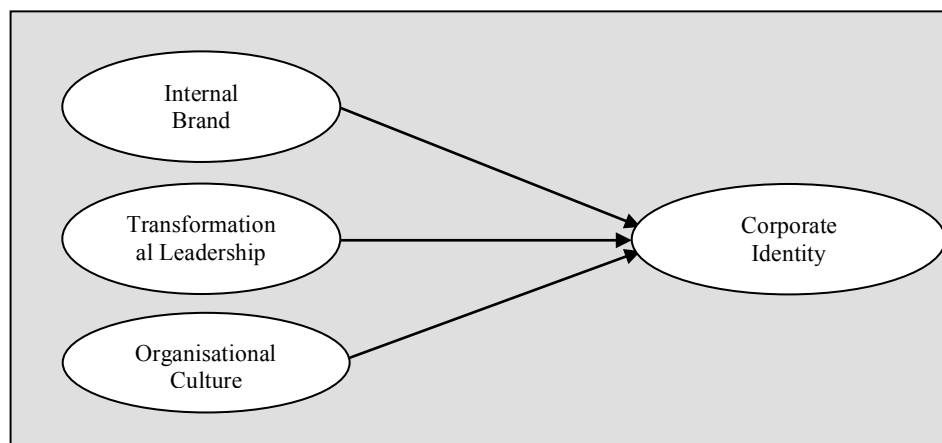- Proposition 3: Organisational culture will have a positive impact on Corporate Identity Management (CIM)

Fig. 1. The proposed model of the antecedents' Corporate Identity Management (CIM).

5. Research Implications

This paper contributes toward the present theories by extending and testing theories, validating conceptualizations of developing and examining a theoretical model.

First, this research tries to link the antecedents of institutional factors such as internal brand, organizational culture, and transformational leadership to corporate identity management. Examining the CIM model in a different context (non-western country) could offer additional perspectives into the present literature from the non-western context (Hofstede, 1980).

Second, although most corporate identity researchers could gain something from using a systematic management and integrated framework, the CIM field of study lacks consistency, contrary and scattered. Thus, a wider view of CIM is required, because concepts and practices need to be developed and best comprehended. The dimensional knowledge in this paper will provide a best understanding of the complicated driving force of CIM.

Lastly, this paper may be beneficial for those undertaking studies as it could develop their understanding of the determinants of CIM in the higher-education sector. Furthermore, it will help those involved in the teaching of CIM to understand the practical concept in creating suitable courses, adjusting applicable criteria and drawing relevant qualifications for the future direction in the higher-education system. Researchers in CIM for example, can focus their work from a strategic management standpoint and reinforce their professional status.

6. Conclusion

This paper predominantly offers better understandings toward the determinants of CIM. Specifically, this paper verifies theories in a different context (non-western) in order to examine their applicability in other settings than the west. To summarize, the CIM theoretical model has proven to be useful to the organisations and the conceptual model presented has also proven its robustness. It was discovered that internal brand, corporate culture and corporate leadership are factors that affect CIM directly. Hence, this research addressed the determinants of CIM, and they are discovered to be significant factors.

The literature and the academic community need new settings to prove the applicability and validity of theories formed in the west (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991) and new studies are essential in order to test the association of prevailing theory to the new setting (Tsui, 2006). Thus far, most theories related to CIM originate from the sets of ideas associated with western culture, and thus signify this specific culture, and the institutional foundations which are also constructed on a western culture. Hence assessing the CIM model in Malaysia adds additional perspectives to the existing literature, because Malaysian universities and their cultural backgrounds are significantly distinct from those of western cultures (Abdullah and Lim, 2001). The model clarifies the antecedents of CIM in Malaysian higher-education sector and reveals broader applicability.

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