

Premier Polytechnics Brand Image: A Pilot Study on the reliability of the instrument.

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Abstract: Branding is part of the promotional aspect of marketing and is extremely important to the image, reputation, and success of an organization or institutions. Successful branding would help to attract and retain students at the institution. Polytechnics need to market themselves in order to attract students. To compete in the current marketplace, polytechnics management has to find effective approaches to attract students including adopting and practicing the culture of quality across all aspects of their activities. As part of strategies, three polytechnics have been selected as the nation's premier polytechnics. The three institutions chosen are PSA (Selangor), PUO (Perak) and PIS (Johor). The three premier polytechnics are said to focus on technical programmes in niche fields which address the needs of the services industry. Centres of technology which serve as hubs of reference, research and international collaboration will also be established in the premier polytechnics. It is apparent that the establishment of a **premier polytechnic** focuses on developing a distinctive image whilst maintaining the institution's competitive advantage. Implicitly **premier polytechnics** are formed significantly for advancing the socio-economic progress of a nation, particularly through its human resource development. Furthermore, it is hoped that **premier polytechnic** would become competitive and resilient enough to be among the best institutions in the world. This paper reports on the perceived brand image of **premier polytechnics** among students. The main objective is to develop a model of **premier polytechnics** brand image which is capable to make polytechnics the preferred choice of students. A new instrument is proposed to measure corporate image and establish its empirical validity and reliability through pilot studies. As a result, each factor or component yielded a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.8 to 0.9 which is greater than the recommended threshold of 0.70 suggested by Nunnally. 1978.

Key words: *Premier Polytechnics, brand image dimensions. Pilot study and reliability*

INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen the aggressive promotion of Premier polytechnics by the government, an initiative that was enthusiastically embraced by three polytechnic in Malaysia (PUO, PSA and PIS)) after its introduction in 2010. This interest parallels the growth of the knowledge economy and subsequently led to the recognition that comparative advantage can be gained from the polytechnic's branding, its technical programmes in niche fields and centres of technology which serve as hubs of reference.

As part of its initiative to improve the quality and image of polytechnics, certificate-level courses would no longer be offered from the July 2010 intake. Polytechnics will now focus on diploma and advanced diploma programmes. Under the transformation plan, there will be a 30% increase in the number of places offered for diploma programmes from 60,840 in 2009 to 87,440 in 2012. The Polytechnic Transformation Plan has set to make polytechnics as the preferred

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choice for students in the field of TVET and would increase its student enrolment to 119,000 by 2015.

Recently there has been a marked increase in the intake of students in most polytechnic as well as premier polytechnic (Table 1). The figures show that the students' intake in premier polytechnics is experienced a spectacular growth annually. However, the Ministry of Higher Education records on the intake of students reveal a fluctuating trend. The data shows that in 2016, the intake of students decrease to 5066.

POLYTECHNICS	INTAKE				
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
PUO	1055	1961	2503	2284	2614
PSA	1189	1318	1909	1333	1716
PIS	1139	1492	1859	1449	1770
Total	3383	4771	6271	5066	6100

Table 1 : Premier Polytechnics

This upswing was inconsistent, as only a slight increase (6100) in the students' intake was recorded in 2017 compared to 2015 (6271).

The fluctuating trend does not resonate well with the aim of increasing student intake to advance the establishment of Premier Polytechnics as to be 'preferred institutions'. From this perspective, the Premier Polytechnic efforts to meet the country's needs in embracing global challenges as well market itself in a climate of global competition would have less impact, particularly if this trend continues. While there is growing consensus that branding is important [1], the relationship between a premier's polytechnic status, its strategy and its ability to attract students is still unclear. Thus, further research should be carried out to address this matter. This study responds to the need to gain better understanding of this fluctuating trend by investigating issues using the brand image paradigm

METHOD

For the purposes of this paper, our approach to utilizing pilot study. This provides the basis for interpreting the results of the pilot study and determining whether it is feasible to proceed to the main study. Johanson and Brooks, [2] suggested that 30 representative participants from the population of interest is a reasonable minimum recommendation for a pilot study where the purpose is preliminary survey or scale development. For similar reason, Treece and Treece [3], noted that for a project with "100 people as the sample, a pilot study participation of 10 subjects should be a reasonable number" (p.176). Hill [4] suggested 10 to 30 participants for pilots in survey research.

The pilot test was conducted for the full questionnaire using respondents whose backgrounds were similar to the actual study. In this study, 30 students from Premier Polytechnics were selected to answer the questionnaire besides giving opinions about the questionnaires. By using this method, the researcher would get instant response and gained further information related to the questions given. The exercise that was used in pilot test is person administered survey. This method was carried out to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire and to find out the weaknesses and potential errors of questionnaires [5]. Based on the information given, these amendments can be made to ensure the questionnaires will be easily understandable for respondents in the future.

RESULTS

Item to total correlations and Cronbach's alpha were computed. Cronbach's coefficient alpha is the commonly used measure for internal consistency reliability and it is importantly used for measuring multi-point items [6]. As a result, each factor or component yielded a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) ranging from 0.8 to 0.9 which is greater than the recommended threshold of 0.70 [7]. Cronbach's alpha value of .7 and above is considered to be reliable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994) [8]. An alpha value of .7 and above indicates items are homogenous and measuring the same construct.

CONCLUSIONS

Pilot studies can be very informative, not only to the researchers conducting them but also to others doing similar work. This study is perhaps one of the first to investigate determinants of premier polytechnics brand image which will provide insights on how the premier polytechnics could improve their brand images

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