

## **EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WEBSITE BRANDING FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING IN THE KLANG VALLEY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The intention of this study is to determine the perception of students in evaluating the effectiveness of website branding for institutions of higher learning (IHLs). In addition, it is also to measure the effectiveness of website branding and the important role it plays as a medium in branding for institutions of higher learning. Besides, it is also to determine how brand recall may influence students' decision to enrol into a particular school. The findings of this research are, hopefully, intended to provide accurate and useful information so as to facilitate further research in similar fields of study. Permission was granted by the Directors of the IHLs to deliver and collect the questionnaires. Questionnaires were given to 600 students of 10 selected IHLs in the Klang Valley. The respondents involved were students enrolled in the social science, technology and arts and design courses as well as all the school administrators ranging from the Principals to the key personnel of the departments. The respondents were asked about their perception with regard to evaluating the effectiveness of website branding for institutions of higher learning so as to gain their true interpretation and understanding of website branding. Responses from the respondents have shown that, generally, branding through a website was more important as compared to the use of other traditional mass media. The website was another medium that could be important for branding of IHLs. Many student respondents agreed that the website was more effective in their search for information compared to the use of the traditional mass media. From the traditional mass media, one might find it difficult to obtain the required information since many IHLs seldom employ any publicity using the traditional mass media. Educational institutions that posted good websites that could provide clear and sufficient information to their potential students would then have a competitive advantage over those that did not. The findings have shown that strong brand recall could provide customers with an assurance of quality and a reduction of search time in the purchasing process. Besides that, the findings have also indicated that branding through a website was definitely more effective in influencing the students in making decisions to enrol in their courses compared to the use of traditional mass media strategies.

Keywords: Branding, internet marketing, website branding

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this digital era, the transmission of information is becoming an increasingly important component. New technologies raise questions on what is taught and how it is taught. According to the Oxford American Dictionary (2003), WEB are the initials for the World Wide Web. It is defined as an extensive information system on the Internet providing facilities for documents to be connected to other documents by hypertext links. It is sometimes called WWW. Every website comes with a Uniform Resources Language (URL)

that guides the Internet surfer to locate the WWW site. The effectiveness of Internet branding as a marketing tool explains how information can be accessed and disseminated via the Web. An analysis of current usage patterns has indicated that IHLs that adopted Internet branding had the competitive edge. In this research study, brand building through the Internet will be studied to spearhead the academic environment vis-a-vis evaluating its effectiveness for IHLs. Furthermore, it will also study how these institutions identify students' perceptions of brands, and the effectiveness of Internet branding as perceived by their users.

Today IHLs are competing to brand themselves in several ways to reach and gain a wider variety of students. Prospective students, like prospective customers, have a vast array of choices: private or public school, large or small, domestic or international, liberal arts or technical - the list goes on. Like businesses competing for talented workers, IHLs compete vigorously for talented students and calculate ways to improve the conversion rate from accepted to enrolled students. Higher education is a broad marketplace, and no college or university can rest on its laurels. According to *The Star* dated 10 Nov 2011, only three of 210 private colleges audited under the Malaysian Quality Evaluation System for Private Colleges (MyQuest), were rated six star (Distinction) and received scores of above 90%. The three top-scoring private colleges were Penang Medical College, Segi College and Taylor's College. A total of 403 private institutions had been invited to be audited under the MyQuest system which was implemented for the first time in 2011 using data of the colleges in the 2010/2011 academic year. Today, ranking of IHLs can be measured through IHL research quality, graduate employability and recognition, teaching commitment, students, resources, quality of management system, program recognition and international commitment. Although many IHLs have their own websites, few are aware of the effectiveness of brand building through this medium. It is for this reason that the researcher feels that there is a necessity to carry out a systematic and scientific research on Internet branding that can be employed by the IHLs' marketing authorities in Malaysia to increase their enrolment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The reaction towards Web branding influences brand attitudes. Branding has been characterised as the process of creating value through the provision of a compelling and consistent offer and customer experience that will satisfy customers and keep them coming back (Aaker, 1991; De Chernatony and McDonald, 1992). As customers develop trust in the brand through satisfaction in use and experience, companies have the opportunity to start building relationships with them, strengthening the brand further and making it more difficult for competitors to imitate (Doyle, 1998). This could include attitudes, behaviour, opinions, self image as well as views of others where marketers would use their information to create a brand for the product.

According to Keller (2008), the key to creating a strong brand is to be able to choose a name, logo, symbol, package design or other characteristics that identify a product and distinguish it from others. The different components of a brand that identify and differentiate it are brand elements. Moreover, McDaniel (1996) has stated that the Internet has been providing firms new alternatives for generating brand awareness, promoting a

desired brand image, stimulating new and repeat brand sales and enhancing brand loyalty, and building strong brand equity. Nearly all packaged goods firms have a presence online.

Nevertheless, Lewis (1993) has indicated that factors creating financial value for strong brands can be categorized into two parts that were factors related to growth (a brand's ability to attract new customers or resist competitive activity) and factors related to profitability (brand loyalty, premium pricing, lower advertising or sales ratios). Also according to Keller (2008) brand knowledge was the key to creating brand equity, because it could create differential effects that build strong brand. The Web has the ability to build brands. Keller (2008) has further stated that the key desirability criterion was that a brand must be relevant and important to the target consumer. Consideration of a relevance test could be easily overlooked. Consumers would then feel that brand was the one they should seriously consider. Besides, brands needed to have consistency. In order to achieve this, one needed to understand how cohesive and well integrated the marketing programme should be. Does the marketing programme relate effectively to past marketing programmes and properly balance continuity and change, evolving the brand in the right direction? This is an example of question that marketers should constantly asked themselves.

New technologies and emerging market trends have converged to shift the balance of power from companies towards customers. Companies are finding that they have to redefine their marketing and branding strategies due to the unique characteristics of the Internet and its capacity to change old rules (Ibeh et al., 2005). We have seen that a brand is generally thought to evoke, in the customer's mind, a certain personality, presence and product or service performance (Aaker, 1991; Doyle, 1998) and that the concept of a "brand" can be a way for consumers to simplify the time-consuming process of search and comparison before deciding what to buy (Rowley, 2004; Bergstrom, 2000). We have argued that the advent of the Internet has added a more complex and dynamic element to branding strategy, particularly the implications for real-time interaction and marketplace crowding. Many online businesses are, thus, searching for new e-brand strategies that might assist them in creating some distinctiveness and in engaging their customers (Kenney and Curry, 1999).

The findings by Simmons (2007) stated that literature of branding identifies understanding customers, communicating with them and maintaining ongoing interaction as essential to the augmentation of core products and services to create successful brands. Segmentation is viewed by Goldsmith (1999) as a key facilitator, helping the marketer to understand more precisely the structure of the market and who the customer is or should be. This author takes the argument further, in stating that personalisation can play a role in this online segmentation approach, allowing marketers to precisely and cost effectively target segments and develop more one-to-one relationships. The prototype of personalisation is the World Wide Web. The power of the Internet is its ability to tailor itself for each of its users.

According to Rowley (2004), brand building will be increasingly important in providing continuity and customer commitment in a fast-moving marketplace. In an electronic shopping environment where physical interaction is reduced and product qualities and benefits must be distilled and captured in a way that can be communicated over the wires, online branding may be increasingly important. Others argue that with the wealth of information on the Web at their fingertips, coupled with intelligent agents and search engines to help them locate the information, products and services that they need, users will no longer rely on the shorthand of brand. Instead they will gather detailed information on products and services and make their own judgements on the suitability of a product,

thereby making brands superfluous. There is evidence to suggest that it is difficult to communicate an online brand in the absence of preconceptions already established through other channels. Many of the early dotcoms failed because they needed to establish presence and reputation quickly and the huge marketing budgets that this required undermined their financial stability. The key focus has been to balance the need to protect and not corrupt established brands as established organisations enter risky “new marketplaces” while leveraging the brand equity of existing brands.

An experimental pilot study research was conducted on 75 respondents to assess the effectiveness of Internet as a medium to promote the brand. The respondents were students studying business, technology and arts and design courses in 10 selected institutions of higher learning in the Klang Valley area. The questionnaires were given and collected personally by the researcher.

The objective behind the experimental design was to maximize external as well as internal validity. As a result, great care went into creating the experimental conditions that would permit fair and representative tests of the hypotheses. Specifically, two factors were monitored: (i) brand name in the institutions of higher learning website in terms of whether a brand name explicitly conveyed a product benefit and (ii) website exposure sequence in terms of the nature of the website.

Brand name was manipulated between subjects, so that half of the sample viewed the website for the IHLs and the other half viewed the website for new IHLs that used four key features, namely attractiveness, informing, positioning and delivering brand names.

From the researcher’s observation, there were more design, business and computer courses in the Klang Valley than in other parts of the country. The locations of the surveyed universities and colleges were in the Klang Valley, such as Subang Jaya, Kajang, Petaling Jaya, Bandar Utama, Bandar Sunway, Shah Alam and Cyberjaya. The IHLs that were selected included INTI and SEGI in Subang Jaya, Sunway University in Bandar Sunway, KBU International College in Bandar Utama, Olympia College in Petaling Jaya, Universiti Industri Selangor (UNISEL) in Shah Alam, New Era College in Kajang, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) in Petaling Jaya and Sungai Long, Universiti Teknologi MARA or UiTM in Shah Alam and Limkokwing University of Creative Technology in Cyberjaya.

Another reason for the choice of the Klang Valley was that most of the IHLs offering design, business and computer courses were in this part of the country. The research study covered 10 institutions of higher learning offering design, business and computer courses and the total population of all the institutions taking these courses was around 60,000. For the purpose of this study a total of 600 respondents is an ideal number. Therefore the researcher decided to survey all the IHLs in the Klang Valley and from each institution of higher learning 60% female and 40% male respondents were used as samples. This number selected was based on random sampling.

## **EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

According to Malhotra (2004) “an experiment is formed when the researcher manipulates one or more independent variables and measures their effect on one or more dependent variables, while controlling for the effect of extraneous variables”. Experimental design is a set of procedures specifying, (I) the test unit and how these units are to be divided into

homogeneous subsamples, (II) what independent variables or treatment are to be manipulated, (III) what dependent variables are to be measured and (IV) how the extraneous variables are to be controlled.

One of the more comprehensive formulations in assessing website effectiveness was developed by Simeon (1999). Simeon proposed the AIPD model, arguing that an effective website must accomplish four principal objectives:

- (1) attractiveness (A)
- (2) informing (I)
- (3) positioning (P)
- (4) delivery (D)

Therefore, websites could be evaluated in terms of their contributions towards these aims. Recognizing that each AIPD component was multidimensional, Simeon has attempted to identify dimensions of each AIPD factors and to determine their relative importance.

For this research study, a pilot study was undertaken where 30 students enlisted from the local IHLs community participated in a pilot study. 60 per cent of the sample were females. All the respondents were less than 25 years of age. Respondents were given a briefing about the research: a website was being developed and they were being asked to evaluate it. The website was developed with four (4) features, namely attraction, informing, positioning and delivery. The respondents had to examine the website that promotes the brand name of the IHL on their computer screens.

A pilot test was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of all the items used in the questionnaire. Based on the test, the researcher was able to identify whether the respondents were able to understand the questions asked and the content of the research. This was important to ensure that no confusion would arise. Data collected from this pilot test were processed by using the SPSS software. This was to test the validity and reliability of the items. However, a few items were fine-tuned and some new items were added to ensure that validity and reliability were significant for the study.

In true experimental design the experimental group was exposed to the treatment but the control group was not. Post-test measures were taken on both groups. In the context of measuring the effectiveness of a website for an institution of higher learning, a post-test control group design was implemented as follows.

A sample of 600 respondents from 10 institutions of higher learning was selected at random for this research. Half of these were randomly assigned to the experimental group, and the other half would form the control group. Respondents in both groups were then given a questionnaire each to obtain a post-test measurement on attitudes toward the effectiveness of a website for an IHL. The respondents in the experimental group were exposed to the newly developed website feature. Finally, a questionnaire was administered to each respondent in both groups to obtain post-test measures on their attitude towards the effectiveness of a website for an IHL. (Figure 1.1)

Respondents were permitted to view their own institution's website and another website from another institution at random. The experiment was conducted in two sessions over the course of three days. Respondents were told in the first session that they would view a website of their own IHLs and be asked to evaluate the effectiveness. After viewing each of the website for 30 minutes, respondents provided their overall evaluations of the brands as a whole and their general reactions to the websites. Half of the respondents then were dismissed and asked to return two days later to answer additional questions about the

proposed new features (in terms of attraction, informing, positioning and delivery). At this second session, respondents viewed each of two new websites for 30 minutes, provided additional general evaluations, and completed a questionnaire regarding other aspects of the feature. Memory measures were then collected for the two websites that promoted the brand.

Using the focus group guidelines developed by Morgan (1988), the discussion lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The discussion was led by a moderator as well as two observers. Students were shown a lengthy checklist of attributes adapted from Olsina *et al.* (1999). They were asked to choose and evaluate the factors they felt were important when assessing the performance of websites. Probative questions pertaining to variables mentioned as important were raised. Initially, the discussion centred on consumer experiences with websites in general. The moderator included topics such as the perceived meaning of user-friendliness, the role of virtual branding and attributes used to evaluate websites. Findings of the focus group research could be generalized and used to refine measures for a survey designed to specifically assess consumer preferences. The insights and information gathered from the focus group helped to support and provide additional guidance in measuring each AIPD component and assessing its role in the AIPD framework.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Control Group</b> Exposed to the website of IHL. Not exposed to the newly developed website</p>	<p>Both groups took a survey with questions regarding the test brand.</p> <p>Differences between the two groups were tested for statistical significance and the attributes were used to develop research website.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Experimental Group</b> Exposed to the website of IHL and exposed to the newly developed website</p>	

Figure 1. Experimental Design

The primary dependent measure was an aided recall measure of main benefit claims in the website. Respondents listed the appropriate claims for the target brands when given brand name cues. Respondents were asked to indicate all claims recalled for a brand on the institution's website if more than one claim had been viewed. Co variate measures were also collected as proxies for subjects' inherent product category involvement and attitudes that potentially could affect their responses to the website. Those *four* measures, assessing subjects' attraction, informing, positioning and delivery were combined to form a scale of category involvement with a satisfactory coefficient alpha reliability estimate of 0.8.

The researcher used the Likert Scale to measure the respondents' opinions. Using the four-point scale "Strongly Disagree = 1" "Disagree = 2", "Agree = 3" and "Strongly Agree = 4", the respondents were asked to circle the numbers in either box based on the scale given to indicate their response to each statement. The responses from the respondents were analysed by the researcher using two computer softwares, namely, Microsoft Excel and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This approach was the easiest to analyse as

the researcher could focus on four categories of responses. The data were analysed to test all the hypotheses.

In order to measure the validity and reliability of the research instrument where questionnaires were used, the researcher had to refer to a few experts in branding. Based on their opinions, a few changes have been made on the research content, scope, format and terms used. This was to ensure that the instrument used was relevant to this research. After adjusting and fine-tuning the questionnaire, the research instrument was then tested on its validity and reliability. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha to measure the validity and reliability of the data of the study.

According to Christian et.al. (1990), Cronbach's alpha measures how well a set of items (or variables) quantifies a single unidimensional latent construct. When data has a multidimensional structure, Cronbach's alpha will usually be low. Technically speaking, Cronbach's alpha is not a statistical test - it is a coefficient of reliability (or consistency). To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the researcher analysed the data collected with a computer package called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and utilised the method of Cronbach's alpha for tests. Mohd Majid (1995) has stated that the validity index which is most commonly used in research must be above 0.60.

Based on the index of validity and reliability, if the Cronbach's alpha is above 0.60, then it clearly shows that the instrument used has very high validity and reliability value. This clearly proves that the research has fulfilled the requirements to conduct the study to evaluate the effectiveness of web branding for IHLs. It has been clearly tested that the value of Cronbach's Alpha for each item in the research was between 0.85 and 0.97.

Table 1: Profile Of Student Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	240	40%
	Female	360	60%
School	Computing	200	33.3%
	Business	200	33.3%
	Design	200	33.3%
Ethnic	Malay	191	31.8%
	Chinese	341	56.8%
	Indian	57	9.5%
	Others	11	1.8%
Institutions of higher learning	INTI College	60	10%
	UTAR	60	10%
	Limkokwing University	60	10%
	New Era College	60	10%

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UNISEL	60	10%
Olympia College	60	10%
KBU	60	10%
International SEGI College	60	10%
Sunway University	60	10%
UiTM	60	10%

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Attraction

It has been proven that an IHL is able to increase the traffic flow to its website considerably. Reach has always been a measure of marketing communications effectiveness, a focus on access to and connection with students. Unconstrained by physical limitations, cyber-reach on the Internet can explode. Hence, the first task of branding through the Web is to attract a steady stream of interested users to visit the online presence of IHLs.

According to the research study, there has been a variety of methods to attract interested parties to the website of an IHL. For well-known IHLs with established brands, such as LimKokWing University, Sunway University, Universiti Industri Selangor and Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, the URL or web address itself could be a competitive advantage; it is also a tool to attract users to each IHL online presence. When online consumers do not directly navigate to a particular URL of IHL, they can still be directed there through the use of affiliates.

Nevertheless in the study by Pardun & Lamb (1999) banner advertisements have also been used to build traffic and their brand name by many IHLs. The use of banner advertisements could have a significant impact on the number of hits a website might receive and might even translate into actual sales on the Web. Some researchers have advocated the use of the traditional mass media to promote websites, a technique particularly relevant for IHLs with integrated e-commerce and “bricks-and-mortar” presence. Also, recommendations from Hoffman and Novak (2000) have pointed out that the traditional mass media might also be a powerful source for attracting and acquiring new customers (Hoffman and Novak, 2000).

This research study has found that there could be numerous approaches to attracting students to one’s website. Clearly, however, the process must be managed to control average student acquisition costs. Marketers must evaluate the cost effectiveness of the various methods of attracting students and budget their promotional expenditures accordingly. Regardless of how customer acquisition can be accomplished, it should therefore be obvious that the first order of business in e-commerce would be to bring current and potential customers to the website.



According to Lea et al (2006) social network means a set of people or organisations or other social entities that are connected by a set of social meaningful relationship to better achieve desired outcomes through sharing of expertise, resources and information. Lea et al (2006) goes on to suggest that both direct or indirect relationships enhance social integration and provide the participants opportunities to be engaged with their peers within the social network, thereby allowing for information and knowledge transfer. Graham et al (2009) reiterates the success that Facebook has had, stating that Facebook is the fifth most trafficked site on the Internet worldwide and the second most trafficked social media site in the world. The ability to reach such vast numbers of people and the advantages this has for organisation are also stated by Raskin (2006).

### **Informing**

In order to build the brand of the IHLs online, websites must provide the content and information students would require and value. Typically, for websites of IHL websites, this would include information about the institutions and its courses and services. A website's content, how it has been presented, and how easily it can be accessed by visitors to the site, should be important influences on students' behaviour. Internet users are likely to be very involved and active in obtaining information (Perry and Bodkin, 2000).

Many empirical studies have shown user-friendliness as one of the most important criteria influencing their use of a website (Abels et al., 1998). It has included factors such as the interface and aesthetic features, global site understandability, ease of use, range of search capabilities and availability (Olsina et al., 1999). Hence, students must be able to easily move through the site and obtain the content they would like to seek and enjoy. However, this might be difficult to achieve, particularly when a website has matured, new features and functions would be constantly added to the website. Students might be confused with the content or the website has become complicated to use. This can result in customers leaving a particular website.

Many students might appear to prefer graphical interface, simply pointing and clicking, which would make it easier for consumers to navigate a website and find out what they want. It was observed, for example, that the more interactive a website was compared to its competitors, the more likely individuals would be to revisit it (Kolsar and Galbraith, 2000). Two-way online communication between students and IHLs has been important. Such knowledge would not only facilitate building relational markets but also increase students' abilities to learn how to browse and to find relevant information on the website. IHLs could profit from the interactive culture on the website.

Most Web designers seek a professional outcome in their work. The study by BJ Fogg (2000) has suggested that organisations which cared about their credibility should be ever vigilant—and perhaps obsessive—to avoid small glitches in their websites. These “small” glitches seemed to have a large impact on Web credibility perceptions. Even one typographical error or a single broken link could be damaging. While designers may face pressures to create dazzling technical features on websites, failing to correct small errors could undermine their work.

## **Positioning**

“The positioning capability of a website relates to the key factors determining the company’s e-commerce market positioning strategy” (Simeon, 1999). Prior research has concluded that discounted price (Reichheld and Scheffer, 2002), convenience and unique merchandise (Phau and Poon, 2000) were some of the market positioning strategies adopted by most e-marketers. Many institutions of higher learning have adopted a niche market positioning strategy. For example, LimKokWing University has positioned its organisation as a creative and innovative institution. Thus, the positioning capability of a website could reflect its ability to deliver the benefits sought by targeted students brought to the site through “attracting” efforts.

## **Delivery**

“The delivery function emphasizes the way the website provides reliability, speed, security and interactivity” (Simeon, 1999). Downloading time (Abels et al., 1998) must meet user-based criteria that could likely influence consumers’ use of, and satisfaction with, a website.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the present study, the researcher has investigated the effectiveness of website branding for IHLs among students in the Klang Valley. The study tried to examine the relationship between personality, computer usage and effectiveness of the websites. The findings in this study are parallel to the conclusions of previous studies: the effectiveness of website branding has not significantly been related to computer usage and personality but that it has been facilitated by other variables like brand strength, favourability, uniqueness, effectiveness and brand recall.

This research is an attempt to make some contributions towards a better understanding of the effectiveness of branding through websites for institutions of higher learning offering business, technology and art and design courses in the Klang Valley. In addition, an attempt was made to determine the future development of effective websites for such IHLs. It is generally perceived that branding through the website has been neglected by most members of the academic community, especially the management board. It appears that most members of the board believed website branding to be a less important and favourable medium than other traditional mass media such as the print and electronic media.

As long as there is an Internet connection, information can be retrieved from the website. The researcher does not need to travel to gain or send information. Therefore, a website is considered a convenient source to obtain and disseminate the latest information. The number of search engines available such as Yahoo, Google and MSN, has enabled many to use the website as a source of information. Information from around the world is readily accessible to respondents by just a click of the mouse.

The study highlighted by Hoffman and Novack (1996) has stated that the information available on the product offering (and the buyer’s reaction to this) would influence the buyer’s perception of the product. Hence, all elements of the marketing mix must be

effectively communicated through relevant channels of information. Observing that this traditionally followed a “one to many” communication model, whereby “a firm reaches many current and potential customers, segmented or not, through marketing efforts that allows only limited forms of feedback from the customer”. The Internet, on the other hand, could facilitate an interactive multimedia “many to many” communication network, thus radically altering the way in which firms could do business with customers and suppliers. It allowed for immediate response and the opportunity for the recipient (or reader) to add their own “content” through the relevant medium.

Since newspapers, magazines and outdoor advertising were easily available, these media would allow the respondents to read several times to understand the message. As for the website, one would need to have electronic devices such as mobile phones or laptops in order to connect to the website. It is also easier to read from printed materials compared to the electronic screen. However, to the majority of the respondents, surfing through the website was more effective in finding information compared to the use of the traditional mass media. One was able to select which IHL’s website to visit in order to gain the required information. As for the traditional mass media, one might find it difficult to gain the information if the IHLs seldom did any publicity through any traditional mass media. It was found that educational institutions with good websites that provided clear and sufficient information to their potential students would have the competitive edge.

The study by Dholakia and Rego (1998) has stated that advertisements through the traditional mass media like television or newspapers frequently carried the URL address and represented one source of information about the firm’s website. In other cases, word of mouth about a particularly novel or useful website page might be transmitted from one website surfer to another in his/her social circle. A third source of information was a listing of “hot” sites, compiled by various entities on the website.

It is imperative that the management of an IHL has the information on why students decide to enrol in a particular course. Each student is an asset and a revenue source for an institution. With this in view, the conclusion is that the website is a desirable mode for marketing to potential students. Both the traditional and website approaches are required to influence the student population in the decision-making process. This is due to the fact that both types of media go hand in hand. In order to gain further in-depth information about a desired brand, enquirers may log on to the respective website. Potential students may have seen the desired brand on the web, which is further enhanced by reading or seeing an advertisement of that brand in print media or in a TV commercial.

The information available in most IHL websites is too brief and unclear. In many instances, certain functions of the websites are not updated or are inaccessible (broken links). To make matters worse, certain ‘design’ institutions do not have attractive websites despite the fact that design should be the main forte of the institution. Many institutions do not take into consideration the power of branding through websites, especially in this cyber age.

A website’s information should generally be inexpensive to produce. Potential customers should have immediate access to the information provided on the website. Information displayed on the website must be appealing in order to attract the attention of potential customers. The above scenario has shown that institutions of higher learning have generally neglected this opportunity because they generally fail to perceive website branding as something as important as the usage of other traditional mass media such as the newspaper

and magazines. This has made it difficult for potential students to be motivated to seek out further information. The overall design and look of the main webpage of the institution's website has considerable influence on their decision to enrol in the institutions or to reject it.

Brand personality can influence brand processing, brand attitudes and brand loyalty. Institutions of higher learning's marketing managers and administrators should consider what they are communicating through their websites and place importance on the brand's personality antecedents when designing the website. Website branding can and should play a very important role in communicating these messages to its viewers. Facts to be taken into account should include the overall academic reputation of the institutions of higher learning, the academic standing and overall profile of the institutions of higher learning's director or dean, as well as the history of the institutions.

In addition, the institutions of higher learning's 'products' must be displayed on the respective websites. The graduates as well as current students' experiences at the institution should be featured to provide potential students with the 'feel' of how it would be like if they were to study at the particular institution. The brand personality portrayed by the website can influence various stakeholder attitudes towards an institution of higher learning. The same approach can also be used for most brands in many industries and geographical areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The following recommendations are suggested so as to further improve on the website branding of the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. This can be achieved through showing off the awards received by students studying in the institutions through their websites. These awards should convince the potential students to enrol in the course provided by the specific institutions.

Besides this, for building brand success on the website, it is recommended that institutions be consistent with their real world branding and personality. A unique and differentiated website can be achieved through attractive designs. The visual should be consistent with specific colour schemes. The content should be based on the personality and positioning of the brand. It is important to know your target audience. It is important to write and design with the potential audience in mind. Visitors who surf the website would want to get pertinent information in a 'click'. It is recommended to use short sentences in the messages. Correct usage of English or any language and spelling error-free information are necessary to impress its viewers.

A website is a communication medium that conveys image. In order to take advantage of the inherent strengths of the website as a two-way communication, websites of IHLs must provide content and function that support their brand image. In multi-channel marketing campaigns, sites also need elements like language, imagery, typography and layout to be consistent with both the intent of the positioning and the style of advertisements in other media.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the delivery channel should enable action to be followed up. Websites do not just appear before customers the way traditional mass media like television advertisements do. If potential students see a home page, it is because he has typed a URL or clicked a link. This means that he has arrived with goals like finding

specific information, making a purchase or getting service. Website branding must supply the content and function that a potential student needs in order to achieve its goals. For example, potential students looking for an affordable IHL that offers business, technology and arts and design courses need content that must include course fees and a website function that allows them to apply online immediately. Websites also need navigation that makes it easy for users to find the content, and they need presentation that makes it easy for them to understand the content.

In order to brand effectively, it is recommended that the brand name and important text be placed in the first part of the website page. This part of the page should appear first on a screen. The first impression of the brand on the website will be judged based on the page. In addition to the page content, it is recommended that small pages be used. In the website, normally visitors will not read sequentially. Visitors usually want to select small pieces of information and decide what information they want to read.

In conclusion, since the Internet is currently one of the most promising and innovative approaches in education, it is recommended that better exposure and more intensive cognitive processing be proposed as an important cause of the effectiveness of branding through the website. Therefore, it is recommended that more research work be done about when, why, where, and for whom branding through the website is effective.

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