Paper no.44

An investigation into antecedents and consequences of universities internal branding in Thailand: from the manager’s perspective.

Abstract

This research aims to examine the antecedents and consequences of internal branding in universities, as well as variables that have mediating and moderating effects. Internal branding focuses on employees’ understanding of the brand value and the way they deliver the brand experience. The research methodology would be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, steeped in a belief of the value of triangulation as a strategy for conducting valid and reliable research. Top management and academic employees of Thai universities will take part in the research involving use of interviews, questionnaires.

Keywords: higher education, internal branding, employee, leadership, government policy

1. Introduction

For service organisations that usually face the challenge of developing the brand for an intangible and complex offering, developing the organisation brand from inside out is vital (Judson et al., 2006). Educational institutions increasingly employ some kind marketing activities and branding programmes (Oplatka and Brown 2004; Bunzel 2007; Ivy 2001), even though they tend to be unsystematic in nature (Oplatka and Brown 2004). Stensaker (2005) states that the university brand will not be trustworthy if their employees display brand characteristics. However, several authors note that employees may not support and represent their company’s branding effectively (Ind 2001; Mitchell 2004; Schein 1992). Sometimes employees’ beliefs
and actions may disagree with the external generated image (Melewar and Karaosmanoglu, 2006). However, research indicates that “companies with consistent, distinctive and deeply held values tended to outperform those companies with a less clear and articulated ethos” (Collins and Porras 1995 cited in Mosley 2007, p.128). Internal branding is about aligning employee behaviour with brand values (Vallaster and de Chernatony 2004). This, in turn, eventually endorses employee behaviour which supports the brand (Karmark 2005).

Given the importance of internal branding in university, it is worthwhile investigating further the concept to complement existing research. This research has two main research objectives. First, it attempts to develop a process model to explain the antecedents and consequences of internal branding in university. Second, it intends to empirically test the model in non-western setting which will help the researcher to examine the external validity of western-developed theories (i.e. the applicability of theories in other context). This also includes the re-evaluation of operationalisation of the constructs. In particular, this study intends to answer the following research question:

Research question: From the manager’s perspective, what can qualify as antecedent and consequences of internal branding in university? In particular, this question can be divided into four sub-questions as follows:

RQ1) Are top management characteristics, such as leadership characteristic and market-oriented characteristic, determinants of internal branding in university?
RQ2) Are governmental policy, such as decrease of funding and market approaches, determinants of internal branding in university?

RQ3) What is the relationship, if any, between internal branding in university and employee brand support as an outcome of internal branding from marketing and communication based perspective?

RQ4) Is the impact of internal branding in university direct? Are there any mediating/moderating effects embedded in the relationship between internal branding in university, employees brand support, and other factors (e.g. government policies; top management characteristics and departmental activities)

By achieving the aforementioned objectives, it is expected that this research will help advance current knowledge about the image/brand building (from people within organisation) of higher education institutions and offer practical insights to university managers. Moreover, higher educational policy makers (government policy makers) would possibly find this research is useful in order for encouraging universities to build their brand, from people within their institution.

In the next section, the evaluations of internal branding in universities, its antecedents and consequences based on previous research and literature, will be briefly explained. In addition, a conceptual model (see Figure 1, page 11.) and research hypotheses will be presented.
2. Internal Branding in Universities

First of all, in order to recapitulate the development of the research around this topic, the evaluations of internal branding in universities will be briefly explained, mainly based on the review of literature in higher education management, brand management, organisational identity, organisational culture and behaviour, internal communication, human resource management, marketing management, government policy, and leadership.

Significant movement has been found towards the university as a corporate enterprise (Henkel, 1997). Branding has become a strategic managerial decision for higher education, because it impacts upon the institution’s capability to recruit desired university staff and students and to introduce new facilities and programmes (Belanger et al., 2002). To build and deliver a strong corporate brand, internal stakeholders will play an important role (Hatch and Schultz 2003; Knox and Bickerton 2003; Schultz 2005; Melewar and Karaosmanoglu 2006; King and Grace 2007). In a university context, internal stakeholders are: (1) students, (2) academics, and (3) non-academics (Melewar and Akel 2005). This study focuses mainly on academics thereafter called ‘employees’.

Internal branding in universities is recognised as a new phenomenon that has become important for universities in increasingly competitive markets (Judson et al., 2006). Internal branding is about aligning employee behaviour with brand values (Vallaster and de Chernatony 2004). Stensaker (2005) states that the university brand will not be trustworthy if their employees display brand characteristics. However, Judson et
al. (2006, pp.105) found that “when internal branding efforts are implemented in universities, staff have clearer understanding of their respective universities’ brand values and are subsequently better able to use these brand values in their everyday work”.

Based on what Urde (2003), Ind (2007) and Karmark (2005) have defined, internal branding is to enable employee to understand the values inherent in the brand and organisation in order for them to naturally deliver the brand’s promises to consumer in their day-to-day operations. However, as Ind (2007) claims that values are not created but instead already exist in organisation, thus the important question is how well they are expressed and embedded. This study, therefore, draws attention to understand the tools that universities use to communicate, express, and embed brand values to employees in order to ensure that their employees behave in alignment with their desired image.

However, internal branding as the way to enable employee to understand the brand values in order for them to naturally deliver the brand’s promises to consumer, can be operated within two perspectives (See Table 1) ‘a marketing and communications based perspective’; and 2) ‘a norms and values based perspective’ (Karmark, 2005).
### Table 1: The differences between a marketing and communications based perspective and a norms and values communications based perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketing and communications based perspective:</th>
<th>Norms and values communications based perspective:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal brand communication, training and development, brand books and manuals</td>
<td>fostering brand identification through culture-embedding mechanisms, storytelling and events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and implementation</td>
<td>Values-based management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relying on the brand values as guidelines for the employees to live by on the job</td>
<td>Builds on the premise that the personnel values of employee become congruent with the brand values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct control- top-dawn management, The formal socialisation process.</td>
<td>Normative control; The informal socialisation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate identity perspective: anchored in a strategic and visual perspective, with a focus on identity as corporate communication, top management has an explicit role in the formulation of corporate identity, decides how the organization is expressed to external audiences</td>
<td>Organisational identity perspective: anchored in cultural perspective. Focuses on how organisational members make sense of issues relating to the question of ‘who we are as an organisation’ in the context of the organisational culture and history, a collective shared understanding of the organization's distinctive values and characteristics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** developed base on literature review by Albert and Whetten (1985); Van Riel (1995); Hatch and Schultz (1997); Albert, Ashforth, and Dutton (2000); Ind (2001); Wilson (2001); Stuart, (2002) and categorisations by Karmark (2005)

However, within a higher education context, according to a study undertaken by Henkel (1997), universities are being transformed into corporate enterprises. The movement of universities towards corporate enterprises tends to emphasise on direct control over employees (Henkel, 1997). Henkel (1997) notes that the security of academic tenure; a simple career structure; and the independence of at least teaching and research, all of which represent deeply held academic values that tend to be no longer applied. The roles and responsibilities of academics seem to be increasingly well-defined (Henkel, 1997). de Boer et al. (2007), further support the argument that a university as a corporate actor is transforming from a loosely coupled system – “with autonomous units” (Weick, 1976, p.8), to be a more tightly coupled system, in which freedom of choice is limited (Weick, 1976, p.8). In addition, Ind (2007) notes that in an organisation that has highly explicit codes of behaviour, such as army, educational institutions, and religious institutions, there tends to be a danger if individuals adapt their idea of self to their day to day operation. Therefore, it seems that the norms and values communications based perspective which emphasises (in-
direct) controlling of the underlying experience, thoughts, and feelings that influence
behaviour (Karmark, 2005), may not be applicable in this circumstance.

This study examines internal branding in university from the marketing and
communications based perspective because this perspective focuses on carefully
ensuring that people are committed, and that they understand the whys and hows of
brand delivery by using direct controls (Karmark, 2005). In addition, in the marketing
and communication based perspective, brand values are diffused throughout the
organisation in a top-down style (Karmark, 2005), which is similar to the management
styles that universities in most parts of the world have significant experience with
(Tsai and Beverton, 2007). Therefore, the study aim to examine the antecedents and
consequences of internal branding in universities from marketing and communication
based perspective as well as relevant underlying mechanisms (e.g. mediating and
moderating effect).

3. Gaps in internal branding in universities and areas of problem
Having reviewed the literature related to internal branding in universities, several
directions for further research have been revealed. The research gaps which this
thesis would address are explained in the following subsections.

First, it can be concluded that internal branding in universities has emerged since
there is the need to align employees’ behaviours to support a desired image in order to
be compatible with market mechanisms, which are mainly driven by government
policies (Marginson, 1996; Ivy, 2001; Brookes, 2003; Stensaker, 2005; de Boer et al.,
2007). However, most previous studies on internal branding (e.g. Gotsi and Wilson,
2001; Urde, 2003; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2004; Aurand et al., 2005; de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) are conducted within the private sector, in which the influences from government policies were often ignored. Although a few researchers (e.g. Judson et al. 2006; Balmer and Liao, 2007) have undertaken studies on internal branding in university, empirical research has not investigated the relationship between internal branding in higher education and government policies.

Second, in terms of its consequences, according to the previous studies, employees’ behaviours which support the brand values are considered to be consequences of internal branding (e.g. de Chernatony, 2001; Keller, 1999; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006; King and Grace, 2007). Nevertheless, it seems that the literature rarely considers the deeper implications for the employees’ relationship with the brand, for instance, the literature does not consider whether it is practicable that the employee should live the brand or what the role of brand supporter really implies for the employee (Karmark, 2005). In addition, the mechanism underlying these relationships is still unclear. Omitted, mediating and moderating variables may change the strength or direction of the relationships discovered in the past.

Third, although some researchers (e.g. Judson et al. 2006; Balmer and Liao, 2007) have undertaken research on internal branding in university, the research tends to focus only on classic internal communication tools (university brochures; campus meetings; e-mail messages; and university memos), while other employee communication tools, for example, employees training and development tend to be ignored. In addition, the
relationship between internal branding in university and how employees support their brand still remains unclear.

Moreover, most studies have been conducted in the private sector and/or western countries (e.g. Gotsi and Wilson, 2001; Urde, 2003; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2004; Aurand et al., 2005; de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006; King and Grace, 2007). Few studies have been carried out in other regions (e.g. Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007) and/or the public sector (e.g. Hankinson, 2004), moreover, very few researchers (e.g. Judson et al. 2006; Balmer and Liao, 2007) undertake the research on internal branding in higher education sector, therefore theories should be tested in different settings (i.e. industries and regions) to increase their generalisation.

In the next section, the conceptual model of the study will be described and the development of hypotheses will be presented.

4. A conceptual model and research hypotheses

It seems that internal branding in universities has emerged since there is the need to align employees’ behaviours to support a desired image in order to be compatible with market mechanisms, which are mainly driven by government policies (Henkel, 1997; Stensaker, 2005). In addition, internal branding in universities tends to be related to top management characteristics (e.g. leadership characteristic, market-oriented characteristics) (Gotsi and Willson, 2001; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2004, 2006), as the top management is responsible for creating the
university’s mission, visions, and policies in addition to communicating these to employees.

Moreover, according to *Social learning theory* (Bandura, 1977 cited in Burmann and Zeplin, 2005, p.292-293), it seems that top managers can directly create employee brand support because employees learn about brand-related norms and values by observing behaviours of top management (Bandura, 1977; Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Gad, 2003; Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Burmann and Zeplin, 2005; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006). However, it seems that in order to develop institution strategies, university top management may depend on other variables (Perrow, 1970 cited in Parwar and Eastman, 1997; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2004), for example government policies, because they often interpret government policies (Karol and Ginsburg, 1980; Marginson, 1996; Brookes, 2003; Trim, 2003; Stensaker, 2005).

Employee brand support has been referred to as an outcome of the internal branding processes (Schultz, 2003; de Chernatony and Cottam, 2006; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007; Punjaisri and Wilson, 2007). However, the departmental activities for example human resource activities, marketing communication activities of an organisation tend to influence the relationship between internal branding and employee brand support (Mitchell, 2002; Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Ind, 2007). Therefore, it seems that the behaviour of employees to support the brand in different organisations can vary depending on how the organisation’s brand values are related to departmental activities (Gotsi and Wilson 2001; Aurand *et al.*, 2005).
Having reviewed the literature related to internal branding in universities, the researcher proposes a conceptual model and research hypotheses which are presented as followed:

5. Research hypotheses

*H1:* University top managers who exhibit leadership characteristics have a positive influence on university internal branding.

*H2:* Market-orientated behaviours of university top managers have a positive influence on university internal branding.

*H3:* The less the funding from government, the greater the impact on university internal branding.

*H4:* Quasi approach to education policy has a positive impact on university internal branding.

*H5:* The relationship between government policies and university internal branding is mediated by top management of university.
H6a: University internal branding is positively related to employees’ understanding of the brand.

H6b: University internal branding is positively related to employees’ delivering the brand.

H7: The relationship between university internal branding and employee brand support is moderated by human resource management activities.

H8: The relationship between university internal branding and employee brand support is moderated by the marketing communication activities.

H9: The relationship between top management and employee brand support is partially mediated by university internal branding.

6. Methodology

The methodologies which would be in this research are shown in Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 : The research methodology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population: The population of the study would include universities in Thailand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Sample These universities would randomly selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection Secondary data: in order to fulfill the research objectives, the source of the secondary data which the researcher have used include all the journals, books, and reports relevant to the study. A concept conceptual model and hypotheses would be firstly generated from the secondary data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary data The primary data collection would be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, steeped in a belief of the value of triangulation as a strategy for conducting valid and reliable research (Denzin, 1978; Jick, 1979; Cohen and Manion, 1986). Top management and academic employees of Thai university will take part in the research involving use of interviews and questionnaires.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **The qualitative research** would be firstly used for deeper insights into the topic. In addition, it is used to test if the conceptual model and hypotheses are appropriate for the chosen study environment, to identify relationships, and to possibly generate additional measurement items for the further quantitative research.

- **The quantitative research** would be used for empirical evidence and to analyse relationships
Measurements: All the measures would be drawn from the previous researches and align with the conceptual aspect of the research model.

7. The research estimated time schedule

The estimated time schedule which is planned for this research is presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month/Year</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct-07 to Feb-08</td>
<td>1. Survey literature and learn to use relevant tools&lt;br&gt;2. Finding research question(s)&lt;br&gt;3. Writing research proposal revision; draft (finish)&lt;br&gt;4. Survey literature and learn to use relevant tools&lt;br&gt;5. Review Literature&lt;br&gt;6. Secondary data research (also Literature search)&lt;br&gt;7. Start writing literature review&lt;br&gt;Get Supervisor’s feedback, meet at least once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-08</td>
<td>1. Deepen understanding of the problem or the issues around the research&lt;br&gt;2. Writing literature review&lt;br&gt;3. Planning framework&lt;br&gt;4. Get supervisor’s feedback, meet at least once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-08</td>
<td>1. Developing and refining the study conceptual framework&lt;br&gt;2. Writing literature review&lt;br&gt;3. Deepen understanding of the problem or the issues around the research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-08</td>
<td>1. Writing research framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun-08</td>
<td>1. Developing hypothesis and revising literature review&lt;br&gt;2. Reviewing and revising research methods&lt;br&gt;4. Writing literature review (finish): Frame Work&lt;br&gt;5. Planning for qualitative research&lt;br&gt;• Primary data collecting:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-08</td>
<td>1. Planning for qualitative research&lt;br&gt;2. Back Thailand: collecting qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug-08</td>
<td>1. Collecting qualitative data in Thailand&lt;br&gt;2. Contract with supervisor via e-mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sep-08</td>
<td>1. Finish the qualitative data collection (Back to UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct-08 to Nov-08</td>
<td>1. Back to Thailand for collecting quantitative data&lt;br&gt;2. Respondents appointment&lt;br&gt;3. Contract with supervisor via e-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec-08 to Apr-09</td>
<td>1. Collecting quantitative data&lt;br&gt;2. Contract with supervisor via e-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-09 to Jun-09</td>
<td>1. Data transcribed and re-checking&lt;br&gt;2. Contract with supervisor via e-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul-09 to Aug-09</td>
<td>1. Back to UK&lt;br&gt;2. Data coded, separate the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-09 to Nov-09</td>
<td>1. Analysis the result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Range</td>
<td>Task Description</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec-09</td>
<td>1. Conclude the result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan-10 to Feb-10</td>
<td>1. Complete solution or framing of argument and review of recent literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar-10 to Aug-10</td>
<td>1. Report writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep-10</td>
<td>1. Written thesis ready for viva</td>
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</table>

8. References


