INFLUENCE OF BRAND PERSONALITY, EXTERNAL PRESTIGE, AND REPUTATION ON STUDENT SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS BUSINESS SCHOOL.

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to see the impact of brand personality, external prestige and reputation on student supportive attitude towards business schools of Pakistan.

Design/methodology/approach – Survey research method is used to collect data from 372 business students of 18 business schools of Pakistan in which 10 belong from government and 8 from private sector. Out of all respondents, 194 were male and 178 were female. 224 were enrolled in bachelors & 148 in masters. SEM (structural equation modeling) is used to empirically test the proposed model and AMOS is used to analyze the proposed structural equation model.

Findings – The model indicated that, there is a positive relationship of brand personality, external prestige and reputation on student attitude towards the business school

Research limitations/implications – Being a researcher, access to every business school was almost impossible which causes a limitation for the study due to which data from 17 business schools from across Pakistan was collected.

Social implications – The study will help to build a productive understanding regarding business school positive image its external prestige and reputation in order to positively affect on student choice of business school. It will help to design strategies which would attract more students and gaining a well repute in education sector.

INTRODUCTION

Over the previous decade, there appeared a major shift in the education industry of Pakistan where the choice of students pursuing higher studies has been budged to business education. This shift has increased the rivalry among different competing business schools and has re-shaped the education industry as never before.**(Saeed and Ehsan 2010).** The root cause to such a situation is a paradigm shift in a graduates 'mind from "being employed" to "being an entrepreneur". The main factor that contributed into the situation is the influx of foreign investment in the country for which trained business management professionals were required resulting in an increased number of universities in the private sector. The aim was to produce trained business professionals but the situation gone wrong. This privatization led to a surplus of business graduates at one end while causing higher unemployment rate on the other(2013). In order to cope up with the situation where there was insufficient investment in public sector and inefficient management towards the needs of growing population, the local patrons invested in the opportunity to meet the demands of business graduates **(Wallin Andreassen and Lindestad 1998)**. As a result, a number of business schools appeared in the private sector where some claimed of being affiliated with foreign business institutes.

In the context of Pakistan, such studies are needed in order to further boost up the education industry; one of the major emerging industries of the country. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore how brand personality, external prestige, and reputation of an institute can bring in a supportive attitude by the

prospect consumers. Exploring these factors will let the business schools understand the concept of corporate image and further their understanding on how this image can be a way out to a positive student attitude. Furthermore, studying the relationships among these constructs under the concept of corporate image will help in enhancing the understanding of business schools about the strategic implications of university communication management

LITERATURE REVIEW

The model used in the study has four variables to satisfy the objective of this research paper namely student supportive attitudes, image, reputation, and external prestige.

IMAGE

Corporate image is not a new idea. It refers to be an overall impression **(Dichter 1985)** or an aggregate of a person's beliefs, ideas, impressions and attitudes towards an object, product or organization at large **(Andreasen 1996).** Image is a vibrant and complex phenomenon that varies from person to person. Many companies target different market segments for their brands at a single point of time. In order to position a brand successfully, companies need to spot out their strengths and weaknesses in each targeted segment as consumers vary in their choices, opinions and social interactions **(Barich and Kotler 1991**) making it impossible for the company to put one desirable image for all.

Thus this hypothesizes that;

H1: Favorable Business School reputation is positively associated with students' supportive attitudes toward the Business School.

PERSONIFICATION AND BRAND PERSONALITY

Many studies have been conducted on the concept of brand personality which highlights that a brand's personality needs to be aligned with the consumer's personality. Different scales have been developed in order to assess a company' success in doing so. Being a general consumer behavior concept, this phenomenon helps companies in successfully positioning themselves the way their target market understands **(Davies, Chun et al. 2004)**

Aaker's brand personality scale is one of the widely used tool for assessing brand perceptions. According to him, brand personality is ''the set of human characteristic associated with a brand'' (p. 347) **(Aaker 1997),** which is shaped by the direct and indirect experiences of consumers with the brand.

Thus this hypothesizes that;

H2: Favorable Business School personality is positively associated with students' supportive attitudes toward the Business School.

EXTERNAL PRESTIGE

(Davies, Chun et al. 2004) also constructed a model where a company's corporate image was measured from both the internal (employees) and external (customers) perspectives. Recent researches have highlighted that an organization with a superior image on the outside tends to cultivate individuals' sense of organizational membership more than the internal ones **(Smidts, Pruyn et al. 2001).** Perceived external prestige is considered more valuable in assessing a brand's image because it is treated as an objective variable that highlights individual's perception about the prestige of an organization which is shaped by the individual's own experience.

Thus this hypothesizes that;

H3: External prestige of a Business School is positively associated with students' supportive attitudes toward the Business School.

SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNIVERSITY

In the context of education, scholars argue that a student's attitude towards an organization shapes whether the behavior will be in the favor of organization or not. If the attitude turns out to be positive, it may lead to increased student loyalty. This loyalty is the most important factor that needs to be retained by the higher education institutions as it increases student's motivation and active participation. *Commitment.* Organizational commitment is another important factor that shapes an individual's attachment with the institute **(Buchanan 1974);(Ridder 2004)** and **(Sheldon 1971)**.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey methodology is used for gathering data for this research where both public and private sector business institutes were analyzed. Out of many public & private sector business schools operating in Pakistan, 18 institutes were randomly selected as sample for this research. In out of 18, there were 10 private sectors and 8 government sector business schools in order see from student's perspectives. About 372 students were selected at random with between 19 – 24 years of age. Out all respondents, 194 were male and 178 were female participants. 224 bachelor's students with BBA and 148 were masters. To test the proposed model of this study, four constructs were used out of which three were independent variables namely university personality, external prestige, and business school reputation. Students' supportive attitude towards business school was used as dependent variable. The questionnaire for the study used 7-point Likert scales to test the relationship between independent and dependent variables where the data was collected both face-to-face and through social media.

REPUTATION & STUDENT SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDEs

This study hypothesized that favorable reputation of a business school has a positive effect on students' choosing that business school. The estimated parameter of reputation (-.8) is significant at $p<0.01$, therefore H1 is accepted. As greater the reputation of a business school the greater is the chances of student to choose that business school.

BRAND PERSONALITY & STUDENTS' SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDES

This study hypothesized that favorable brand personality has a positive effect on student supportive attitude (H1). The estimated parameter of brand personality (-.2) is significant at $p<0.01$, therefore H1 is accepted. As brand personality of a business school increases, student chance of supportive behavior will increase as well.

EXTERNAL PRESTIGE & STUDENT SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDE

This study hypothesized that favorable external prestige of a business school has a positive effect on student supportive attitude (H1). The estimated parameter of brand personality (-.4) is significant at $p<0.01$, therefore H1 is accepted. As external prestige of a business school increases, student chance of supportive behavior will increase as well.

DISCUSSION

The result of this study supports each of the research hypotheses we made and provide several level of empirical support for the model made towards student supportive behavior. The overall factor structure explained 0.90 percent of sample variance which shows the reliability of the variables. The discussion of branding of business school is still new and needed to unfold. This study provides an interesting perspective of the subject.

LIMITATIONS

Being a researcher, access to every business school was almost impossible especially due to shortage of time and the reason that many of the educational institutions get off due some unsuitable situation which causes a limitation for the study. This allows us to collect the data from 18 business schools from across Pakistan.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future direction of this research might be towards using it in multi institutions. If these results are to be applied outside Pakistan, the affect of other factors like different higher education institutions need to consider first. The construct relationship may get affected by characteristics like institution's organizational structure and culture. By using evidence of reliability and validity of this research, same study can be conducted outside Pakistan as well. The study predicts that in future there will be huge amount of body of knowledge on corporate image with understanding that favorable corporate is of the most important asset an organization have and required a great attention.

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