

Student's Perception on the Selected Facets of Reputation Quotient: A Case of a Malaysian Public University

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Abstract

Past empirical studies have shown that specific facets of Reputation Quotient model positively influenced the reputation. However, the relevance of applying the Reputation Quotient model that focuses on the university setting in developing economies is still under researched. Hence, this study aims to examine the perception of current students about the dimensions of Reputation Quotient in one of the Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs). In particular, the study aims to find out the differences between the subscales of Reputation Quotient pertaining to products and services, social responsibility, vision and leadership, financial performance, and emotional appeal facets. Multistage sampling was employed in this study, whereby simple random sampling and convenience sampling were applied. A quantitative (survey) method was employed in this study, in which questionnaires were distributed to 383 current students (local and international), but with 378 valid responses received. The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and one sample T-test. Based on the findings, the current students at the public HEI have a positive view about the reputation of the university. Data revealed that the students perceived positively on the subscales of Reputation Quotient pertaining to the five facets mentioned. The results call upon the management of the public HEI to focus on the dimensions mentioned in order to enhance the good perception and images from various constituents that will increase the survival of the institution in this competitive business market.

Key words: Reputation management, Reputation Quotient, stakeholders, student's perception, higher education institution

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Introduction

In the turbulent business environment, reputation has become a significant concept for higher education institutions (HEIs) which offer various types of services to cater multiple stakeholders. This is because HEIs nowadays focused on building solid reputation as the core element in management (Aula & Tienari, 2011; Duarte, Alves, & Raposo, 2010). Many HEIs need to compete for the resources with other universities in order to survive in the complex competitive environment (Ivy, 2001). Therefore, universities are jumping into the bandwagon, in which more HEIs adapt to these new economic realities (Jevons, 2006; Weymnas, 2010) and focused on reputation management (Alves & Raposo, 2010). Hence, reputation serves as a valuable intangible asset for the corporations to maintain the sustainable competitive advantage.

However, numerous studies claimed that corporate reputation, especially in the academic or HEIs setting, is still understudied and needs further exploration (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007; Šontaite & Bakanauskas, 2011). This has further supported the notion of Gür (2015) who urged for more research on managing corporate reputation, especially in the universities that provide multi-level services beyond just education, for sustainable management in the long run. In addition, past studies also highlighted that corporate reputation measurement, especially the application of Reputation Quotient particularly in the Malaysian setting, is relatively unclear and still lack of reliable evidences. Furthermore, despite the model's popular usage in the Western and developed economy, it is still

relatively uncertain how this particular model is applicable or suitable within the Asian perspectives (Kanto, de Run, & Md Isa, 2013). In particular, studies of this model within Malaysian perspectives need further exploration, hence leaving a contextual gap in the literature (Kanto *et al.*, 2013).

In addition, different stakeholders will have different expectations regarding the reputation management in a diverse educational system (Suomi & Järvinen, 2013). It is aligned with the notion of Ressler and Abratt (2009) whereby university and intentions of stakeholders are interrelated. Hence, for this paper, it focuses on the current students because they are the major stakeholders in the university and often, universities' financial stance depends greatly on this particularly group. (Ali-Choudhury, Bennett, & Savani, 2009).

Therefore, this study aims to uncover the voids by investigating the perception of the current students as one of the main stakeholders about the facets of Reputation Quotient. In addition, the study also intended to test the differences between the subscale of each facet in the Reputation Quotient and overall corporate reputation among the students in a selected public HEIs in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Definitions of Corporate Reputation

According to Fombrun (1996), corporate reputation is a perceptual representation of a company's past actions and future prospects that describe the firm's overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading competitors. Later, Fombrun (2012) further highlighted the new definitions of corporate reputation which focused on the different stakeholder group, whereby corporate reputation is defined as a collective evaluation of a corporation's attractiveness to a specific group of stakeholders relative to a reference group of corporations with which a corporation competes for the resources. In addition, Alessandri, Yang and Kinsey (2006) defined university's reputation as a collective representation of the university's various types of stakeholders.

Corporate Reputation and Related Past Studies

Gür (2015) aims to investigate the impact of students' perception of corporate reputation in a higher education institution on the financial performance. The study utilizes quantitative research design and applied Reputation Quotient that developed by Fombrun, Gardberg and Server (2000). The findings revealed that the perception of the students on corporate reputation of the university is at a relatively high level. In addition, the study also confirmed that there is a significant impact on financial performance of corporate reputation. Past researchers claimed that intangible assets (reputation) together with the organizational tangible assets and resources will help to enhance the financial performance (Neville, Bell, & Mengüç, 2005; Eberl & Schwaiger, 2005; Robert & Dowling, 2002; Burke, 2011; Vig, Dumičić, & Klopota, 2017). The other facets such as emotional appeal, product and services, vision and leadership, workplace environment and social and environmental responsibility also have significant impact on reputation through the financial performance.

For instance, Karakose and Kocabas (2007) intend to examine students' perception on the reputation of primary schools and wish to find out the differences of perception among the students. The unit of analysis comprised of 258 primary school students. The findings of this study revealed that there are no significant differences among the students' perception according to the type of schools (public and private) and gender variables. In addition, public schools have a much better reputation as compared with private schools pertaining to the reputation dimensions (quality of services, quality of management, financial soundness, workplace environment, social responsibility, emotional appeal and corporate ethics). However, students who either studied in the public or private school claimed that the reputation of their schools is still insufficient or relatively low.

In the same vein, Kwatubana (2014) aimed to focus on perception of reputation in South African schools with predominantly Black students. The data were collected from four categories of stakeholders, namely parents, educators, school managers, and clerks. The results showed that

reputation management as a multi-faceted construct include academic performance, good leadership and management, organizational climate, and emotional appeal. In addition, the results also revealed that internal stakeholders perceived social responsibility as an important element in determining the reputation of the school.

In another study, Šontaitė-petkevičienė (2015) tried to analyze the different perception of customers on corporate reputation management of HEIs. The study applied exploratory study (focus group) to identify the indicators of the reputation, followed by descriptive (survey) methods to collect data from the different stakeholders of four (4) Lithuanian universities. The results revealed that the attribute of corporate reputation in HEI context comprised of behaviour, studies, emotional appeal, citizenship and social responsibility, leadership, performance, workplace, competition, career, and innovation. Based on the above notion, the management of HEIs needs to consider the attributes mentioned when managing their reputation.

Karademir and Şimşek (2013) intend to identify the corporate reputation level of Anadolu University with pertaining to the internal and external stakeholders' assessment. The findings revealed that overall the respondents have a positive view on the reputation of the university. In addition, the correlation analysis showed that there is a strong and positive relationship between the dimensions pertaining to the elements such as management and leadership, employees, work environment, corporate culture, product and services and social responsibility.

Based on the above notion, universities should take education which goes beyond theoretical and classroom aspects and focus on equipping the students with real-world knowledge in their particular fields, and apply new technologies for future career enhancement. In addition, the university's ability to generate projects that help to solve the problems of society and country (social responsibility) will transform the university into an institution that is highly recognized by various stakeholders.

This is in line with the study done by Kanto, de Run, and Md Isa (2016), whereby they wish to examine the Reputation Quotient in Malaysian banking industry. Based on the confirmatory factor analysis, the findings concluded that the five (5) multi-dimensional of Reputation Quotient, namely emotional appeal, product and services, financial performance, vision and leadership, and social responsibility are highly important in the Malaysian banking industry. However, the workplace environment is not the determinant factor. Based on the discussion above, therefore, the current study analyzed only the five dimensions as mentioned above because these dimensions appeal to the Malaysian setting.

On the contrary, the study done by Verčič, Verčič and Žnidar (2016) who explored an academic organization's reputation among various stakeholder groups by focusing on the multidimensional construct based on the Reputation Quotient of universities. The findings indicated that the attributes of reputation were similar for the three (3) stakeholder groups through the confirmatory factor analysis. However, their study found out that the reputation is unidimensional which differs with the notions of Shamma (2007) and Fombrun *et al.* (2000) that reputation as a multi-faceted construct.

In a related study done by Chan, Leong, Nadarajah and Ramayah (2016), they applied the reputation model to the three (3) public-listed companies (PLCs) in Malaysia. Their findings revealed that the three selected PLCs are congruent with the facets of RepTrak reputation model (improved version of Reputation Quotient). Based on the discussions, past studies had highlighted about several corporate reputation dimensions from different scholars. However, each institution varies with the dimensions due to the nature of business or industries that they operate and the different expectations of their constituents.

Based on the literature drawn, the current study, therefore hypothesized that:

H₁: There is a positive perception of students about the subscale of Reputation Quotient facets (product and services, social responsibility, vision and leadership, financial performance, and emotional appeal).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized quantitative (survey) design, whereby this design allows the researcher to effectively determine the opinions of respondents about a particular subject from a specific group of people (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, Babbie, 2012). Hence, the deductive approach by using the survey is deemed to be the most suitable method to apply in this study.

Population and sampling

This study was carried out in a public university with a total population of 2,7874 students. A sample size of 383 was drawn from this population based on the Yamane's (1967) formula. Out of the 383 questionnaires, only a total of 378 questionnaires were valid to use. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a sample size range from 30 to 500 would be sufficient and acceptable for the social science studies. A multistage sampling procedure was applied in this study. Researchers used a probability sampling (simple random) to get the public university and then applied convenience sampling to collect the data from the students in the university.

Procedures

For the data collection, a structured anonymous questionnaire had been distributed to the students (local and international) who were, at the time of data collection, studying in a particular public university. Researchers have granted the permissions of the respective lecturers who teach the *Mata Pelajaran Umum* (MPU) subjects, as the MPU subjects is compulsory to be completed by all the university students upon graduation. The students were selected from those subjects as they are coming from different faculties and diverse programs to avoid biases in choosing the sample.

The Instrument

There are (2) sections in the instrument, whereby Section A is a demographic section and Section B contains items for the facets of corporate reputation. Demographic questions in section A were designed to gather information about characteristics of respondents such as gender, the type of student (local and international), age, race, and education level. In Section B, the items were adopted from the Reputation Quotient (Fombrun *et al.*, 2000) measured on the five-point Likert-type scale where 1 indicates "Strongly Disagree"; 2 represents "Disagree"; 3 indicates "Somewhat agree"; 4 represents "Agree"; and 5 indicates "Strongly Agree".

The interpretation of the Likert-type scale which based on Umi, Zamri and Jamaludin (2011) is as below:

1	Strongly disagree	Negative
2	Disagree	
3	Somewhat agree	Positive
4	Agree	
5	Strongly agree	

Reputation Quotient is chosen because it is one of the most widely used reputation scale instruments for measuring the corporate reputation and it has been tested in various cross cultural settings (Gardberg, 2006).

Data Analysis and Statistical Significance

The data were then analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. Based on the notion of Umi *et al.*, (2011), the scale of 3 in the Likert-type scale was interpreted as positive. Hence, the current study applied one sample T-test, whereby it presumes the mean of the population (test value = 3) to compare the mean scores of each of the subscales in the Reputation Quotient and overall corporate reputation (sample mean) to access the perception of the student (stakeholder) on it. Although by using descriptive statistics, we were able to know the perception of students on the subscales of the Reputation Quotient, however, by using one sample T-test, it will show whether each of the items in the scale is significant or vice versa. The technique which used one sample T-test to compare the subscales to access the perception has been applied and testable in several past studies (see Hashim, 2015; Mohd Hasan, Chan, & Bidin, 2018; Wok & Ithnin, 2018). Hence, it is deemed an appropriate analysis to be carried out.

Pilot-Testing

A pilot test was conducted to test the reliability of the instrument. 39 sets of questionnaires were distributed to the students in SEGi College Kota Damansara in the Faculty of Communication and Creative Design (see Table 1). According to Hair, Babin, Money, and Samouel (2007), the reliability analysis scale can be accepted if the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is between 0.6 and 1.0. Hence, the Cronbach's alpha value for the current study ranged from .637 till .872 which is highly accepted. Before a T-test can be carried out, the data should be normally distributed, as normality is an important statistical assumption in the parametric analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Based on Table 1, the values for skewness and kurtosis for the variables are in the range between -2 to +2, with 5% of sampling error which is considered acceptable to prove normal distribution exists (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Hence, the current data are still normally distributed and the requirements for parametric analysis are met.

Table 1: Reliability and normality analysis on the dimensions of Reputation Quotient

Construct/ Items	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha (n=39)	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Section B						
Facets of Reputation Quotient						
Products & services	4	.773	7.00	20.00	-.217	.244
Social responsibility	3	.637	5.00	15.00	-.254	-.099
Vision and Leadership	3	.747	3.00	15.00	-.360	.308
Financial Performance	3	.764	5.00	15.00	-.509	.277
Emotional Appeal	3	.872	3.00	15.00	-.631	.654

Results & Discussion

Table 2 shows majority of the respondents in this study are females (72.5 %), and the rest are males (27.5 %). For the category of student, the majority of the respondents are from local (88.9 %) as the current study conducted in a Malaysian public university, where local students make up the biggest portion of the population and are Malay (58.7 %) with ages ranging from 20-24 years old (76.2 %). Out of the total respondents, more than half of the respondents are bachelor degree holders (73.5%).

Table 2: Demographic profile of the respondents (n= 378)

Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	104	27.5
Female	274	72.5
Student		
Local	336	88.9
International	42	11.1
Race		
Malay	222	58.7
Chinese	88	23.3
Indian	32	8.5
Others	36	9.5
Age		
20 - 24	288	76.2
25 - 29	54	14.3
30 - 34	21	5.6
35 - 39	11	2.9
40 - 44	4	1.1
Education		
STPM/HSC/Diploma	45	11.9
Bachelor Degree	278	73.5
Master Degree	46	12.2
Ph. D.	9	2.4

The main objective of the study is to find out the perception of students about the facets of Reputation Quotient. Table 3 shows the mean score for all the items ranging from 3.42 to 4.10. The highest mean score was represented by the statement “I admire and respect my university” ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.79$) and was categorized under the emotional appeal facet. The statement “My university offers products/services that are good value for money” ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.83$) and “My university always stand behind the services they offer” ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.81$) from the product and services facet were less perceived favorably by the respondents in the current context.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation Reputation Quotient facets and overall corporate reputation ($n=378$)

Facets of Reputation Quotient	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Product and Services		
My university offers high quality products/services.	3.60	0.87
My university offers products/services that are good value for money.	3.49	0.83
My university always stand behind the services they offer.	3.42	0.81
My university is very innovative in introducing programmes for students as customers/clients.	3.69	0.79
Overall	3.55	0.83
Social Responsibility		
My university threats people well through community services.	3.62	0.90
My university appears to support good causes.	3.75	0.81
My university seems to environmentally friendly.	4.08	0.80
Overall	3.82	0.84
Vision and Leadership		
I believe my university’s leader has an excellent, strong, and appealing leadership.	3.90	0.86
My university leader has a clear vision for the future.	3.89	0.82
My university takes advantage on market opportunities.	3.77	0.87
Overall	3.85	0.85

Financial Performance		
I trust my university is a strong organization and have a good record of profitability.	3.89	0.79
I believe my university tends to outperform other universities.	3.88	0.85
My university has strong prospects for future growth.	4.04	0.79
Overall	3.94	1.90
Emotional appeal		
I have a good feeling about my university.	3.98	0.86
I admire and respect my university.	4.10	0.79
I trust my university.	4.06	0.83
Overall	4.05	1.93
Overall corporate reputation	3.84	1.27

In addition, the overall mean score of 3.84 and the highest mean score of the emotional appeal facet ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.93$) indicated that the students have good recognition and perception regards the facets of corporate reputation that carried out by the university and it is at the positive stage. This has further supported the numerous past studies which indicated that the students have a positive view about corporate reputation of the university (Karademir & Şimşek, 2013; Gür, 2015).

The financial performance facet has a second highest overall mean score of 3.94, which indicated that reputation is a positive, tangible asset that creates financial values for the organization and the constituents (Neville, *et. al*, 2005; Eberl & Schwaiger 2005; Burke, 2011). In relation to the above mentioned, Grupp and Gaines-Ross' (2002) study emphasized on the leadership values (credibility, integrity, and high quality communication) in determining the organizational reputation which are also congruent with the results of the current study.

The students also have a good perception about social responsibility of the university, which is congruent with the statement of Kwatubana (2014) that internal stakeholders perceived social responsibility as a pivotal attribute in determining the reputation of the school.

On the contrary, the facet of product and services ranked the least as compared with other elements ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.83$). This showed that the students are relatively satisfied with the services provided by the university, however, the services can be further improved and enhanced. This has further supported the view that customer satisfaction plays a significant role between quality of product services and organizational reputation (Carmeli & Tischler, 2005).

Further, one sample T-test was conducted to analyze the findings. As shown in Table 4 below, the significant value of the overall mean score of corporate reputation ($t = 123.04$, $df = 377$, $p = .000$) and all the items under the facets of the Reputation Quotient are positive and significant. Thus, H_1 is accepted. Hence, it can be implied that students have a positive perception on the subscales of the Reputation Quotient facets (product and services, social responsibility, vision and leadership, financial performance, and emotional appeal).

Table 4: One sample t-test between each sub-scale of Reputation Quotient and the score of corporate reputation ($n=378$)

Facets of Reputation Quotient	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> ^{**}	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Product and Services	My university offers high quality products/services.	3.60	0.87	13.48	377	.000
	My university offers products/services that are good value for money.	3.49	0.83	11.52	377	.000
	My university always stand behind the services they offer.	3.42	1.68	10.06	377	.000
	My university is very innovative in introducing programmes for students as customers/clients.	3.69	0.79	16.78	377	.000
Social Responsibility	My university threats people well through community services.	3.62	0.90	13.50	377	.000
	My university appears to support good causes.	3.75	0.81	17.97	377	.000
	My university seems to environmentally friendly.	4.08	0.80	26.47	377	.000
Vision and Leadership	I believe my university's leader has an excellent, strong, and appealing leadership.	3.90	0.86	20.30	377	.000
	My university leader has a clear vision for the future.	3.89	0.82	20.99	377	.000
	My university takes advantage on market opportunities.	3.77	0.87	17.16	377	.000
Financial Performance	I trust my university is a strong organization and have a good record of profitability.	3.89	0.79	21.77	377	.000
	I believe my university tends to outperform other universities.	3.88	0.85	20.19	377	.000
	My university has strong prospects for future growth.	4.04	0.79	25.97	377	.000
Emotional Appeal	I have a good feeling about my university.	3.98	0.86	22.37	377	.000
	I admire and respect my university.	4.10	0.79	27.28	377	.000
	I trust my university.	4.06	0.83	24.72	377	.000
Overall Corporate Reputation		3.84	1.27	123.04	377	.000

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat agree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

** test value = 3

The findings are in line with the study done by Kanto *et al.*, (2016) who stated that facets of reputation, namely product and services, social responsibility, vision and leadership, financial performance, and emotional appeal are the dimensions that shape the corporate reputation within a Malaysian context. In addition, numerous past studies also yielded the similar results that corporate reputation makes up of several facets as mentioned in the university context (Gür, 2015; Karademir & Şimşek, 2013; Šontaitė-petkevičienė, 2015). This is further congruent with the notions of Barnett, Jermier, and Latterfly (2006) that reputation is the collective judgments of an organization based on the evaluation of the financial, social and environmental impacts towards the organization over time.

In addition, the current findings supported Fombrun *et al.* (2000) that the corporate reputation is made up of multi-dimensional construct, and are on the contrary with Verčič, *et al.*, (2016) who state that reputation is a unidimensional construct.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In summary, this study revealed that the selected students who studied in the particular public HEI have positive perception about the university reputation. The findings of this study provided new perspectives to the Reputation Quotient model that can be applied to a university setting and contributes to research on reputation in a developing economy.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the reputation perspectives in the education sector, particularly in a Malaysian setting. However, there are several limitations. Firstly, the current study was only limited to investigate the corporate reputation from the perspectives of students in only one of the public HEIs in Malaysia. Therefore, the future study can look into other research universities (RU) in Malaysia about their stakeholders' perception on the university reputation and initiatives. In addition, the comparison between the perception of students from public and private universities in regard to their perception on corporate reputation would provide a wider understanding in the Malaysian education system on reputation management. Further studies on different angles will provide diverse research perspectives and increase validity.

There is a limitation of the current study particularly on the sampling techniques. Although the sample size of the study (n=378) meets the requirement to perform parametric statistical analysis like T-test, however, due to the sampling methods there is a tendency for the current results do not able to generalize back to the population due to the use of convenience sampling. However, the researcher has tried to minimize the limitations by distributing the survey questionnaires to the student who take the university compulsory courses which have diversity in programs and faculties.

In addition, the sample was limited to the students who were currently enrolled and have experienced with the particular public HEI. Hence, future research can carry out similar studies by testing on the various constituents of HEIs such as parents, alumni, prospective students, employees, and media to make comparison between the stakeholder groups about their perception on the corporate reputation to enhance the Malaysian research on the area of corporate communication.

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