Investigating University Characteristics on Personality Traits

**Kullanun Sripongpun^{1*}, Nattanan Saksamrit², Watcharapong Intarawong³,
Pattama Suriyakul Na Ayudhya⁴**

^{1, 2, 3, 4}Kasetsart University, Sakon Nakhon, Thailand

ABSTRACT

Objective - This study aims to extend the brand personality concept by applying this concept to the organization, i.e., the university.

Methodology/Technique – A questionnaire was designed based on Aaker (1997)'s 5 dimensions of brand personality scale to collect the data. 400 Thai undergraduate students of Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus participated in this study. Participants were first informed of the study description and instructed to think of a university as if it were a person and to rate on a five-point scale (1 = not at all descriptive, 5 = extremely descriptive). In the data analysis, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were used.

Finding – The results from the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a varimax rotation showed 5 factors of university personality. Factor 1 represents competence dimension having 10 items (successful, leader, technical, corporate, cool, hardworking, secure, spirited, confident and reliable). Factor 2 represents sophistication dimension which had 4 items (glamorous, good looking, smooth and upper class). Factor 3 represents ruggedness dimension which had 5 items (western, tough, masculine, rugged and outdoorsy). Factor 4 represents sincerity dimension which had 2 items (honest and sincere). The last factor was excitement dimension which had only 1 item, imaginative. Furthermore, according to student perspective, the majority of university personality dimensions of Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus was ruggedness dimension.

Novelty – Research examining the dimensions of organization personality is still scant. To fill the gap, the current study was conducted to demonstrate how the brand personality concept was applicable when the organization was viewed as a brand. Therefore, it is a preliminary step toward such direction to extend and apply the brand personality concept to a new different area.

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JEL Classification: M10, M19.

Keywords: University Personality; University Characteristics; Personality Traits; Brand Personality Concept.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, facing changes and uncertain environments is a challenge for organizations all around the world (Gupta, 2011).

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* Corresponding author: Kullanun Sripongpun

E-mail: kullanun.s@ku.th

Affiliation: Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science, Kasetsart University, Thailand

The competition can occur in various fields and organizations, even among educational institutions (Judson et. al., 2009). Many universities have adjusted themselves and prepared their organizational images to encounter the radical changes (Lee et. al., 2008). In order to differentiate themselves from the other competitors, they decided to spend some budgets on the improvement and the development of their organizational images (Palacio, Meneses & Perez, 2002). In so doing, the brand personality concept, one of the important dimensions of brand image (Plummer, 1985), is a useful element which any universities can apply to make their brands distinctive or unique. In addition, the brand personality should be used to connect universities to external stakeholders (Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013). Scholars have paid attention to the brand personality concept (Shyle & Hysi, 2013), and previous studies have shown that brand personality can be applied to different areas. Therefore, the current study was conducted to demonstrate how the brand personality concept applies when the organization is viewed as a brand.

Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus where is the fourth campus of Kasetsart University besides Bangkok Campus, Kampangsaeen Campus and Sriracha Campus. It was established in order to respond to the government's policy of the distribution of educational opportunities in the Northeast of Thailand. Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus has 4 faculties as follows; Faculty of Natural Resources and Agro-Industry (6 courses in Bachelor Degree and 2 courses in Master Degree), Faculty of Science and Engineering (8 courses in Bachelor Degree and 2 courses in Master Degree), Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science (8 courses in Bachelor Degree and 1 course in Master Degree) and Faculty of Public Health (2 courses in Bachelor Degree and 1 course in Master Degree). With two decades of experience, Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus aims to raise the quality graduates with morality and ethics. Many strategies were used for the development of the university image and the university strategic plan in order to attract new students. Therefore, in terms of a research site, the researcher selected Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus, Thailand to uncover how Aaker (1997)'s 5 dimensions of the brand personality were applied.

2. Literature Review

For more than a decade, many organizations have faced competitive environments which has been increasing (Judson et al., 2009). From a competition perspective, a university is one of the organizations which should adapt faster to confront a change of both internal and external environment. The administration of many universities has been focusing on being and becoming more business-like (Lee, 2008). In other words, universities have implemented marketing techniques which also include developing the university brand (Judson et. al., 2009).

Not only is developing brand a valuable technique, it is a way to a create brand image. If you want to understand your consumers, you have to understand your brand image (DeArmond & Crawford, 2011). For educational aspect, the brand image, i.e., university image is increasingly important for the competition among universities and make them different from their competitors (Palacio, Meneses & Perez, 2002). The university image can be determined as all the beliefs which an individual person has toward the university in terms of the faculty, the curriculum, and the teaching quality (Alves & Raposo, 2010). The overall university image is very important to the clients' (students and their parents) decision-making (Arpan, Raney and Zivnуска, 2003). Furthermore, students' willingness to recommend their university to other people can be affected by university image (Alves & Raposo, 2010).

According to Plummer (1985), the concept of brand personality is one dimension of brand image. Brand personality is a set of human traits or personalities that can be used to explain the brand (Aaker, 1997). Usually, the marketers use the brand personality concept to create their good relationships with their customers (Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2009). If their brand personality is obvious, it could be recognized and remembered easily by their customers (Mishra, 2011). Moreover, it will represent the product uniqueness differentiating from other competitors (Aaker, 1996).

Aaker (1997) developed a brand personality scale by using a technique of factor analysis. It can be divided into 5 dimensions including 42 personality traits as follows:

- 1) Sincerity which includes down-to-earth, family-oriented, small-town, honest, sincere, real, wholesome, original, cheerful, sentimental, and friendly;
- 2) Excitement which consists of daring, trendy, exciting, spirited, cool, young, imaginative, unique, up-to-date, independent, and contemporary;
- 3) Competence including reliable, hard-working, secure, intelligent, technical, corporate, successful, leader, and confident;
- 4) Sophistication consisting of upper class, glamorous, good looking, charming, feminine, and smooth; and
- 5) Ruggedness, i.e., outdoorsy, masculine, western, tough, and rugged.

Brand personality is a useful technique for positioning the brand (Watkins & Gonzenbach, 2013) and helping a brand differentiate itself in the marketplace (Parker, 2009; Park & John, 2010). Aaker's 5 dimensions of brand personality was accepted by many researchers. Therefore, they have been applying the brand personality concept to non-product studies (Sripongpun & Polyorat, 2014). Brand personality concept was also used to describe or explain a personality in other fields (Messent & Serpell, 1981 as cited in Sung & Tinkham, 2005), such as destination personality (Hosany, Ekinci, & Uysal, 2006), restaurant personality (Musante, Bojanic & Zhang, 2008), website personality (Chen & Rodgers, 2006), and city personality (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010; Amatyakul & Polyorat, 2017).

As mentioned above, the university personality is a new concept of applying human personalities to university description. In other words, the university personality is using the human traits to describe the university's characteristics. Humburg (2017) found that the personality traits are related to the education system. Therefore, developing strong and unique university personalities can be beneficial to the universities in improving their performance and protecting themselves in a competitive situation (Patterson, 1999; Ali-Choudhury et. al., 2009). A concept of brand personality is a significant key element for universities to build and maintain their own favorable images. Also, this concept plays the important role in differentiating each university from their competitors (Watkins and Gonzenbach, 2013). Moreover, a better understanding of the university personality can help administration committee position the university properly. Additionally, they can develop the university strategic plan in order to attract new students.

3. Research Methodology

This study is a quantitative research. A questionnaire was designed based on Aaker (1997)'s 5 dimensions of brand personality scale to collect the data. Participants of this study was randomly selected using nonprobability sampling and purposive sampling method. 400 Thai undergraduate students who are now studying in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Management Science, Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus from different years of study were selected. Data was collected for 2 weeks. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for all traits in the questionnaire. It presented 0.910 accepted reliability value as Hair et. al. (2010) explained that the acceptable reliability value should not be less than 0.70. Participants were first informed of the study description and instructed to think of a university as if it were a person and to rate on a five-point scale (1 = not at all descriptive, 5 = extremely descriptive). In the data analysis, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were used.

4. Results

The results reveal that the majority of the respondent were female (276 persons or 69.0%), most of them were between 20 years old (144 persons or 36.0%) and majority of the 173 respondents were in their junior year (43.3%). Moreover, the results from exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with a varimax rotation showed five factors of university personality being as same as Aaker (1997)'s brand personality framework. Personality traits having low loadings ($<.50$) or cross-loaded on 2 dimensions (over .30) were removed (Nunnally, 1978). Factor 1 represents competence dimension having 10 items (successful, leader, technical, corporate, cool, hardworking, secure, spirited, confident and reliable). Factor 2 represents sophistication dimension which had 4 items (glamorous, good looking, smooth and upper class). Factor 3 represents ruggedness dimension which had 5 items (western, tough, masculine, rugged and outdoorsy). Factor 4 represents sincerity dimension which had 2 items (honest and sincere). The last factor was excitement dimension which had only 1 item, imaginative. Furthermore, according to student perspective, the majority of university personality dimensions of Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus was ruggedness dimension. Table 1. illustrates the factor loadings, eigenvalues and percentage of variance explained.

Table 1. Factor loading of aggregate data

	Items	Varimax-rotated principal Factors				
		Factor 1 Competence	Factor 2 Sophistication	Factor 3 Ruggedness	Factor 4 Sincerity	Factor 5 Excitement
1	successful	0.670				
2	leader	0.647				
3	technical	0.628				
4	corporate	0.626				
5	cool	0.590				
6	hardworking	0.579				
7	secure	0.561				
8	spirited	0.543				
9	confident	0.539				
10	reliable	0.514				
11	glamorous		0.805			
12	good looking		0.690			
13	smooth		0.661			
14	upper class		0.608			
15	western			0.759		
16	tough			0.748		
17	masculine			0.740		
18	rugged			0.673		
19	outdoorsy			0.522		

Table 2. Factor loading of aggregate data (Cont.)

	Items	Varimax-rotated principal Factors				
		Factor 1 Competence	Factor 2 Sophistication	Factor 3 Ruggedness	Factor 4 Sincerity	Factor 5 Excitement

20	honest				0.861	
21	sincere				0.649	
22	imaginative					0.855
	Eigenvalues	11.64	3.49	2.23	1.72	1.19
	% of variance explained	27.84	8.32	5.31	4.10	2.83

- Italics= items not loaded on the intended factors.

5. Discussion

The study reveals 5 university personality dimensions similar to Aaker (1997)'s 5 brand personality dimensions including competence, sincerity, sophistication, excitement, and ruggedness. Most of the personality traits loaded on the intended dimensions. Nonetheless, the brand personality structures in the present study are not completely identical to those of Aaker (1997). In other words, there are 2 unexpected items which do not represent the exciting dimension as in Aaker's (1997); those are cool and spirited. These 2 items are identified as the representatives of the competence dimension. It might be because of the meaning of these 2 words. In other words, these 2 personality traits can be translated into Thai variously. We Thai people usually use the words "cool" and "spirited" differently in many contexts. Moreover, some characteristics and the meaning of the items in the excitement and competence dimensions may be closely related. The participants will be probably confused and interpret those words following their own opinions.

6. Conclusion

According to the data mentioned above, the study displayed the university personality of Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus which consists of 5 dimensions (competence, sophistication, ruggedness, sincerity, and excitement). It could be concluded that Aaker (1997)'s five dimensions of the brand personality can be used to measure the personality of other aspects, i.e., website personality (Chen & Rodgers, 2006), destination personality (Hosany et. al., 2006), city personality (Kaplan et. al., 2010), and university personality.

The findings of the current study revealed the students' perspectives on their institution which discovered the university personality. Additionally, the university personality could be used as a part of determining the university strategic plan. So, it can help administration committee position the university properly. The results also reveal the dimension that received the highest value of mean. The ruggedness dimension got the mean value of 3.99 which was the highest among these dimensions. With this finding, the administration committee of Kasetsart University Chalermphrakiat Sakon Nakhon Province Campus can apply it to the university strategic plan development for attracting new students. In addition to the ruggedness dimension that got the highest mean value, it might be because of the physical characteristics of the campus which are unique and outstanding. The location is very distinctive because it is surrounded by nature and clean air. Therefore, the administration committee should present these dominant advantages or features which relate to the ruggedness dimension in order to attract new students.

The limitation of the current study is related to the data collection process. There are some personality traits which have similar meaning, so it may not be clear for the respondents. Therefore, the findings suggest avenues in future research to inform a clear definition of some personality traits which have similar meaning before asking a respondent to complete a questionnaire. Moreover, in order to obtain more accurate data, the researcher should collect data from more representative samples that are the lecturers, the staff of the universities, and the students in upper secondary schools.

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