

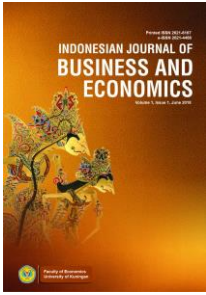
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The Relationship between Integrated Marketing Communication and Leadership Styles - In the Context of Malaysian Higher Education

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Abstract

The purposes of this study are to assess the level of IMC implementation, to investigate the factors for developing and implementing a successful IMC plan, and to determine the interconnection between leadership styles and IMC in the selected Malaysian public and private higher learning institutions (HLIs) based on the perceptions of administrators and lecturers. Qualitative methods were employed, whereby IMC four-stage framework and seven dimensions of full range leadership theory served as the basis of this study. The results of this study show that a majority of the interviewees claimed that their institutions have reached stage 4 (strategic integration) of the IMC framework. Nevertheless, there were inconsistencies in the answers between the administrators and lecturers. The results also reveal that the important factors in developing and implementing a successful IMC plan in Malaysian HLIs are uniting functional operations by aligning the activities of the HLIs toward serving the customers, getting support from the top management of HLIs, studying their customers thoroughly, and utilising social networks to communicate with their current and prospective customers. Moreover, the leadership styles practised in the interviewees' institutions expose that the dimension of intellectual stimulation was the most mentioned, followed by laissez-faire, inspirational motivation, and management-by-exception. The leaders of the selected Malaysian public HLIs showed a higher tendency of practising transformational leadership style compared to the leaders of the selected Malaysian private HLIs who showed the tendency of practising transactional leadership style. Thus, practising an appropriate leadership style is an important factor that influences the effectiveness of leaders in the Malaysian HLIs.

Keywords: Integrated marketing communication; integrated marketing communication framework; leadership styles; full range leadership theory.

JEL Classification: M31

INTRODUCTION

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been conceptualised by Schultz (2004, p. 9) as “a strategic business process used to plan, execute, and evaluate coordinated, measurable, persuasive brand communications programmes over time with consumers, customers, prospects, employees, associates, and other targeted relevant external and internal audiences”. In brief, IMC can be generally understood as a concept which provides the idea of how organisations could sustain in the highly competitive global market through a business process that can be evaluated and measured, whereby the communication and behaviour of both internal and external stakeholder groups are being put into emphasis to form a coordinated and consistent brand communications (i.e. brand messages, brand image, brand relationships, etc.).

In the complex global marketplace where intense competition is evident, the traditional marketing tactics which focus on the Four Ps (i.e. price, promotion, place, and product) (Schultz & Schultz, 2003) and the supply-chain approach (Kitchen & Schultz, 2000) are unsustainable for an organisation’s long-term survival (Holm, 2006). To add on, higher learning institutions (HLIs) are urged to adopt a marketing-oriented approach in order to survive (Wiese, 2008); improving their MARCOM programmes by getting familiar with the principles of service marketing (Szántó & Harsányi, 2007) and encouraging communicative interchange among internal and

external stakeholder groups (Schüller & Rašticová, 2011).

In fact, in Malaysia, education reforms are constantly taking place in order to adapt education to national development needs (Goi & Goi, 2009). In the recent Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015 to 2025 for higher education, it has been outlined in the 10th shift, that is, a transformed higher education learning that the objective is aimed at breaking down the operating silos across departments, forging stronger partnerships with HLIs, industry, and community, and improving its efficiency and effectiveness in its role as a regulator and policy maker (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). These efforts of addressing performance issues in the Malaysian education system are in line with the aims of IMC, that is, to bridge the gap in relationships by promoting the ‘non-siloed’, cross-functional organisational structure.

Besides that, Malaysian private HLIs were expected by the State to attract more international students as they do not have to meet targets for domestic students as required in Malaysian public HLIs (Chang, Morshidi, & Dzulkifli, 2015). Thus, universities need to transform themselves in order to meet the challenges presented by the policies by realigning their organisations with the environment, redesigning themselves to achieve new goals, redefining roles and responsibilities, and reengineering their organisational processes, of which, such dramatic and bold changes require reform before they can be