# Rebranding of Higher Educational Institutions in Malaysia

Chai Lee Goi (Corresponding author)

Department of Marketing and Management, School of Business, Curtin University of Technology

CDT 250, 98009 Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia

Tel: 60- 85-443-939      E-mail: goi.chai.lee@curtin.edu.my


Mei Teh Goi

School of Business Infrastructure, Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College

Corporate Block, IKRAM Park, Jalan Serdang - Kajang, 43000 Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia

Tel: 60-3-8926 -6993      E-mail: g_mt10@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

In order to create reputations in the local and international market, rebranding of Malaysian Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) have been practiced intensively in the recent years. The main objective of this study is to review rebranding of HEIs in Malaysia, which are focus more on public and private HEIs. In order to adapt education to national development needs and as the number of enrolment of tertiary students has been increasing rapidly, education reforms are constantly taking place in Malaysia. In response to the growth of students' enrolment in degree courses, public colleges and public university campus branches are being upgraded to university-colleges status beginning in 2000.

**Keywords:** Rebranding, Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)

## 1. Introduction

Number of studies have been done in the academic field (Daly and Moloney, 2004; Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006). Table 1 shows the recently published and unpublished rebranding related studies. Some of the studies refer to this phenomenon as repositioning or revitalising the brand. Muzellec et al. (2003) and Rosenthal (2003) claimed that this phenomenon should cover wider areas; therefore, they introduced the term 'rebranding'. Koku (1997) explained that while a firm decides to change its name, not only would it change the firm's performance but also the communication between a firm and its consumers. In general, services brand focus on three areas: (1) external branding which explains how organisations create brands (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; McDonald et. al., 2001); (2) internal branding which focuses on employees (Aurand et. al., 2005; Hankinson, 2004; Vallaster, 2004); and (3) customers' perceptions towards brands (Jones et al., 2002; O'Cass and Grace, 2004; O'Loughlin and Szmigin, 2005).

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of this paper are to review the development of public and private education institutions in Malaysia and the importance of branding in higher educational institutions.

## 3. The Development of Public Higher Educational Institutions

Under the Universities and University Colleges Act 1969, five public universities were established in the 1960s to 1970s, four public universities were established in the 1980s to the early 1990s, and ten public universities in the late 20th to the early 21st century (see Table 2). With a shift to the knowledge-based economy in the mid-1990s and failure of public institutions to offer places to the rising demand for higher education, higher education in Malaysia have been divided into public and private systems (Wong and Hamali, 2006). To date, there are around 600 private HEIs and 20 public universities in Malaysia.

In order to adapt education to national development needs and as the number of enrolment of tertiary students has been increasing rapidly (see Table 3), education reforms are constantly taking place in Malaysia (Ahmad, 1998). In response to the growth of students' enrolment in degree courses, public colleges and public university campus branches are being

upgraded to university-colleges status beginning in 2000. For example, Kolej Universiti Sains dan Teknologi Malaysia (KUSTEM) was the Fisheries and Marine Science Centre Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) at Mengabang Telipot, Kuala Terengganu.

In 2001, the National Technical University College of Malaysia (KUTKM), Melaka was the first public 'university-college' introduced in Malaysia under the University and University College Act 1971 Section 20, and now there are six public university college status institutions. The Minister of Education at that time, Tan Sri Musa Mohamad clarified that a university-college can be defined as a small scale university, which (1) awards its own degree qualifications, (2) has an enrolment around 10,000 students, (3) offers 70% degree courses and 30% diploma courses, and (4) is practice and application oriented (Sooi, 2006). StudyMalaysia (2005) explains that a university offers courses in all areas of knowledge; while university-college institutions focus on specific areas. Furthermore, students' enrolment in each University College should not exceed 10,000 students.

Efforts have been made by the government to increase students' enrolment in public university-colleges. However, misconception about the status of 'university-college' as second-class higher educational institution has failed to attract students' enrolment (Sooi, 2006). At the end of 2006, the Ministry of Higher Education upgraded all the public university colleges to full-fledged universities.

## 4. The Development of Private Higher Educational Institutions

Private education in Malaysia has flourished since 1950s. Private schools were at that time alternatives or gateways for students who were unable to enter government schools. In the early 1970s, there was a significant shift of roles and functions in the private education system whereby its providers placed more importance on pre-university courses as well as providing tutorial support to students in preparing them for external examinations in semi-professional and professional qualifications (StudyMalaysia, 2005).

The early 1980s witnessed a significant change in the roles and responsibilities played by private colleges as providers of tertiary education. By the end of 1980s and 1990s, Malaysia witnessed an unprecedented and accelerated growth of private higher education. Due to the growth of information and communication technology (ICT), higher costs and a change in government policies lesser number of Malaysians are pursuing higher education overseas (StudyMalaysia, 2005). During the global recession in 1980s, a group of Malaysian academics from the University of Malaya and Institute Technology MARA initiated efforts to establish private colleges offering undergraduate Bachelor's degrees (Tan, 2002). As a result, private colleges were established during this period.

In the mid-1980s, Dr Mahathir Mohamad (Malaysia's 4th Prime Minister) suggested that local private colleges should explore twinning with higher education institutions in Australia and countries elsewhere (Tan, 2002). The growth of twinning programmes had introduced various models of credit transfers, for example one year study in local and two year study in foreign country (1+2). Colleges such as Inti, Metropolitan, HELP, and KDU were attracting huge numbers of students through their twinning programmes. Conducting foreign degree programmes in local institutions attracted the attention of middle- and high-income customers.

The rapid growth of Malaysian private HEIs in the 1990s did not result from the above reasons only but also from the growth in the number of high school graduates, rising income of parents, and rising costs of public higher education (Ayob and Yaakub, 1999). Tan (2002) also stated that the economic boom of the 1990s led to the establishment of a group of single discipline private colleges. For example, the Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology (APIIT) focuses on information technology, and Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology offers arts and design programmes.

The trend of corporate presence in Malaysian private higher education intensified during the 1990s economic boom. The collaboration between the corporate sector and colleges became significant for colleges competing for a better image following a proliferation of colleges established in the 1990s (Tan, 2002). The increase in the number of private colleges and foreign university campuses in Malaysia also resulted in an extensive growth of foreign students (Ghazali and Kassim, 2003).

From 1996 onwards, the Education Act, 1961 enabled the systematic growth of Private HEIs and brought about the setting up of private sector-funded universities and branch campuses of foreign universities. The first private Malaysian university, namely Multimedia University, was established in 1997 (StudyMalaysia, 2005). In 1998, the 3+0 programmes were introduced which allowed students to obtain their degrees from a foreign university without having to do any part of their programmes overseas (Said, 2002).

Ayob and Yaakub (1999) categorised five groups of private higher educational institutions in Malaysia: (1) large corporations or organisations closely linked with the government, (2) established by large public listed corporations, (3) established by political parties, (4) independent private colleges, and (5) local branches of foreign universities. In January 2005, there were altogether 599 private higher educational institutions in Malaysia; 11 private HEIs with university status, 11 private HEIs with university college status, 5 foreign university branch campuses, and 532

non-university branch campuses (StudyMalaysia, 2005).

Higher education at the degree level was totally public in the 1990s (Shahabudin, 2005), and private colleges were not allowed to award their own degree. Yet demand remained strong for degree programmes and professional courses in the education market. Therefore, many private HEIs established formal arrangements with foreign universities to offer educational programs ranging from certificate courses to postgraduate programs (Lee, 2003).

The drastic drop in the Malaysian exchange rate from RM2.50 to RM3.80 to the US dollar caused the Malaysian government to introduce a series of reactive measures, including efforts to reduce the outflow of students to universities overseas (Tan, 2002). Since early 2000, private education in Malaysia has gained local acceptance as a pathway for higher education and Malaysia is also being internationally recognised as an education exporting country where foreign students can pursue their higher education (StudyMalaysia, 2005).

The Malaysia National Development Plan (1990-2010), a master policy framework for several major policy plans to realise the vision of the country to become a developed and industrialised country by the year 2020, aims to make Malaysia a centre of excellence in education in the pacific region (Tan, 2002). In line with the government's aspirations to make Malaysia an educational hub, the Ministry of Education (MOE) actively invited qualified private HEIs to become University-Colleges in the year 2001.

In conjunction with the vision, in the year 2001, Malaysia's first private university-college was introduced. There were 535 colleges, which were invited to be transformed and the colleges needed to comply with the quality standard outlined under the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (Norfatimah, 2005). Even though the transformation of colleges to university-college status attracted a number of colleges to apply to change the status, customers have the perception that the 'university-college' status is second-class higher education (Sooi, 2006). Furthermore, the university-college status institutions are only allowed to grant their own degrees, or in other words, the Malaysian brand. O'Cass and Lim (2002) indicated that the country-of-origin which conferred degrees had significantly influenced a customer's choice, and specifically western origin is preferred over brands of an eastern origin. Thus, this provided a great challenge for the colleges to transform themselves into university-college status institutions.

Nevertheless, the enrolment in private HEIs increased dramatically from 15,000 in 1985 to 322,891 in 2005, and the total population was 2,838,832 students in 2005 (Abidin, 2004; StudyMalaysia, 2005.). The huge demand for higher education had attracted many big corporations to be involved in the education industry in the early 1980s (Tan, 2002). Sungei Way Group set up its Sunway College, and First Nationwide Group set up KBU International College are some of the examples. However, the business of private higher education only gave moderate returns to investment compared to other service industries (Ayob and Yaakub, 1999). Therefore, higher educational institutions had to develop a set of unique characteristics in order to face challenges such as the development of a more customer oriented service approach to education and an increased emphasis on corporate image (Melewar and Akel, 2005). As a result, marketing activities had become more significant for Private HEIs in Malaysia.

The University College of Technology & Management Malaysia (KUTPM) became the first private college to be upgraded by the Ministry of Education in the year 2001. In the year 2003, three private colleges were upgraded to university college status empowering them to award their own degree qualifications. This move by the Government also marked the start of international branding of Malaysian homegrown degree qualifications (StudyMalaysia, 2005). Currently, there are 12 private university-colleges, which have been upgraded. Table 4 shows the new and old names of the private university-colleges in Malaysia.

Generally, there are two patterns in changing the names of the colleges in order to build a better identity of themselves among university-colleges in Malaysia. The first pattern was the name is changed completely, for example, Ikram College of Technology has changed its name to Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College. Second, the name is changed but the umbrella name remains, for example L&G Twintech Institute of Technology has changed its name to International University College of Technology TWINTECH (IUCTT), and HELP Institute has been changed to HELP University College.

## 5. Importance of Branding for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)

Rosenthal (2003) claimed that the literature of marketing in HEIs has been discussed since the early 1980s; two of the significant areas are the branding process and the change process within the educational institutions' settings. Kotler and Fox (1995) have indicated the importance of branding in educational institutions and said "branding can add value to an educational institution's offer and provide more satisfaction for the consumers". However, published literature related to branding in educational institution is still limited.

Gray et al. (2003) have investigated the influence of cross-cultural values on the positioning of international education brands. The result has identified learning environment, reputation, graduate career prospects, destination image and cultural integration as dimensions of brand positioning. The most significant result of this study suggested that a standardised or adapted branding strategy could be adapted in Asian markets. This study provides a better understanding

of brand strategy in education branding in order to avoid the danger of adopting product based branding strategy.

Branding is powerful in providing competitive advantages. Stensaker (2005) indicated some benefits of branding to higher educational institutions: attract students from high income families, provide information and image, improves institutional cooperation, instigates internal change, re-discovers what they are and their basic purposes.

## 6. Conclusion

HEIs extensively practice rebranding in order to increase their brand equity. Rebranding has been debated as one of the most significant brand management practice. The phenomenon of rebranding often occurs in the service industry, and is specifically crucial for universities and colleges (Koku, 1997b). In order to create reputations in the local and international market, rebranding of Malaysian HEIs have been practiced intensively in the recent years. Malaysia attracts foreign students from neighbouring countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Bangladesh and China. The current important consideration lies in the initiative to improve and strengthen the higher education sector, both public and private. Multi-aspect enhancements to meet the global benchmark are vital to serve as the foundation for the country's higher education to compete in a more challenging and competitive higher education sector with the inclusion of regionalism (Wan, Kaur and Jantan, 2008).

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Table 1. Summary of literature on rebranding

| Citations | Purpose of study | Finding |
|---|---|---|
| Hankinson and Lomax (2006) | To evaluate the effects of rebranding in large UK charities on staff knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. | Rebranding has positive impact on knowledge and attitudes of employees, but effect on the behaviour of employees less. |
| Muzellec and Lambkin (2006) | To understand the drivers of the corporate rebranding phenomenon and to analyse the impact of such strategies on corporate brand equity. | Rebranding factors: Change in Ownership structure  Change in Corporate strategy  Change in External environment  Change in Competitive position |
| Melewar et al. (2005) | To explore France Telecom's visual rebranding program. | The process of rebranding: Problem recognition  Development of strategies  Execution of action plan  Implementation  Reviewing the impact |
| Daly and Moloney (2004) | Continues exploration of Muzellec et al. (2003) study and presents a case history of a company. | Corporate rebranding framework: Analysis – market analysis, brand audit, opportunity identification  Planning – communicating to Internal customers, renaming strategy, the rebranding marketing plan  Evaluation |
| Stuart and Muzellec (2004) | Introduced the concept of rebranding, the motivations for corporations to rebrand, and discussed the issues of the name, logo and slogan. | Rebranding definition |
| Causon (2004) | The process of managing the change programme within the organisation as it rebrands and repositions | Three stages: The education phase  The identification phase  The implementation phase |
| Rosenthal (2003) | Analyses the process of renaming postsecondary institution. | Continuous attention to marketing and growth is necessary once an institution does decide to rebrand itself. |
| Kaikati (2003) | Analyses the re creation of a global consulting giant by pinpointing the main lessons of rebranding, restructuring and repositioning. | New identity: Communication  Names  Logo  Strategy: phase-in/phase-out |
| Muzellec et al. (2003) | Investigated the corporate rebranding phenomenon | Rebranding Mix: Repositioning  Renaming  Redesigning  Relaunching |

| Lomax et al. (2002) | Qualitative study examines seven UK-based organisations which have re-branded in the past five years. | Conceptual model of the re-branding process:<br><br>Trigger<br><br>New Brand Development<br><br>Project Management<br><br>Follow-through |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Boyle (2002) | Identify the problems of Shell Retail's rebranding programme. | The nature of convenience retailing chain.<br><br>The task oriented nature.<br><br>The geographically dispersed location.<br><br>Never created significantly positive brand equity. |
| Koku (1997) | Compared the enrolment patterns, before and after the colleges and universities changed their names. | The name change did not affect the enrolment. |
| Koku (1997b) | Investigated the financial performance of an organisation during the post name change. | Corporate name change is an effective strategy for firms in the services industry to communicate improved standards. |

Table 2. List of Public Higher Educational Institution and Year of Establishment

| Name | New Name | Year Established | Year Renamed |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Universiti Malaya (UM) | - | 1962 | - |
| Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) | - | 1969 | - |
| Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) | - | 1970 | - |
| Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) | Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) | 1971 | 1997 |
| Universiti Tecknologi Malaysia (UTM) | - | 1975 | - |
| International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) | - | 1983 | - |
| Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) | - | 1984 | - |
| Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) | - | 1992 | - |
| Uniersiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) | - | 1994 | - |
| Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris | Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) | 1997 | - |
| Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) | Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) | 1999 | 1999 |
| Kolej Universiti Islam Malaysia (KUIM) | Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) | 1998 | 2007 |
| Kolej Universiti Sains dan Teknologi Malaysia (KUSTEM) | Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) | 1999 | 2007 |
| Kolej Universiti Teknologi Tun Hussein Onn (KUiTTHO) | Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) | 2000 | 2007 |
| Kolej Universiti Teknikal Kebangsaan Malaysia (KUTKM) | Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) | 2000 | 2007 |

| Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan dan Teknologi Malaysia (KUKTEM) | Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP) | 2001 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kolej Universiti Kejuruteraan Utara Malaysia (KUKUM) | Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) | 2001 | 2007 |
| Kolej Ugama Sultan Zainal Abidin (KUSZA) | Universiti Darul Iman Malaysia (UDM) | 2005 | 2007 |
| Akademi Tentera Malaysia (ATMA) | Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia (UPNM) | 1995 | 2007 |
| Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) | - | 2006 | - |

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), 2007

Table 3. Total enrolment of students in higher educational institutions

| Institutions | Year | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
| Public HEI | 270,436 | 304,628 | 281,839 | 294,359 | 293,978 | 307,121 | 331,025 |
| Private HEI | 261,043 | 270,904 | 294,600 | 314,344 | 322,891 | 258,825 | 323,787 |
| Total | 531,479 | 575,532 | 576,439 | 616,869 | 616,869 | 565,946 | 654,812 |

Source: Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), 2007

Table 4. Malaysian Private University-College

| No. | New Name | Old Name | Year Established | Year Upgraded |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | University College of Technology & Management Malaysia (KUTPM) | PTPL college | 1996 | 2001 |
| 2. | Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology (LUCT) | Limkokwing Institute of Creative Technology | 1992 | 2003 |
| 3. | Kuala Lumpur Infrastructure University College (KLIUC) | Ikram College of Technology | 1997 | 2003 |
| 4. | International University College of Technology TWINTECH (IUCTT) | L&G Twintech Institute of Technology | 1994 | 2003 |
| 5. | University College Sedaya International (UCSI) | Sedaya International College | 1990 | 2003 |
| 6. | HELP University College (HUC) | HELP Institute | 1986 | 2004 |
| 7. | Sunway University College (SyUC) | Sunway College | 1987 | 2004 |
| 8. | Binary University College of Management and Entrepreneurship (BUCMS) | Binary College | 1984 | 2004 |
| 9. | Asia Pacific University College of Technology & Innovation (UCTI) | Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology (APIIT) | 1994 | 2004 |
| 10. | Selangor International Islamic University College (SIUC) | Selangor Darul Ehsan Islamic College | 1995 | 2004 |
| 11. | INTI International University College (INTI-UC) | INTI College Malaysia | 1986 | 2006 |
| 12. | Taylor's University College | Taylor's College Subang Jaya | 1969 | 2006 |
| 13. | Kolej Universiti Insaniah (KUIS) | Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kedah | 1995 | 2006 |