A Communications Strategy of the Malaysian Research Universities to add Value

Strategi Komunikasi Universitas-universitas Riset di Malaysia dalam Meningkatkan 'Nilai'

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Abstract

This paper's purpose is to understand what criteria constitutes narratives in the vision and mission statements on the corporate website of the Malaysian research universities based on storytelling elements. By looking at the vision and mission statements, through qualitative content analysis to discover what type of storytelling use in the local research university and to examine if it helps to add 'value' and effectively use as corporate strategy practice to better position itself among the top 100 'world-class university'. The results of this study, provide a preliminary findings of higher education institutions practice of their narratives in order to gain a competitive advantage within education industry. The paper also be valuable and provide an insight on how universities in Malaysia to communicate their narratives and corporate strategy in order to gain a competitive advantage and position to be the 'world-class university'.
Keywords: *Storytelling, Strategy, Research University, Malaysia, World-Class University.*

Abstrak

Tujuan dari makalah ini adalah untuk memahami kriteria dari narasi visi dan misi dalam laman situs universitas-universitas riset di Malaysia dengan menggunakan elemen-elemen pengisahan cerita. Dengan melihat konten visi dan misi tersebut, melalui metode analisis isi kualitatif, bertujuan untuk menemukan jenis pengisahan cerita seperti apa yang digunakan oleh universitas-universitas riset dan untuk menilai apakah itu membantu untuk menambah 'nilai', serta secara efektif dapat digunakan sebagai praktik strategi universitas untuk memposisikan diri lebih baik di antara 100 besar 'universitas kelas dunia'. Hasil penelitian dari studi ini, memberikan temuan awal mengenai praktik pendidikan tinggi dalam mencapai keunggulan kompetitif dalam era industri pendidikan. Makalah ini juga bermanfaat dan memberikan wawasan tentang bagaimana institusi-institusi pendidikan tinggi di Malaysia dalam mengkomunikasikan narasi dan strategi mereka untuk mendapatkan keunggulan kompetitif dan memposisikan diri sebagai 'universitas kelas dunia.'
Kata Kunci: *Pengisahan Cerita, Strategi, Universitas Riset, Malaysia, Universitas Kelas Dunia.*

Introduction

In these worldly challenges organisation, we are living in a saturated with corporate messages, stories and symbols. During this time, it is increasingly complex and difficult for the organization to gain its competitive advantages because competitors learn quickly and adopt the success modernisation. The reputation of an organization cannot be controlled directly and corporate identity is the key to build a positive reputation (Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010).

On the other hand, one of the universities biggest challenge is that finding an identity and maintain its positive reputation. Currently, universities still becoming an aspiration for families, a priority for modern economy and major business export. But somewhere along the journey, they seem to have suffered in identity crisis. What are they for? Who are they meant to serve? And who should pay for them? Why this concept are important pieces of any organization's strategy? Therefore, what universities need is to find a renewed sense of purpose and to make a new contract with the public about how they can support one another globally and locally.

The content of the communication strategy is influence by the process by which it is formed and by different individuals and layers of the organisation who have had a stake in it. Ideally, the content of the strategy starts from the organisation-wide assessment of how the organisation is seen by different stakeholders (reputation) in light of the organisation's vision (vision and mission) at a particular point of time. The gap between the reputation and the visions forms the basis for the formulation of a strategic intent. So far, however, there has been little discussion how this strategic intent translated into strategic messages – using stories that are designed to change or reinforce perceptions in line with the vision and mission of how the organisation wants itself to be known.

The purpose of this research is to explore how Malaysia's research university communicate their vision and mission statements on the corporate and then to identify recurring themes. Moreover, we will seek to uncover styles of storytelling used by Malaysia's research university that are listed in the QS world ranking university.

To achieve the aim of the study, this study applied Spear and Roper (2013) themes and elements of corporate stories found in the literature. The study analysed integrated marketing strategies/behaviours in vision and mission statements of the selected research university. The statements are ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication and intimidation behaviours (as parts of the assertive strategy), excuses, apologies and justification behaviours (part of defensive strategy) and the demonstrative and illustrative strategies.

The study offers some important insights into how vision and mission statements could influence stakeholder impression of an organisation and add value to the organisation. The results of the study have academic and managerial implications. Although the literature suggests that an organisation's vision, mission statements are key aspects of corporate personality and a critical part of an organisation's communication activity (Suvatjis, Chernatony, & Halikias, 2012; Olutayo & Melewar, 2007; Otubanjo, 2012), these vision and mission statements are generally underutilize by the organisation. This indicate gap between theory and practice and there is a need for greater guidance and provide preliminary findings on how organisation should plan and implement it effective practice on the use these statements or narratives as part of corporate identity management in order to gain a competitive advantage within the education industry.

Meanwhile, the view of the stories can be seen in Roper and Fill's study (2012) where the authors suggested that storytelling can help to demonstrate the importance of the corporate strategy to internal and external stakeholders, and create a position for the company against competitors, as well as help a firm to bond with its employees. Brown et al. (2009), defined corporate reputation as a stakeholder's perception of the organisation (Brown, Dacin, Pratt, & Whetten, 2009), and Dowling (2006) suggests that if the story causes stakeholders to perceive the organisation as more authentic, distinctive, expert, sincere, powerful, and likeable, then it islikely that this will enhance the overall corporate reputation.

Defining Storytelling

In order to explore storytelling, it is important to define what criteria constitutes a story. In the Spear and Roper (2013) study, there is arguments with regards of the difference of terms 'stories' and 'narratives'. Some of the terms that these authors use are 'organisational stories' (Collins, 2013), 'organisational narratives' (Meyer, 1995), 'corporate narratives' (Dowling, 2006) as well as 'corporate stories' (Gill, 2011; Riel & Fombrun, 2007; Janssen, Dalfsen, Hoof, & Vuuren, 2012). The arguments suggested that stories have internal temporally related sequence of events and coherence while narratives do not always have coherence plot or characters (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004). Collins (2013) note that stories is type of distinctive narrative forms.

Sole and Wilson (2002), defined storytelling as sharing knowledge and practices through narrative and anecdotes in order to communicate lessons, complex ideas, concepts and causal connection. Forster (1963) in considering stories to be a series of logically and chronologically related events. Martin et al. (1983) definition is quite similar to Forster, and claim that organisational story as one that focuses on a single, unified sequence of events apparently drawn from the organisation's history. 'Myths', involving heroes and villains, courage, sacrifices, and or deals are some examples of corporate stories characters (Gabriel, 1991).

Elements of Storytelling

A good storytelling elements wouldfeature the attributes that drive corporate strategy and reputations (Riel & Fombrun, 2007). From this, the author proposed and identify three reputation platform includes activities, benefits, and emotion. This is main reputation platform order to develop corporate stories. Numerous studies by Baker and Boyle (2009), Janssen et. al. (2012), Wilkins and Thompson (1991), and Woodside et al. (2010). Woodside (2010) have reported several elements to form stories includes activities, accomplishments, internal and external benefits, emotion and conflict in their empirical and conceptual studies.

In a study which set out to determine the elements of storytelling, Riel and Fombrun (2007) study appear to be quite similar as the elements of story suggested in the literature where in the definition of these reputation platform themes and different story elements that could drive certain aspects of the corporate reputation. In the same vein, several studies namely Larsen (2000), Dowling (2006), Driscoll and McKee (2007), Marzec (2007), and Marshall and Adamic (2010) note that strategic elements include vision and mission of the organisation is also important in order to develop stories. Table 1 presented summarised how each reputation platforms theme could be presented by different elements of stories.

Storytelling Theme	Storytelling Element	Author
Activities	1. Activities	Janssen et al. (2012); Larsen (2000); Riel and Fombrun (2007); Wilkins and Thompson (1991
	2. Accomplishments	Riel and Fombrun (2007)
Benefits	3. Internal benefits	Dowling (2006)
	4. External benefits	Dowling (2006)
Emotional	5. Emotion	Baker and Boyle (2009); Barnes (2003); Dowling (2006)
	6. Conflict	Woodside et al. (2010)

Strategy	7. Vision	Baker and Boyle (2009); Dowling (2006); Driscoll and McKee (2007); Larsen (2000); Marshall and Adamic (2010); Marzec (2007)
	8. Mission	Dowling (2006); Larsen (2000)
	9. Values	Baker and Boyle (2009); Barnes (2003); Driscoll and McKee (2007); Marshall and Adamic (2010); Riel (2000); Rekom (1997)

Table 1. Themes and Elements of Storytelling identified from the Literature
Source: Adaptation from Spear and Roper study (2013)

Activities Theme

It has been suggested that the activities theme to communicate the centrality of a key activity or business the organisation is involved in (Riel & Fombrun, 2007). In his major study, Riel and Fombrun (2007) identifies that a corporate story should portray the organisation's core activities, competences, abilities, and accomplishments. Similarly, this view is supported by Larsen (2000) who incorporates competences as a key element of the corporate story. In 2012, Janssen et al. also reported that core activities are recognisable characteristic of corporate stories. The empirical study identified core activities in nearly all of the 45 corporate stories analysed.

Benefits Theme

In the benefits theme, it emphasises on the attractive outcomes or benefits stakeholder's expectation from the organisation's activities (Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Dowling (2006) pointed out that benefits are noted asan element of corporate stories and can be customized and the organisation has to decide which storyfit their target market or centralised core story for all.

Emotional Theme

In the benefits theme, an establishment of an emotional theme link with stakeholders to obtain a personal connection. Authors such as Roper and Fill (2012), and Brown et al. (2009) emphasize that a corporate brand can display the battles the organization has had and how problems were solved, to add emotion and audience involvement. To do so, conflicts are identified in the storytelling literature as key elements of stories, in the form of hardship and difficulties, and what steps were taken to overcome the situation, according to the understanding of Fetscherin and Usunier (2012), and Woodside (2010). Several authors: Collins (2013), and Abratt and Keyn (2012) argue that an emotional theme in stories has not always benefited credibility due to its fanciful content, but when there is emotional involvement, the results tend to be more intense towards the brand.

Strategy Theme

In the strategy theme, the corporate story is proposed to articulate the organisation's strategy, by incorporating the corporate mission, vision and values (Larsen, 2000; Marzec, 2007). Dowling (2006) suggests that the story should include elements of the company's mission, and Barnes (2003), Dowling (2006), Driscoll and McKee (2007), Larsen (2000), and Marshall and Adamic (2010) all emphasise the importance of including the corporate values within the story. Roper and Fill (2012) propose that the organisation's values should be explained in the corporate story, to position the corporate brand in the minds of stakeholders.

Benefits of using of Storytelling

Together, these studies provide important insights into the advantages of using storytelling includes knowledge transfer, by helping people to organise, remember and understand information (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; McLellan, 2006; Morgan and Dennehy, 1997; Woodside, 2010), as people are likely to relate the story to experiences already in memory (Woodside, 2010). Stories can be used in organisations as a means to motivate people and create a message memorable enough for people to take cause and action, if there is an identified interest to the listener (Prusak, 2001; Kaye, 1996).

From an organisational perspective, employee interpretation is an emotionl and cognitive response (intrapersonal communication) to information presented (Taliaferro & Ruggiano, 2010; Mohan, McGregor, Saunders, & Archee, 2008). Preliminary work by Gardner and Martinko (2004) is a strong advocate for the use of storytelling by business leaders and communication strategists. His research in the field of cognitive psychology strongly links using stories to change people's minds and reinforce opinions, which complements many objectives for a successful public relations internal communication programme (L'Etang, 2008; Harrison, 2007).

From an employer's perspective, a broader value for corporate storytelling is its potential to persuade, motivate and inspire employees about their organisation, thus strengthening internal loyalty and reputation (Simmons, 2007).

Impression Management Theory

Meanwhile, in 1959, Goffman introduced a dramaturgical perspective of social interactions in which portrays the as actor engaging in performances before audiences (Gardner & Martinko, 2004). Integrated marketing activity can create a positive impression of an organisation, which can enhance corporate image and help build good reputation (DuBrin, 2010; Schniederjans, Cao, & Schniederjans, 2013). Studies have also investigated integrated marketing activity in forms of corporate communication, including annual reports (Merkl-Davis, 2011; Rahman, 2012; Schleicher, 2012), press releases (Brennan & Guillamon-Saorin, 2009), and corporate stories (Spear & Roper, 2013). The study by Spear and Roper (2013) found that there is a links between story and elements and integrated marketing strategies/behaviors, which indicated the corporate stories could influence audience and build a corporate brand.

This study followed from Spear and Roper (2013) by analysing integrated marketing strategies/behaviours in vision and mission statements. Specifically, the study analyses the statements for ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication and intimidation behaviours (as parts of the assertive strategy), excuses, apologies and justification behaviors (part of defensive strategy) and the demonstrative and illustrative strategies. These strategies/behaviours have been identified by various authors (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Young, Gardner, & Gilbert, 1994).

Methodology

Sampling

In order to select the sample, the base data set was used to identify a possible list of universities the 2019 Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking for the analysis. This ranking assesses universities based on some metrics:
1) Academic Reputation, 2) Employer Reputation, 3) Faculty/Student Ratio, 4) Citations per Faculty, and (5) International Faculty.

Considering that both (1) and (2) metrics add up to 50 % of the overall score and that both metrics are based on a survey completed by 70.000 individuals in the higher

education community and 30.000 employers, respectively (QS, 2017), universities without these assessments were not considered. The total numbers of Malaysian universities listed in the QS World University Ranking are 5 which becomes the population of this study (Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)). This list is selected because it is the representatives of the Malaysia Research Universities (MRU) in Malaysia; the oldest public universities (establishment); and all companies have official website.

Data Collection

Prior studies have noted the importance of vision, mission statements are commonly presented on organization's official websites (Dowling, 2012; Ingenhoff & Fuhrer, 2010; Abdullah & Nordin, 2013; Schmeltz, 2014; Spear, 2017). Prior to this, the paper identified vision and mission from the official websites of the universities in the samples.

The study found that the statements were often in the 'About Us', 'Our Background', 'Discover Us', 'Info' (or similar) section of a website, or could be found by using a websites' search engine to search for 'vision', 'mission' or 'philosophy'. If the criteria of the above statements could not be found, then it is deemed to be missing from the universities' websites.

The study note that statement can appear more than once on universities' website. If the statements are similar then the most systematically phrased statements were used. If the statements differ, then both were included in the analysis.

Following to the concepts, it can be seen that there is an overlapping of statements definition in the websites. It is referred on a website as 'vision', 'mission' or 'philosophy' in either the heading or main menu of the websites. Thus, it enabled the study to explore the use of these statements, rather than forcing statements that suits the definition of statements.

Content Analysis of Vision and Mission Statements

In order to identify the storytelling elements and themes in the vision, mission statements, a deductive approach was taken in the study based on the Spear and Roper (2013) study. Together, the studies also followed by Brennan and Guillamon-Saorin (2009), Pearce (1982), Abdullah and Nordin (2013), Spear and Roper (2013), Zulkifli (2013) and Spear (2017).

As the content analysis involved a qualitative approach, it is appropriate for an exploratory study. Hence, it has been suggested that all manual coding is qualitative, as the coder has to interpret the data, based on a coding manual (Krippendorff, 2004). The advantages of using this manual coding it enables more detailed analysis of texts, and it also has the most appropriate ways to explore storytelling/narratives elements, due to the tact and complexity of the storytelling elements (Brennan & Guillamon-Saorin, 2009).

The researcher developed a manual coding to provide instructions to code the statements. Statements could be assigned multiple codes, to allow for multiple story theme and elements in the statements.

Result and Discussion

The website of Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World Ranking universities and selected sample were searched for their vision and mission statement. Some universities presented more than one statement on their website. Statement could also be coded for multiple storytelling elements. The background of the universities by research, establishment and world ranking position identified discussed below.

Particulars	Code	Code Definition	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)
Research	LO	Low					
	ME	Medium					
	HI	High	√	√	√	√	√
Establishment	1	50-100 years	√			√	
	2	25-50 years		√	√		√
	3	10-25 years					
World Ranking Position	A	1st -100th	√ (87th)				
	B	100th-200th		√ (184th)			
	C	200th-300th			√ (202th)	√ (207th)	√ (228th)

Table 2. Background of the Universities by Research, Establishment and World Ranking position Identified (Source: QS World University Rankings® 2019)

The above table shown that, there is 5 universities has high level research reputation. All of the universities that is chosen for this study, has established in between 45-100 years. According to the QS Worlds Ranking University, only Universiti Malaya (UM) has reach top 100 position, meanwhile the lowest is Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) listed in the top 300 positions (228th).

Most Frequent Words in Vision and Mission Statements	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)	Total
Knowledge	4	2	1	1	-	8
Research	2	-	-	1	1	4
Development	1	1	1	-	1	4
Innovation	1	-	-	2	1	4
University	1	-	1	1	1	4
International	1	1	1	-	-	3

Table 3. Overall Vision and Mission Statements: Most Frequent word used Identified

It is apparent from this table that the most frequent words used in vision and mission statements in Malaysian research universities is 'knowledge', and five least frequent words are 'research', 'development', 'innovation', 'university', 'international'.

Vision & Mission Statements	Storytelling Element	Ingratia-tion (other Enhance-ment)	Ingratia-tion (self-Enhance-ment)	Self-Promo-tion	Exempli-fication	Demons-trative	Illus-trative	Total
Universiti Malaya (UM)								
Vision	To be an internationally renowned institution of higher learning in research, innovation,	-	1	2	-	1	3	7

	publication and teaching.							
Mission	To advance knowledge and learning through quality research and education for the nation and for humanity.	2	4	2	2	-	2	12
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)								
Vision	UKM is committed to be ahead of society and time in leading the development of a learned, dynamic and moral society.	1	3	2	2	1	1	10
Mission	To be the learning centre of choice that promotes the sovereignty of Bahasa Melayu and internationalises knowledge rooted in the national culture.	-	3	2	-	1	1	7
Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)								
Vision	To become a university of international repute.	-	1	1	-	1	1	4
Mission	To make meaningful contributions towards wealth creation, nation building and universal human advancement through the exploration and dissemination of knowledge.	2	3	-	1	-	2	8
Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)								
Vision	Transforming Higher Education for a Sustainable Tomorrow	-	1	-	-	1	-	2
Mission	USM is a pioneering, transdisciplinary	1	5	1	1	1	-	9

	research-intensive university that empowers future talents and enables the bottom billions to transform their socio-economic well-being.						
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM)							
Vision	To be a premier global academic and research institution, excelling in science, technology and engineering.	-	1	2	-	1	1	5
Mission	To lead in the development of holistic talents and innovative technologies for universal well-being and prosperity.	1	3	1	2	1	3	11

Table 4. Number of Storytelling Elements identified in Vision and Mission statements

Table 4 presents an overview of the vision and mission statements was coded for storytelling theme. From the table above, we can see all the universities develop the storytelling elements in the vision and mission statement 'ingratiation (other enhancement)', 'ingratiation' (self-enhancement), 'self-promotion', 'exemplification', 'demonstrative' and 'illustrative'. Element 'ingratiation' (self-enhancement) is the most frequent storytelling element used in mission and vision statement of the Malaysian research universities the least used storytelling element used in the mission and vision statement is 'ingratiation' (other-enhancement).

The results obtained from the preliminary analysis are shown in Table 4, UM has the highest number of storytelling elements found in the vision and mission statements in their official website. Meanwhile, USM shows the lowest number of storytelling elements in their vision and mission statements.

Interestingly, there were also differences between these universities where in USM has the lowest number of storytelling elements used in their vision statements and UKM has the highest number of storytelling elements used in their vision statements.

This study purpose to identify how Malaysia Research University communicate their vision and mission statements on the corporate websites based on Spear and Roper (2013) themes and elements of corporate stories found in the literature. The findings are discussed in this section in light of the research question posed in the beginning of this paper, as follows: *first*, what type of storytelling elements used in the vision and mission statements of the Malaysia Research Universities?; *second,* how is the use of story helps to add value and effectively use as corporate strategy practice to better position itself among the top 100 'world-class university'?

The overall vision and mission statements analysis indicates that six most frequently used terms on the websites are 'ingratiation (other enhancement)', 'ingratiation' (self-enhancement), 'self-promotion', 'exemplification', 'demonstrative' and 'illustrative'. There is a need for self-awareness by the universities, to mentioned themselves in the mission statement and vision statement for example company self-concept (Pearce, 1982). The word frequencies of 'knowledge', 'research', 'development', and 'innovation', King et al. (King, Findlay, & Ahrens, 2010) argues that the research universities in Malaysia tended to sought a role in the world, as global universities.

Another important finding was that there is a definite trend for the Malaysia's research universities to globalize their influence and operation through the internet via the corporate websites. Considering the terms established by Ingenhoff and Fuhrer (2010) and Mansi et al. (2017) on organizations' vision and mission statements, there were no apparent similarities observed between the terms used by the research universities in Malaysia. These findings support the overall conclusion argued in the literature review (appendix 1), namely, the overall sameness rather than uniqueness in vision and mission statements universities (Kuenssberg, 2011), particularly in claiming education and research (Hladchenko, 2013).

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is *first*, Universiti Malaya (UM) vision and mission statements tended to focus internally on the universities' competences (through self-enhancement/ingratiation) and external focus on the universities' wider environment (through an illustrative strategy). The benefits theme is most frequently used by UM for example:

- Vision: to be an internationally renowned institution of higher learning in research, innovation, publication and teaching.
- Mission: to advance knowledge and learning through quality research and education for the nation and for humanity.

The use of 'innovation', 'advance knowledge', 'learning', 'quality', and 'humanity' in the vision and mission statements indicated that it can influence stakeholders' impression of the universities in different ways.

Second, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) vision and mission tended to focus internally on the universities' competences (through self-enhancement/ingratiation) and accomplishment on the universities' (through self-promotion). The activities theme is most frequently used by UKM.

Third, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) vision and mission statements tended to focus on internally on universities' competences (through self-enhancement/ingratiation) and external focus on the universities' wider environment (through an illustrative strategy). The benefits theme is most frequently used by UPM.

Fourth, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) vision and mission statement tended to focus on internally on universities' competences (through self-enhancement/ingratiation). The benefits theme is most frequently used by UPM.

Fifth, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) vision and mission statements tended to focus on internally on universities' competences (through self-enhancement/ingratiation) and external focus on the universities' wider environment (through an illustrative strategy). The benefits theme is most frequently used by UPM.

An internal focus in vision and mission statements can be important to express who or what an organisation is (as suggested by (Desmidt & Prinzie, 2008); Chun & Davies,

2001). This indicate that organizations should balance the internal and external focus of their statements in order to effectively use them as corporate identity.

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