

The Model of Brand Image Building through Sports Support at Private Universities in Thailand

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Abstract: There are many universities in Thailand which provide support in popular competitions, teams, or athletics. Most of them believe that fans who love their teams will love their teams' supporters too. Therefore, the fans tend to purchase their supporter's products. That is, greater awareness from sports supporter can also lead to an increase in the number of student applications to attend the university. However, a scarcity of empirical research still exists in this field, particularly in Thailand. The objective of this study is to study the management method of the universities in managing their popularity of athletic students to achieve their brand equity or sports supporters to be able to get good image back. 500 students who are in the first year of private universities and 500 students who have just finished the secondary school will be selected as sample. All samples were collected by questionnaires. Then, they were analyzed the relation between the universities who play higher levels in role of sports supporters and the students for find out the model.

The results of this study reveal that almost all universities distributing some scholarships to athletes do not require any benefits in return because it is one part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies. All the respondents think that universities who play higher levels in the roles of sports supporters have a good image. The model, which is a management method for the universities, who have higher levels in the roles of sports supporters, are able to have good images as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Sponsor integrity} &= 0.61_ \text{Team support} \\
 \text{Event sponsor fit} &= 0.49_ \text{Sponsor integrity} + 0.13_ \text{Event Type or sport identification} + \\
 &0.31_ \text{Event characteristic or Brand cohesiveness} + 0.18_ \text{Event} \\
 &\text{objective} \\
 \text{Brand Image} &= 0.86_ \text{Event sponsor fit} \\
 \text{Brand Equity} &= 0.98_ \text{Brand Image}
 \end{aligned}$$

Keywords: Sports support, Brand image, Brand Equity, Model

Introduction

As there are many private universities in Thailand, they face intense competition. How does a university stay competitive over its rivals? Traditionally, a price war was used as the main tool for competition. Customers were provided with financial incentives such as discount tuition fees or switching a fee from one place to another.

Nowadays, colleges and universities are becoming increasingly more entrepreneurial in nature as schools seek various strategies to generate additional revenues and exposure. One of many popular strategies of private universities used for a tool of their marketing is brand building via social marketing activities.

Literature Review

Dos (2008) identified that societal marketing has been shown to create competitive advantages for a company and an institution by building brand awareness, establishing brand credibility, enhancing corporate image and stimulating consumer's purchase intention. Societal marketing can allow corporations to differentiate themselves from competitors by creating an emotional bond with consumers.

In turn, corporate image can exert a powerful influence on customer attitudes and behavior with several universities achieving notable improvements in corporate image through implementing societal marketing programs.

Moreover, many private universities also believe that societal marketing should be a standard business practice. There are many types of societal marketing such as sports supporters via sports sponsorship, giving scholarship to national athletes and so on. They believe that sports supporters program is often considered as an important aspect in building the brand image. Cornwell, B. and Smith., R.K., (2001), Subhadip, R. and Lopamudra, G. (2008), Robert, M.(2001), Lardinoit, T. & Derbaix, C. (2001), Vassilis, D. and Frederic, K. (2002), Charles, B., Pascale, Q. and Carolin, P. (2009), Aaron, S., Brian, G. and Hans, W. (2008), Kevin, G. and Gregg, B. (2008) identified that customer will remember and have positive feeling with brand of sponsor who support in sports team which they favorite.

It can help them to draw the outsider in and form the foundation for general awareness of the respective educational institution, increase media coverage, elevate in the number of higher-quality students enrolling in the university, enhance ability to recruit distinguished faculty, increase donations from alumni and friends of the school, increase level of campus pride, and the image of its students and graduates, build bonds of community by the role of supporters, utilize a tool for student recruitment with recruiting events for prospective students during sport competition season. Wolf R.A. (2000) Goff B. (2000) identified that the famous athletic student who received scholarship from university could help university increase its fame.

Sports supporters might be able to leverage the brand equity to enhance their institutions. Brand equity is the added value a brand gives to a product. Brand equity resides in the consumer's mind and is composed of two brand knowledge components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness refers to the strength of brand information held in memory and is manifested by consumers' ability to identify the brand under different conditions.

Aaker (1991) identified that brand image is defined as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory". Brand associations represent information about a brand held in memory. Image transfer occurs when associations that comprise the image of a sporting event or sport property "transfer" to influence the image held of a corporate sponsor associated with the event or property.

Universities believe that the recent move to sport supporters can attract more students to attend the university. Students and alumni also feel that the move has given them more pride in their university and has also improved school spirit. Such increases in spirit and pride might eventually translate into long-term loyalty in, received financial gains from ticket sales, and the sale of licensed university logo apparel and merchandise, direct and significant effect on a university's image

Greater awareness from sport supporters can also lead to an increase in the number of student applications to attend the university, allowing the university to increase academic and enrollment standards, further strengthening the academic reputation of the school.

The universities believe that fans who love their teams, will love their teams' supporter too. It affects the intention to purchase their supporter's product or study with universities. That is greater awareness from sports supporters can also lead to an increase in the number of student applications to attend the university. However, a scarcity of empirical research still exists in this field,

particularly in Thailand. Therefore, this topic is of interest to the researcher. Meanwhile, there are many research questions about the benefits of universities from the role of sport supporter too.

Objectives

1. To study management methods of Thai private universities used to manage their popularity for athlete students for achievement of the universities brand equity.
2. To study relationship between the Thai private universities who play higher levels in the role of sport supporter and the students (who are in the first year in universities) applying for Thai private universities.
3. To study the relation between the universities who play higher levels in the role of sports supporters and the students (who have just finished the secondary school) applying for Thai private universities.
4. To study the model which is a management method for the universities who play higher levels in the role of sports supporters to be able to get good image.

Materials and Methodology

Subjects: In this study, the researcher practiced applied research using mixed methodology using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In the quantitative research approach, a Likert scale questionnaire is used on the respondents, which are 500 participants from secondary school students and 500 students from universities.

Research Implication

Population and sample group:

In the quantitative research approach, a Likert scale questionnaire is used on the samples, which are the 500 participants from secondary school's student and 500 students from universities. Secondary school's students were selected because they would decide to study further with universities. Students from universities were selected because they had experience to decide study with universities in the previous year.

The data for this study were gathered through questionnaires. The questionnaires were developed by using the literature on brand equity building lead to intention future purchase. The questionnaires were distributed to the sample population after they had been pretested on 50 students to ensure that they included terminology that would be understood. The aims were to test the content validity of measures, to identify any ambiguity in the questions, and to identify any difficulties in answering the questions. Reliability was conducted by test-retest method, and data analysis by Cronbach's Alpha including validity was also conducted by Index of Item Objective Congruence: IOC. Pretest respondents were also asked to report the ease and time of response, as well as the appropriateness of vocabulary. The latter were modified as a consequence of the respondents' comments, and a new questionnaire was piloted with a further 3 expertises, after which only minor modifications were made. The questionnaire items in this study were developed from an extensive review of academic literature. The variables were selected from the literature review, as well as from three experts. When the survey was confined to a target area, and the organization was willing and able to assemble groups of samples to respond to the questionnaires at the workplace, personally administering the questionnaires was a good way to collect data. The main advantage of this is that the researcher or a member of the research team could collect all the completed responses within a short period of time. Any doubts that the respondents might have regarding any question could be clarified on the spot.

In the case of using a quantitative research approach

The complex probability sampling selected in this study used multistage cluster sampling as follows:

In case of secondary school's student

The first year university students in all provinces are approximate 360,974 persons (www.dola.go.th). This study used the formula of Cronbach to determine sample size as follows

Cronbach's formulation method:

$$n = \frac{NZ^2 / 4}{NE^2 + (Z^2 / 4)}$$

N = All audiences who are around 360,974 persons.

Z = standard value in case of normal distribution.

In this case $= 1 - (\infty/2) = 0.975$

$= 1.96$

E = Error value = 0.05

Where

$$n = \frac{(360,974(1.96)^2) / 4}{360,974(0.05)^2 + ((1.96)^2 / 4)}$$

$$n = 96.23$$

Therefore, sample sizes are around 100 persons. But the author needed the research results have high reliability, the author will use sample size equal 500 persons.

For data sampling, the author has 3 stages. The first stage, using a stratified sampling method by dividing all the provinces in Thailand into 4 groups. The second stage, using quota sampling method, by dividing all schools into 4 groups. The third stage, using simple random sampling to sample each school from each group to select 500 respondents from all provinces in each group. The author chose the samples as systematic as follows: 1) after every fifth sample passed the author chose one sample. When a previous sample was completed or returned, the author waited for a fifth sample to pass. 2) After the fifth sample passed, the author chose the next sample. The secondary school students in all provinces are approximate 360,974 (www.dola.go.th). This study used the formula of Cronbach to determine sample size.

In case of university students

The author selected five universities through a purposive selection. Because these five universities have outstanding results about the sports supporter role over 5 years. The author selected first year student of these universities for being the population of this paper. The first year university students in all provinces are approximately 548,017(www.dola.go.th). This study used the formula of Cronbach to determine sample size as follows:

Cronbach's formulation method:

$$n = \frac{NZ^2 / 4}{NE^2 + (Z^2 / 4)}$$

N = All audiences who are around 548,017 persons.

Z = standard value in case of normal distribution.

In this case $= 1 - (\infty/2) = 0.975$

$= 1.96$

E = Error value = 0.05

Where

$$n = \frac{(548,017(1.96)^2) / 4}{548,017(.05)^2 + ((1.96)^2 / 4)}$$

$$n = 96.24$$

Therefore, sample sizes are around 100 persons. But the author needs the research results have high reliability; the author will use sample size amounting to 500 persons. For data sampling, the author processed a random sampling and it was used for this population. The author samplings from 5 universities and 100 samples were selected from each university. The author chose the samples as systematic as follows: 1) Every fifth sample pass the author would choose one sample. When a previous sample was completed or returned, the author waited for a fifth sample to pass. 2) After the fifth sample passed, the author chose the next sample.

In case of qualitative research approach

Interviewees were randomly selected by purposive sampling from outstanding leaders who are executive in universities and have experience in sports supporter over 5 years.

Methods: In case of quantitative research approach, A Likert scale questionnaire is used on the samples. The questionnaire items in this study were developed from an extensive review of academic literature. The variables were selected from the literature review, as well as from three experts. Validity was also conducted by Index of Item Objective Congruence: IOC. The suitability of questionnaires was evaluated by using 4 levels of rating scale as followings:

Average value between	3.51 – 4.00	means the most suitable
Average value between	2.51 – 3.50	means more suitable
Average value between	1.51 – 2.50	means suitable
Average value between	1.00 – 1.50	means least suitable

Each question which is about brand equity and intention to purchase, is implemented by studying the literatures, concepts, theories, and related researches. Pretest respondents were also asked to report the ease and time of response, as well as the appropriateness of vocabulary. The latter was modified as a consequence of the respondents' comments, and a new questionnaire was piloted with 3 experts who have more experience in sports supporters, after which only minor modifications were made. The questionnaire was distributed to the sample respondents after the questions had been pretested on 50 students for validity and reliability testing. This process was constructed to ensure that respondents would understand the terminology. The aim was to test the content validity of measures, to identify any ambiguity in the questions, and to identify any difficulties in answering the questions. Reliability was conducted by test-retest method, and data analysis by Cronbach measurement.

When the survey was confined to a target area, and the organization was willing and able to assemble groups of respondents to respond to the questionnaires at the place of study, personally administering the questionnaires was a good way to collect data. The main advantage of this is that the researcher or a member of the research team could collect all the completed responses within a short period of time. Any doubts that the respondents might have regarding any question could be clarified on the spot.

Whereas in the qualitative research approach, an in-depth interview of the respondents, which are the 5 participants chosen through a purposive selection, is used as a data collection tool. The validity of questions was tested by using a construct validity test. The consistency of questions was identified by using the index of item objective congruence: IOC. The question's items in part were developed from an extensive review of academic literature. The variables were selected from the literature review, as well as from three experts. Moreover, the suitability of questions was evaluated by using 4 levels of rating scale as followings:

Average value between	3.51 – 4.00	means the most suitable
Average value between	2.51 – 3.50	means more suitable
Average value between	1.51 – 2.50	means suitable
Average value between	1.00 – 1.50	means least suitable

Each question involved brand equity and intention to purchase, was implemented by studying the literatures, concepts, theories, and related researches. Pretest respondents were also asked to report the ease and time of response, as well as the appropriateness of vocabulary. The latter was modified as a consequence of the respondents' comments, and new questions were piloted with 3 experts for validity testing. These processes are constructed to ensure that they included terminology that would be understood. The aims were to test the content validity of measures, to identify any ambiguity in the questions, and to identify any difficulties in answering the questions, after which only minor modifications were made. The questions were used with the sample further. The author conducted in-depth interviews with 5 respondents who are executives of Thai private universities which are more famous as sports supporters. All co-researchers have experience as sports supporters for over 5 years. All 5 participants were chosen through a purposive selection.

Statistical analysis: The statistical significance was set at the level of 0.05. Path analysis by LIREL program was used to analyze data in this study. Seven assumptions of SEM that researchers should always test are as follows:

Table 1 showing results of SEM assumption testing.

Number	Value	Standard criterias	Results
1	χ^2/df	Less than 5	4.27
2	RMSEA	Less than 0.08	0.063
3	NFI	Over 0.9	0.92
4	CFI	Over 0.9	0.92
5	RMR	Less than 0.10	0.09
6	GFI	Over 0.9	0.93
7	AGFI	Over 0.9	0.98

Data of this study passed every assumption of Path analysis by the LISREL program. The results of Path analysis by LISREL program achieved standard value. They have meaning that data from this paper can be used for further analysis. Therefore, the author brings all data for analysis to find out the answers of the research objectives.

Results

The findings were as follows:

Objective 1. To study management methods of the universities used to manage their popularity for athletic students for achievement of their brand equity.

Most of the interviewees identified that private universities need 3 things. First, athletic students should play their sport on behalf of the university when the university has a requirement. Second, athletic students should have good behavior and good performance in education. Third, they should express gratitude to the university when interviewed by the press.

Objective 2. To study the relationship between the universities who play higher levels in the role of sport supporter and the athletic student who applies to enter the university.

First, the author used the Chi-square to test relation between universities who play higher levels in the role of sport supporter and decision making of the students who decide to study at that university. The results are shown as follows:

Table 2 showing relationship between universities which higher levels in the role of sport supporter and decision making of the student who decides to study at that university.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	89.392 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	98.646	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	21.174	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	378		

The analysis result is significant at 0.5%, significant value result is 0.00. It has meaning that relation between universities who play higher levels in role of sport supporter and decision making of the student to decided studying with universities.

The next step, the author used an Independent sample T-test to compare attitude between the attitude of secondary school students and attitude of students at universities. The results show that both groups have the same attitudes. That is, universities who play higher levels in the role of sport supporter and decision making of the students who decide studying at this university. The results show as follows:

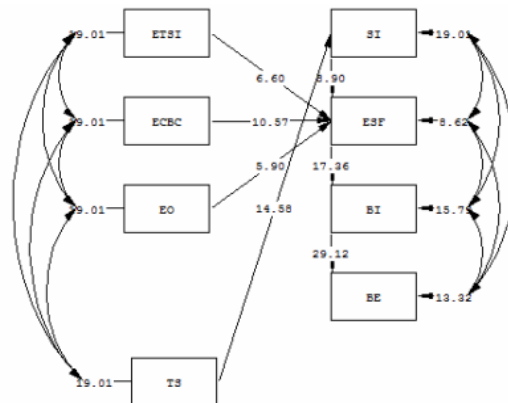
Table 3 showing attitude comparisons between students from universities and secondary school students about to enter universities who play higher levels in the role of sport supporter and decision making of the students who decide studying with that university.

	Group	N	Mean	SD.	t	sig
ETSI	secondary school students	370	3.66	0.65	0.36	0.72
	students from universities	358	3.65	0.67		
ECBC	secondary school students	370	3.75	0.63	0.49	0.63
	students from universities	358	3.73	0.63		
EO	secondary school students	370	3.79	0.56	0.33	0.74
	students from universities	358	3.78	0.57		

	Group	N	Mean	SD.	t	sig
TS	secondary school students	370	4.03	0.57	0.57	0.57
	students from universities	358	4.01	0.58		
SI	secondary school students	370	3.52	0.75	0.39	0.70
	students from universities	358	3.50	0.75		
ESF	secondary school students	370	3.81	0.62	1.16	0.25
	students from universities	358	3.76	0.62		
BI	secondary school students	370	3.82	0.70	1.42	0.15
	students from universities	358	3.74	0.74		
BE	secondary school students	370	4.07	0.84	-0.67	0.50
	students from universities	358	4.11	0.82		

The result shows that significant value is higher than 0.05. That is, both of 2 groups (secondary school’s student and students from universities) have had the same attitudes. It has meaning that, universities who play higher levels in role of sport supporter and decision making of the student to decide studying with universities.

Objective 3. To study the model which is a management method for the universities which play higher levels in the role of sport supporter to be able to get good image.



The model of this study is as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Sponsor integrity} &= 0.61_ \text{Team support} \\ \text{Event sponsor fit} &= 0.49_ \text{Sponsor integrity} + 0.13_ \text{Event Type or sport identification} + \\ &0.31_ \text{Event characteristic or Brand cohesiveness} + 0.18_ \text{Event objective} \\ \text{Brand Image} &= 0.86_ \text{Event sponsor fit} \\ \text{Brand Equity} &= 0.98_ \text{Brand Image} \end{aligned}$$

Conclusion

There are many universities in Thailand which support popularity competitions, teams or athletes. Most of them believe that fans who love their teams will love their teams' supporter too. It affects the intention to purchase their supporter's product. That is greater awareness from sport supporters can also lead to an increase in the number of student applications to the university. However, a scarcity of empirical research still exists in this field, particularly in Thailand. Therefore, there are many questions about the benefits of universities from the role of sport supporters, and searcher's purposes are as follows:

1. To study a management method of the universities which manage their popularity for athletic students for achievement of their brand equity.
2. To study the relation between the universities who play higher levels in the role of sports supporter and the students (who will be entering the first year in universities) applying to the university.
3. To study the relation between the universities who play higher levels in the role of sports supporters and the students (who have just finished the secondary school) applying for the university.
4. To study the model which is a management method for the universities who play higher levels in the role of sports supporters to be able to get good image.

In this study, the researcher practices applied research using mixed methodology between quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In the quantitative research approach, a Likert scale questionnaire is used on the samples, which are the 500 participants from secondary school's student and 500 students from universities. Whereas in the qualitative research approach, an in-depth interview of the respondents, who are the 5 coresearchers chosen through a purposive selection, is used as the data collection tool.

The results reveal that almost all universities that distribute some scholarship to athletes do not require the benefits in return. Because it is one part of their CSR strategies, all respondents think that universities who play higher levels in the role of sports supporter have a good image. The model, which is a management method for the universities which play higher levels in the role of sport supporter is able to get good image as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Sponsor integrity} &= 0.61_ \text{Team support} \\ \text{Event sponsor fit} &= 0.49_ \text{Sponsor integrity} + 0.13_ \text{Event Type or sport identification} + \\ &0.31_ \text{Event characteristic or Brand cohesiveness} + 0.18_ \text{Event objective} \\ \text{Brand Image} &= 0.86_ \text{Event sponsor fit} \\ \text{Brand Equity} &= 0.98_ \text{Brand Image} \end{aligned}$$

The model can translate as follows:

If the university can build Brand equity in mind of the student, it can motivate student to apply to study further with university. Important factor of brand equity is Brand image.

If the university can build Brand image in mind of the student, it can make Brand equity of university. Important factor of Brand image is Event sponsor fit. Event sponsor fit is event selection suitable with product of sponsor.

Important factor of event sponsor fit is Sponsor integrity, event Type or sport identification, event characteristic or brand cohesiveness and event objective. Sponsor integrity is sincere supporting to sports team for long time. Event type or sport identification type of sports such as football, basketball.

Event characteristic or brand cohesiveness is level of sports competition such as sub-district, province, domestic and international. Event objective is occasion anniversary event, charity event.

Important factor of Sponsor integrity is team support. Team support is amount of the audience see the event both at home and in stadium.

Suggestion

This study tries to find out what relationship between universities who play higher levels in role of sports supporters and the students. Further study should be done on comparison between type of sports supporter (scholarship for athletic student, sponsor role, host of sports event) which type has effect to build brand equity for sponsor.

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