

# Student's Perceived University Image is an Antecedent of University Reputation

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**Abstract---** *The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of student's perceived university image on the reputation of university. Higher education institutions are using different marketing methods to attract students. Social media is one of that marketing tools through which student have perceived an image about university. This perceived image makes an expectation about university in the minds of students. If these expectations are fulfilled by university then students shows their loyalty towards university and give positive feedbacks and recommendations about university. This positive recommendation will have a positive impact on university reputation. Image has been used usually in place of reputation but both of them are two different ideas, in spite of the fact that these two are interrelated constructs. The knowledge among students is still very limited on the topic of similarities and differences between image and reputation. A total number of 250 questionnaires were distributed to international students, selected using proportional random sampling technique, at five research public Malaysian universities. Partial Least Squares (PLS) Structural Equation Modeling was used to analyze the collected data, assess the model and test hypotheses. The findings show that the student's perceived university image influence university reputation through mediating role of student satisfaction. The university image- reputation model of higher education institutes created by this study could justify and predict the consequences of university image and satisfaction of higher education institutes on university students' word-of-mouth behavior and university reputation, and it could function as the criteria for promoting effective marketing strategies of higher education institutes.*

**Keywords---** *University Image, Student Satisfaction, University Reputation.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Internationalization of Higher education (HE) has encouraged international competition among universities. Many universities now identify the need to develop a positive image and reputation among their stakeholders. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are making an investment to increase resources with a purpose to attain favorable perceptions among their stakeholders (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). HEIs which want to boost up their image and reputation in the future may need to search for effective ways to attract, retain and increase strong relationship with students (Hishamuddin, 2008). Earlier, traditional media such as print media, broadcast media, university websites and educational fares were used to spread information about university. Now, latest boom of social media has provided universities new chances to advertise to the target audience. One of the main

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features of social media is that students can share knowledge and their experience about university on social media sites. In particular, online reviews through social media strongly influence student's decision about taking admission in the university (Wong et al., 2018).

Today, students rely heavily on social media for every type of information. Social media provides a platform for the universities to build up their positive image and sustain reputation and on the other hand also provides opportunity for the students to discuss the performance of their university online. Universities need student's feedback and online reviews in order to maintain and improve its service quality. Furthermore, student satisfaction is generally expected to be an important part of positive word of mouth, retention and loyalty. The satisfaction and loyalty of the students are strongly influenced by the quality of the services provided. Therefore HEIs should pay attention to service quality and satisfy their students (Leyla & Ali, 2012).

However, Landrum, Turrisi, & Harless, 1999; specify that image creation and reputation management is a major issue. When universities advertise their universities through different social media platform, in fact they are creating some expectations of students about university. These expectations actually show the image of university in the minds of the students. These expectations are may be unrealistically high or low. These expectations motivate students to take admission in the university. After reaching the host destination and experiencing different service quality, students evaluate the performance of university by commenting positive or negative reviews on social media. If student's expectations equal or lower to university performance, student's reviews are positive and if student's expectations are higher than university performance, student's comments negative about university performance. These positive and negative comments actually show the capabilities of university performance and build university reputation made by students. Universities must be capable to manage its reputation by answering the comments of students on social media. There is still little knowledge about critically manage university image and reputation effectively and efficiently.

According to Amelia et al., 2017 image and reputation are two different; however interrelated concepts, but still there is little knowledge about the similarities and difference between image and reputation formation. Furthermore there is no consensus exists regarding the scope that cover HE image and reputation. Image is something which is created through different information before experiencing; while reputation is the final assessment or evaluation of performance after experience.

To sum up, if an education institution wants to sustain its operation in the highly competitive higher education sector, it must develop a positive image, maintain good service quality, achieve student satisfaction and loyalty with potential and existing students and alumni and enhance university reputation.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***University Image***

Today, university image is progressively receiving attention in order to attract the students. According to Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) organizational image of a university is the perceived image that the public has of a HEI according to their ideas, interests and information provided to them. Under this definition every person mentally

forms an image of an institution, which could be different in each person that evaluates the institution.

The study on image has been done mostly in commercial fields and public relations. Less work on image is done in service sector like education. Since 1990s corporate image of universities became an area of interest for the researchers. For example, Theus (1993) had mentioned many factors as the part of university image. According to him, size of the university, its location, weather, courses offered, distinctiveness, financial resources of university, diversity among students, and the number of services provided by the university as sources of university image. Williams and Moffitt (1995) suggested that a university image offers an attractive worth to educational institutions as they become customer-focused.

The most important work on university image has been done by Kazoleas et al. (2001) and Arpan et al. (2003). Both of these authors argued that university image is formed by overall image of the university, image of the programs offered by the university, researches, teaching and education quality, environmental and financial facilities, internal and international name of university and social media marketing. However, it is not easy to choose the right university based on all these factors as the perceived image of an institution also depends upon the choices, actions and social interaction among the people (Duarte et al., 2010).

According to Duarte et al., 2010, image is a multidimensional construct and it increases the complexity of measuring university image. According to literature, student's decision about university depends upon different factors such as academic reputation of professors; graduate students play an important role in communicating the good or bad image of university. In some studies university environment, university size, facilities provided by university can also influence student's perceived image (Alessandri 2001; Arpan et al., 2003; Aghaz et al., 2015). Furthermore, teaching quality, courses offered, academic superiority can also contribute to the perceived university image. In addition, students evaluate the quality of university with regard to its academic reputation and international ranking.

### ***University Reputation***

University reputation is the overall opinion of an institution, what it stands for, what it is associated with and what a student supposed to get when using the services of university (Dowling, G. ,2001). For university reputation, reputation management is very important (Hillenbrand and Money, 2007). Reputation management is a professional policy to keep organization flourish and successful for a longer period of time and the institution will be successful if it has maintained good relationship with its stakeholders (Deephouse, 2004).

Educational institution must have knowledge about the needs and wants of its stakeholders. An educational institution will sustain for a longer period of time if it has the ability to manage and achieve its stakeholder's satisfaction (Tetrevova and Sabolova, 2005). According to Vidaver-Cohen (2007, p. 280) "a good education institution reputation can ease stakeholder uncertainty about future organizational performances, strengthen competitive advantage, contribute to public confidence and create value by maximizing an organization's ability to receive a premium for products or services."

According to Singh and Weligamage (2010), stakeholders of educational institution include students, graduates,

academic staff, non-academic staff, parents, government and society. A university must understand, realize and meet the needs and expectations of various stakeholders. Singh and Weligamage (2010) identified different wants and needs of various stakeholders of educational institutions such as student's needs from a university to provide them with quality education, proper academic guidance and academic environment. Graduates wish that at the end of their studies they are equipped with employability skills, life-long learning experiences and achievements.

Similarly, if a university wants to be reputable it should provide its academic and non-academic staff with the opportunities to get achievements, teaching and research skills, improvement opportunities, financial and non-financial benefits, recognition respectively. In the same way parents want quality education and more opportunities for their children; Government wants from a reputable institution a smooth functioning, financial management and good governance; society also wants a reputable institution to serve for them by providing employable and responsible, skillful and committed graduates. Thus an institution will have a good reputation if it serves and address the expectations of its stakeholders especially students as they provides opportunities and threats for the institution. Petrick et al (1999) commented that reputation is a fragile intangible asset that takes time to build but is easily damaged.

### ***Difference between Image and Reputation***

All through the previous literature, image has been used interchangeably by reputation but there is a slight difference in these terms which cannot be ignored. According to Dutton et al., 1994 and Elsbach, 2003; image has been considered as an individual construct to reputation. Image is a short-lived concept while reputation is for longer period of time. Image is the collection of all the opinions, views, beliefs an individual has towards the university while reputation concerned with the question "what do stakeholders actually think of an organization". According to Boulding (1956) image is a mental description based on faith of people while according to Fombrun (1996) reputation consists of history of users experience with product and services providers. Dichter (1985) argued that an image is a concept that forms in people's minds after they have collected opinions while according to Bennet and Rentschler, 2003 reputation talks about more on value judgments about organization stability, honesty and consistency formed over a long period of time. Therefore, according to these authors, image is something what organization wanted about them to be seen by their stakeholders and how actually it is perceived by its stakeholders and reputation is a function of how well it performs in meeting its stakeholder's needs and expectations.

### ***Student's Satisfaction***

Student satisfaction is an important aspect for any institution. Satisfaction takes place when the supposed performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations. The most effective ways to attract and retain students and uphold positive relationship between students and institution is to increase student satisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1996). The concept of student satisfaction is complex and multidimensional in the context of higher education. To measure student satisfaction, university management must continuously develop and improve teaching and service quality. University management can take help from student's feedback in delivering right service quality and achieve student satisfaction. According to Jurkowsch, Vignali and Kaufmann (2006) claimed that the student satisfaction is the student's fulfillment response to product and services provided by education

institution. From this perspective, student should receive positive services to satisfy their university experience as valued customer.

### ***Student's Perceived University Image is an Antecedent of University Reputation***

There are many debates in the literature regarding the relationship between image and reputation. There is still a lack of consensus regarding the definition and differentiation between reputation and image. Fombrun and Van Riel (1997) have suggested that image should be contained within reputation by reason of image being one element of reputation. According to Brown et al (2006), development of an organization's reputation starts from an image that is created by an organization with the intention of influencing stakeholder's perceptions, which will eventually form a reputation. Wartick (2002) argued that reputation is a function of image. The research findings of Hawabhay, Abratt and Peters (2009) revealed that corporate reputation is closely linked to image.

Previous studies relating to image and reputation have been conducted in the business sector; Sung and Yang (2008) argued that image and reputation found in prior studies can be applied to higher education. Based on the arguments, this study uses the view points of Brown et al (2006).

Social media has the ability to guide the people to draw their expectations and communicate the business goals. Social media is a useful platform for two way communication between institution and students (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Good branding and marketing through social media by universities shows strong indication about the quality and creditability of an education institution. Social media marketing by universities will help students in evaluating the attractiveness of a particular educational institution (Ultey, 2002: Qureshi, Rasiah, et al., 2019; Qureshi, Yusoff, et al., 2019; Rahim N. S. A., 2019; Rashid M., 2019b, 2019a; Rasli, Qureshi, Isah-Chikaji, Zaman, & Ahmad, 2018; Sami, Jusoh, Md Nor, Irfan, & Qureshi, 2018; T. R. Q. M. I. Shafiq M., 2019; T. R. Q. M. I. T. J. Shafiq M., 2019; Zahid et al., 2019)). A university provides all the information on social media and hence creates a positive image in the minds of the students.

However, Nguyen and LeBlanc (2001) observed that image is a multidimensional construct and difficult to measure and analyze as which factor affect university image and in which extent. As such, to choose the right university is not easy as students have many choices available to them. Therefore, students compare the international reputation of university, program offered by universities, scholarship availability, academic reputation of professors of different world universities available on social media. Students also discuss the services provided to the international students by university on student's blogs. Blog posts, reviews of students, social media marketing and ratings all have a significant impact on student's perceived university image and decision about taking admission at that particular university.

After selecting a university based on student's perceived university image, student's creates some expectations from the university. After reaching the host destination and experiencing the university services overtime, students will show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction level about university performance (Ali, Qureshi, & Mustapha, 2019; Hishan et al., 2018, 2019; Ibrahim, Khan, Ramli, & Qureshi, 2019; Irfan, Rasli, Sulaiman, Sami, & Qureshi, 2019; Latif et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2018; Nor et al., 2018; Qureshi, Elashkar, et al., 2019; Qureshi, Qayyum, et al., 2019).

Finn and Wiley (2000) argued that satisfaction level could be a result of the dissimilarity between expected and perceived performance, whereas a performance delivery is worse than expected result shows dissatisfaction. Today students share everything on social media; if students are satisfied that is if students perceived university image equals their expectation level, student are happy and will give positive words about university on social media and dissatisfaction of students will lead to negative word of mouth by students on social media. All the feedbacks and comments of students on social media will have an effect on reputation in the long run.

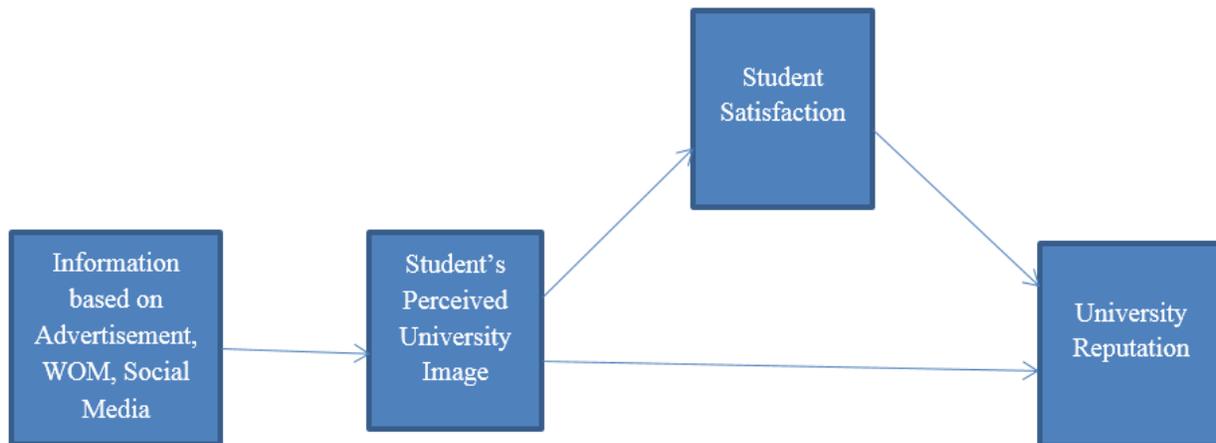


Figure 1: Proposed Model for the Study

Following hypothesis has been proposed based on the above discussion:

Hypothesis 1 states that university image has a positive relationship with student satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2 of the study states that student satisfaction has a positive relationship with university reputation.

Hypothesis 3 of the study states that university image has a positive relationship with university reputation.

Hypothesis 4 of the study states that student satisfaction mediates the relationship between university image and university.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *Sample and Measures*

A random sample of 250 international students from five public sector research universities of Malaysia was taken for this study. 180 dully filled questionnaires were received form the international students of five research public sector Malaysian universities with a response rate of 72%. However, there were some missing data in the responces which was treated with median imputation to replace the missing value with the median value of the constructs. University image was measured using four items adapted from Narteh (2013) and Nguyen and Leblanc (2001) which validated for multi-dimensional measure. All responses were recorded on 5 points Likert scale with 1 coded as strongly disagree, 2 coded as disagree, 3 coded as neutral, 4 coded as agree and 5 coded as strongly agree.

Student's satisfaction was measured by using satisfaction scale by using four items adapted from Abdullah (2006) and Westbrook and Oliver (1991). The objective of this scale is to measure the satisfaction of the students

about service quality which they perceived from social media. All responses were obtained on 5 points Likert scale with 1 coded as strongly disagree, 2 coded as disagree, 3 coded as neutral, 4 coded as agree and 5 coded as strongly agree.

University Reputation was measured by using four items from HEDPERF service quality dimensions; one from each dimension in higher education presented by Abdullah (2006), Huang (2009), Brochado (2009). Five points scale was used to measure the responses of the participants in the study. This scale includes 1 as strongly disagree and 5 as strongly agree. Sample item of this scale includes “international postgraduate students at five research universities”.

Demographic part contains demographic information of respondents to collect their age, gender, qualification and experience. Detail of these demographic data is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that the 119 of the respondents were male rest 61 of the respondents were female that is 66.11% and 33.88% respectively. More than 50% respondent’s age lies within 31-40 years. Total 92 respondents belongs to this age group, 21.11% belongs to the 20-30 years age group, 23.89% belongs to 41-50 and 3.89% belongs to the age group above than 50 years. 74.44% respondents were married and 25.56 were single.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondants

<i>Demographic</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	119	66.11
Female	61	33.88
<b>Total</b>	180	100
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	134	74.44
Single	46	25.56
<b>Total</b>	180	100
<b>Source of fund</b>		
Scholarship	111	61.67
Self-Sponsored	69	38.33
<b>Total</b>	180	100
<b>Age</b>		
20-30	38	21.11
31-40	92	51.11
41-50	43	23.89
Above 50	7	3.89
<b>Total</b>	180	100

### **Measurement Model Validation**

The current study applied SEM statistical techniques to find the measurement models and the structure model quality criteria for practical work. PLS algorithm approach was utilized after fixing the indicators of the measurement. The PLS analysis analyses both the measurement model and the structural model (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2013) and it is considered as one of the best statistical procedures for SEM. Goodness of measurement model was tested

through PLS by testing the convergent and discriminant validity to examine the construct reliability and construct validity of the constructs and loadings of all indicators to their respective constructs (Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010). After that test the structural model to confirm the hypothesized relationship of the study.

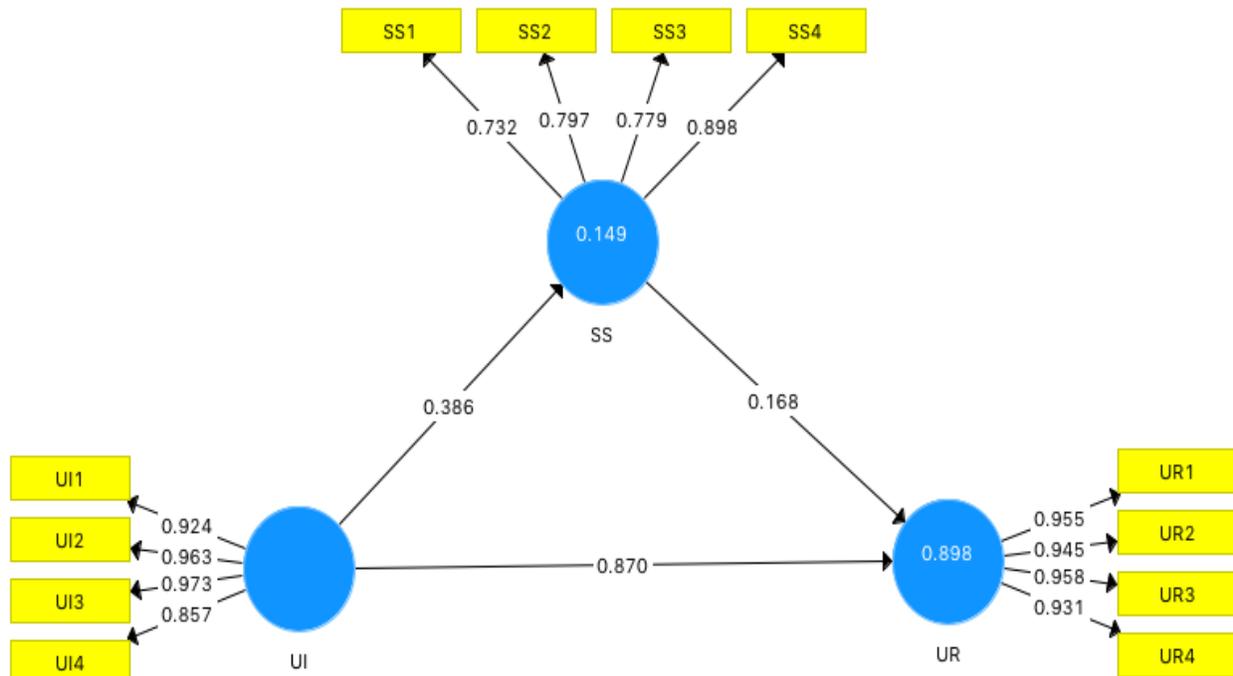


Figure 2: Measurement Model

Convergent validity is the construct indicators that reflect a significant amount of the mutual proportion of variance among factors. It determines the amount of correlation among the measures of the same concept (Hair Jr *et al.*, 2013; Rasli, 2006). Convergent validity deals with construct loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and constructs reliabilities.

To analyse the convergent validity, it is crucial to investigate whether all the items are significantly loaded on a construct. To ensure the indicators reliability, main loading and cross loading of items were checked. The question items with the main loading value of 0.7 and above are retained suggested by Hair *et al.* (2013).

AVE is the sum of square of standardized factor loadings to represent how much variation in each item is explained by latent. In addition, AVE is the average percentage of variation described by the measurement items in a construct. The standard value of AVE is 0.50 or higher.

Table 2: Average Variance Extraction of all constructs

Constructs	Final AVE
University Image	0.865
Student Satisfaction	0.646
University Reputation	0.897

Table 2 shows that the average variance extraction of the student satisfaction was 0.646, university image was reported 0.865 and university reputation was reported 0.897.

Table 3 shows the construct reliability value of each variable. The threshold value of the Composite reliability is 0.70 or above (Cooper *et al.*, 2006; Rasli, 2006). Table 3 shows that all the constructs have the adequate reliability of all constructs.

Table 3: Reliability of all Constructs

<i>Construct</i>	<i>Final Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Final Composite Reliability</i>
University Image	0.733	0.822
Student Satisfaction	0.829	0.879
University Reputation	0.772	0.851

The composite reliability value for student satisfaction was reported 0.879, university image was reported 0.822 and university reputation was reported 0.851. Cronbach's Alpha value for student satisfaction was reported 0.829, university image was reported 0.733 and university reputation was reported 0.772. These values indicated a high level of reliability of the instrument. Thus, based on outer loadings, AVE and construct reliabilities it can be concluded that there is no issue of the convergent validity of the constructs in the current study.

### **Structural Model (Hypothesis Testing)**

Research hypotheses were tested through the results of structural model. The results of the hypothesis are generalized on the basis of path coefficients, p-value, and t-values, with a significance level of 0.05. The researcher proposed four hypotheses in the current study. Hypothesis 1 states that University Image has a positive relationship with Student Satisfaction. Path coefficient of the University Image → Student Satisfaction was 0.386 with R<sup>2</sup> value 14.9% and P < 0.05. This indicates the existence of significant positive relationship between University Image and Student Satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 of the study states that Student Satisfaction has a positive relationship with University Reputation. Path coefficient of the Student Satisfaction → University Reputation was 0.168 with R<sup>2</sup> value 89.8% and P < 0.05. This indicates the existence of significant positive relationship between Student Satisfaction and University Reputation. Similarly path coefficient of University Image → University Reputation was 0.870 with R<sup>2</sup> value 89.9% and P < 0.05 confirms the existence of positive relationship of University Image with University Reputation.

This confirms the hypothesis 3 of the study that University Image has a positive relationship with University Reputation. Hypothesis 4 states that Student Satisfaction mediates the relationship between University Image and University Reputation. Path coefficient of the University Image → Student Satisfaction → University Reputation was 0.065 with P < 0.05. This indicates the existence of student satisfaction as mediator between the relationship between University Image and University Reputation.

## **IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Student's perceived university image describes the overall impression of university reputation, availability of product and services in the minds of students before coming to the university. University image is created through social media. Social media provides a platform between institution and students. Students will be satisfied with the services of university after their experience with the university performance and university reputation is the overall performance of the university. The crucial part about university reputation is student satisfaction which will have an

effect on student's behavior, students trust and profitability of institution. It is important for the HEIs to worry about university image because educational institutions must have a knowledge how their university image is perceived by different audience, how it is perceived regards to their competitors and universities must monitor the gap between actual image and expected image of university. This study fills the gap by investigating the impact of university image on university reputation through mediating role of student satisfaction.

The findings of this study show the positive relationship among university image, student satisfaction and university reputation. According to previous studies, student satisfaction is positively related to student's university image (Johnson et al, 2001; Anderson et al., 1994; Oliver, 1980). According to Lim, Benbasat and Ward, 2000 university image is a driver and has a strong impact on student satisfaction. Andreassen and Lindestad (1998b) found that corporate image affects customer satisfaction particularly when the customer does not have much knowledge about the product or service, while Clow, Kurtz, Ozment and Ong (1997) suggested that corporate image has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. A study by Alves and Raposo (2007) found that the construct of image of an institution has a direct and significant effect on the construct of student satisfaction in higher education. Similarly, many studies reveal that corporate reputation is positively linked with customer satisfaction (MacMillan et al., 2005; Fombrun and Van Riel, 2003; Selnes, 1993). Previous literature shows that student satisfaction helps in measuring reputation (Vidaver-Cohen, 2007; Ferris, Berkson and Harris, 2002; Wartick, 2002; Cornelissen, 2000). Carmeli and Tishler, 2005 claimed that corporate reputation to be an outcome of customer satisfaction. The studies of Walsh, Beatty and Shiu (2009) and Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, and Beatty (2009) also provide evidence that satisfaction drives reputation. The vast majority of studies relating to image and reputation have been conducted in the business sector, with only a few empirical investigations of these constructs conducted in service-oriented industries such as education (Sung and Yang, 2008). In the literature image and reputation are used interchangeably but some scholars argued that they are different and individual constructs. Brown et al. (2006) suggested that the development of an organization's reputation starts from an image that is created by an organization with the intention of influencing stakeholder's perceptions, which will eventually form a reputation. Hence, university images formed by external stakeholders, often formed through communications and marketing methods created by universities themselves (Christensen and Askegaard, 2001). University reputation is the result of aggregated image development and stakeholder perceptions over a period of time (Stuart, 1999; Barich and Kotler, 1991), and a university reputation is shaped when students hold consistent positive images and experiences over a long period of time (Fombrun, 1996). Wilkins and Huisman (2013) argued that a customer can be influenced by corporate reputation of an organization when establishing a corporate image; this means that corporate reputation can be both a driver and an outcome of corporate image formation.

This study was conducted in only five public universities of Malaysia. Similar study can be done in different public and private universities of Malaysia. Furthermore, future studies can include different geographical and cultural background in order to understand the image of university in the minds of students and building university reputation from these students belonging to different parts of the world.

## V. POLICY IMPLICATION

The findings from this study will suggest HEIs policy makers to treat reputation as a broad, multi-indicator intangible strategic asset that can help them in achieving superior performance and to maintain reputation by using social media.

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