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Competency Assessment for Branding Programs Development in Thailand's Higher Education

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Abstract

The ever-changing business environment resulting from changing consumer behaviors, fierce competition and advances in technology affect the strategic positioning of a brand. Maintaining healthy brands or embarking on a rebranding or repositioning strategy calls for a more creative set of branding management competencies in order to respond to the marketing challenges of the 21st century. This research paper attempts to assess brand management competences, attitudes and knowledge important in current business environment, to further accurately design branding-related curricula that truly reflect needs in the contemporary business and professional environment. Using a qualitative research approach, the data was collected from focus group interviews and questionnaires with seventeen management people from the private sector. The results identify the top-rated knowledge and/or competencies needed in branding a business, which are competence in research development, knowledge of brand strategic planning, ability to communicate added value in a clear way, knowledge of brand identity development, and ability to manage and keep the brand management process 'alive', respectively. The paper concludes with a discussion of the underlying key implications for both academia and business.

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1. Introduction

Under a changing environment, brands are vital factors in maintaining competitive advantage for successful organizations. It is not surprising, therefore, to see several brand management techniques, including revitalizing, reposition, rebranding, or renaming brands, being widely used in a variety types of organizations (Ishaq, Hussain, Asim, & Cheema, 2013; Horng, Liu, Chou, & Tsai 2012; He & Li, 2011; Ferguson & Brown, 2011;). The above methods also imply that developing strong brands involves consistency, active management and constant interaction between all stakeholders and the organization (Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009).

This further implies that academics and management educators are charged with the task of producing graduates who possess brand management competencies and/or the knowledge required to achieve success in the business world. Extensive research regarding brand management competencies has been conducted in the context of academia and education (Shonhiwa & Ndudzo, 2015; Goi, Goi, & Wong, 2014; Williams & Omar, 2014; Sharma, Rao, & Popli, 2013; Waldeck, Durante, Helmuth, & Marcia, 2012). In particular, Hestien, Rotem, and Rivin (2008) evaluated the most needed marketing skills for students to become brand managers. Shonhiwa and Ndudzo (2015) especially made arguments that unique skills and capabilities, known as core competencies, are crucial for success in this industry. Although this stream of research has covered many aspects of academia and education, discussion of assessing brand management competencies and knowledge for the purpose of curriculum development in higher education has been limited, especially in Thailand.

With this background, this paper argues that competencies and knowledge obtained from voices in brand management will be valuable for academics and management educators to design brand management-related programs that truly respond to the current needs of industry. It should be noted here that this research and its findings are a first step in curriculum development for the brand management programs of a large public university in Thailand. We will first review current literature on the importance of brand management to business and competencies. Research methodology and the findings will then be explained. The paper concludes with theoretical and managerial implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Why brand management competencies and knowledge?*

Business researchers have long made the case of the importance of brand management as a strategic tool to successfully compete in an industry (He & Li, 2011; Ferguson & Brown, 2011; Merz, et al, 2009; Kapferer, 2008). Herstein, Rotem, and Rivin (2008) argued that as brand becomes the business core of any organization, it should be managed professionally so as to cope with business challenges such as an increased number of brands, increased power of wholesalers, channel dynamics, global forces, aggressive brand extensions, and competitive markets. In addition, Kotler and Keller (2006) pointed out that managers of successful 21st century brands must demonstrate strategic control of the brand management process. They must be able to create, design, and implement marketing activities or programs that manage brands so as to maximize their values.

2.1. *Competency*

Sims and Koszalka (2008) define competency as “a knowledge, skill, or attitude that enables one to effectively perform the activities of a given occupation or function to the standards expected in employment” (p.569). In other words, specific competencies are importantly required in order to perform a specific role. There is a growing trend in higher education to use competencies and standards to guide the development or evaluation of programs and curricula, and to obtain assessment data about student performances and abilities in specific areas (Dabbagh & English, 2015; Shonhiwa & Ndudzo, 2015; Landmann, 2013; Halpem, 1999). As argued by Acedo and Hughes (2014), curricula should be designed or restructured according to current needs of stakeholders in an industry, rather than case studies from textbooks.

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