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Criteria for Effective Authentic Personal Branding for Academic Librarians in Universiti Sains Malaysia Libraries

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Abstract

This pilot study explores the current situation and inter-relationship between criteria for effective authentic personal branding and authentic personal branding strategies with weight on years of working experience among 45 academic librarians in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). It focuses on the academic librarians' (a) reputation in a university, (b) responsibilities to library users and library services, and (c) their relationship with library users. The result of running the Kendalls Tau B Correlation Coefficients revealed nine findings. These include: (i) authenticity, authority and persistence are the dominant criteria for effective authentic personal branding; (ii) visibility is the dominant criteria for effective authentic personal branding; (iii) distinctiveness is the dominant criteria for effective authentic personal branding related to academic librarians' relationship with library users; (iv) persistence is the only criteria for effective authentic personal branding related academic librarians' reputation in USM that have moderate correlation with all authentic personal branding strategies; (v) performance is the only criteria for effective authentic personal branding related academic librarians' responsibilities to library users and library services that have moderate correlation with all authentic personal branding strategies except personal brand strategy; (vi) goodwill, visibility and authority are the three criteria for effective authentic personal branding related to academic librarians' relationship with library users that have moderate correlation with all authentic personal branding strategies, whereas the other criteria have weak correlation; (vii) personal mission and personal key roles are the two stages in authentic personal branding strategies; (viii) personal brand statement and personal brand identity are the two stages in authentic personal branding strategies; and finally (ix) personal brand identity have strong correlation with all authentic personal branding strategies. This study can help Malaysian librarians to create a new tune of modern day needs for the librarianship profession and upgrade their personal professionalism.

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1. Introduction

Academic librarians or also known as knowledge workers are one of the key values of strengths to university libraries. As professional workers, they need to realize and take the current challenge towards professional image transformation. During this transformation process, authentic personal branding becomes academic librarians' personal mission, followed by their personal key roles that are translated into the criteria for effective authentic personal branding and authentic personal branding strategies in fulfilling the current needs of library users and adaptation to technology changes. In the end, academic librarians can be in the same level with other professionals in service based profession such as lawyers, doctors and so forth.

Raslin (2010) emphasized that “a good library and information manager is not supposed to stop transformation; rather they are required to create and promote transformation in line with the new media. If not, we will be left behind and will not be relevant anymore”. This is supported by Syed Mohammed Alhady and Azfahane Zakaria (2010) when they said “...building a professional brand for us as librarians is too important to ignore”. Not even that, an educated, skilled, productive, disciplined and competent workforce will be a major asset to the nation (Shahar, 1994). “The image of a professional is created by people’s personal experience of it. It is down to librarians and information professionals at the grass roots level offering excellent services to their users and customers” (Ayre, 2003).

Initial findings have indicated that the topic of authentic personal branding is still new in Malaysia, especially when it deals with the criteria for effective authentic personal branding and authentic personal branding strategies with narrow relationship to academic librarians’ professional image. In general, previous studies done on authentic personal branding field was concentrated more on cases of business individuals and celebrities especially in determining their rise to build a successful personal brand. Through authentic personal branding, it helps academic librarians to unlock their potential in building the new image of academic librarians without leaving their specialties as professionals in librarianship. Without doubt, it affects their reputation in a university, responsibilities and relationship to library users and library services.

Benefits of having authentic personal branding for academic librarians are to face and override problems related to (i) negative image of librarians’ profession that have painted librarianship as an undervalued profession, (ii) repeatedly stereotype by the university members as non-professional workers, (iii) no awareness on the real academic librarians’ responsibilities and qualifications such as their knowledge, duties, skills and educational qualities, and (iv) public perception draw more heavily on stereotypical representations of librarians’ personalities (Seale, 2008). So, academic librarians need to take action towards these issues by bridging it with the adaptation of authentic personal branding model. In fact according to Rampersad (2014), “...that there is no job security so be independent and re-define yourself by building, implementing and cultivating your authentic personal branding; become the CEO of your life as you attract and create new opportunities”. In retaining their professional status, human element of librarianship must be promoted to emphasize their educational mission (McGuigan, 2011). If not, till then, stereotypes can lead to the very real damage and distortion of any profession (Howland, 1989).

This paper aims to advance the mission in exploring the current situation and inter-relationship between criteria for effective authentic personal branding and authentic personal branding strategies with weight on years of working experience among 45 academic librarians in Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). The authentic personal branding model lined by Rampersad (2000) is used as the main indicator for the study. Furthermore, it focuses on the academic librarians’ (a) reputation in a university, (b) responsibilities to library users and library services, and (c) their relationship with library users.

2. Methodology

Target population for this study was academic librarians in Universiti Sains Malaysia. Allowing for five percent (5%) error rate, a sample size of 45 academic librarians was stratified according to campus/branch libraries and academic librarians’ grade positions. Questionnaires were distributed directly to respondents starting from 2nd February 2015. This study used a combination of two statistical tests including descriptive and correlation analysis. Descriptive analysis aims to investigate level of agreement and response on issues related to professional image of academic librarians in the university, whilst correlation study aims to establishing the correlation or significance

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