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Academic Branding Strategy in Enhancing International Competitiveness: A Case Study of the Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara

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Abstrak

Globalisasi pendidikan tinggi mendorong perguruan tinggi untuk bersaing secara global dan memperkuat posisi strategisnya melalui branding akademik. Program Studi Magister Manajemen Universitas Sumatera Utara (MM USU) dituntut untuk mampu memanfaatkan sumber daya internal secara optimal guna meningkatkan daya saing internasional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi branding akademik yang diterapkan oleh MM USU dalam meningkatkan daya saing internasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi non-partisipan, dan analisis dokumen yang melibatkan dua belas informan kunci, terdiri atas pengelola program studi, dosen, alumni, dan mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa MM USU memiliki sumber daya internal yang kuat, meliputi identitas akademik, kompetensi dosen, reputasi alumni, kehadiran digital, dan jejaring kolaborasi. Berdasarkan perspektif Resource-Based View, sumber daya tersebut memenuhi kriteria VRIN, namun belum terintegrasi secara optimal ke dalam strategi branding akademik yang terpadu, khususnya dalam konteks eksposur internasional dan komunikasi digital berbahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis terhadap pengembangan kajian branding akademik berbasis RBV serta implikasi praktis bagi pengelola pendidikan tinggi dalam merumuskan strategi branding akademik yang berorientasi global.

Kata kunci: branding akademik; pendidikan tinggi; Resource-Based View; daya saing internasional

Abstract

This study examines the academic branding strategy implemented by the Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara (MM USU) in enhancing its international competitiveness. The increasing globalization of higher education has intensified competition among universities, requiring academic institutions to strategically leverage their internal resources to strengthen global positioning. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research explores how MM USU utilizes academic identity, faculty competence, alumni reputation, digital presence, and collaborative networks as strategic resources. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis involving twelve key stakeholders consisting of administrators, faculty members, alumni, and students. The findings indicate that MM USU possesses valuable internal resources that meet the VRIN criteria under the Resource-Based View framework. However, these resources have not been optimally integrated into a coherent academic branding strategy, particularly in terms of international exposure and digital communication. This study contributes to the academic branding literature by highlighting the importance of strategic resource orchestration in strengthening international competitiveness in higher education institutions.

Keywords: academic branding; higher education; Resource-Based View; international competitiveness

1. Introduction

The globalization of higher education has intensified competition among universities at both regional and international levels. Higher education institutions are no longer evaluated solely based on academic performance, but also on their ability to build strong reputations and distinctive identities through effective academic branding. Academic branding has become a strategic instrument for universities to communicate their academic quality, institutional values, and competitive positioning to global stakeholders.

In this competitive environment, postgraduate programs play a crucial role in strengthening institutional reputation and international visibility. The Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara (MM USU) faces increasing pressure to enhance its international competitiveness through strategic branding initiatives. Despite possessing various internal strengths, such as qualified faculty members, reputable alumni, and institutional support, the effectiveness of academic branding strategies remains a critical challenge.

Previous studies on academic branding in higher education have primarily focused on branding outcomes, student perceptions, and institutional rankings. However, limited attention has been given to how internal organizational resources are strategically utilized to support academic branding, particularly in postgraduate programs within developing country contexts. This gap highlights the need for a resource-based perspective in analyzing academic branding strategies.

This study aims to analyze the academic branding strategy of the Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara by examining how internal resources are leveraged to enhance international competitiveness. Using the Resource-Based View framework, this research seeks to identify key internal resources, evaluate their strategic roles, and explore challenges in implementing integrated academic branding. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of academic branding literature and provide practical insights for higher education institutions in designing effective branding strategies.

2. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design with a case study approach. The case selected is the Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara (MM USU), which represents a postgraduate program seeking to strengthen its international competitiveness through academic branding strategies. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with twelve key informants consisting of program administrators, faculty members, alumni, and students. These informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement and knowledge of academic branding activities. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents, accreditation reports, official websites, and promotional materials related to branding and internationalization. Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative analysis model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was guided by the Resource-Based View framework to interpret how internal resources contribute to academic branding and international competitiveness.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that the Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara possesses several key internal resources that support academic branding. Academic identity is reflected through curriculum relevance, institutional values, and alignment with national and regional development needs. Faculty competence emerges as a major strength, demonstrated by academic qualifications, teaching experience, and involvement in research and community engagement. Alumni reputation also contributes positively to the program's branding, as graduates hold strategic positions in public and private organizations. However, alumni involvement in formal branding initiatives remains limited and unstructured. In addition, MM USU has developed digital platforms and collaborative networks, but these have not been fully optimized to support international branding, particularly in terms of English-language content and global visibility.

From a Resource-Based View perspective, these internal resources meet the criteria of being valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. Nevertheless, the lack of strategic integration and coordinated branding governance limits their effectiveness in generating sustained international competitiveness. These findings suggest that strong internal resources must be supported by consistent communication strategies and long-term international collaboration to maximize branding impact.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the Master of Management Program at Universitas Sumatera Utara has significant internal resources that can support academic branding and enhance international competitiveness. However, these resources have not yet

been optimally integrated into a coherent and internationally oriented academic branding strategy. The findings highlight the importance of strategic resource orchestration, digital branding enhancement, and stronger alumni engagement.

This study is limited to a single case and relies on qualitative data, which may restrict generalizability. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative or mixed method approaches to further explore academic branding strategies in higher education institutions.

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