

**THE IMPACT OF WORD-OF-MOUTH SOURCES ON THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND KNOWLEDGE AND
BRAND TRUST**

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**FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR**

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BRAND TRUST**

ANG CHUAN LOCK

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**FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
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ABSTRACT

The idea that higher education is a valued commercial product has reached the global marketplace. The rapid growth of newly established colleges and universities in South East Asia, Middle East and North African region have intensified trade in this sector. However, Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia still facing failure to rule it and unable to secure the most possible number of students. The failure of PHEIs has alarmed the government. Here, the enrolment of students becomes a complicated issue. Past studies suggested that the increasing of enrolment is highly possible by the dissemination of positive word-of-mouth communication (WOM) sources which greatly enhance students' existing knowledge towards a particular PHEI and the resulting trust. Accordingly, this study examines the moderation impact of WOM communication influences towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs. Sequential explanatory mixed method research design has been utilized in this study. Students from PHEIs in Klang Valley were approached in person to participate in the survey and a series of interviews with administrators of selected PHEIs was subsequently conducted. The quantitative analysis of this study discovered that the inclusion of influences from WOM communication sources has significantly heightened the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs. Similarly, the qualitative analysis of the study further enhanced the discovery on the view of PHEIs operators. PHEIs are recommended to capitalize on the potential of effective branding and the management of WOM communication sources in order to improve student's enrolment in their institutions.

ABSTRAK

Gagasan tentang pengajian tinggi sebagai produk komersial bernilai telah mencapai pasaran global. Perkembangan pesat bagi kolej dan universiti baharu di kawasan Asia Tenggara, Timur Tengah dan Afrika Utara turut memperhebat perdagangan dalam bidang ini. Namun, Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Swasta (IPTS) di Malaysia masih gagal dalam penguasaannya dan tidak mampu mengambil bilangan pelajar yang memuaskan. Dengan ini, pendaftaran pelajar menjadi isu kompleks. Kajian lepas mencadangkan peningkatan pendaftaran pelajar mempunyai kemungkinan besar untuk mencapai kejayaan dengan adanya penyebaran sumber komunikasi sebaran mulut yang positif. Sumber-sumber ini mampu meningkatkan pengetahuan pelajar yang ada tentang sesebuah IPTS dan kepercayaan terhadap IPTS tersebut. Berdasarkan perbincangan ini, kajian ini akan menguji kesan penyederhanaan bagi pengaruh komunikasi sebaran mulut terhadap hubungan antara jenama pengetahuan dengan jenama kepercayaan bagi sesebuah IPTS. Reka bentuk penyelidikan campuran penjelasan berturutan telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Pelajar IPTS dari Lembah Klang telah dihubungi secara individu untuk mengambil bahagian dalam kajian tinjauan manakala siri temu duga bersama dengan pentadbir dari IPTS tertentu telah dikendalikan seterusnya. Analisis kuantitatif bagi kajian ini mendapati pengaruh sumber-sumber komunikasi sebaran mulut telah memuncakkan kesan jenama pengetahuan terhadap jenama kepercayaan bagi sesebuah IPTS secara signifikan. Begitu juga, analisis kualitatif bagi kajian ini turut menyokong dan mempertingkatkan penemuan kajian ini melalui pandangan pentadbir IPTS. Maka, IPTS adalah dicadangkan dalam mengfokuskan dan menggunakan potensi bagi keberkesanan penjenamaan dan pengurusan sumber komunikasi sebaran mulut untuk meningkatkan pendaftaran pelajar dalam institusi masing-masing.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, my wife, Keng Keng and my children, Vo Fi and Vi Ko for their love, patience and support.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Academic Advisor
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
APEX	Accelerated Programme for Excellence
BI	Brand Image
BK	Brand Knowledge
BS	Brand Superiority
CW	College Website
eWOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
FM	Family Members
FR	Friends
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRA	Hierarchical Regression Analysis
HSC	Higher School Certificate
IPTS	Institusi Pengajian Tinggi Swasta
IT	Information Technology
LCE	Lower Certificate of Education
LR	Literature Reviews
LSA	Lower Secondary Assessment
MCE	Malaysia Certification of Education
MLR	Multiple Linear Regression
MMRD	Mixed Method Research Design
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MQA	Malaysian Qualification Agency
MRT	Media Richness Theory
MSSEE	Malaysian Secondary School Entrance Examination
PIC	Person in Charge
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution

PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
PTPTN	Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional
RO	Research Objective
RQ	Research Questions
SLR	Simple Linear Regression
SM	Social Media
SPM	Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
ST	School Teacher
STD	Standard Deviation
STPM	Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia
UPSR	Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah
WOM	Word of Mouth

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Education is a key stimulus in developing the nation's social and economic capital. Education essentially enhances the creativity and innovative thinking of learners besides providing the necessary skills to the learners in order to compete and sustain in the present ever challenging era. Awareness on the importance of education among Malaysians has been steadily increasing which could be discovered from the surge in literacy level among youth (below 15 years) from 88 percent in 1980 to 99 percent in 2012, while literacy level among adults (above 15 years) have increased twice than the youth segment for the same time duration ("Preliminary Report Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025", 2012). The upward trend is indeed in line with the Government's emphasis on the education sector through appropriate measures under the enactment of Government Transformation Plan, Economic Transformation Plan and Government's New Economic Model ("Preliminary Report Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025", 2012).

Recent years have also witnessed the Government's special care for the higher education segment due to its prominent role in helping attain a high-income developed nation status for the country ("The National Higher Education Action Plan 2011-2015", 2012; "Malaysia's education sector well poised for future growth", 2011). The realization of such aspiration is only possible through various innovative economic

activities which usually necessitate their involvement of highly knowledgeable and creative citizens (Symaco, 2012). Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have then become a great source in generating citizens with such desirable characteristics where the operators essentially produce an approachable labor force towards the sudden shifts in today's advanced and fast moving environment through the provision, creation and dissemination of the theoretical knowledge alongside a valuable practical knowledge to the learners (Symaco, 2012; Weisbrod et al. 2008).

The sector of higher education in Malaysia has a long history where the sector was initially made up by merely public universities. At that time, the access to higher education was almost far-fetched for most of the eligible students due to the limited number of HEIs and enactment of the New Economy Policy which inaugurates the quota system (Lek, 2010). Since then, 70 percent of seats in public universities have been compulsorily allocated to Bumiputra students which then form a tussle among the best performing Non-Bumiputra students from various ethnic groups for the remaining seats in public universities (Lek, 2010; Wan, 2008). Such state had indirectly compelled those eligible yet unsuccessful students to study abroad. Nevertheless, the choice to study abroad has been the option only for affordable students. Preference to study abroad had also created a significant impact on the country's economy where it resulted into a large outflow of currency in mid 1990s which was then one of the key contributors for the country's current account deficit (Lek, 2010). Subsequently, Government legislated the Private Higher Education Institutions Act in 1996 which has been the foundation for the commencement of private institutions' operation in Malaysia (Yusoff, 2014; Lek, 2010).

Since then, the number of private higher education institutions (PHEI) has been steadily escalating from 6 PHEIs in 1990s to about 600 in 2014 offering various academic programmes ranging from Certificates, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor, Masters to Doctorate level (The National Higher Education Action Plan 2011-2015”, 2012; Tham, 2011; Lek, 2010; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>). Of these PHEIs, 33 are of university status, 4 are foreign university branch campuses and the remaining about 500 are of college status (<http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

The advent and an admiring growth of PHEIs had enhanced the access for higher educations for all Malaysians irrespective of their demographic profile. This could be seen from the rise in the number of students who had an access for higher educations from about 7 percent in 1970s, followed by an increment of 5 percent in 1980s and almost doubled-up to 23 percent in early 2000s. Eventually, it hit 30 percent in late 2000s. Further, Government has also predicted that about 50 percent of Malaysian would have an access to higher educations by 2020 (“Malaysia’s education sector well poised for future growth”, 2011; Lek, 2010; Arokiasamy et al. 2009). Industry analysts claimed that the prediction is feasible as it has been projected that about 90 percent of Malaysian students would be required to go through PHEIs in order to obtain their tertiary qualifications by 2020 (Lek, 2010).

On the other hand, PHEIs have been also playing a vital role in order to meet Government’s vision to be the regional educational hub in the near future. As the 11th top study destination in the world, Malaysia is currently housing about 90000 foreign students from 100 nations and it was predicted that about 200000 foreign students would be pursuing their higher educations in Malaysia by 2020 (Wan, 2013; Therin, 2012). Unlike the enrolment in PHEIs, foreign students’ admissions into public

universities are mainly for the postgraduate courses with mere 5 percent of seat's allocation for the undergraduate courses (Chong & Ahmad Mokhtar 2013). Government's policy in prioritizing local students to pursue undergraduates programmes besides its emphasis on the research and development had resulted into the greater choices of postgraduate courses instead of undergraduate courses for foreign students in Malaysia (Khalid, 2014; Wan, 2013).

Alternatively, this policy has widened up the business opportunities for PHEIs in attracting more foreign students to pursue undergraduate studies at their institutions. At present, 70 percent of foreign students in Malaysia had enrolled in PHEIs where this trend is expected to grow steadily due to the rise in the demand for undergraduate courses by students around the globe (Chong & Ahmad Mokhtar 2013; "Malaysia's education sector well poised for future growth", 2011). With this, the PHEIs are significantly increasing the influx of foreign currency into Malaysian economy and subsequently contribute towards the improvement in Gross National Income (GNI).

1.2 Problem Statement

The idea that higher education is a valued commercial product has reached the global marketplace. The rapid growth of newly established colleges and universities in South East Asia, Middle East and North African region have intensified trade in this sector. However, Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Malaysia still facing failure to rule it and unable to secure the most possible number of students. The failure of PHEIs has alarmed the government.

The higher education sector of Malaysia essentially comprises of a huge number of private operators compared to their government-funded counterparts. In actual fact, the competition in this sector is very intense particularly among the private operators due to the market saturation caused by the operation of about 600 PHEIs where 33 of these PHEIs are universities, 4 are foreign university branch campuses and about 500 are colleges (Therin, 2012; Lek, 2010; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>). In spite of their market saturation, statistic indicates that PHEIs have failed to rule the higher education sector. In 2010, the enrolment of students in Malaysia's higher education institution was 1.13 million comprising both foreign and local students. Of this admirable figure of enrolment, only 48 percent was taken place in PHEIs ("Malaysia's education sector well poised for further growth", 2011).

Regardless of their market opportunities in the form of popularity among foreign students in pursuing undergraduate courses and Government's quota system which resulted into limited seats for non-Bumiputra students, PHEIs were not able to secure the most possible number of students (Ismail, 2007). For instance, the enrolment in PHEIs was very modest in 2007 even though there were about 250000 local students who have completed their high school educations but did not enrol for their tertiary educations. Besides, it was also claimed that such highly competitive environment could probably result into decline in the enrolment by about 20 percent particularly among small-sized institutions (Zalina, 2003). The current modest and the potential decline in the enrolment portray those weaknesses of PHEIs in recruiting new students and a new challenge for PHEIs in ensuring their sustainability in the marketplace.

Further, the market concentration of PHEIs has translated into numerous alternatives for students in selecting the study destination which then lengthen their

decision making process (Gooch, 2011; Kinzie et al, 2004). In addition, the widespread dominance of Internet has also complicated their decision making process in selecting a suitable institution for them to pursue their studies (Rieh & Hilligoss, 2008). The Internet permits the students to do a wide-ranging online comparison on all the options available in the marketplace particularly in terms of choices of academic programmes offered, tuition fees and accreditation of the programmes within short time duration. This certainly creates well-informed target customers of PHEIs who usually anticipate a good value for the services paid to the PHEIs.

Meeting such anticipation has been a great challenge for many of the PHEIs which are quite frequently brought to the limelight due to their sub-standard performance (Blessinger & Sengupta, 2012; Gooch, 2011; Chai, 2007). Profit-oriented motive combined with the large pool of staffs who are not possessing Doctorate qualification and are then having difficulty in delivering lessons were always lamented for the inferior quality of PHEIs (Gooch, 2011; Lek, 2010). Nevertheless, the ministry takes a great care on the quality issues where stringent rules were set in which about 30 percent of PHEIs with poor quality were required to discontinue their operation thus far (Lyn, 2010) or were imposed substantial amount of fine following the regular audits, inspection on the facilities and complaints received from public (Gooch, 2011). Such policy was in place in order to withstand the country's image which is aspired to be a regional educational hub in the near future. Failure to preserve the quality of PHEIs would definitely tarnish not only the country's image but also the brand image of individual's institution (Sultan & Wong, 2012).

Due to the unique characteristics of service which dampen an objective judgment prior to its consumption, reliance on firm's brand has become a strategic

weapon for many service-oriented firms (Ozretic-Dosen, 2007). It is a prevailing scenario in higher education sector where branding of HEIs provide the key stakeholders of institutions i.e. prospective students, a much easier way to identify and distinguish them from the other competing institutions (Lambooy, 2011; Waerass & Solbakk, 2009). This is indeed a much needed solution for many PHEIs in Malaysia due to the market saturation which in turn results into enormous alternatives of tertiary education for students to decide on.

Subsequently, preservation of brand name has become a vital yet challenging task for any firms particularly those in service sector, the sector where educational institutions operate in. Enhancing the brand name of PHEIs in Malaysia is very important not only to appeal to the local students but also to foreign students in which the aspiration of Government greatly relies on (Abu Bakar et al, 2009).

Preservation of the brand name is highly plausible through the effective formation of brand knowledge. Chandon (2003) viewed that knowledge formed about the brand among the customers would be able to affect their emotional connection with the firm and its offerings. In addition, such knowledge also enables the customers to assess a particular brand. Keller (2001) emphasized that a good formation of brand knowledge would enable firms to have a strong customer base with customers who are loyal and less price conscious. Such customer base would definitely improve the firm's market competitiveness and effectiveness.

Brand awareness and brand image are the two key components utilized in forming the brand knowledge (Chandon, 2003). Past studies found a significant association between these two components in which higher level of brand awareness

would result into a better positive image of the brand itself (Esch et al. 2006; Atilgan et al, 2005). These interdependent components of brand knowledge are found to strongly affect consumers' memories (Hsu & Cai, 2009). Brand knowledge of customers would determine their commitment with the brand and the firm. In view of the importance in creating the brand knowledge among customers, firms usually allocate substantial outlays in the marketing and promotion activities (Davis et al, 2008, Aaker, 1991). This is very much needed for the firms to capture a competitive position in the consumer's memories.

In fact, a strong brand is essentially a mark of trust which is usually highly accounted by consumers as it denotes products with high quality, arouses perceived security among the consumers and improves their confidence level that the brand will perform as promised (Aaker, 1996). It is also claimed that improvement in brand trust would create a path for long-term relationship between customers and firms besides inducing the consumer's purchase intention (Seyed Mojtaba et al,2013; Bouhlel et al. 2011). Any catastrophe in enhancing and preserving the brand trust of firm would certainly produce adverse effects towards the success of firm (Kabadayi & Kocak Alan, 2012; Syed & Norjaya, 2010). Similarly, PHEIs with poor brand trust would certainly struggle to secure a sizeable market share in the competitive higher education sector as students would usually avoid institution with poor performance as they believe it would not able to deliver its promises.

In the Malaysian context, many students would rather wait for the second or third attempt to enrol in public universities which used to be associated with superior quality instead of hurriedly enrolling into PHEIs (Ismail, 2007). This issue is not unique only to Malaysia but rather worldwide; according to a high ranking of official from one

of the premier universities in Europe, “Universities for a very long time have been based on trust and the entire higher education system operates on trust, and the public has been finding more and more reasons to be mistrustful” (Lewis, 2014). Such skeptical behavior towards PHEIs can be effectively curbed through dissemination of positive word-of-mouth (WOM) by the trustworthy sources.

This is in line with a typical typology of consumer behavior which claims that consumers not only seek information given by the firms but also from their close social circles or sometimes even from other consumers (Peter & Olson, 2002). Therefore, WOM is greatly considered as a vital component in influencing student’s decision on the selection of PHEI (Yahya et al. 2014; Jalilvand et al, 2011). Prospective students greatly trust the information obtained through WOM than the information from firm’s paid communications as their decision on the enrolment is very costly and significant for their future growth (Robert, 2009; Burmaster, 2008). On the other hand, WOM with constant communications of positive information would also greatly enhance the student’s confidence and brand trust towards PHEIs (Yahya et al. 2014; Andreassen & Streukens, 2009; Park & Lee, 2009; Newman, 2003).

It is remarkable to note that WOM is at least twice as powerful as traditional promotional tools particularly in influencing sales where with the widespread practice of electronic WOM, it is now 50 percent more influential than it was 30 years ago (Bughin et al. 2010; Marsden,2005). It was also found that about 90 percent of surveyed respondents had cited that WOM as their preferred source of information though this discovery is subject to the nature of offerings (Marsden, 2005). Existing studies also claimed that the recommendation of WOM is much more powerful due to the heavy involvement of students though, on most occasions, WOM recommendation is slightly

less positive in services sector due to the great variance in the delivery of services (Bughin et al. 2010; Roberts, 2009; Burmaster, 2008; Marsden, 2005). This signals that WOM, despite its significance towards the brand trust and subsequent student's enrolment, would probably result into the dissemination of negative information on PHEIs which are inherently service-oriented firms. Such potential contrary scenario could be effectively managed with the numerous appropriate types of WOM information sources (Selwyn & Facer, 2007).

An extensive review on the existing literatures indicate that there is a visible gap in terms of deficiency of researches investigating the moderation impact of WOM on the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs. The existing studies have focused either solely on the determinants of brand equity and brand loyalty, impact of brand equity on the students' satisfaction, determinants of WOM, issues and challenges in branding higher educations or impact of electronic WOM on brand image and or purchase intention in non-education sector. This has necessitated a need to further explore the research area on the moderation impact of WOM toward the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs by considering the possible variance in the impact of different sources of WOM.

1.3 Research Purpose

PHEIs in Malaysia are facing stiff competition in order to acquire a sizeable market share irrespective of the under penetrated students' market. Past studies suggest that this issue can be curbed by increasing the enrolment of students. This is highly possible by the dissemination of positive WOM which greatly improve students' confidence and subsequently their trust on the specific brand of PHEI. Accordingly, the purpose of this

study is to examine the influence of WOM towards the possible relationship between students' brand knowledge of the PHEIs and the resulting trust. Besides, the impact of various types of information sources on the said association is also examined in order to appreciate the effect of individual information sources. On the other hand, in order to validate the responses of students towards the issues investigated, the responses of PHEI representative are also investigated. Their responses have been obtained in order to further understand the impact of various types of information sources towards the positive relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of the PHEI. Stated below are the research objectives and their respective research questions in which this study intends to achieve:

(a) RO1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs

(i) RQ1: How does brand awareness of PHEIs affect brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by students?

(ii) RQ2: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand awareness of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?

(iii) RQ3: How does brand image of PHEIs affect brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by students?

(iv) RQ4: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand image of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?

(b) RO2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

(i) RQ5: How does each type of WOM sources affect the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by the students?

(ii) RQ6: Do PHEI administrators perceive similarly on the impact of WOM sources on the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs?

1.4 Research Scope

As far as the researcher is concerned, there are limited researches within this field. Reviews of past studies in the field of traditional WOM, electronic WOM, brand knowledge and brand trust within education and services sector have been greatly done by the researcher of this study. This is because the reviews of assorted past studies are essential so as to obtain insights pertaining to the problems at hand and therefore, construct the intended research variables.

Resources and dimensions of WOM as well as brand knowledge and brand trust among PHEIs are the focal points of this study. This study refers WOM as information pertaining to the PHEIs which has been disseminated to students and subsequently affects their perception on the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs. Besides, WOM sources are the origins of information that are disseminated while brand trust is the student's expectation on the performance of PHEIs in meeting its promises.

The researcher has employed mixed method research design in this study in which the data collection and analysis began with a quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative phase. In fact, the target population of this study consists of students who have completed secondary schools education, matriculation or A-level examination as well as the administrators of selected PHEIs within Klang Valley. Thus, investigation on the students was conducted initially in the quantitative phase while that of the administrators of PHEIs was conducted subsequently in the qualitative phase of this study.

Pertaining to the research instruments of this study, the limited past studies cause the researcher to construct an exclusive research instrument for this study. Specifically, there were no past research instruments that could be adopted in this study. Thus, the researcher of this study has constructed a suitable research instruments by referring to the past studies at the initial stage, followed by modifying the instrument based on the quantitative findings. The modified instrument was then utilized during the qualitative data collection process.

To collect both quantitative and qualitative data, a survey was self-administered to preselected students nationwide and subsequently followed by the conduct of in-depth interviews with administrators of selected PHEIs in Klang Valley. The latter procedure was taken so as to triangulate the information gathered from the students. Then, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software was used to analyze the quantitative data. As for the qualitative data, three approaches suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used to complete the analysis. The result of the analysis was then substantially utilized to provide additional support to the quantitative findings. This in turn, enabled the findings and discussions of this study to be more comprehensive.

1.5 Research Significance

The study is anticipated to create several significant contributions towards enhancement in body of the knowledge and further growth of the services sector in general and PHEIs in particular.

Previously, WOM was often associated as an independent non-paid promotional tools and insignificant contributor towards the promotional activities of a product. However the findings of this study would uncover a new horizon in services sector particularly among PHEIs that WOM could be utilized as powerful promotional tool for the current generation. The findings of this study is expected highlight that WOM can be treated as a distinct form of promotional mix in this modern era of sustainability due to its reachability through technological intervention as well as cost sensitive solution. This is applicable not only to practitioners but also to the academics.

Accordingly, academics within the field of marketing communications could further explore their research journey by investigating the impact of WOM alongside other traditional promotional tools in order to appreciate the precise impact of WOM towards the issue concerned. Besides, the investigation on the brand knowledge, brand trust and WOM within the complicated education (sub-service) sector would definitely induce researchers alike to investigate the similar concept on other sub-services sector.

Besides, the findings of this study will demonstrate that the brand trust can be acquired and/ or enhanced through appropriate practice of WOM. As PHEI is struggling for a good volume of market share, WOM can be opted to enhance the institution's brand trust and then increase its market share. The findings would also reveal the exact type of WOM information sources which shall be utilized by the operators of PHEIs to formulate their WOM-oriented promotional activities.

On the other hand, Government will be greatly benefitted from findings of this study. As Government is intending to be a regional educational hub where it always attempts to maintain positive image, understanding on the utilization of WOM would be

deemed necessary. In addition, Government's potential subsequent switch to the utilization of WOM as one of the key promotional tools would result into reduction in the Government's expenditure for the costly promotional tools. Finally, this research would be also useful for other countries with similar profile as Malaysia who are experiencing growth in higher education sector.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

PHEI – Private Higher Education Institution comprising both colleges and universities

Brand Knowledge – Relates to the brand awareness and brand image of a PHEI. Brand knowledge is known as the reactions of consumers upon the knowledge of the brands.

Brand Awareness - Brand awareness is defined as whether and when the customer recognizes the brand.

Brand Image – Brand Image is referred to the consumers' associations with the brand.

Brand Trust - Brand trust is characterized as a unique individual relationship that exists between consumers and brands which often attributed as the eagerness or willingness of a consumer to depend on a brand's capability to showcase its intended functions

WOM sources – WOM sources are divided into 2 categories which are namely traditional and technological. Traditional sources are sources which use oral influences which are distributed face to face. The examples of traditional sources are friends and family. The technological sources are using the digital interfaces to spread information.

Examples of technological interfaces are like internet and social media.

1.7 Thesis Layout

There are a total of six chapters in this paper. At the beginning, Chapter 1 presents the information about the education in Malaysia, followed by the initiatives discussion which led to the conduct of this study. Next, research objectives are stated clearly as the focal point of this study. Originating from the clear objectives, the scope of the research is then presented as it could prevent redundant information to be presented as well as filtering the unrelated topics to be discussed in this paper. Lastly, this chapter ends with the definitions and brief explanation of some of the key terms and concepts that are used throughout the whole study.

Chapter 2 presents the review of related past studies which is parallel with the problem statement of current study. The dimensions and sources of WOM as well as brand knowledge and brand trust are intensively elaborated in this chapter. Then, the research framework and hypothesis of this study end this chapter.

Chapter 3, which is the chapter of research methodology, presents the information of how to conduct this study. These include not only the research and sampling design, but also data collection and data analysis procedures of this study. To provide a detailed elaboration on the procedures of data collection and data analysis, both of these topics are presented individually instead of in a combination. More importantly, they are designed based on the nature of the research approach that has been adopted in this study.

Chapter 4 summarizes the quantitative findings obtained from the statistical techniques which have applied such as factor analysis, one-way analysis of variance

(ANOVA), cross-tabulation analysis, regression analysis and hierarchical regression analysis, followed by interpretation of these findings. Comprehensive discussions which highlight the similarities and dissimilarities of the findings as compared to the past studies are also presented in this chapter. At the latter part of this chapter, the analysis is presented based on the research objectives that have been suggested in this chapter.

On the other hand, the qualitative findings gathered from the in-depth interviews are presented in Chapter 5. In this chapter, the researcher shall provide the description of each interviewee prior to the discussions of the information provided by them. The discussions are presented based on the research objectives stated in this Chapter. Nevertheless, the results from the qualitative findings are utilized to complement some of the significant quantitative findings.

Lastly, Chapter 6 summarizes the notable quantitative and qualitative findings of this study, followed by the implications in detailed. The limitations of current study as well as the recommendations for future researchers are then elaborated at the last part of this chapter.

1.8 Summary

In short, this chapter presents an overview of the current study which includes background of the study, problem statement, the scope of the study, research objectives and thesis layout. Specifically, the highlights not only include the scenario of Malaysia's PHEIs, but also the importance of WOM in affecting the relationship

between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs. As a matter of fact, there are limited past studies in this field. Most importantly, the current study which utilizes MMR design may possibly shed light in this field of study as none of the past researches have applied this design. Hence, it is highly possible that this study becomes valuable to all of the stakeholders within Malaysian higher education sector. The past literatures utilized for current study will be discussed in next chapter.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter essentially presents a comprehensive review on the past studies relating to brand trust, brand knowledge and word-of-mouth which are the key areas of this study. Nevertheless, a detailed review on the history of Malaysia's education is furnished in this chapter in order to enrich fundamental knowledge on the education system in Malaysia before discussing the research specific issues. Briefly, this chapter begins with an exploration on the underlying theories related to the study's key areas. It advances with a detailed discussion of the research variables and hence a proposed conceptual model prior to lay sound justification on the research hypotheses constructed.

2.1.1 History of Education in Malaysia

The Malaysian education system begins from pre-school and further to higher education. The purpose of furnishing the history of education in Malaysia is to provide a background to the vigorous expansion in private higher education in recent years. Furthermore, it gives a clear view pertaining the impact of traditional education system on the establishment of higher education institutions in Malaysia.

The Malaysian education system before British colonization was established with only informal type of education. Informal education consists of education of learning from skills and experience for survival such as fishing, farming for boys, as well as cooking and weaving for girls. Suraus, Mosques, or Pondok Schools were the teaching places of Al-Quran and Islamic studies to the young generations of Muslims (Sufean, 2004).

There are three major ethnic groups in the Malaysian population known as the Malay, Chinese and Indian. The minority ethnic group is the Punjabi and a few others like Kadazandusun. According to Milne (1967), ethnic composition became a vital consideration for economic, politic and social systems. This ethnic consideration is known as 'ethnic arithmetic' which responsible for the development of the system of the Malaysian society. This ethnic consideration has greatly influenced the formation of state and policy agendas especially in the education policies of Malaysia (Jamil, 2010).

When British colonized Malaysia back then, policy on education was very unclear and it was significantly absent. However, there were four types of vernacular schools – the Malay-medium, Chinese-medium, Tamil-medium and English-medium schools that were established to help the community (Mok, 2000; Gaudart, 1987). All four types of vernacular schools were governed by missionaries and British Government. This is important because a vernacular school carries an essential role in ensuring the cultural heritage to be maintained among each culture in Malaysia (Dayu, 2013; Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000).

As a matter of fact, Penang Free School is the oldest school in Malaysia in which it was established in the year 1816. Other than that, Malacca High School started

since 1826, Singapore Free School in 1834, and finally Victoria Institution were established in the year 1893. Most schools were situated in the urban areas. This is because most of the population in Malaysia were situated in the off city locations back then due to the under-developed infrastructures like roads and transportations. Malay-medium school uses Malay as a medium of instruction and they emphasized on 3Rs which are the “Reading”, “wRiting”, and “aRithmetic” (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Gaudart, 1987). Malay-medium schools focused in living skills such as gardening, poultry farming, basket making, and handicrafts. Malay-medium school conducted their classes in *Pondok* schools. Chinese-medium School on the other hand was operated mostly by the Chinese community. These schools utilized Chinese as medium of instruction. In the year of 1919, the School Registration Enactment was passed and legitimated. This is responsible to control political activities in the school and help to create a much healthier environment to conduct the syllabus (Abdul Razak & Peter, 2008; Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000).

When it was the Second World War, education served as a tool for propaganda so as to portray the loyalty of the local towards the Japanese emperor who had colonized Malaysia. The Japanese language was set as a compulsory medium of instruction for all of the subjects in school. The language was called Nippon-Go and other languages were banned in schools. During the World War, secondary schools in Malaysia were utilized to be the army operation hubs and detention camps were set up in school hostels. Nonetheless, every morning, Malaysian students were required to sing the Japanese national song as a sign of respect (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Gaudart, 1987).

Before Malaysia gained its own golden independence, so as to standardize and enhance the Malaysian education system, there were a few legislations and reports being made. Firstly, The Holgate Report was compiled and it was proposed in the year 1949. It is responsible to conduct a purpose to standardize the educational system. Other than that, English was introduced and was encouraged to be used as a medium of communication and instructions for all schools which are still in operation in Malaysia. However, it was later rejected by the Federal Legislative Council. In the year 1951, the Barnes Report was written where it proposed that all primary vernacular schools may observe their respective educational system though it was compulsory to incorporate the same syllabus across all the schools in Malaysia (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Gaudart, 1987).

In addition, the usage of dual language namely Malay and English was implemented (Jamil, 2010). Secondary schools adopted English as a medium of communication and instruction. On the other hand, in the year 1952, The Fenn-Wu report was proposed to support one national education system. Through this, it is in vision to achieve standardized educational which would be equal to the students. In addition, this report contains its purpose to maintain all the Chinese-medium schools to continue their operations. The Razak Report which was proposed in the year 1956 contained items about the education system. In the report, it was stated that there should be two types of primary schools - the standard primary school and the standard type primary school (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000). It was divided in such a way because the standard primary school is indeed the Malay-medium schools while the latter one is the Chinese-medium schools, Tamil-medium schools or English-medium schools. However, these two types of primary schools should use standard syllabus besides teaching both Malay and English languages. These criteria were made as compulsory subjects for all

types of school. Similarly, a common syllabus and examination should be used by all national secondary schools too. This was to match the consistency of education as well. Other than that, to have a better productivity level in schools, training about the standard syllabus would be offered in the teachers' training colleges (Jamil, 2010; Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Gaudart, 1987; Tray, 1984).

The education system in Malaysia was further improvised after the independence of Malaysia. There were many adaptations, implementations and visions to be operated in realizing the concept of a standardized education system which is functional that could increase the productivity levels of Malaysians in the future days ahead. As a result, the Rahman Talib report was proposed in 1961 which emphasized on the Malay language usage as a medium of instruction. Accordingly, The Education Act was implemented in 1961. This act was innovated and based from The Razak Report and The Talib Report. Later, the National Education System was established after The Education Act 1961 and was legalized in Malaysia (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Gaudart, 1987; Tray, 1984).

There was an educational proposal which is the 1956 Razak Report with its main aim in developing the education system in Malaya. The formation of the "ultimate objective of educational policy" was to encourage the utilization of the national language as the main source of connector of instruction among people while simultaneously developing the growth of languages and culture of other races (Kua, 2012). Malay has become the national language of the country and has been made as the sole official language in 1967. There are three main objectives by the education in Malaysia. The bulletins are - providing a 6-year primary education, which is the minimal number of years; 3-year lower secondary education to everyone; preserving

and sustaining the growth of languages and cultures of every community who lives in Malaysia; and uniting all races in order for Malaysians to evolve together in the global level (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Unesco, 1972).

In 1960, The Talib Educational Review Committee Report was implemented which then was incorporated in the Education Act 1961. The review of the report has implanted a few criteria that generated the development of the education system of Malaysia. The sources are still being applied and utilized optimally in the present education system of Malaysia. This review report suggested the 13 recommendations, which are universal free primary education, automatic promotion, express classes, assessment examination, improvement of Malay, Chinese, and Tamil Primary schools, raising school- leaving age to 15, enhancement of technical and vocational education, control of primary education, federal inspectorate, introduction of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instructions, language medium for public examination, expansion of teacher training courses, and religious and moral instruction (Sufean, 2004; Mok, 2000; Unesco, 1972).

The Government has established the 1961 Educational Act. In order to standardize the language usage for conduction of classes they have implemented a compulsory policy that they must fully utilize. The policy stated that the languages used in teaching secondary schools are restricted to only two which are English and Malay. Meanwhile, the policy would allow the four major languages which are Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English to be used as an alternative medium to conduct classes for primary school students (Tray, 1984).

After that, the Education Act 1996 was established and further replaced the Education Act 1961. Starting from pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, post-secondary education, technical education, private education, religious teaching, special education and teacher education, there was a needed guideline provided by this education legislation. This legislation mentioned that the usage of national language (Bahasa Melayu) as the compulsory medium of language for clearer messages and instructions of institutions except national schools as well as ministry exempted institutions (School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015).

Now, there are 4 stages in the education system in Malaysia - the primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary (Sixth form) which are in accordance to the Education Act 1961. In the Education Act 1996, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is obliged to offer pre-tertiary education. Pre-school, primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels were all included. However, tertiary education was not provided for students as it is optional for students. Moreover, the approval of the terms and conditions of the operations of tertiary education forms is indeed the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education. The Government is obliged to provide eleven years of education without charging any educational fees for primary and secondary students in public schools. On the other hand, for the private and international schools, they would charge a certain amount of fee to the students according to their terms of operations (School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015).

According to the Education Act 1996, all children who are aged between 7 to 12 are encouraged and compulsory to register for primary school for the first step in formal education, nationally. The school term would be starting from January and it will end in November. This legislation had also standardized the assessment of students by

providing the formal examinations for the end of primary level - Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR); the end of lower secondary - Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR); the end of upper secondary - Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM); and the end of sixth form level - Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM) (School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015).

According to School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed (2015), there are at least 95 percent of public primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Meanwhile, pre-tertiary education has three categories which are the government education institutions, government aided education institutions and private education institutions.

In the primary stage, pupils are given 6 years of education. Classes are instructed in one of the four languages (English, Malay, Chinese or Tamil) according to the type of school the student's enrolled in. Primary schools are where students are automatically promoted which meant they progress to a new level from year to year. Primary school allows students at the age of 6 to enrol which is governed by the Educational Act 1961 and Educational Act 1996. Students are assessed at the end of their primary stage which is when they are in their sixth primary year which was introduced as Malaysian Secondary School Entrance Examination (MSSEE) which was then abolished in the year 1964 due to the introduction of comprehensive school systems in the following year.

However, there is an assessment test introduced in the following year for year five primary students. Assessment test are needed to evaluate students' progress. This step was taken in order for schools to take measures to help weak students (Unesco, 1972; School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015). According to School of Malaysia

Directory 3rd Ed (2015), the providers of primary education are public schools, government aided schools such as the national type schools which are funded by the public (Chinese and Tamil schools) and private schools. According to the Education Act 1996, the medium uses in teaching instructions are Malay language. Meanwhile, national type schools are allowed to use Chinese and Tamil as a medium of instruction but Malay language subject is compulsory to be taken and English is the secondary language. Under the Educational Act 1996, MSSEE is replaced with Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) or known as Primary School Achievement Test.

After the completion of primary education, automatic promotion of the graduates to lower secondary (which is also known as a comprehensive stage) is then executed. At this stage, students are around age 11 plus. This stage of education provides 3 years for students where the levels are known as Form I, II, and III. The medium of instruction is either English or Malay. There is a “Remove” year for students between year six of primary education and Form I in lower secondary education. This ‘Remove’ year functions as training for students for the change of language medium as they proceed to lower secondary stage. During the last year of lower secondary stage which is Form III, there will be an assessment examination named as Lower Certification of Education (LCE). This assessment is conducted in dual language, English and Malay. This examination was first introduced in English mediums in the year of 1957 (School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia was introduced in the year of 1960 which was a complementary of LCE. After obtaining the results, qualified students can choose to continue upper secondary education or vocational schools or seek employment. After the implementation of Education Act 1996, LCE is replaced with Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) which also named as Lower Secondary Assessment (LSA). After the

establishment of Educational Act 1996, students from primary education are automatically promoted to secondary level educations which consist of three different levels. The three different levels are remove classes which is a year provided for transition programme; lower secondary (Form I-III, for ages 11-15) which focuses on general education; and upper secondary level (Form IV-V, for ages 16-17) which categorizes students to different streams of either Arts, Science, vocational studies, technical studies or Religious. There are three levels for national type education institution and two levels of education provided in public institutions (School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

The Remove classes are for students from national type school students who have insufficient Bahasa Melayu knowledge after the assessment from UPSR. In contrast, if the students have sufficient Bahasa Melayu knowledge as the medium of instruction in secondary school, they are allowed to be promoted directly to Form I (lower secondary education) . The upper secondary education is for students who sat for the LCE. This stage provides two years of education for students who are selected based on their results of the LCE examination. Qualified students are categorized under two groups known as the academic group (arts, science, agriculture, home science, and technical streams) and vocational group. The students of the academic group are to sit for a formal examination known as Malaysian Certification of Education (MCE). Meanwhile, students from the vocational group will be sitting for a formal examination known as Malaysian Vocational Certificate of Education Examination (School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015; Unesco, 1972; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

After Education Act 1996 was established, students who completed PMR at form III are automatically promoted to upper secondary education. Students are given

an option to choose a few types of schools with their qualification based on their PMR results. In the academic Secondary Schools, there are compulsory, elective and core subjects. These subjects are basically in the area of applied arts, humanities and science in which students have a choice to join either science or arts stream based on their preference and also their results from PMR. In the technical institutions, they offer three streams which are the technical, vocational and skill streams which offer same core subjects. Nonetheless, there are also National Religious Secondary Schools which in Malay, known as Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama. This type of school provides Islamic Religious and Arabic studies. The core subjects are Al-Quran Tasawwur Islam, Al-Quran and Syariah Islamiah studies. As for Special Education Schools, it offers education for students who have special needs like disabled students with visual, hearing, and learning disabilities (Unesco, 1972; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

Students who are qualified for post-secondary education are selected to join. At this stage, there are two years of post-secondary education which are the lower and upper form 6. Similar to the academic Secondary School, there are three different streams namely the arts, science and technical stream. At the end of the upper sixth form year, students are required to take a formal examination which is known as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination (Unesco, 1972; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

Students can choose to continue their study through the tertiary education stage where they can register to their preferred universities or colleges. The government has implemented Private Higher Educational Institutions Act 1996. This legislation is established by the Malaysian government in order to encourage private sector to take up the responsibility to offer education of tertiary level. By the end of the year of 1999, there were a large proportion of young Malaysian students aged between 17 to 23-year-

old enrolled in tertiary education. The number of students enrolling in tertiary education has increased by 22 percent (Rudner, 1977). Meanwhile, there were 11 public tertiary education institutions, 7 local private universities, 3 foreign university branch campuses and more than 400 private colleges which were approved by Malaysian Education Government operating in year 2000.(School of Malaysia Directory 3rd Ed, 2015; <http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

According to Lee (2004), “Education for Elites” (i.e. first phase), “Education for Affirmative Action” (i.e. second phase), “Education As and For Business” (i.e. third phase) and “Education for Global Competition” (i.e. final phase) are the four phases exist in Malaysian higher education.

In the first phase - the “Education for Elite” period which is in the pre-1970s, there was only one university that was known as the University of Malaya which emphasized on education of primary and secondary levels. In the second phase which is the “Education for Affirmative Action”, in the post 1970s to 1990s. In this phase, they had established some state-controlled universities. During this phase, the enrolments of students are based on ethnic quota admission policy. According to Aihara (2009), the Malaysian government has taken measures in order to restructure the society. Specifically, the government has established a quota system in public higher education institutions based on different ethnics. In 1979, there was an agreement pertaining to the proportion of quota which stated that Bumiputera occupied the greatest portion (55 percent), followed by Chinese (35 percent), Indians (10 percent) and the least portion for other minorities. State-controlled universities refer to universities which were being monitored on their types of curriculum and student activities (Lee, 2004).

In the third phase - the “Education As and For Business” phase occurred during the year of 1990 to 2000 in which other state-controlled universities were established. This can be shown by the evidence from market in which foreign private post-secondary education showcases. This type of education encompasses corporatization of public higher learning institutions and universities. During this phase, government made efforts on improving the quality of higher learning education by establishing quality mechanisms and was brought forward to the fourth phase. In the final phase which is the “Education for Global Competition” which is in the post 2000 till the present. This phase includes the establishment of Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). In this final phase, there is an evidence on internationalization or also globalization establishment of research universities and APEX universities (Lee, 2004).

2.1.2 Private Higher Education in Malaysia

Malaysia aims to be a regional education hub in the Asia region. Positive growth in the enrolment of students from numerous parts of the world signifies that Malaysia is on the verge of reaching its aim (Wan, 2013, Therin, 2012). Currently, it accommodates about 90000 foreign students where private higher education institutions (PHEIs) are considered as a vital source in serving the huge and growing market of these foreign students. This could be attributed due to Government’s stringent regulation in offering trivial number of admissions to public higher institutions for foreign students particularly for undergraduate courses. Besides foreign students, locals are also greatly benefitted by PHEIs as these institutions are their typical study’s destination for local students particularly for those who did not obtain admission into public higher education institutions.

In 1996, the enactment of Private Higher Education Institutions Act brought about the operation of the PHEIs in Malaysia (Yusoff, 2014, Lek, 2010). Accordingly, the amount of private higher education institutions has been steadily escalating from 6 PHEIs in 1990s to about 600 in 2014 where 33 of these PHEIs are of university status, 4 are foreign university branch campuses and the remaining about 500 are of college status (<http://www.mohe.gov.my>).

The growing number of PHEIs signal a prosperous market growth as it significantly contributes towards the nation's socio-economic development. Such development is viable through the enhancement in the literacy rate among Malaysians which can be presently witnessed in terms of growth in the number of schools students who continue their tertiary educations ("Malaysia's education sector well poised for future growth", 2011; Lek, 2010; Arokiasamy et al. 2009). On the other hand, operation of PHEIs has also been a great stimulus for nation's economic development as it facilitates the influx of foreign currency through the enrolment of foreign students in Malaysia (Chong & Ahmad Mokhtar 2013; Therin, 2012) particularly for undergraduate courses (Khalid, 2014; Wan, 2013).

Despite its importance and popularity among both local and foreign students, enrolments at PHEIs are not reassuring the key stakeholders ("Malaysia's education sector well poised for further growth", 2011; Ismail, 2007). Past researchers had underlined several factors that had contributed for such scenario where building brand trust is deemed most appropriate in accelerating the student's enrolment in a PHEI and hence the ultimate success (Seyed Mojtaba et al, 2014; Lamboy, 2011). It is also perceived that building brand trust is highly possible with enrichment in the brand

knowledge of a PHEI (Hsu & Cai, 2009) where such association is postulated to rely on the dissemination of effective word-of-mouth communications.

2.2 Underlying Theories

This section discusses three underlying theories related to the key areas of this study namely Brand Knowledge Pyramid, Reflective-Formative of Brand Trust Model and Media Richness Theory. Description on these theories would provide an insightful view on the essential dimensions and linkages of the study's key areas while on the other hand, presenting a valuable standpoint on the related researches and thus a credible guideline for its practical applications.

Through the explanation of the following theories, it provides the important insight on the possible attribute to be included in the research, especially in the perspective of private higher education industry. Moreover, through the explanations of these theories, it enable researchers to identify the connections of the possible attributes to explain how brand knowledge is able to influence the brand trust among the consumers in the private higher education industry with a moderating effect of word of mouth to it.

2.2.1 Brand Knowledge Pyramid

Brands are the key business weapons for companies in today's highly competitive environment, where a successful brand clearly denotes the companies' core business and

offerings besides being an indication of companies' quality offering and trust for the companies' key stakeholders (Keller, 1993). Researchers (Alimen & Cerit, 2010; Gupta et al 2010; Keller, 1993) suggested that such great value of brand exhibits its sound substance where it is also commonly referred as the brand equity. Organizations of the brand educate consumers on the power of the brand so as to generate consumer based equity. Brand equity is able to create positive brand attitude towards the brand. The benefits of brand equity are further discussed in the following.

Brand equity can be measured for companies' financial purpose particularly in assessing companies' assets and for improving the companies' market productivities. The latter can be made possible only by understanding the consumers' perception and behavior toward the companies' brand (Alimen & Cerit, 2010; Kuhn, et al 2004; Keller, 2001; Wood, 2000; Keller, 1993). According to Aaker (1991), investments should be made in brand equity which can lead to sustainable competitive advantage and long term value.

Brand equity management is perceived as a continuous, planned and long-term strategy. Brand equity aims that company should be emphasized as it increases the confidence in the brand where consumers would make purchasing decisions with reduced perceived risk. Reduced perceived risk would make consumers feel confident. Hence, brand equity ensures development of relationship between brand and consumer to be strengthened with the amount of trust and confidence. Other than that, "added value" is also portrayed as the result from past investments made on brand equity (Tuominen, 1999). According to Bagozzi et al (1998), brand equity provides added value for both consumer and the firm. Customers gain value through enhanced information processing, confidence in decision making, and perceived purchase risk is

reduced. On the other hand, firms enjoy added value from brand equity through increased marketing efficiency, brand loyalty, improved profit margins, and achieving differentiation over competitors.

Marketers should evaluate marketing activities and aspects closely for a brand and recognize various possibilities that might be gained from brand knowledge. In addition, brand knowledge influences the long term success of the firm's upcoming marketing programmes due to its significance where consumers are able to acknowledge the brand and ensures that it stays in the evoke set of the consumers by minimizing marketing locomotives. Hence, this will monitor consumers' behaviors and purchase intentions towards a particular marketed product (Keller 1993).

According to Tuominen (1999), there are two perspective of a brand where it is either positive or negative which reacts accordingly to the responses and the reactions from the consumers. Therefore, the acceptance of a new brand extension would be more flexible for the consumers who react positively towards the brand equity. Other than that, these consumers would be less sensitive towards the increase of price and the reduction of advertising needs. Consumer-based brand equity is effective when the particular brand itself would be impactful for the consumers when they are familiar with the brand. Familiarity often leads to greater liking without conscious awareness (Allen & Janiszewski, 1989). The inviting response from the consumers would benefit the respective firms which may increase the firm's revenue, lowering its expenditures, and therefore, harnessing the margin of profits (Keller, 1998, Keller, 1993). Both brand knowledge characteristics and customer brand response hypotheses are the components of brand equity (Koll & Wallpach, 2009).

Brand knowledge is known as the reactions of consumers upon the knowledge of the brands (Koll & Wallpach, 2009). According to Keller (2001), brand knowledge refers to brand awareness (whether, and when, consumer knows the brand) as well as brand image (what are the associations that a consumer has with the brand). Based on this explanation, Keller (2001) proposed a pyramid model of brand knowledge (refer to Figure 2.1).

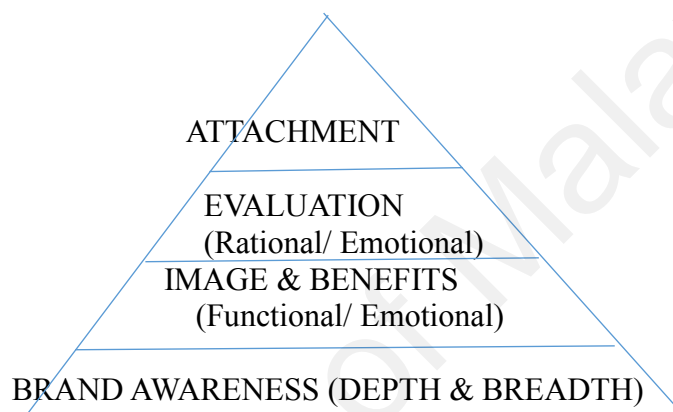


Figure 2.1: Brand Knowledge Pyramid
Source: Adopted from Keller (1993)

This pyramid model consists of four different levels of brand knowledge - Brand Awareness (Depth & Breadth), Brand Image (Functional / Emotional), Brand Evaluation (Rational / Emotional) as well as Brand Attachment. This model proposed that rational and emotional brand evaluations are the origin of the attachment of brand, which derives from emotional and functional brand associations and also require brand awareness (Keller, 2001). It was perceived that the lower level of dimensions are foundations for the higher levels of dimensions in the pyramid where a consumers would obtain sound brand knowledge when he / she has become attached to the brand which is possible only when the consumer has positive evaluation. Such positive evaluation by consumers is the typical outcome of brand which has a fair share of brand

awareness and image among its consumers. Hence, Keller (2001) proposed that the measurement of brand knowledge also known as measurement of “consumer mind – set” as it also captures how consumer perceived the brand in their mind which could be easily measured with causal questions on the relative significance of brand awareness and brand image.

In the other context, brand knowledge characteristics are viewed as brand perception while the perceptions that develop behavior, behavioral intentions, preferences or comparative evaluations refer to the customer’s responses (Hartman & Spiro, 2005). In addition, the intensity of response towards brand greatly depends on the content and structure of brand knowledge (Koll & Wallpach, 2009).

Brand awareness is the lowest level in this brand knowledge pyramid. Keller (2001) proposed that brand awareness measure the accessibility of the brand in a consumer’s memory. It can be measured through two different ways: Brand Recognition or Brand Recall. Brand recognition which is based on aided recall indicator has the minimal level of brand awareness. It is essential in product decisions made in store and point of purchase (Keller, 1993). On the other hand, brand recall is defined as the ability of a consumer to retrieve the brand from his or her memory when given the product category, the needs are fulfilled by the category, or other types of probe as a cue. It involves in recalling the brand name, symbol, logo etc. to certain associations in consumers’ memory. In fact, the depth of recall (the percentage of a consumer who knows the brand) and the width of recall (the cues that lead to the brand recall) are the two components that are measured in brand recalling. In spite of that, Keller (1998) stated that breadth is also part of the brand awareness where it is measured through the range of purchase and usage situations where brand elements were taken into

consideration in the consumers' minds. In addition, brand awareness is built when the brand is consistently exposed to the consumers through associating their memory to the product's category such as usage and consumption situations.

Brand awareness has been made a priority in some studies where it is essential for all communications to occur as customers must first be aware of the brand. In addition, without proper communication, consumers would not have any knowledge of the brand and no associations can be created when consumers are not aware of the brand. Brand awareness has been positioned as the most vital first step in certain studies where it is crucial in building a "bundle" of associations in the brand memory to allow the information of the brand to stay in the memory of consumers (MacDonald & Sharp, 2013; Holden, 1993; Keller, 1993; Holden and Lutz, 1992; Aaker, 1991; Rossiter & Percy, 1987; Stokes, 1985).

On top of that, brand awareness has been made responsible to develop the evoked set within consumers in order for consumers to be able to make a purchase decision on a particular brand. Evoked set is formed between familiar brands which are the brands that the consumers are aware of and that is where consumers start searching for more information or gain information with people around them. According to Woodside and Wilson (1985), it is proven that top-of-mind awareness increases purchase intention and greater recall of the brand. This is also where consumers employ the rule of thumb also known as heuristics when they are making purchasing decisions where consumers do not always spend time to make purchase decisions. Hence, they buy familiar brands and minimize the cost of decision making like time spent and cognitive effort through the employment of heuristics and familiarity towards the brand where they buy the brand they heard of (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). In addition, Aaker (1991)

states that brand awareness is able to improve the value of a brand as it could place the brand in consumer's mind, act as a barrier to new entrants' (Kurtz & Boone, 2013) and reassure customers on the organization's commitment and brand quality.

While brand recognition not only measures how well the consumers could recognize the brand but also their attitude towards this particular brand. Keller (2001) proposed that during a recognition task, a brand name or a brand logo acts as a stimulus to the consumers and hence, causing them to be able to identify that they have seen it before (e.g. in supermarket, in magazine advertisement etc.). High brand recognition brings forward customer loyalty when consumers are able to have positive associations with the brand and knowledge before their first contact with the brand and confirmed and strengthened after the first purchase. Good brand recognition is essential as it forms a base for a clear and attractive brand image. Furthermore, good brand recognition brings higher customer satisfaction levels as consumers perceived purchase risk is reduced which then helps to translate that brand confidence into brand equity (Koniewski, 2012). On top of that, Thoma and Williams (2014) stated that consumers often perceive that the recognized item has a higher criterion value. Therefore, the effect of strong recognition influences judgment of consumers towards psychological decision-making (Thoma & Williams, 2014). Therefore, brand awareness does not necessarily means that brand recall occurred, but more to brand recognition where consumers could also undergo recognition when they recognize the location of the brand, the packaging, and its logo (Rossiter & Percy, 1987).

The second level of brand knowledge pyramid is Brand Image. A brand needs to express its meaning through certain relationships, either direct or indirect. The former one refers to consumers' direct experiences and contact with the brand while the latter

one refers to the depiction of the brand in publicizing or other ways of communication. Keller (2001) defines brand image as the associations that people have towards a brand. Brand image allows consumers to understand and relate the messages that the brand wishes to deliver. The delivery of these messages is able to be done by the brand through either indirect or direct expression.

In addition, the extrinsic characteristics of the products or services are also one of the concerns of brand image. These characteristics encompass the strategies which attempted by the brand to fulfill consumers' psychological or social needs. Others like history, heritage and experiences where consumers could create association towards the brand when their needs are met as well as user profiles, values, personality and also purchase and usage situations are all considered as extrinsic characteristics (Keller, 2001). Looking from another point of view, brand image can be referred as consumers' imagination about the brand rather than their actual memory on the brand. These attributes in turn, help to satisfy more customers' latent needs as a bonus to the basic product. Similarly, Aaker (1991) mentioned that brand image is a set of association in consumer's memory. Brand that expresses their image tend to have more influence satisfaction of consumers and when satisfaction of consumers are fulfilled, consumers become more loyal towards the brand (Bluemer & Ruyter, 1998). Hence, it is believed that brand image is very important in influencing consumer's purchase intention.

The third level of brand knowledge pyramid is brand evaluation. Brand evaluation is assessed as the collection of consumers' opinions about the certain important values consisting of quality, likeability and the perception of products in comparison with one another. Keller (2001) proposed that brand evaluation is the consumers' own personal judgments with the respects to the particular brand itself.

Here, consumers will have their respective thoughts, contrasts and comments in evaluating the brand's aspects before making final decisions about taking in a brand to themselves. Two distinct dimensions of brand evaluation are present. They are known as the rational and emotional aspects. Keller (2001) defined that the rational of the brand evaluation is divided into four different passages. They are brand superiority, brand considerations, brand credibility (trustworthiness and likeability) and brand quality. On the other hand, the emotional brand evaluation is used as measuring channel on the emotional responses, reactions and feedback of consumers towards a particular brand. Consumers would have their respective powers to think freely and respond to available brands diversely for comparison purposes. In other words, it is refer to an inner state of mind which is either positive or negative. There are six types of emotional brand evaluation which defined by Keller (2001). Particularly, they are self-respect, social approach, security, excitement, firm and warmth.

Brand attachment stands tall as it is the highest level of the brand knowledge pyramid. This compartment measures the depth or the intensity of the psychological bond which built by the consumers with the brand and the level of activities by the consumers that reflects the loyalty of the brand. In addition, brand attachment is closely associated with brand trust. This is because trust forms attachment as consumers who trust the brand would be attached to the brand and would stay loyal to the brand. Therefore, they would do repeat purchases on that particular brand. This allows consumers who have high amount of confidence and trust towards the brand would only be able to increase the purchase intention towards the brand. Brand attachment brings consumers closer to the brand where consumers trust and loyalty are equally essential for decision making purposes about a selected brand (Keller, 2001).

Through this study, brand awareness and brand image are frequently used as the factors to measure the brand knowledge. This is because, the big picture of brand image functions as an attraction device to draw consumers into the activities of purchasing the products or services. Brand awareness creates the knowledge frame that the consumer would find it useful when scouting or discovering a particular brand. This is further strengthened by the study of Keller et al (2008), whereby consumers' awareness of a brand name holds the first critical stage in the process of developing the world of brand knowledge.

2.2.2 Reflective Formative Model of Brand Trust

In this highly competitive market condition, brand trust significantly drawn the attention of many researchers in the process of developing and improving better customer relationships (Selnes, 1998). This is essential to deliver satisfaction for the customers according to their demands, wants, and needs for a particular brand they chose. Other than that, the process of building up customer commitment (Morgan & Hunt, 1994) and the process of maintaining customer loyalty (Ball et al, 2004; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000) also must be taken into count.

Brand trust enables the company to have a longer sustainable quality of the particular brand's life. Retaining the consumers helps the organization of the brand to generate higher sales and profit margin. Furthermore, loyal consumes who have confidence towards the organization of the brand would buy extensions from that brand. Hence, the sales of the company would increase indirectly as well.

Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) and Lau & Lee (1999) had defined that brand trust is about the willingness of the customers by relying on the brand's ability to perform its functions. Therefore, consumers who are able to rely on the brand are said that they trust the brand. For a consumer, who is able to rely on the brand meant that the brand has performed to the consumers' expectation. When the brand is able to perform what it is expected, the organization of the brand understood the needs and wants of the consumers.

On the other hand, Delgado – Ballester et al. (2003) defined it as 'the confident expectations of a brand's reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer'. It is because when a company takes in higher risk, there will be a higher chance of delivering better results and benefits for the consumers. Both variables of risk and delivery are both positively related. It is not easy to deliver good results if organizations are not to take risk. Risk taking is essential in order to get brand awareness. Furthermore, risk taking involves heavy brand innovation and differentiation in order to satisfy the needs and wants of consumers.

Other than that, it is shown that brand trust in a multidimensional perspective has a better conceptualization compared with the one-dimensional in the studies of Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001) and Lau & Lee (1999). Brand trust can be built in various numbers of ways without even noticing the activities going on sometimes. Past studies from (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Lau & Lee, 1999; Mayer, et al, 1995; Moorman et al, 1992; Zucker, 1986; Larzelere & Huston, 1980) indicated that brand trust can be measured with reflective indicators. Therefore, the feedback received should be taken into account for further evaluation and processing to improve its brand

quality in the future. Nevertheless, as time passes by, the relationship of the overall brand trust to its dimensions may be different in nature.

Reflective-formative model of brand trust is used widely in order to explain the variable of brand trust. It is stated that brand trust is not only determined by the first order factors of brand competence and brand benevolence but it is also a second-order factor that relates. This theory elaborates that brand trust is developed based on the multidimensional construct and it contributes collectively from each of the dimensions because they have specific content domains and behave independently from each other (Delgado – Ballester et al. 2003). It is proposed that the trust of consumers towards a brand may occur at different levels. Consumers' expectations towards a particular brand vary and hence, their level of trust is equally different. This premise would comprehend a systematic assessment of the holistic structure of brand trust (Li et al, 2007).

The statement was further evolved that the brand trust of a product is derived from three different dimensions which are Brand Credibility, Brand Integrity and Brand Benevolence (Delgado – Ballester, et al 2003). Brand credibility is the attribute required to measure the brand's ability to meet the consumers' expectations and demands. When consumers' expectations on their needs and wants are met, they will have confidence in that brand which would encourage repeat purchase on the brand. Brand integrity is also known as the attribute which is responsible to assess the loyal motivations to the brand in relation to its own generated promises involving the terms of exchange (Keller, 2001). Brand integrity allows consumers to feel connected to the brand. Brand integrity is developed when the consumers and marketers have enough information to make the brand established in the competitive business world. Meanwhile, brand benevolence is known as the attribute that is used to utilize the brand of durable consumer-oriented

policy with the consideration of the consumers' interest (Delgado – Ballester et al, 2003).

Li et al. (2007) proposed that the trust in one aspect of a selected brand may be different individually from other reoccurring aspects. This also implies that there is a lack of causal flow from the overall trust to focused dimensions. They further suggested that if one of the dimensions of brand trust is increasing, it will also be able to increase the overall trust of the customers towards the brand. In fact, this is due to the improved trust in one specific dimension like credibility. There is a high possibility that the present of a causal flow from the general construct to its specific dimensions may unlikely to occur. This is especially happened when the given trust in one aspect such as integrity may not cover with aspects like benevolence but with overall brand trust. Consequently, this implies that formative indicators are more appropriate to be the specific dimensions of the overall trust instead of reflective indicators. According to the studies done by Jarvis et al (2003), creditability, integrity and benevolence behaviors are believed to be the essential elements of brand trust due to their abilities to contribute to the overall brand trust.

2.2.3 Media Richness Theory

Media richness theory (MRT) is derived from information richness theory that is originated in the 1970s where the research from past researchers. This theory was used by many organizations to overcome internal and external challenges. Media richness theory is used by organizations to formulate ideal strategies on information strategies (Johnson, 2003; Daft & Lengel, 1986; Weick, 1979).

Media richness theory (MRT) is a basis to describe about the communication abilities by the organization of the brand. This theory is used as a medium in reproducing the information delivered from the sender to the receiver (Daft & Lengel, 1986). It was primarily developed to describe and assess the communication mediums used in exchanging information within firms. This is essential to retain solid information that will not cause unambiguous messages and uncertain circumstances for firms to integrate with their respective current and potential consumers. The generic application of MRT is to select an appropriate communication medium. This initiates that the main aim is to form a selection of a precise methodology. Its function is to reduce the equivocality of a clearer message which would not result scenarios into two or more misleading interpretations (Dennis et al 2008; Sun & Cheng, 2007; Daft et al. 1987).

This theory fundamentally suggests that each communication medium has a distinct richness or abilities in reducing the vagueness of message, varied interpretation besides enhancing the understanding on the content of message (Daft & Lengel, 1986). The rich medium is believed to be more effective in exchanging information in contrast to mediums with low richness which are claimed to be less effective. Figure 2.2 illustrate the theory of media richness which ranks the varied communication mediums based on its richness and effectiveness (Musil, 2012).

In addition, it also claims that richness of a communication medium can be assessed based on the medium's ability in handling simultaneous varied information cues, facilitating instant feedback, developing a personal focus and making use of natural language (Daft, Lengel & Trevino, 1987; Daft & Lengel, 1986).

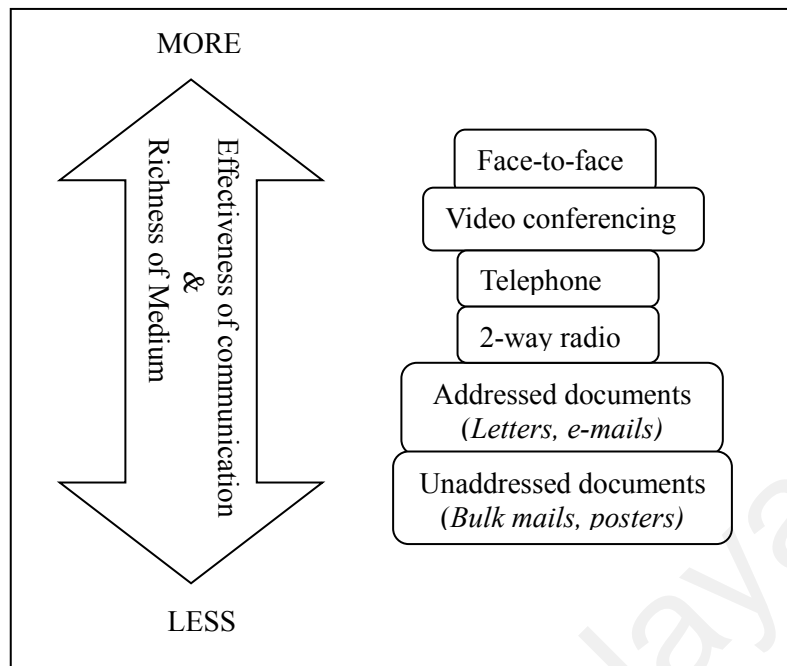


Figure 2.2: Illustration of Media Richness Theory
Source: Adopted from Musil (2012)

As illustrated in Figure 2.2, Face-to-face communication medium is the most effective and richer in delivery of a clear and unambiguous message. There are two types of face-to-face communication which are known as the verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal face-to-face communication permits utilization of two way communication where both sender and receiver are able to interact directly and give each other immediate feedbacks. Hence, allowing both sides of the party to be able to respond via questions and answers in order to have a clearer picture and understanding about the information delivery. In addition, verbal face-to-face communication enables sender's understanding on the receiver of the information through questions and answers. Hence, sender of the information would be able to personalize the way the message to be delivered to certain receivers in order to deliver a successful message where receiver would be able to understand. Non-verbal face-to-face communication enables both receiver and sender of the message to interpret their messages properly with emotional responses with the help of body languages and facial expressions (Rockmann & Northcraft, 2005).

Video conferencing is also known as the part of an effective form of communication and medium where it is a face-to-face communication through electronic device. This type of communication is convenient for everyone who live in different places to have a meeting. The benefit is that we could reach out to people freely without considering the distance. The disadvantage is that both parties must be available in order for the communication to progress and it is an informal procedure of communication which allows immediate feedback to take place.

Telephone and two ways radio communications is a mediocre in message delivery and richness in medium as it lacks face-to-face communication. Sender is not able to understand the receiver fully unless more specific questions are asked due to absence of nonverbal communication such as body language and facial expressions to understand how receiver truly feels during the message delivery process.

Addressed documents also known as written documents are positioned on the lower end of the continuous scale due to its inability in delivering information and message across to receiver immediately and to receive immediate feedback. In addition, written documents lack nonverbal communication which may cause receiver's attention to be lost.

Unaddressed documents are the least efficient form of communication and rich of medium as the message delivered is only one way. Hence, receiver of the information may view the message differently and it might cause misinterpretation of the message delivered. Therefore, the message would not be stored in the receivers mind, and would be ignored. Hence, consumers' decision weight will be affected as there is a risk propensity where consumers are unable to understand the message delivered (Johnson,

2003). Furthermore, the focus from consumers would be reduced which may be caused by noise. Noise is a disturbance that is caused by information overload. For example, too much posters on the streets would cause consumers to miss the piece of information that was essential for organizations to deliver to the consumers. In order to appeal to the consumers, the company should make their information piece bold and outstanding among other advertisements. The advertising ability of the company is put to the test as most companies tend to focus on the quantity instead of quality. The quality of the advertisement is more likely to catch the consumers' attention as quantity actually causes the consumers to become bored and 'used-to' the advertisement placed at the designated destination which leads to the lack of focus thus lose the meaning of the advertisement.

2.3 Brand Trust

Erdem and Swait (1998) proposed that brand is a statistic summary which is responsible to characterize the swelling chronological relationship among two distinct participating groups involved – the service provider and the consumers. Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2005) further enhance this definition. It is simply elaborated by defining a particular brand as a form of product or service that innovate much additional values. Based on the information obtained, the various accomplishments and previous experience of the consumers will develop their impression and the value of particular brand. Since the previous days, many companies had strived to build a powerful yet impactful brand in the market as they would be recognized by the public as the business giants. In order for the companies to operate so, all the current progressing companies need to expand their opportunities and knowledge to gain and create more competitive

advantages in the current operating market. The companies need to obtain higher profit margins, to garner enormous support from all sorts of chain members. Not only that, they are also required to grab the abundance of brand enlargement opportunities in every way possible (Albert et al, 2008; Delgado–Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005).

Looking at the flip side, trust refers to the sum of confidence required in particular individual that is able to derive from valid alternative source (Delgado–Ballester and Munuera-Aleman 2005). When the consumer has confidence towards a particular brand, the purchasing intention will increase. Moreover, trust also can be known as natural acknowledgement which is then processed to a significant or an eventful meaning about his or her purpose, conduct and intrinsic worth (Delgado–Ballester et al 2003). Consumers' acknowledgement of the product meant that the brand is in the memory of the consumers. Consumers are fully aware of the brand before acknowledgement can be developed.

Trust is also the steady state of readiness to rely on a person or firm based on the level of confidence derived from the actions and traits of the particular subject involving the content of risks and unforeseen uncertainties (Jevons & Gabbott, 2000). Consumers is said to trust the brand when they rely on a specific brand for their use. It takes a huge amount of confidence and trust in order to create reliability. Consumers often perceive that reliability is formed when the brand is able to satisfy their wants and needs. There, it lays a great consideration that is closely relatable to the quality of trust. Various researches had been carried out widely by scholars from different fields of operations such as management, marketing, economics, psychology and sociology (Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011; Albert, et al, 2008). These researches explain on how an organization of a certain brand creates confidence to consumers. The organizations

had put all business units to work in order to create a brand where consumers can rely on. It is said that organizations did in-depth research on their consumers. These researchers are meant to understand their consumers as the demand and needs of consumers are dynamic. In order to satisfy the ever changing needs and wants of consumers, organizations of the brand has to constantly evolve and innovate in order to allow the brand to stay in consumers' minds.

The amalgamation of both criteria of "brand" and "trust" results into an important concept in the field of marketing which originates from the various consumers' pervious purchase experiences and communications with a particular brand that they desired (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005). Researchers which have been investigating about brand trust have ascertained that consumers genuinely concern about the rate of success and failure of brands when they choose to trust the brand (Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011). They would reflect and evaluate their decisions about giving their hopes and willingness of the selected brand to meet their demands and expectations accordingly. Consumers often try the brand a few times in order to make sure that the brand matches their needs and wants. Along the way, consumers were also found that after a few trials, consumers would learn how to adapt to a certain brand. Adaptation is good as consumers would try to understand the brand and try to match their expectation towards the brand's performance. It takes a period of time so that the consumers are able fully understand how the brand works. Hence, the organization of the brand should deliver a precise message to the consumers. The message should be clear and unambiguous to the consumers in order for the message to get across. It is said that the message delivered is successful when consumers are able to comprehend the intended message. The message should be letting consumers understand the brand and at the same time to create awareness of the brand to potential

consumers. These messages are essential for consumers in order for them to comprehend whether the brand is suitable to their needs and wants. Furthermore, it is essential to determine the performance of the brands whether it is up to the expectation of the consumers.

Hence, brand trust results into high possibilities and expectations of consumers that the whole consumption of a brand is highly likely to attract potential customers and attract potential customers by generating a new platform both sides to deliver encouraging outcomes (Delgado–Ballester and Munuera-Aleman, 2005). Furthermore, it is also about consumers' anticipation of a brand's very own consistency and intentions that makes the brand to continue its life (Delgado-Ballester et al, 2003). Consumers' support is essential to keep the product and services growing. As the demand grows, the organization of a particular brand would have sufficient capital to continue its life. The support from consumers also allows companies to further innovate their brands in order to keep up with the consumers changing demands and needs. Consumers support does not mean that they only purchase the products out of trust. Consumers support also involves feedbacks and opinions are given to the organizations of the brand. This can easily happen when the organization is easily reached by consumers. In the media richness theory, it meant that there are two way communications which is provided by the company. These touch points of the organization enable consumers to be able to communicate and give feedbacks. In addition, touch points also allow consumers to clear their doubt on the brand as they ask questions on the brand.

In addition, brand trust is characterized as the unique individual relationship that exists between consumers and brands (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Besides, it is also often attributed as the eagerness or willingness of a consumer to depend on a

brand's capability to showcase its intended functions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). Through this, consumers will develop a natural behavior towards the particular brand they chose to stay with. Accordingly, brand trust is perceived when consumers took the considerations into account which is the risk factor associated with the brand (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011; Delgado-Ballester et al, 2003; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). From these studies, it is clearly understood that consumers took a considerable amount of confidence before purchase. Consumers weigh and sought out the risk that would be encountered when they purchase the brand. When consumers are committed to the brand, they will take their time in information searching where they look for information through the organization's available touch points, opinion from others such as WOM and also studies on the message that the company delivered through media. This shows that consumers have an intention to purchase. Hence, organization should create more touch points for consumers in order to create an easier and convenient way for them to reach the organization.

Krishnan and Hartline (2001) suggested that brand trust is one of the many vital components so that the brand could retain the customers' loyalty. It can be seen clearly in the service sectors. It is because, in order for them to serve, they need to be at their best with the necessary equipped information and patience to avoid any uncertainties, doubts and critics from the consumers. From the past studies (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera- Aleman, 2005; Reast, 2005), it was found that variables such as brand performance (a brand trust characteristic), brand affects, relationships of customers with a brand and the impact of credibility are dependent on trust-base commitment with a particular brand. These variables make up the whole picture of the brand trust. Besides that, according to Reast's (2005) study, he believes that brand trust of customers is an obvious future direction in other countries. He further suggested that the studies on

various aspects like services categories and low involvement product play a vital role in not only widening and expanding but also optimizing brand trust. Thus, in his conclusion, he pointed out that when building up brand trust, it will be an obvious disadvantage when a gap in knowledge is present. These factors must be eliminated in order to venture a quality brand trust in the market.

Past researchers (Reast, 2005; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Zucker, 1986; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985) had carried out studies that are corresponding on the topic of brand trust. It is stated that, due to the importance of customer loyalty in this highly competitive market environment, it affects the state of brand trust. For instance, Zucker (1986) proposed that consumers can afford much greater items in present and they are willing to purchase the company product with the main condition, which is the consumers need the confidence to trust the brand and the company altogether. Schurr and Ozanne (1985) also suggested that the value of trust can create more favorable attitudes towards suppliers and also customer loyalties. This will indirectly help partners' projects to exchange their relationships into the future. It will automatically enhance the bond and improve the ways of communication between the two parties by delivering them valid and proper information for further processing in the future. Doney and Cannon (1997) also pointed out that trust itself, can help to increase the urge and the level of competitiveness, to reduce the operations of searching and to analyze transaction costs, as well as to mitigate opportunism in uncertain contexts ahead. They suggested that brands that bind with trustworthy might benefit even greater than their less noticed competitors in the market of the same industry.

The past studies of (Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Ha, 2004; Sultan et al, 2002) had acknowledged the core importance of brand trust. It is by centering on identifying the

influences of brand trust upon consumers to discover even more information about brand trust. In fact, the study of brand trust initially derived from the study of social psychology (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán, 2001), with it being proposed that the relationship between the consumer and the brand is valid. These variables that relate to each other had been further understood and processed in order to get more attention especially in the online sales sector as the advancement of technology is always progressing from time to time (Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Ha, 2004; Srinivasan, 2004; Sultan et al, 2002; Lee & Turban, 2001).

From the study of Michell (1998), they actually discussed about brand trust. It is said that brand trust actually represents a significant correlated with consumers satisfaction. It could be seen as, before a consumer decides to place their trust on a particular product they have selected, they must be able to receive satisfaction by the performance of the brand itself. In order to do that, the consumers need to know about a brand. Besides thinking rationally, a consumer must take up the responsibility to know about the brand's attributes holistically before making further decisions. Other than that, Chinomona et al (2013) acknowledged the clarity of the association of brand trust in influencing the brand preferences of all types of consumers. Even though the numbers of empirical evidence are actively growing on brand trust, it is not clearly stated or highlighted in the marketing literature so as to describe and elaborate the importance of brand trust in the private higher education industry with validity. Hence, in majority, from the previous studies which carried out on antecedents of brand loyalty, there had been a large scale of activities conducted in developing countries as well as some parts of Asia. There is indeed an underlying void which is still warrant for further academic scrutiny (Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Ha, 2004; Srinivasan, 2004; Sultan et al, 2002; Lee & Turban, 2001).

Brand trust is essential for the organization of a brand. It comes in handy when there is a new brand extension, consumers who have confidence in that particular brand has no issues in purchasing from the brand extension as they are fully aware that they can trust the brand. A brand extension is known as almost “similar” to the parent brand category (Aaker & Keller, 1990). One of the characteristics of brand extensions is that the image concept and parent brand are similar (Bridges, 1990). Specifically, brand extension is launched as part of a sequence (Keller & Aaker, 1992) and the quality is known to be similar to the parent brand (Aaker, 1991). Furthermore, brand extension of a good parent brand is a more competitive market compared to other new entrants of brand extensions of other brands. Hence, consumers are actually confident in the brand and the perceived purchase risk is low (Anwar et al 2011). Furthermore, brand trust creates loyal consumers who would try out new brand extensions and generate WOM to other potential consumers. Loyal consumers tend to be advocates to other potential consumers by delivering WOM on their past purchase experiences and their knowledge. Hence, it is essential to build a strong foundation on trust to gain more loyal consumers and in order to be a market leader in the business industry.

Brand quality is one of the concerns in developing brand trust (Chen, 2001). Many consumers often perceive that high price means higher quality. Ensuring the brand quality up to the standard of the consumers’ expectation is crucial as the spread of WOM after consumers’ purchase experience would either increase the level of trust and confidence towards the brand or vice versa.

Brand trust can also be closely associated to brand quality. In the study of Chen (2001), brand quality is known to have a direct relationship with the purchasing behavior of consumers and the development of their attitude towards brand extensions.

With the amount of trust consumers put on the brand, the expected quality should be able to match the expectations of the consumers. Therefore, the brand has to deliver superb quality in order to impress consumers. In this way, new brand extensions would be an easy entrance when consumers have confidence on the brand's quality.

Other than that, brand quality does not only concern brand extensions but the parent brand itself. In order to retain loyal consumers and gain their trust, the brand's quality should be maintained or improvised. Hence, consumers' trust towards the brand would be definite. Brand quality is essential especially for high involvement products. High involvement products are brands which are expensive. Hence, consumers often weigh their decisions by evaluating and doing a series of decision making process so as to make the right decision.

Cognitive dissonance is a state of an individual facing inconsistent thought which created a negative intrapersonal state (Elliot & Devine, 1994). Cognitive dissonance can happen when there is reduced level of confidence towards a particular brand. Therefore, organization of a particular brand should utilize right media in order to reassure and to avoid consumers from facing cognitive dissonance after their purchase of their products and services. Media richness theory can be used to create marketing strategies in order to connect to their consumers and reassure them of their products and service. Furthermore, consumers can feel secure of their choice of purchase. In this way, it can help in reducing post purchase cognitive dissonance. On top of that, reassurance gives consumers a sense of security and also organizations of the brand are perceived to have good after sale service. Hence, the trust that the consumers have towards the brand could be enhanced and the trust towards the brand is further strengthened. Satisfied consumers would definitely share their experience of

their purchase which results in positive WOM. Hence, organizations of the particular brand can increase their brand trust and confidence from other potential consumers.

Brand trust can be closely associated to brand attachment where consumers are defined as loyal and have confidence towards the brand in the theory of brand knowledge pyramid. Brand attachment is the highest level of brand knowledge. In this stage, consumers would have a better understanding and a closer relationship towards the brand. This is where consumers are able to find an association towards the product. Furthermore, brand attachment in this stage meant that consumers already have better knowledge on the brand and can fully relate to the brand. Trust is created when brands were able to meet the expectations and needs of consumers. Hence, consumers were satisfied with the performance of the brand after understanding the brand's usage. To fully understand the brand, consumers need sufficient knowledge so that they could feel attached to the brand and trust the brand. This could be done after sufficient surveys and trials on the brand.

Consumers trust towards the brand would lead to brand loyalty (Lau & Lee, 1999) which is known to be the measurement of attachment of a consumer towards a brand (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty is essential for a company to build long term profits and sales. In addition brand loyalty enables company to have a successful entry when they launch a new brand extension. Once consumers are loyal, positive WOM is easily spread among consumers and other potential consumers. Brand loyalty is known as consumers who have repeat purchase behavior and intention to repurchase a particular brand (Brown 1952). According to Guest (1955) and Jacoby (1971), there are two components of brand loyalty known as the brand loyal behaviour and brand loyal

attitudes. Attitude is known to influence the behaviour of an individual. Behaviour is known to have partially affected by situational factors which is availability.

In addition, Luhmann (1979) proposed a theory known as sociological theory of trust which provides three dimensions in asserting expectations based on personal experiences and cultural meaning systems. These three dimensions are known as familiarity, confidence, and trust. Familiarity is the foundation of the development of trust where consumer must first be familiar of the brand before they can learn more of the brand. Besides that, familiarity encourages purchase intention as they know the brand either through WOM or external media (Janiszewski, 1989). Familiarity leads to confidence on the particular brand due to careful evaluation and sufficient information. When consumers are familiar with the brand, they are confident to buy. Hence, brand trust is established.

Furthermore, brand trust can be easily developed using media richness theory. Consumers' confidence and trust towards the brand can be developed using appropriate media such as the face to face medium. Organizations of the brand should let consumers have a trial on their brands in order to create an impression and let consumers evaluate them. It is essential for organizations to organize and place suitable and appropriate touch points for consumers to learn more of the brand. Face to face communication is considered as a good way to build trust between two parties involved.

This study had used the Three Dimensions of Brand Trust (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003) as a measuring tool for the variables present in brand trust. This model is proposed that there are three essential components to be measured for the brand trust among the consumers, namely: brand credibility, brand integrity and brand benevolence.

2.3.1 Brand Credibility

In present days, the society and the market portray highly competitive market environment, as the value of customer loyalty has become an essential source for the companies to sustain in the intense world of competition. Companies in majority, especially in the service sector managed to change their servicing sector by directing its focus on the satisfaction of various consumers, as the criteria of credibility becomes the key factor of their main success in business. Sweeney et al (2008) suggested that if only a company can consistently attract and retain its potential and existing consumers for a longer duration of time and provide credible brand product for them, other uprising external issues could be suppressed. This is because the random untruthful information received may ruin up customers satisfactions and consequently bring hurt and stress to the company to continue its operations and productions. Although this concept may be workable but it is surely not an easy task to build up its very own type of brand credibility.

According to Erdem & Swait (1998), brand credibility is channel of a long term investment. It is referred that way because it involves consumers' trust and believes on the particular product. Hence, to improve the brand credibility, a company needs to generate its own initiatives and to keep its promises. Not only that, the companies must always act based on their words to satisfy consumers by delivering them the confidence to trust their published brand.

According to Simons (2002), the credibility is known as the perceivers' assessment of the communicators' relevant knowledge, honesty and good intentions towards the perceivers (McCroskey & Young, 1981). Herbig & Milewicz (1995) further

enhanced the definition of credibility. It is by including the component of believability of an organization. They proposed that the more believable the message source is, the more likely it is to influence the receptor. The attraction will get stronger when the presence of acceptance and trust are present. Simons (2002) suggested that credibility will occur when reliable organizations managed to execute their responsibilities as they were told and also meeting consumers' expectations. In addition, the credibility is also time sensitive whereby the existing organization may perceive different credibility in the future. It is also based on the intention of organizations accordingly to its purposes and promises. All of this would exist when the organization evaluate and tend to use past actions confidently to predict the future behaviors overtime. Much experience and judgment are needed in order to forecast results in a more consistent manner.

Other than that, Ohanian (1990) also suggested that creating positive traits from sender that further manipulates a receiver to accept the sender's message is the criterion of credibility. It can be done through various forms of communicating the message between one and other. This can be regarded that the brand credibility as believability of intentions of an article at a specific period of time. Wang & Yang (2010) suggested that the sender could be a form of a person, a brand, a company, a mascot etc. Gurviez & Korchia (2003) proposed that brand credibility is considered as an advantage of the brand to assess and meet the consumers' expectations. It is based on the consumers' attribution to the brand with a certain degree of expertise which derived from consumers' functional expectations for their needs and wants of satisfaction level.

Erdem & Swait (1998) proposed that there are three main components in brand credibility based on their study of consumers – based brand equity by using signaling theory. The three main components of brand credibility are trustworthiness, expertise

and attractiveness (Erdem, et al, 2006). Trustworthiness describes about how reliable the information of a particular brand is to people. The consumers would be able to know more about the brand while develop their trust towards a particular brand that they are interested in. Meanwhile, expertise is about the company's abilities to provide what they promised based on the particular product. This is where the company's advantages are showcased on the service providing for the customers before and after purchase. On the other hand, attractiveness is the evaluation of brand in terms of personality determinants. Different people have different perspective over brands. Various people around would have respective impression and thoughts when they have their first sight of a brand available in the market.

Erdem & Swait (1998) came up with a relatable relation. They claimed that the better the brand credibility, the lower the perceived risk from the consumers. In conjunction, it results in the less information gathering and processing costs consumers would be required to incur during the decision making process. Furthermore, a good brand credibility will also be able to increase expectations from consumers and directing them towards a good quality of product when compared with less credible brands. Gurviez & Korchia (2003) further suggested that good brand credibility would further improve the quality perceptions of consumers as the signals of brands would influence the psychological process by which objective quality levels are transferred into perceived levels.

Brand credibility can be measured in these three dimensions known as brand expertise, brand trustworthiness, and brand likability. Brand expertise is the extent where brand is a market leader, innovative and competent. In brand expertise, it is seen as the brand is able to differentiate itself from its competitors well through quality

concerns such as quality on service or product where consumers are able to form positive judgment on the brand. Furthermore, when brand is able to differentiate itself, it meant that the brand is competent and innovative where it can grasp consumers' awareness and increases consumers purchase intention, where, it can become a market leader. Brand trustworthiness can be seen in the dimension where the brand is dependable and sensitive towards the interests of consumers. Hence, consumers are able to trust the brand because it can satisfy the needs and wants of the consumers. In order to have brand trustworthiness, a good brand image should be formed to express what the brand can do for the consumers. Brand likability on the other hand is the fun, interesting and worth time spent when consumers are using the brand. This dimension can be easily measured when consumers give feedbacks to the organizations of the brand (Keller, 2001).

On top of that, brand credibility can be done after sufficient evaluation has been done. Brand evaluation is the third highest in the brand knowledge pyramid where consumers would already have sufficient information and knowledge on a particular brand. Hence, they are able to make emotional or rational evaluations based on the image that the brand expresses itself. Furthermore, brand credibility can be done when organizations of a particular brand utilizes the appropriate communication tool from the media richness theory to communicate and deliver the message intended of their brand to the targeted consumers. Brand credibility can be easily developed when consumers are able to connect with the brand such as trials, meeting with the brand's employees having moment of truths. It is essential that the brand is able to deliver what it is expected by consumers. Therefore, interacting with the targeted consumers are essential in order to understand their needs and wants. Furthermore, having connection with consumers enables the organization to understand the consumers and are able to deliver

what is expected of, makes consumers feel that the brand is trustworthy and worth their time and money spent for the product. In addition, understanding consumers help in getting the right approach to deliver the message to the targeted consumers and with the appropriate message delivered, consumers would be able to evaluate the brand thoroughly.

Based on the reviews of past studies on brand credibility, it is referred to consumers' level of believability towards the product information which integrated in a particular brand. To realize that concept, it is required that consumers should perceive the brand as in having the expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness blended altogether.

2.3.2 Brand Integrity

Marketing researchers (Beerli et al, 2004; Caruana, 2002; Bloemer et al, 1999; Reichheld, 1996; Aaker, 1991) acknowledged that brand integrity is an essential component in order to gain the trust from the consumers. The consumers believed that the companies which are having the existing great pool of brand loyalists will result and benefit greater market shares and obtain higher rates of return of investments.

A loyal and contented consumer base is able to assist in increasing the company's relative bargaining power effecting the suppliers, partners and channels (Anderson et al, 2004). In other words, it means that loyalty of customers will be reduced in the stage of instability and the chances of associated risk of the company occurring in the future would be much lower. Dick and Basu (1994) further enhanced

the importance of brand integrity by acknowledging the customer loyalty. This is because, through this brilliant way, can create positive WOM communication and create better competitive strategies for companies to experience and expand. This is agreed by the study of Oliver (1999), where customer loyalty is engaged in affirmative WOM communication. Hence, there are much more research studies in present that place more focus on the variables in the topic of brand integrity.

Gurviez and Korchia (2003) defined integrity as the attribution of loyal motivations to the brand in relation to its promises which involving the terms of the exchange. Other than that, this is also known as the honesty of its 'claims' in the widest meaning of the word. According to Gurviez and Korchia (2003), the measuring level of success of a company in a competitive market condition is highly depending on the achievement of organizational goals that can satisfy the needs of their consumers of various categories. This can be seen through the pattern of the frequency of consumers who is still keeping contact consistently with the company. There, it forms a frequency relation. The more frequently the consumers purchase the product, the higher customer loyalty would form towards the company. However, it is not an easy task to be implemented, as consumers nowadays are well informed. Since they are quite well equipped and they contain the complete information of the products brand that enables them understand the motives of marketers, they do not give in easily in fulfilling their tasks. Hence, brand integrity becomes a herculean responsibility for all marketers. However, when the company is able to achieve the brand integrity from its consumers, it will result in a great success to the company itself.

Erdem and Swait (1998) acknowledged that when consumers have the perception that the brand offers the accurate product features, the image or quality level

at an ideal fair price to everyone equally, brand integrity will occur. Hence, in order to nurture the brand integrity among the consumers, companies must place their attention on the mechanism of information delivery. However, not all companies adept this art and struggle to establish themselves in the consumers' heart. Thus, this would be one of the biggest challenges for all companies. It is because the companies need to come up with a good brand integrity that recognizes the brand as something that greater than a set of attributes which can be surpassed or imitated so that they can grab a success (Erdem & Swait, 1998). This significant, especially most company must view its brand as brand image that defines its company's philosophies in the present days so far.

Brand integrity is referred to the biased (non – random) behavioral response (buyer) which are expressed over time by some decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of brands and it became a functional property of psychological process (Jacoby, 1971, p25). In this study, there are two different dimensions of brand integrity which is used to explain the motivation of loyalty on the consumers: attitudinal brand integrity and behavioral brand integrity.

According to Mellens et al (1996), the consumers' predisposition towards a brand as a function of psychological process is referred as attitudinal brand loyalty. In particular, this includes commitment towards the brand, attitudinal preference and intention to purchase the brand as a part of the big picture of evaluation. While behavioral brand integrity is the tendency of a consumer to repurchase the brand, it is revealed through behavior which can be measured and which has a direct impact on the brand sales (Hammond et al, 1996).

Through the review of past studies, brand integrity can be seen as the consumers' perception on the sincerity, honesty and concern of a brand in meeting the consumer's interest throughout his and other's repeat purchases.

2.3.3 Brand Benevolence

Benevolence behavior is a primary component in service sector. It acts as a brief demonstration to the consumers that the employees are well trained and the products are reliable to market as well. Researchers (Ganesan & Hess, 1997; Morgan & Hunt, 1994) proposed that benevolence behavior is characterized by the pro – consumer attitudes and by the refuting aspect to adopt an opportunistic behavior exclusively based on their own interest. Furthermore, from benevolent service, employees are able to persuade and motivate the consumers even more that they will receive a special token which is supplementary to the contract in question. Even though this would be recognized as a special token that may incur additional cost inclusively to the company, but this enables the enhancement of the loyalty and trust from the consumers towards the company and not forgetting its products in the future.

Benevolence is an attribution to a brand of a durable consumer. It is indeed acted as an oriented policy which has considered consumers' interest in the short term period even before the brand interest. It means the presumption of a benevolent brand policy towards the consumer managed to help consumers to experience a leverage which is more secure in future, since what were offered is the durable terms of a fair exchange for everyone (Gurviez & Korchia, 2003). Mayer et al (1995) further enhanced the definition by referring benevolences as the extra contractual behaviors of employees

that assigned to assist consumers to improve the latter's wellbeing. Other than that, benevolence can also be considered as the willingness of employees to take consumers' interests into account in the process of making decisions. The past researchers (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002; Mudrack et al, 1999; Upchurch & Ruhland, 1996) suggested that benevolent employees always act accordingly with much attentive sensitivity as well as rational consideration to not only the consumers' respective needs but also their interests. Mayer et al. (1995) proposed that benevolence consists of two different dimensions which is known as the altruistic benevolence and mutualistic benevolence.

Jarvenpaa et al (1998) stated that altruistic benevolence refers to the extent to which interpersonal care and concern are felt and received by a trustee as well as the extent of the trustee's willingness to do good to the trustor beyond egocentric profit intentions. As for Mayer et al. (1995), they believe that altruistic benevolence is an extra contractual sub behavior which helps to improve the counterpart's wellbeing without apparent future forecast gain. This behavior is essential for most companies especially in the servicing industry. Through the altruistic benevolence, employees will be much more willing to offer unilateral assistance voluntarily to serve the consumers naturally without burdens. Through this extra mile of additional services, it not only helps to retain the existing customer loyalty but also able to attract more new potential consumers all around. Jarvenpaa et al. (1998) suggested that employees who have the characteristics of altruistic benevolences are more willing to help the customers even though they are not required to do so. Altruistic benevolent employees provide guidance in order to help consumers voluntarily without emphasizing egocentric profits.

In spite of that, according to Doney and Cannon (1997), the extent to which one party is genuinely has interest in the other parties' well - being and will seek for future joint gain is known as mutualistic benevolence. In other words, mutualistic benevolence can be known as the extra – contractual assisting behavior which is promoted by the future joint gain. Furthermore, since mutualistic benevolence is based on the reciprocal utilitarian motives, Mayer et al. (1995) further elaborated it as a calculator as such employees may provide additional assistance to consumers during the service so that their loyalty toward the products or companies can be enhanced.

Based on the reviews of past studies, brand benevolence can be defined as the initiative of employees in favouring consumers' interests in order to avoid any discomfort situations to consumers and to enhance the customer loyalty for future benefits towards the company.

2.4 Brand Knowledge

Keller (2003) proposed that brand knowledge has a close relationship to individual meaning about a brand stored in consumers' respected memories. In synonym, it can be also referred as the description and evaluation of the brand's very own relatable information and characteristics. This encompasses a brand node in consumers' memories that gradually develop and create a diversity of associations which is connected. It is essential for companies to understand thoroughly about the influences of brand knowledge because it contains the ability to assist consumers to understand the companies' products and services in a more holistic and deep manner. Emotional connection and impression in the form of evaluation and assessment can be influenced

by brand knowledge when consumers evaluate the particular brand. They would have objective judgments by their individuality attachments towards a product that they would buy. Not only that, consumers who are loyal would pass down the trusted brand to other generations of users and potential users as well through various indirect channels. Through brand knowledge, it helps to increase the loyalty of the customers, subsequently decrease the price elasticity of each demand, and make improvements in the marketing effectiveness as well as initiating better market competitive chances (Keller, 2001)

Hsu and Cai (2009) had acknowledged that the importance of awareness and the image of brand are strongly correlated with the respective consumers' memories that had been taken into count. This is further strengthened by the studies of Aaker (1991) and Davis et al (2008) which showcased that brand awareness and brand image are used often to build stable foundations of substantial outlays in distribution of goods and services, promotions and advertising campaigns. Besides that, brand awareness and brand image were discovered to have significant associations with one another (Atilgan et al, 2005; Pappu, 2005). They both proposed that when the level of brand awareness is higher, the positive image of the brand itself would grow better (Esch et al, 2006). Hence, this study focuses on the components of both the brand awareness and brand image in measuring the main title of brand knowledge.

2.4.1 Brand Awareness

Keller (1993) proposed that the primary dimension in order to establish good brand knowledge is to make use of brand awareness. This is taken into account that the first

and initial prerequisite dimension for the brand knowledge system to work, the functions of brand awareness needs to be fully optimized. In addition, it portrays consumers' ability in brand identification (Keller, 1993). The ability for consumers to identify the brand is essential as it is proven that consumers are aware of the brand. Besides that, for a consumer to be able to identify the brand mean that they are familiar with that brand. As mentioned earlier, familiarity is important to increase purchase intention of a particular brand.

Besides that, Schmitt (2012) defined that brand awareness as the abilities of consumer in brand recognition and brand recall. In particular, brand awareness exists when consumers are alert on the basic identity of the company or product's name to the advanced cognitive detailed information about the product. Additionally, Huang & Sarigo (2012) and Nedungadi (1990) acknowledged brand awareness as a component that is significantly connected with the possibility of a brand name coming to mind easily. Consumers who can easily recall the brand's or organization's name is known to have brand recognition. Therefore, organization of the particular brand that can make sure that consumers are able to recall their brand's name had successfully utilized the media richness theory in developing a successful media. Successful media meant that the intended message that the organization delivers reached the consumers.

In the view of Farquhar (2000), brand awareness describes the rate of speed over a given period of time or in other words, how fast the brand elements could be recalled by a consumer in his or her memory. This organic activation attitude happens spontaneously upon the observation of the object. In addition, Farquhar (2000) further suggested that only consumers with high brand awareness can make relevant choices when selecting the products for purchasing purposes or repurchasing purposes of a

targeted brand. This is because when consumers are more aware of the brand, they tend to do repeat purchases as they easily recall the brand. Familiarity is all that counts for consumers in making decision for purchase on low involvement products. Low involvement products are normally products which don't require much information search but more to spontaneous decision.

Keller (1993) acknowledged that brand awareness actually brings a significant impact that contributes to the decision making process of consumers by influencing the strength of the brand associated in each of their minds. Brand awareness is responsible to play a crucial role in influencing consumers' decision making to purchase. This is because it helps the consumers to recall and recognize the selected product that they would like to purchase. Besides that, having good brand awareness enables the probability of the brand to be selected to increase as it is to be considered and selected by the consumers before purchase (Keller, 1993). When consumers have the advantage to recall the brand in the product category, it automatically provides the awareness to the consumers. This will let the consumers know about the existence of brand in their memory instantly. Therefore, they may consider and initiate their own intentions to purchase the particular brand or not. Keller (1993) further explained that the brand awareness also affects consumers' decision during the brand selection process, even though there is absence of a particular brand in their thoughts, they would still take the external factors into considerations.

Besides that, brand awareness is important among consumers as it helps them to reduce risk in purchasing, especially towards a newly launched product. Keller (1993) agreed that trust – based relationship between the consumers with the company can be cultivated through brand awareness. Through this way, consumers' confidence in their

purchase decision and their perceived risk assessment can be influenced because of their familiarity with the brand and its traits.

In this society, higher education market is becoming more competitive as more established education institutions enters into this high profit earned industry. Heaney and Heaney (2008) suggested that in order to stand competitive advantages in higher education industry, universities can utilize public relation to establish their institutions as the leaders in their field, and earn the trust from the public, as well as expand their brand awareness online (Heaney & Heaney, 2008). PHEIs can use their public relations and internet marketing effort in order to increase the brand awareness. Universities may consider sharing some videos, articles, picture about the universities, thus the future consumers may remember their existing in the market.

From the study of Ye and Raaij (2004), they suggested that, to build strong brand awareness, it is necessary to attract the consumers' attention first in their memory. It is a vital initiation step to approach the consumers first. Hence, they concluded that, there is a valid correlation relationship that exists between three components. They are brand awareness, brand recall and recognition performance by consumers. Other than that, Hoeffler and Keller (2003) also demonstrated that brand awareness consists of two important elements. They are known as brand recall and brand recognition. Brand recall refers as the tendency on how easily consumers can remember the product by looking at the basic information in their memory; while brand recognition portrays the level of liquidity of consumers who are able recall the product by just looking at the basic information. It is said that to obtain a bold brand awareness, it is essential to ensure that the brand is well known by the consumers compared with those new or unknown products. Through the review of some past studies, the conclusion is formulated stating

that, brand awareness in study can be defined as the consumers' ability in recognizing and recalling the brand name.

Brand awareness influences consumer's decision making as it utilizes heuristics of choice where consumers often purchase brands they are familiar with (Hoyer & Brown, 1990). The known brand will be normally chosen as consumers believed that it is safe to purchase and it might probably be the best. Heuristics are also known as good rule of thumb where consumers often purchase brands that they perceive can meet their expectations. Rule of thumb is also referred as the "gut feeling".

Brands are made familiar through word of mouth and also through mass communication means. Keller et al. (2008) proposed that through the strength and formation of brand associations in the brand image, brand awareness is able to influence consumers' decision making. Most importantly, a necessary condition is needed for the creation of a brand image. This condition is that a brand node has been established in consumers' memory and the nature of the brand node must influence the consumers on how easily different types of information could be attached to the brand in consumers' memory.

Based on Koniewki (2012), brand awareness can be measured using three types of indicators known as spontaneous brand recall, top of mind recall, and aided recall. Spontaneous brand recall is when consumer chooses the brand when there is a given product category which in short, means the consumer's selection range. Consumers at this stage would be aware of the brands that are easily remembered.

On the other hand, Top-of-mind recall indicator which is also known as “the most remembered brand” and the brand has the highest value where consumers will think of the brand first. This indicator concludes that the emotional link created with the brand is stronger compared to the spontaneous recall. The emotional link is created when consumers feel that the brand has an association to the consumer by having strong brand image. Other than that, it can be developed from constant reminder by the brand through appropriate media (Koniewski, 2012).

Meanwhile, aided recall is referred to consumers’ recognition of a brand among other brands, showing their ability of recognizing the brand when they have seen and heard about it which also indicates that aided recall has a weak link between the brand and the consumer. Brand awareness measures the effectiveness of the company’s marketing activity, and indirect factors that the company is unable to control such as the perception of a consumer towards the brand and recommendations by other consumers (Koniewski, 2012).

High brand awareness helps brands to generate more potential consumers and sales. High brand awareness is beneficial for both the consumer and the brand. Consumers with high brand awareness would be able to give feedbacks and extra information to the organizations of the brand. The feedbacks on performance of the brand and also the needs and wants of the consumers would be able to help the organization of the specific brand to be able to improve their services or products so as to match the needs of the target market. In addition, they are able to create and develop a more appropriate tool for customers’ communication so as to generate more awareness from potential consumers and retain loyal consumers.

In short, brand awareness is the basis that influences consumers' purchasing intention (Koniewski, 2012). Awareness is also obtained through proper communication tools that are used to create consumers' acknowledgement and encouraging consumers to gather more information of the brand once they are aware of the brand. Organizations of the brands can easily capture the attention of consumers by expressing the brand with the right brand image. Hence, consumers would be able to relate to the brand and increases their purchase intention.

As mentioned above in the brand knowledge pyramid, brand awareness creates brand attachment as consumers grow more aware of the product and slowly move to the stage where they would want to learn more of the brand. Through the learning process, consumers would feel the need of the brand and slowly find the brands meaning of existence and how the consumers can relate to the brand. Brand awareness can be developed through proper communication tools such as utilizing the media richness theory. Organizations of the particular brand will employ the appropriate communication medium in order to deliver their message across to the consumers of their brand and their company (Daft et al, 1987).

2.4.2 Brand Image

Brand image gives off its meaning through extrinsic properties, including ways on how brands attempts to meet consumer's needs on social and psychological. According to Keller (2001), brand image is based on how consumers perceive "what the brand does" and the concept of the brand in terms of quality and performance. Brand image also

helps consumers to be able to identify the needs that the brand satisfies (Hsieh et al, 2004).

Brand image can be easily referred to the brand's intangible aspects namely user profiles, experiences, heritage, history, personality and values as well as purchase and usage situations. User profile is associated with the type of consumers who use the brand where consumers would be more inspirational and idealized users. Specifically, brand users might be classified according to demographic profiles like the gender, race, age, income level and marital status. Psychographic factors are lifestyles, careers, social issues, and attitudes. Besides that, purchase and usage situations are also intangibles of the brand image where it concerns the conditions such as the type of channel that the brand is distributed or the location of the brand, specific store, availability and convenience of purchase. Other than that brands will also differ one another due to its personality traits that are relatable to different group of people. Personality such as ruggedness, sophistication, competence, excitement and sincerity are the five dimensions of brand personality. Subsequently, the past events may develop a brand itself relatively which may contain personal experiences or episodes that consumers from various identities may find it familiar.

Berry et al (1988) acknowledged that the importance of a brand image in marketing strategy as a strong brand image is able to act as a strong competitive advantage towards its competitors. Through a strong brand image, it helps to reinforce the image in consumers' memories, which enable them to remember and buy the product. Hence, brand image is essential for product differentiation in which it provides assistance for consumers to distinguish the brand among other brands. In this way, consumers' likelihood to purchase the differentiated product brand would increase

(Hsieh et al, 2004). This is further supported by the study of Schiffman and Kanuk (1991), where consumers perceive a known and famous brand is more desirable solely due to the difference in image.

In addition, Koniewski (2012) stated that in order to develop a positive brand image, organizations of the brand has to establish a unique, favourable and strong association for the brand so as to satisfy the needs of the specific target of consumers. Furthermore, having strong brand image helps in creating positive communication other than being able to differentiate itself from competitors. Positive communications leads to good brand image where consumers are able to trust the brand and also increase their purchasing intention (Aaker, 1991). Furthermore, consumers are able to share their experience and their positive judgment of the brand with their peers which results in positive word of mouth.

According to the brand knowledge pyramid, the highest level of brand knowledge is brand attachment where consumers found its relationship and association with the brand. Consumers at this stage are dependent on the brand and their trust fully integrated as they have high confidence of that particular brand when they had already climbed the pyramid of brand knowledge.

Keller (1993) also acknowledged that brand image is one of the many attributes which is essential in influencing the buying behavior among the consumers. Brand image is known as the associations of external target groups which contain a general knowledge and recognition in their respective minds about the particular brand that they have selected. This shouldn't be seen lightly because, being as one of the crucial determinants of buying behavior among the consumers, this can strongly affect brand

image (Gurhan-Canli & Batra, 2004; Keller, 1993). This is further acknowledged by Hsieh et al (2004), where it stated that, brand image contributed a lot in helping consumers in recognizing their own needs and satisfactions about the brand itself, and also indirectly help the company to compete with other competitors. This enables the consumers to make their own choices based on the differences and the uniqueness of all brands out there. Brands should be varied and can be differentiated from one another. This forms the need of competitiveness between the brands in the market. However, in the study of Park & Rabolt (2009), it is contradicting because it was said that brand image did not influence directly on attitudinal brand loyalty. However, the mediation of consumers' satisfactions and brand trust actually showed an indirect effect of brand image to attitudinal brand loyalty.

Biel (1993) acknowledged that consumers' perception is important in brand image in comparison. Hence, the studies that are mainly focused on brand image are rapidly increasing. In addition, Park et al (1986) acknowledged that consumers derive brand image from an equation. The equation stated that the total set of brand related activities done by a company, such as brand attitude, perceived value and feelings (Kirmani & Zeithaml, 1993) equals to brand image. To Reynolds et al (1984), there are several ways that brand image operationalizes. It can be workable through brand personality, beliefs and attitudes, perceptions of products, feelings or impressions, general characteristics and linkages between characteristics and feelings. All aspects of characteristics stated are all essential and must be worked closely to realize the main focus on building brand image. Besides that, Berry et al. (1988) also suggested that the elements of brand image consists of colors, symbols, words and slogans which would convey a much clearer and consistent message to the consumers. This would make the consumers to understand a product in a more in-depth or a more holistic manner.

On the other hand, Keller (1993) identified that through direct experience with brand information, brand associations could be obtained by the consumers. The information could be communicated through a variety of methods such as the company itself, media sources, word of mouth as well as inferences which is based on pre-existing associations with the brand itself. As a result, brand associations build up brand image and then deliver the brand's meaning to the consumers' memories.

Martinez & Pina (2003) proposed that the associations can be referred as tangible and intangible, intrinsic, or extrinsic aspect of a brand. They are all depending on personal experience. Keller (1993) suggested that the determinant of brand image consists of favourability, strength and uniqueness. Keller (1993) also defines favourability as how the extent of the favourability of the brand are evaluated with two choices to choose from as one main outcome. It is either positive or negative image; while uniqueness is referred as how special or how noticeable the brand stands when it is compared to others in the consumers' memory of brands. Furthermore, Keller (1993) and Aaker (1991) claimed that brand image can help to create huge importance and assists consumers with the compilation of information gathers, the concept that distinguish the brand, the reasons created to purchase, and also the constructive feelings being produced.

Brand image is also considered as a brand association as it is held in consumer's memory on how they can relate and associate with the brand either rationally or emotionally (Keller, 1993). Brand association which can be closely related to brand attachment can be evaluated using the brand knowledge pyramid. Brand attachment is the highest level in the brand knowledge pyramid where brand that can achieve the

highest level is more successful in gaining the awareness of the consumers and stays in the consumers evoke set during purchase decisions.

Furthermore, a good brand image provides a basis for brand extensions (Aaker, 1991). There are several studies that indicated parent brand affects the overall brand trust. Therefore, parent brand which has a positive brand image would influence reduced perceived risk during the purchase of new brand extensions. (Anwar et al, 2011; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Aaker & Keller, 1990).

In the brand knowledge pyramid, the image that the brand expresses that matches the consumer's needs and expectation would make consumers feel that the brand understands them. Therefore, consumers would trust the brand that can associate with them and match their expectations.

Brand attitude is the overall evaluation of consumer towards a brand (Keller, 1993). Brand image is essential for consumers to be able to process the information of the brand, differentiating the brands, intentions for consumer to purchase and building positive feelings for consumers (Aaker, 1991).

In short, brand image is concluded as the consumers' perception towards the product itself. This study defines brand image as the perception of consumers towards a brand which will be reflected as the associations that exist in each of the consumers' memory.

2.5 Word-of-Mouth

The behavioral relationship between consumers and brands has been the underlying factor for the proposition of word-of-mouth or brand evangelism in the services industry (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Kemp et al, 2012). Word-of-mouth marketing can be classified into either positive or negative. Marketers have stressed that for the past twenty years, a pleased consumer would pass the happy experience to eight other people whereas a displeased consumer would inform more than twenty people regarding their unpleasant experiences (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Pimental & Reynolds, 2004). On the other hand, advances in technology have increased these numbers by many folds as it is easier to disseminate information online (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Ha, 2004).

Firms in general, have devoted tremendous attention and resources in research to understand the relationship their consumers share with their brands in order to encourage consumers to behave in a beneficial manner towards them (Keller, 2012; McAlexander et al, 2002). This is due to the fact, the marketplace today is highly competitive and firms are narrowing their attention to a small but powerful group of consumers to achieve this objective (Kemp et al. 2012). Hence, the strong persuasive communication power of word-of-mouth marketing should not be undermined (Trusov et al, 2009; Watts & Peretti, 2007; Brown et al, 2005; Pruden & Vavra, 2004).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) can be referred as the verbal backing up for a brand by spreading positive recommendations about a brand and persuading others about the superiority of a brand as compared to its competitors (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013). Moreover, WOM has also been defined as the efforts by marketers to transform

the “liked” brands into the “loved” brands and stimulate positive word-of-mouth and avoid circulation of negative information regarding brands by consumers (Batra et al, 2012). It can be further classified as the interaction between one consumer and another consumer induced by the relationship which they share with their respective brands (Pimental & Reynolds, 2004; McAlexander et al. 2002).

Abundance of information is accessible and made available at the consumers fingertips with the advent of the Internet (Andreassen & Streukens, 2009; Awad & Ragowsky, 2008). However, at times consumers are pressed for information and it is unavailable to aid them in their decision making process (Sweeney et al, 2012; Trusov et al. 2009; Mazzarol et al, 2007). When consumers are put in such situations, they would rely on the opinions of others (Berger & Schwartz, 2011). In addition, the interpersonal communication and the sharing of information between one consumer and another person regarding a common issue of interest to both parties elevate the importance of WOM (Borgatti et al, 2009; Carl, 2009). Accordingly, since WOM is a non-paid form of advertising and the sender does not gain any monetary rewards, it then elevates the credibility of the sender and also the information shared (Hinz et al, 2011; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Moreover, its communication is viewed as a persuasive form of communication as compared to its paid counterparts (Sweeney et al. 2012; Watts & Peretti, 2007).

Brand loyal consumers are essentially an added advantage for firms as their loyal consumers would verbally and voluntarily communicate and persuade people around them to try out their favourite brands (Matzler et al, 2007). Brand loyalty can be expressed as the extreme emotional connection with brands and the consumers plan to buy and consume only particular brands (Sawhney et al, 2011; Pimental & Reynolds,

2004). These consumers would go to great lengths to influence other people to try out and or switch to their favourite brands (Matzler et al. 2007) besides discouraging them from using competing brands (Kemp et al. 2012).

On the other hand, brand evangelists are far greater than just “satisfied” and “loyal customers”. Brand evangelists consist of a small group of highly influential consumers who disseminate positive WOM which is essentially optimistic opinion to their social circles and eagerly persuade them to use the same brand (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Matzler et al. 2007). It has resulted from the impact that psychological and emotional fondness that a consumer has on a specific brand (Scarpi, 2010). Moreover, brand evangelist would vouch for their brands avidly (Sawhney et al. 2011) and rapidly spread positive experiences to their social circles (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; McConnell & Huba, 2003). Accordingly, researchers have claimed that firms with high intensity of brand evangelism would produce a more positive or constructive WOM communication (Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011; Pimental & Reynolds, 2004).

WOM has been an important promotional tool for practitioners in general and it has been used to complement other promotional tools like advertising, sales promotion, public relations and others (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Carl et al, 2008; Shimp et al, 2007). WOM plays a vital role in the education sector when the other factor such as cost, brand name and reputation does not differ significantly from one institution to another (de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Positive WOM plays an important role in attracting students to study at colleges (Albors et al, 2008). In addition, constructive WOM acts as a free form of advertising for colleges and they are viewed as trustworthy information (Keller, 2012). Experiences and recommendations

shared by credible sources would most likely increase the preference of students to study at a particular PHEI (Chan & Ngai, 2011). WOM plays a vital role in the education industry when consumers search for information and during the final selection process of higher education institution (Shimp et al, 2007; Marsden & Kirby, 2005; Dunnewind, 2004).

Westbrook (1987) highlighted a study that investigated the relationship between purchasers' post-purchase behavior and usage of cable television and automobile products. This study explained that negative and positive feelings which are associated with a purchasers' service experience or product could form inner tension within themselves. At this moment, WOM normally could be able to discharge such tension. In addition, other authors elaborated with more elements associated with this behavior. They found out that consumers are motivated to share their experiences with their relatives or peers when these experiences involve the affective elements of consumers such as sadness, pleasure and satisfaction (Neelamegham & Jain, 1999; Nyer, 1997; Dichter, 1966).

There are five characteristics of word of mouth by Buttle (1998) which are known as intervention, solicitation, timing, focus and valence. Meanwhile, WOM can be categorized as positive or negative which the evaluations are given on the organization and its brand (Lim & Chung, 2011). Positive WOM is when good testimonials and feedbacks are spread among the society about the brand and the organization. Negative WOM on the other hand would affect the image and the trust of the brand to be damaged. Hence, when negative WOM is spread, the brand would suffer damage and loss of trust and image. According to Mangold et al (1999), negative WOM has twice the impact created compared to positive WOM as negative WOM is more

diagnostic and informative. Furthermore, negative WOM is developed by unsatisfied consumers. Consumers tend to remember bad things or experiences more than good ones. Hence, the valence of WOM affects consumers' decision making.

In addition, timing is one of the characteristic of WOM where according to Buttle (1998), WOM is possibly expressed either before or after the purchase of a particular brand. Pre-purchase WOM is known as input WOM which acts as an important source of information. Post-purchasers often like to share their purchase experiences which are known as the output WOM.

Intervention is also another characteristic of WOM where organizations of brands try to intervene to generate and create WOM. This activity is known as intervention where organizations manage WOM by encouraging spread of WOM. Intervention is done when organizations sought individuals such as endorsers, referrals, and opinion leaders to act as role models to create awareness of the brand (Buttle, 1998).

WOM comes from different sources other than consumers. The sources of WOM can be from opinion leaders such as from school teachers, endorsers, and people who are trend setters. WOM is offered with or without any exchange or solicitation (Buttle, 1998).

2.5.1 Measures of WOM Communications

WOM communication is essentially an interpersonal interaction between two or more participants which includes the sharing of information (Matzler et al. 2007). In the services sector, consumers are more inclined to depend on WOM communication due to the intangible nature of services (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Andreassen & Streukens, 2009; Zeithaml et al, 2006). In addition, services unlike products are intangible in nature, time perishable and heterogeneous (Vargo & Lusch, 2006; Zeithaml et al. 2006). In addition, services such as education are predominantly based on experiences of consumers (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003). Hence, the choice of a PHEI is perceived as a risky decision (Wangenheim, 2005; Pruden & Vavra, 2004).

Sources of WOM are directly related to the manner in which a consumer behaves towards a brand and is supported by both online and offline factors (Becerra & Korgaonkar, 2011; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Likewise, a consumer's brand related behaviour is found to be influenced by traditional and technological factors of WOM (Delgado-Ballester et al, 2003). Hence, family, friends, school teachers and admission advisors have been classified as the traditional component. On the other hand, the technological component comprises of college website and social media. These traditional and technological components can be systematically assessed by three key dimensions namely perceived credibility, relative influence and usage frequency of a WOM source (Rao et al, 2007; Snoj et al, 2004; Pruden & Vavra, 2004).

Perceived credibility has been characterized as the reliability and trustworthiness of the information that is disseminated by the traditional and technological sources (Pavlou & Gefen, 2004). The decision making process is complex and risky in nature

(McKnight et al, 2004). Especially for an inexperienced consumer, who is about to commit on an important decision such as choosing a higher education institution (Rao et al. 2007). Hence, the consumer would look for means and methods to reduce the uncertainty and obtain reassurance via WOM before deciding (Snoj et al. 2004).

On the other hand, relative influence refers to the relationship element between the consumer and the source of WOM (Chang & Chen, 2008). Personal relationship is described as the degree of understanding and similarity between the two relevant parties (Albert et al, 2008). Accordingly, similarity has been defined as the common characteristics between the consumer and source of WOM such as the manner in which information is being perceived and processed (Sweeney et al. 2012). In addition, this interpersonal factor will influence brand trust levels and affect the perception of consumers (Cunningham et al, 2004). Hence, the high degree of closeness and strong bond shared will affect the relative influence that the source of WOM such as family members have on the consumer (Trusov et al. 2009). However, researchers have ascertained the contrary as well. Consumer would perceive the source as influential even if there exists weak formal relationship between the source of WOM and the consumer (Watts & Peretti, 2007). Accordingly, sources of WOM would be perceived as powerful, when the consumer pays attention to the information presented as opposed to the strength of relationship between them (Batra et al. 2012; Badrinarayanan & Laverie, 2011).

PHEIs are perceived as unfamiliar territories by students after having spent approximately 11 years in the guided environments of schools (Kim et al, 2008). Hence, when consumers are faced with new choice of services, they would naturally be motivated to frequently consult the sources of WOM to reduce the uncertainty element

in the decision making process (Johnson et al, 2008). Usage frequency is attributed as the inherent motivation of consumers to regularly consult the relevant sources of WOM (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013).

2.5.2 Sources of WOM Communications

Initially, face-to-face communication on products or an organisation between people who were not commercial individuals was referred as WOM (Carl, 2009; Arndt, 1967). Later on, in a broader aspect, Westbrook & Oliver (1991) elaborated that WOM encompasses “all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers.” Although Westbrook (1987) did not clarify the specific “informal communications”, it is obvious that these “informal communications” is not referred to the communications that pass product knowledge to consumers from providers or producers through mass-media channels. In contrast, it has a high possibility that these communications are the interpersonal relationships communications.

However, Buttle (1998) argued that electronic means could mediate WOM. To him, he argued that not all informal communications can be considered as the WOM elaborated by Westbrook (1987) as viral marketing practices which had adopted by more companies that led to the fact that the boundary between WOM communication and commercial messages was being blurred (Lindgreen & Vanhamme, 2005). Therefore, the perceived independence of the source of the message delivered is the key defining characteristic of WOM. This definitional evolution shows the accelerated improvement of information technology today.

WOM is rapidly becoming both more amorphous and pervasive. In short, it is agreed that WOM is a way of communication between consumers about a company, service or product where the sources are considered as independent from any commercial influence. These sources played a large role in determining the niche market of the company as it actually affects the choice of the consumer because consumers actually do focus more on the negative information rather than the positive information (Mahajan et al, 1984; Mizersky 1982). Most of the sources of WOM communication can be categorized into 2 main groups which are Traditional Sources and Technological Sources. Traditional sources actually refer to communication that is face-to-face whereas Technological Sources refers to communication via technology.

2.5.2.1 Traditional Sources – Family, friends, school teachers, academic advisors

The level of trust that a consumer has on a higher institution of education depends on the opinions of others (Berger & Schwartz, 2011). In addition, opinions that originate from the primary group such as family members as well as friends are perceived to be more trustworthy and credible as compared to the impersonal sources (Borgatti et al, 2009; Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2003).

(i) Family

In most circumstances, consumers would frequently turn to their family members for opinions and advice due to the strong formal relationship that exists between them as a unit (Lam & Mizerski, 2005). As aforementioned, consumers' relationship with others

plays a vital role in their decision making. Many consumers tend to prioritize relationships especially those with their close ones like family members when they wish to make a purchase. Hence, a brand's credibility and trustworthiness can be strengthened by the influence of the consumers' relationship with their family members. In fact, it is believed that the consumers are highly influenced by the persuasion power of family members that includes relatives.

In addition, when consumers' family members share certain information with them, this information not only carries more weight but is also taken seriously (Goldenberg et al, 2001). Besides, consumers will frequently consult their family members since they can be depended on most of the time. More importantly, when their family bonds are strong, this would render the information provided by the family members to be perceived as more valuable and important (Ennew et al, 2000). This is because the opinions from family members are of the best interest of the consumers.

When it comes to the context of students, family members are generally perceived as a group of people who understand them more. Hence, there is a tendency that the students give more consideration on the opinions given by their family members. Family members are said to act in the best interest of students. Thus, when students become consumers, there is a high possibility that they will be easily influenced by the persuasion power from immediate family members because their persuasion carries more weight as compared to those of sales personnel. To be more specific, sales personnel are usually more cunning as their main goal is to sell their products. Thus, they are perceived as personnel that would apply any speaking techniques to convince their customers. This in turn, lowers their trustworthiness. Hence, when family members are able to clear students' doubts and provide assurance

to them regarding PHEI, this could reduce the element of risks as well as increase the credibility of the college selection process. With lesser risks and higher credibility, tertiary level students are more likely to choose the highly recommended colleges or universities as the institutes for them to further their studies (Riegner, 2007).

In fact, family members play a significant role in motivating an individual to develop purchase decisions. This is because the collective beliefs possessed by the family build up the perceptions of the individual regarding a particular commodity (Sweeney et al, 2012). The influence of family members positively impacts the overall brand image which eventually leads towards the development of sound customers' loyalty. This is essential as loyalty within customers motivates them to pursue repeat purchase. Looking from the context of the enrolment of PHEI, customers' loyalty inspires an individual to carry forward repeat purchases (Blazevic et al, 2013). Besides, their loyalty is stimulated by the aspect of satisfaction which an individual experiences after utilizing a particular commodity (Sweeney et al, 2012).

The point of views possessed by the family members is considered as one of the most important factor as investments which are carried forward in high involvement products require an opinion from a very reliable source (Garnefeld et al, 2013). These opinions which originate from close relationships reflect a collective mind set and hence, shape the purchase behaviour of an individual (Severi et al, 2014). In other word, the point of views which possessed by family members are considered to be the most reliable source because the way of perceiving certain gestures remains the same across the family. The consumer behaviour theory indeed states that the purchase intentions of an individual are highly influenced by the prior experiences of other consumers, which

motivates an individual to pursue purchases in the best favour of a particular brand (Solomon et al, 2012).

Looking from the aspect of WOM, WOM communication happens to take place among family members more frequent due to high level of trust and the personal bond which exist between them (Albert et al. 2008). This is due to the fact that this group of individuals is available and contactable most of the time (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Furthermore, consumers would often consult family members before making any important decisions such as deciding the choice of higher education institution (Riegner, 2007). As a consequence, family members act as an important source of WOM as consumers would actively seek their opinion before they actually select a PHEI (Kemp et al. 2012).

In addition, the information shared by the family members regarding a specific commodity holds substantial value than in the development of positive brand image. The establishment of positive brand image within the minds of customers works as an influencer which tends the prospected customers to buy a certain product over the competitors' products (Kotler, 2011). The preferences of the family members enable the corporations to capitalize upon the developed point of differentiation which ultimately leads a particular business to gain an edge over the competitors. With the help of this point of differentiation, positive WOM could then be stimulated and created (Wien & Olsen, 2014). Therefore, it can be inferred that a brand becomes more credible when family members motivate a person to pursue in a particular PHEI (Hickman & Ward, 2013).

Looking on the flip side, the negative impacts of WOM from family members towards relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust refer to the development of perceived notions. The creation of negative WOM marketing restricts an individual to opt a particular commodity or services. As family members influence the consumers' buying behaviour, the mind-set possessed by the family members could also mould the perceptions of the consumers. In high investment and high engagement products the negative WOM adversely create an impact on the process of decision making of an individual (Sweeney et al, 2014). The development of a positive brand image adds a significant value in the development of brand knowledge and brand trust within the minds of the customers. On the other hand, a product which is negatively publicised for some time may become popular but does not hold sound image within the minds of the customers (Bambauer-Sachse & Mangold, 2011).

Apart from that, the switching cost of the commodity also inhibits an individual to carry forward purchases. High investment products incur high switching cost and therefore, the decision to make a purchase is influenced adversely by negative WOM of relatives and family members. The high investment products entail certain risk factors. However, with the existence of the positive WOM marketing, it adds a substantial value in the development of brand trust (Keller et al, 2011). As far as the enrolment of PHEI is concerned, the decision possesses high switching cost if a student makes a wrong decision. Therefore, the positive points of view from the family members will influence a student to opt the services offered by PHEI.

(ii) Friends

Social relationship is another important source of WOM which has been researched greatly (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009; Steffes & Burgee 2009). It refers to the connection between the consumer and also their circle of friends such as family friends, neighbours, acquaintances and others (LeBaron & Jones, 2002).

Pertaining to that, information obtained from social circles would be seen as valuable because strong ties exist between consumers and their friends (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). This indicates that, when high level of trust ties consumers and friends' together, WOM communication will possibly take place (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2000). In addition, close friends are able to convince and influence consumer's choice of PHEI due to the strong personal bonds that exist between them (Dahl et al, 2001). When there are important matters, consumers will mostly turn to their social circles for opinions after they have consulted by their family members (D'Rozario, 2001). Peers are known to provide unbiased information to consumers. This allows the consumers to feel secure and safe with their honest opinions. Under the mentality of a safe and secure decision, the consumer will eventually proceed with the evaluation of the information and thus, leading them to choose the recommended PHEI (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Hence, friends are perceived as trustworthy sources of information (Steffes & Burgee 2009).

Some students tend to have concessions with their friends over their family members when making important decisions. Sometimes, neglectful family members might cause them to seek information from their friends. This shows that social gatherings and friends are also potential influences upon an individual's decision

making after family members. According to Maslow hierarchy of needs theory, social acceptance refers to one of the basic needs of an individual. Thus, people mould their preferences and values in accordance to the socially accepted values (Subrahmanyam & Tomas Gomez-Arias, 2008). Likewise, the creation of positive WOM in the social groups works as one of the most effective factors which could encourage an individual to opt a particular product or services. In the context of enrolling in the PHEI, the social gatherings and friends circles influence the preferences of a student. The adoption of socially accepted norms and principles enables one to be perceived as an up-to-date individual, which ultimately enhances the status of this particular person (Brugha, 2004). Thus, when it refers to the private higher school education, the point of views and opinions possessed by their friends inspire the student to carry forward decisions which will certainly affect the brand trust of PHEI.

Furthermore, the quality of social relationships influences the decision making carried forward by an individual as a good social relationship works as a key motivation factor to opt a particular product and service. The good opinions possessed by social groups qualify certain services as reliable and consistent (Martin & Lueg, 2013). Therefore, the management of the institution with the help of brand awareness among the customers establishes sound brand knowledge. Consequently, the brand knowledge empowers the existing and prospected customers to differentiate one PHEI from another and thereby, allowing the corporations to gain an edge over the competitors in the highly competitive market (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012). The high school education refers to one of the most important decisions carried forward by students as the entire professional career of an individual is relied on it. Therefore, brand knowledge which is created with the help of positive WOM from friends is able to facilitate the customers to pursue wise decision making and finally, affecting the brand trust of PHEI.

In addition, friends' opinions could influence one's decision making ability in a positive manner. This is because the advice extended by them excludes the aspect of prejudice which helps an individual to adopt private higher school education system. More importantly, after getting the consultation from them, potential students will be more aware of a particular brand of school. This awareness stimulates the establishment of brand knowledge that enables the development of customers purchase intentions (Godey et al, 2012). In relation to that, when purchase intention is established, this intention could change to buying behaviour which is influenced by either positive or negative WOM marketing. As far as private education is concerned, the positive image of a particular institute qualifies it as a reliable place to invest time and money. Therefore, it can be inferred that establishment of positive brand image along with the positive feedback from friends are able to motivate an individual to opt the academic services.

As aforementioned, negative WOM marketing could change one's purchase intention to buying behaviour. Similarly, another factor which possesses a negative impact of friends' WOM towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust refers to the development of stereotypes. Stereotype is indeed, referred to the psychological process which entails the adoption of certain sort of belief based upon the opinions of others, which may be true or inaccurate (Aguirre-Rodriguez et al, 2012). In the context of enrolling PHEI, these stereotypes along with negative WOM marketing might impact the decision making of an individual. Along with this, the negative perceptions of the social groups also influence adversely the overall brand image of the institution. The ranking of a brand within the minds of the customers builds the overall perceptions of an individual that ultimately results in the formulation of customers' purchase intentions (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2013).

Another negative factor which impacts the decision making of an individual for WOM towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust is the development of forceful adoption of a particular commodity. Social gathering and friends sometimes might mould the decision making of an individual which tends a person to purchase a particular service or product vehemently. However, with the development of positive brand image within the minds of the customers, it enables an individual to pursue effective decision making (Badgaiyan & Verma, 2014; Macdonald & Sharp, 2000). As far as the enrolment of PHEI is concerned, an institution with brand image which is positive facilitates the customers to make decision by evaluating the significant differences that exist between the public academic institutes and PHEI. WOM from a friend is perceived as a testimony and is prioritized significantly on decision making of an individual as this is one of the ways to survey and evaluate the quality and credibility of PHEI before the enrolment. When an individual's best friend has reminded him of the poor quality of a particular PHEI, it is highly possible that the individual has a bad impression towards that particular PHEI. As a consequence, there is a low possibility for the individual to select that particular PHEI. Above all, it can be inferred that social gatherings and friends which impact the decision making of an individual for the enrolment of PHEI through WOM will have an influence on the relationship between the brand knowledge and brand trust.

(iii) School teachers

School teachers are known as opinion leaders to students and parents as they possess the basic characteristics of an opinion leader (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Moreover, teachers are also known as expert opinion leaders when they share information pertaining to their area of expertise (East et al, 2008). As a matter of fact, opinion leaders are defined as

individuals who are knowledgeable and willing to exchange information with consumers (Edwards et al, 2007). In addition, opinion leaders are able to influence consumers' decision and change one's perceptions (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

The students, who are also the consumers, perceive that teachers understand them better as valued by the amount of time which they spend together in school (Schindler & Bickart, 2005). In addition, they are also perceived as a credible source of WOM as they are believed to act in the best interest of the students (Dawson, 2008). Consumers would frequently consult their teachers as they find it easier to communicate with them. The opinions of the teachers are mostly regarded as important as that of a family member due to the pertained relationship arisen from constant communication (East et al. 2008). Moreover, information provided by teachers tends to be less biased and they are more sensitive to the concerns of the students. Owing to that, as their opinions are known as unbiased, students depend on teachers greatly when it comes to seeking opinions (Kempe et al, 2003). Besides, teachers are considered to be the guardians or official parents to the students as teachers take on the responsibility to educate and guide the students to a brighter future. This indirectly causes teachers to bond with students like parents and thereby, allowing them to approach the students comfortably with their honest opinions. Due to the fact that students see their teachers as a parental figure, they not only tend to listen more attentively but also susceptibly to their opinions (Kempe et al 2003).

Other than that, the opinions possessed by the mentors also play a significant role upon moulding the decisions of the students as their point of views is considered to be impartial. All the suggestions given by the mentors to the students are considered authentic and reliable as mentors who possess professional opinions enable students to

outshine in the highly competitive world (Campbell et al, 2012). When it comes to enrolling the PHEI, the WOM expressed by the teachers and mentors holds a vital place. This is because teachers and mentors know the abilities possessed by their students. The career counselling which has carried forward by mentors and tutors facilitates the students to opt best professional choices (Wisker et al, 2013; Chemers et al, 2011). Therefore, the positive WOM expressed by the teacher plays as a key motivating factor for the students to make a choice.

Another positive factor regarding the influence of WOM expressed by the teachers is the image of the mentor. Looking from a global perspective, teaching profession is considered as one of the most responsible occupation as it leads the society towards progressive development through students. Therefore, any opinion regarding the studies is considered highly significant. The establishment of positive brand awareness enables a corporation to portray itself positively against the offerings of the competitors (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). In this study, the creation of brand awareness enables the teachers to develop knowledge regarding a particular institution. However, in the academic world, institutes which possess long term legacy and high succeed rates are mostly preferred by the teachers. The aspect of customers satisfaction motivates an individual to carry forward repurchases of a particular commodity or service (Coelho & Henseler, 2012). Therefore, the satisfaction of the teachers regarding the performance of an institute collectively motivates them to recommend this particular institute to their students. Since WOM from teachers is considered as a reliable source, it will definitely influence the brand trust of PHEI.

Another variable influencing the decision of PHEI enrolment of the students carried forward through teachers' WOM is the purchase power of the students. The

purchase power of a customer means an individual's ability to buy a particular commodity or service. This power impacts the purchase decisions of an individual which ultimately influences the overall sales of the company (Slater & Olson, 2002). In the context of this study, teachers would recommend an appropriate option of selecting high schools based on the aspect of students' affordability (Gurau, 2012). With this consideration, the teachers collaborate with the parents to decide an optimum solution for students' enrolment of higher education institution. This in turn, will increase the brand awareness of PHEI as students will know better about the PHEI in terms of their policies.

However, the negative impact of school teachers' WOM towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust on the enrolment of PHEI refers to the development of brand image which is negative in the minds of the students. The development of negative publicity portrays a particular brand adversely to the customers that restricts them to carry forward purchases (Zhou & Whitla, 2013). In the context of this study, the generation of negative WOM expressed by teachers regarding certain institutes not only restricts an individual but a group of students to take admission. Compare to family members, teachers' influence is higher as they will affect the decision making process of a large quantity of students. The negatively endorsed products and services sometime manipulate the brand knowledge that might bring about adverse influences on the entire image building of a particular brand (Brodie et al, 2013). This infers that the negative WOM expressed by the teachers regarding certain PHEI has the ability to affect the prosperity of an institute for a long duration.

In addition, the negative impact of teacher's WOM also refers to the development of bad ranking of the institutes perceived by the students and parents. The

brand ranking depicts the image of a particular brand among the customers which enables the customers to choose one product over another. In the context of this study, the negatively ranked institute would pose a negative impact upon the progressive development of an organization (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2012). The negative ranking would restrict an individual from choosing the services offered by the corporation to the students. In addition to this, the existence of bad brand image also results in decreasing the merit of the academic institute. This ultimately leads the higher education institute towards declination the overall academic results. Meanwhile, since school teachers are seen as role models and leaders in the eyes of students, when the school teachers portray low confidence towards a particular PHEI, it is likely that the students who are also the followers to have low confidence towards that particular PHEI. The school teachers who have low confidence towards a particular PHEI hold low hopes and expectations on students' performance, both curriculum and extra-curriculum aspects. As a result, it creates a chain reaction. Specifically, as the school teachers possess low confidence level towards students' performance, it might lead to low confidence level among the students and hence, resulting in low academic results among the students as well as low brand knowledge (brand awareness and brand image) of the particular PHEI, which ultimately lower the brand trust on that particular PHEI in producing students with excellent performance (Zhou & Whitla, 2013). Also, it has been highlighted that positive brand image motivates the students to opt best possible academic options and thereby, affecting the brand trust of PHEI.

(iv) Academic advisors

Academic advisors are classified as employees who are placed on an institutions payroll (Spoon, 2006). These advisors are known for their expert knowledge regarding their

higher education institution (Schreiner, 2009). In addition, they have the capability and qualification to be the spokesperson on behalf of an institution (Lala & Priluck, 2011). Also, they are the important employees who have the ability to clear doubts of consumers pertaining to admission and financial matters such as course registration, loans offered and others (Ahmad, 2006). However, admission advisors often find themselves in dilemma. Particularly, they are the representatives of the PHEI and hence, they are obliged to market the institution to the best of their ability (McAlexander & Koenig, 2010). Nonetheless, they have also a social obligation to the students (Fuller & Pittarese, 2012). Thus, although it would contradict with them, they are expected to provide beneficial advice to students (Davis et al, 2012).

On the other hand, past studies have shown that consumers would frequently obtain information from academic advisors via face-to-face meeting or technology such as e-mail and phone calls. Education fairs are also held in all parts of the country to allow students to consult with the academic advisors to obtain informative insights on the PHEI of their choice. These education fairs are held to allow the PHEI to advertise their company and recruit more students. Upon request, the students can communicate with professionals of their desired field of study to obtain more information. Most of the additional information retrieval methods are via e-mail or phone calls to the desired PHEI (De Jager & Du Plooy, 2010). Besides, academic advisors are popularly to be sought after during the initial stages of the college search process (Knox et al, 2006). However, they are indeed not a popular choice of WOM as compared to parents and friends (Lala & Priluck 2011; Spoon, 2006).

The positive moderating impact of academic advisors' WOM is based on the attraction and retention rate of students on PHEI. Initially, it enhances the brand

knowledge and after some time, the brand knowledge receives support from brand trust. To illustrate, there is one specific scenario corroborates this concept. Malaysia University of Science and Technology are comprised of the well settled system of WOM described by the academic advisor of the institute. It has been assessed that academic advisors are important in the development of satisfaction within students which ultimately increases the rate of students' retention (Sohail, et al. 2003; Balasubramanian & Cole, 2002). It represents that there is a significant positive impact from academic advisors' WOM towards brand knowledge and brand trust. Therefore, it can be inferred that academic advisors hold a very rigid position within the minds of the students. Hence, the advice provided by the advisor to the students tends them to further studies in a specific PHEI.

Other than that, the impact of WOM is also referred to the proper guidance for students with respect to their career and also their knowledge on different departments of a PHEI. This specific behaviour helps the academic advisors to create a strong relationship with students and to attract more students due to their high attention towards the students. For instance, the admission departments of Malaysia University of Science and Technology are efficient enough to provide support and guidance to their applicants with respect to the departments of the university. The existing operators in the departments used to judge the calibre and interest of the applicants to provide them a set of suggestions (Hanaysha, et al. 2011; Balasubramanian & Cole 2002). It can be inferred that the advice of the academic advisor is considered valuable as the advisors are well aware of the competencies of the students and hence, provide advice accordingly. Therefore, it implies that WOM by admission advisors is able to provide proper guidance for the students.

In addition, academic advisors also impact on the enhancement of brand name of PHEI because this specific department plays an effective role to describe the strengths of their PHEI as compared to other sources. It will help the PHEI to attract more students to join them. It portrays that there is a high relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust (Padlee, et al. 2010). Also, it has been studied that most of the PHEI have stepped in this competitive era. They have been trying their utmost efforts to increase the rank of their PHEI for enhancing the brand name. Therefore, academic advisors explain every positive point of a PHEI to their applicants. Specifically, they create positive WOM among the students regarding their own institution and represent the plus points of the PHEI which motivates the students to opt the advice of the academic advisor.

However, it is worth to note that the negative moderating impact of academic advisors' WOM towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of students is connected to the students' expectations. The past studies suggested that the academic advisors used to provide inaccurate information about PHEI. When the actual service does not match with the perceived expectations, it might create negative impact towards brand trust of students (Kueh & Voon, 2007; Paladino, 2008). The counsellors and academic advisors provide various types of knowledge to their applicants but when the students do not receive the stated services, they might switch their institute and join another PHEI. In fact, as far as the enrolment of PHEI is concerned, the development of positive WOM is greatly dependent on the quality of services offered by an individual. Therefore, false projection and misrepresentation of the facts regarding the services offered by certain institutions could inhibit the production of positive WOM as well as reducing students' trust on the PHEI brand.

Negative moderating impact arises when the services of the academic advisors fail to meet students' expectations. When students feel unsatisfied with the services provided by an institution, they might start spreading negatives WOM with respect to their experience. In fact, it is possible that the negative post purchase behaviour arises due to the development of a false brand image of a PHEI to the students. The lack of knowledge of the academic advisors often results in the dissatisfaction of the students as correct advice is not extended by them. Thus, the PHEI services need to be effective enough to enhance practical knowledge of students so as to create a strong brand trust among students. It is essential for the academic advisors to offer genuine and authentic information to students' with respect to the PHEI and other institutes (Burgess & Steenkamp, 2006; Young, 2005).

2.5.2.2 Technological Sources – College website, social media

The advancement of information technology and popularity online social networking sites has increased the power and influence of word-of-mouth communication (Brown et al. 2005). Almost 27 percent of the world populations, estimated at 1.8 billion people, are on the internet as it was reported by World Population Statistics (World Internet Usage and Population Statistics, 2009). Out of this total, a whopping 764 million comprises of Asian internet users and this figure represents approximately over 40 percent of the world internet user population (World Internet Usage and Population Statistics, 2009). The omnipresence of the internet has tremendously increased the rate at which consumers provide information pertaining to colleges (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Smith et al, 2005). The Internet has also enabled consumers to share their remarks and opinions on specific sites (e.g. forums, web pages, discussions boards etc.) and on networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Myspace, Twitter etc.) regarding

higher education institutions (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013; Sawhney et al, 2011). In addition, most internet users are active members in more than one online community (Albors et al. 2008).

WOM has grown remarkably since 2004, and the WOM association has grown accordingly and has approximately 300 corporate members (WOMMA, 2010). Accordingly, social networking sites and online websites have undergone the most impressive growth due to WOM (Batra et al, 2012; Sawhney et al, 2011; Breazeale, 2008; Brown et al. 2005). As a consequence, the importance of WOM expressed via technology namely the Internet cannot be undermined. As a matter of fact, technology has given rise to a vital form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Chan & Ngai, 2011; Sawhney et al, 2011; Hennig-Thurau, Walsh & Walsh, 2003). Ever since, academicians and practitioners have shown tremendous attention to the impact that eWOM has on brand trust among the PHEIs (Chan & Ngai, 2011; Xia & Bechwati, 2008; Dwyer, 2007).

In addition, information technology and the Internet, provides ample space and venues for consumers to contribute their views regarding PHEIs. These views and comment space would actually allow the consumers to obtain opinions from external sources. These external sources may not be as influential as the consumers closely linked relatives and friends but these external sources actually do provide better insight towards the PHEI of choice (Chen & Xie, 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al, 2003). Hence, these institutions should increase positive eWOM communication initiatives at well-established websites. A good way of increasing these positive eWOM would be increasing the websites communication systems for example, implementing an online chat room for the students to communicate with the advisors directly to obtain important

information regarding the courses they are planning to take and more (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009).

(i) College Website

The Internet has changed the perception and methods of students using it to source for information regarding PHEIs (Litvin et al, 2008). In addition, the Internet has made information online more assessable as compared to its traditional counterparts (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). When it comes to a college website, it not only acts as an interface but also an important touch point for the consumers (Park & Lee, 2009). Accordingly, higher education institutions around the world are using their web sites to approach their target markets (Edward et al. 2007). In fact, the main functions of these websites are to distribute and collect admission forms of the applicants (Chen & Xie, 2008). Thus, in relation to that, there has been a significant increase in consumers' enquiries over the college web sites (Sun et al, 2006). These consumers regularly seek to clarify course related information such as registration, duration and transfer (Hong & Rim, 2010).

More importantly, the college web sites are increasingly used to persuade the consumers (Bailey, 2005). Also, these sites are believed to be able to reduce perceived risks by increasing positive eWOM (Riegner, 2007). These positive comments which are posted on college web sites by students and parents increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the sites. Not only do these positive eWOM boost the college's image, but also enhance the confidence of the consumers to choose the college to further their tertiary studies (Edwards et al, 2009). In addition, perceived credibility of

the sites increases when important information such as fees, affiliation, ranking, financial aids and other are accessible to consumers (Mack et al, 2008).

Nonetheless, students frequently visit college web sites during the initial search process for their choice of PHEI (Lin, 2007). In addition, students make comparisons between PHEIs using information gathered from various web sites. Usually, the PHEI with the best offers would be selected by the consumer due to the high availability in the country. This actually causes the PHEI to be more competitive and thus, offering multiple types of scholarships or grants to enhance their college image to be more prestige and appealing to the consumers (Litvin et al. 2008). Pertaining to that, consumers have also voted the PHEIs' web sites as the most frequent used source of WOM during the college selection process (Edwards et al. 2009). Thus, the higher usage frequency of a college web site indicates higher brand trust levels among students of higher education institutions (Riegner, 2007).

WOM from the college website is indeed important in enhancing student's knowledge with respect to the new roles or implementations by specific knowledge. Every students surfs the website of PHEI to remove their contradictions associated with college roles. The rich information such as fee structure, discounts and scholarship requirements available at the college websites creates a positive image of a PHEI. Therefore, the IT Department of PHEI states every strength of PHEI to increase the brand image among students. Most of the Malaysian-based colleges practise gathering different complaints and issues of students so as to resolve them (Kim, et al, 2011; Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011). It is necessary to provide the latest information on college websites because the students might believe whatever they see on the official corporate websites of PHEI. Accordingly, this specific scenario enhances brand trust of PHEI

among students, and hence, gaining their support towards the PHEI with the help of positive WOM.

Looking at the marketing strategy, college website plays an important role to sustain a competitive market position in an environment. It has been observed that the college website is the most initial approach of students when they assess various universities for taking admission. Consumers compare the information from different college websites and then select the one that matches to their requirements. Therefore, the website interface adds a substantial value in the development of positive brand image among the students. Meanwhile, the WOM that is created with the help of website develops only the intentions of the students on certain institutes but the services quality is the ultimate factor that affects the decision making of an individual (Chakraborty et al, 2002).

However, the negative factor that causes college website WOM impacts towards relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust is the presentation of wrong information within the official website. In the view of Keller et al (2011), the brand trust possessed by an individual is highly influenced by the misconduct carried forward by the marketing department of a company. Inaccurate information presented on college website such as fake information can severely reduce students' satisfactions to study in the particular campus due to breaching of promises by the college management team to the students. Therefore, the development of brand image which is negative in the minds of the students ultimately leads to the production of negative WOM marketing carried forward by the students.

Also, the existence of insufficient information upon the website interface could create a negative impact towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust. According to Young et al (2003) and Wee et al (2003), in the present day, this world is considered as technological advance era in which the websites represents the digital identity of a company. In the context of educational institutions, the content on website will be considered as insufficient when the interface decreases the reliability of the website. This factor possesses a negative influence in the minds of the students and diminishes the prior brand image formed in the schema. As mentioned by Chu & Kim (2011) and Young & Murphy (2003), the positive brand image within the minds of the customers develops a point of differentiation, which enables an individual to identify a particular commodity against the products offered by the competitors. Therefore, it can be inferred that the insufficient information on the institutes' website restricts the students to opt the services provided by them which in turn, might affect their brand.

On the other hand, some information provided on college websites might be obsolete. According to Sohail et al (2004) and Pfaff & Huddleston (2003) the latest information on websites plays a vital role in attracting an individual towards certain commodity. Obsolete information such as old promotion event that are not removed from the college websites portray inefficiency and incompatibility of the PHEI management. Therefore, it implies that out-dated information on the websites of the institutes might influence the decision making and perception development of the students which eventually results in the formation of negative WOM within the market place.

(ii) Social Media

Social media has been classified as a communication process between individuals, in which they create, share and exchange ideas and information in online communities and networks (Chu & Kim, 2011). Further, it is not only a collection of web-based applications which are constructed on the web but also functions for the creation and exchange of content built up by users (Zhang & Daugherty, 2009). Moreover, social media such as Wikipedia, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube rely on the mobile and web-based technologies (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Apart from traditional interpersonal sources, consumers turn to social networking sites for latest updates and opinions on PHEIs (Brown et al., 2005). Information obtained from these sites is indeed complementing the information obtained from traditional sources (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Social media and networking sites are being visited by thousands of consumers by a second (Chu & Kim, 2011). Consumers visit these sites to source for additional information on colleges such as to estimate and compare reputations and also the bundle of services provided (Doh & Hwang, 2009).

Normally, consumers have the flexibility of communicating with their social contacts online according to their mutual convenience (Kozinets et al, 2010). In addition, consumers can also request and provide information regarding PHEIs at their own pace (Zhang & Daugherty, 2009). Also, there are various common characteristics which are shared by members of a social group such as age, peers and interest which increases the degree of understanding between them (Libai et al, 2010). Thus, students

perceive social media as a more reliable and trustworthy source of information (Kotler, 2011).

Generally, the risk factor associated with the process of choosing a higher education institution drives consumers to source for additional information (Bakshy et al, 2011). Thus, the existence of social media enables consumers to exchange information online which indirectly reduces the element of perceived risk (Xia & Bechwati, 2008). This in turn, causes the credibility of social media increases as the available information is shared mostly by individuals based on their past experiences (Kozinets et al., 2010). Moreover, the advent of technologies has enabled consumers to obtain and compare information online with their peers and others via social media (Edwards et al. 2009). This leads to a greater use of social media for the purpose of exchanging PHEIs' information. The high frequency of communication between consumers and others via the social media motivates consumers to repeatedly use them (Riegner, 2007). This signals a good image of the PHEI as students use and rely more on the social media (Chan & Ngai, 2011).

When the PHEI receives high rating, the importance and reputation of them will increase in social media. It has been studied that PHEIs start to receive great emphasis from students and other applicants due to the high rating by higher education committee (Stern & Tseng, 2002). Therefore, social media is important in increasing the brand image of colleges. This particular scenario represents that the PHEI can attain various opportunities through social media in order to fix the brand image in mind of people. Above all, it infers that WOM is important in developing positive brand image.

In relation to brand awareness, the floatation of information through social media is able to make the students aware of a particular brand. Most of the students have created their groups and societies on internet to socialize with the members and to create a strong collaboration among them. The social websites are one of the best approaches to interact with students (Yoo & Donthu, 2002). The course registration process, different kinds of requests, student societal issues and other meetings can be done through social media. It can be said that the fame of PHEI is highly associated by students' WOM on social media. This shows that the social media is one of the effective platforms for all PHEIs to keep in touch with their students.

Another positive moderating impact of social media is the interaction with alumni and ex-students of an institute. In fact, the social media is known as the best platform to keep in touch with the professional life of ex-students. The corporate departments of PHEI will try to keep in touch with alumni of college (Karns, 2005; Granitz & Koernig, 2011). Other than that, the alumni play a critical role in providing support to their previous PHEI with the help of the organization that they are working. Successful alumni will act as opinion leaders in creating brand awareness which will enhance the brand trust of a particular PHEI.

However, the negative factor that influences WOM by social media includes the uncontrollable flow of negative feedback. According to Young et al (2003) and Wee et al (2003), social media which enables the corporation to pursue effective customer resource management is an emerging domain through which WOM marketing is generated. Referring to the present study, the uncontrolled negative comments expressed on the social media forums influences the brand image of PHEI in an adverse manner that may lead to the development of negative perceptions of the customers

regarding specific educational institute. In this scenario, the creation of negative WOM marketing affects the overall brand image of the PHEI and also stimulates the development of incorrect or manipulated brand knowledge.

Another negative factor that influences social media WOM refers to the utilization of social media for the defamation purposes. According to Chu & Kim (2011) and Young & Murphy (2003), social media adds an essential role in the development of brand awareness within the market place regarding a particular brand. Certain conspiracies planned by the competitors also results in the defamation of a particular brand. When it applies to this present study, the usage of social media for defamation purposes impacts the brand image and its positioning negatively. This negative effect leads an educational institution to lose its market share along with the formed competitive advantage. Therefore, it is believed that negative WOM generated through social media leads the academic institute towards declination of brand trust.

In this present era, abundance of accurate and inaccurate information exists on social media. According to Sohail et al (2004) and Pfaff & Huddleston (2003), the internet is considered as one of the most reliable source of information. In the context of WOM creation through social media, it often confuses the potential consumers regarding the authenticity of a PHEI. Therefore, the existence of confusions within the minds of the students also impacts the decision making of an individual and restricts the student towards the acquisition of certain service.

2.5.3 Application of Media Richness Theory

The two major groups of WOM sources discussed above can be also discussed based on the typology of Media Richness Theory (MRT). The traditional sources comprising family members, friends, school teachers and academic advisors are evidently considered as a variation of face-to-face medium. These sources are ranked high in their richness and effectiveness in communicating intended information (Schiefelbein, 2012; Sun & Cheng, 2007; Daft & Lengel, 1986). This is due to the possibilities for students, as the audience, to use the multiple cues i.e. convincing body language of sender, to interpret the information communicated. The information communicated which is usually personalized at least based on the student's socio-demographic profile i.e. education qualification, preference towards an academic course etc. would easily be accepted by the students and their parents. In addition, provision of immediate feedbacks by these sources which are normally in-real time would enhance the acceptance of information received and hence, facilitate the student's decision on the selection of PHEI. Besides, the real-time verbal communication is greatly considered as the key reason for the effectiveness of these sources in communicating the intended information.

Nevertheless, past researches had claimed that tenets of MRT are not appropriate to assess and select an appropriate new communication medium (Elizabeth, 2013; Dennis et al, 2008; Dennis & Valacich, 1999). This is because the theory was constructed before the widespread use of technologically oriented communication mediums (Sun & Cheng, 2007; Dennis & Valacich, 1999). In the context of current study, one of the technological sources i.e. college's website shall greatly vary in its richness based on the use of multimedia i.e. audio, video, graphics, texts and pictures. It

is perceived that websites with extensive use of multimedia applications would have a good richness compared to others with minimal use of multimedia applications (Simon & Peppas, 2004; Jackson & Purcell, 1997).

Similarly, social media greatly differ in terms of its richness. It is all about a medium which facilitates a social interaction in order to communicate information in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist et al, 2008). There are many types of social media ranging from a simple collaborative project such as Wikipedia which mainly utilizes texts, to (micro) blogs such as Twitter which allows for instant, two-way and personalized communications and virtual game-worlds such as World of Warcraft which provides personalized entertainments in the form of the massive online role playing games (Kaplan, 2012). The simpler social media is considered to have low richness though it can be very effective in transmitting low equivocal information to a complex social media which would be very effective in delivering any sort of information due to its richness (Elizabeth, 2013; Debashish & Robert, 2012).

Though all the six WOM source are not exactly fitted into the continuous scale of MRT in assessing its richness, the theory greatly provides basic insights on the dimensions that can be used to assess the richness of each of the WOM sources.

2.6 Development of Research Hypotheses

This section lists and justifies the research hypotheses proposed in this study as illustrated in Figure 2.3 based on the past studies.

2.6.1 Brand Trust with Brand Awareness

Keller (1993) acknowledged that brand awareness is essential in influencing consumers' perspective towards the reliability of the brand itself. It has a relationship with the strength of brain node in the consumer's memory. It is because this actually assists consumers to reflect their abilities to retain the aspects of the brand under various conditions (Keller, 1993; Rossiter & Percy, 1987). Strong brand awareness represents unique and strong associations in consumer's memory. Therefore, not only does having a impactful brand awareness will help out in consumer purchasing purposes, but it will also be a huge advantage for the particular firm's life in the targeted industry.

Brand knowledge plays a part via brand recall and recognition which was able to establish brand attitude. Brand attitude are consumers' sense of credibility judgments such as trustworthy and likeability towards a particular brand (Keller, 2003). Brand attitude has the strongest relationship on forming consumers' purchasing behavior and the significant relationship towards brands association. For example, if a consumer is forced to choose between a well-known brand such as Nike or BATA, the consumer will normally fall back to the brand that is more well-known (Nike) as the existing sense of security will provoke the consumers to choose a brand that is more famous as it indirectly reflects upon the quality of the products produced by the company (Anwar et al, 2011). Hence, brand awareness affects consumers' attitude towards trust and confidence towards the brand.

Brand awareness will cause consumers to want to search more information on a particular brand. Therefore, it will increase their purchase intention in which the performance of the brand is experienced by the consumers. When the performances of

the brand are up to the expectation of the consumer, brand trust would be developed (Risitano et al, 2015).

Furthermore, Esch et al (2006) had put forward that in order to receive brand trust from various consumers around, marketers are required to have the brand awareness as well. This is because marketers would be capable to deliver the information and qualities to the consumers regarding a particular brand available, as the brand awareness is responsible to create a significant impact in the consumers' memory. Indirectly this channel, ease their abilities to recognize and recall certain products. With the minds that are liquid towards the brand out there, consumers would be familiar with the particular brand and they would be able to evaluate their choices before purchasing the brand with bolder confidence as compared to the product qualities. Moreover, as the product from a well-known company provides higher confidence to the consumers, this enhances the probability of the consumers to choose from the respective company for the products offer. This would eventually cause the consumers to be more aware of the brand and with the awareness the consumers would also indirectly transfer the integrated product information to their peers and causes a chain reaction and lead to the information transfer via WOM. With the information transfer, the brand awareness can be transferred thus leading to an increase in demand of products.

Brand awareness is the extent on how flexible and how frequent the consumers think of the brand under various consumption or purchase situations (Keller, 2001). It is mentioned that when given a higher level of awareness, the brand will be developed to be more influential among the community of consumers. Through this expansion, this is the likelihood of the emotional attachment of consumers would be augmented, giving various opportunities to experience the brand's leverages. In short, increase in the

emotional attachment of consumers to the brand is also important to increase the awareness of consumers towards the brand simultaneously. The effects and the results would be quite remarkable. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant relationship between students' brand awareness and brand trust of the particular PHEI.

2.6.2 Brand trust with brand image

The way consumers perceive and relate to the brand is known as brand image (Keller, 1998). It delivers a projection of thoughts and remembrance in the consumers' minds when a brand appears in front of their very own eyes. Brand image encompasses both functional and symbolic beliefs. They are product category specific as each product category gives off different image in order for consumers to differentiate and for consumers to relate to what the brand has to offer. Attentive measuring processes should be expanded and implemented for the unique characteristics of specific brand categories to stand out significantly. Past researchers (Carrasco & Foxall, 2006; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999 etc.) described that the brand image played a vital role in consumer's repurchase intentions, as to showcase the abilities of a particular brand to exhibit a credible reputation. Through this, the confidence level of consumer to purchase or repurchase in the future might have an increase. It is acknowledged the research of Park et al (2009), where brand image is known to have a corresponding relationship with the brand trust and customer satisfaction. When brand trust and brand image receive positive trust, it simultaneously improve the aspect of customer satisfaction. From the past theories provided, the brand knowledge theory indicates that the brand image would influence the attachment of consumers towards the brand. Brand attachment

measures the trust level towards the brand which possessed by consumers. Hence, how the brand expresses itself, is how consumers will view the brand.

In addition, from the study of Esch et al (2006), it was boldly indicated that brand image is capable of particularly exercising a concrete impact on the purchase loyalty among the consumers. This showed that when consumers perceived a positive image or positive reputation towards the brand product, it will automatically increase the reliability of the product, which will be able to increase the trust of the product among the consumers. Hence, when consumer developed their own levels of loyalty towards particular brands of products, it will automatically involve both parties which is by benefiting the firms and manufacturers as well as satisfying customers' desires.

There were past studies which found out the relationship between parent brand effect and parent brand trust. This has proven that the brand image of the parent brand can affect the brand trust of the brand extensions. Hence, if the parent brand image is good, consumers tend to perceive that the brand extensions are good as well. Consumers' perceived risk would be reduced and the purchasing intention increases (Anwar et al, 2011; Bhat & Reddy, 2001; Aaker & Keller, 1990). Past researchers conceptualize credibility as the average of "perceived expertise" and "perceived trustworthiness" of an organization which has a new brand extension (Reast 2005; Keller & Aaker, 1992).

Hence, through the reviews from the past documents, a legitimate suggestion is formed which is when consumers are enjoying the brands by delivering positive response to the firms, it will help to emerge the brand loyalty and the long history of

brand usage (Melo & Galan, 2011; Chaudhuri, 1995). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: There is a significant relationship between students' brand image and brand trust of the particular PHEI

2.6.3 Moderating effect of WOM on Brand Image and Brand Awareness on Brand Trust

WOM is the process of information sharing among consumers with their respective circles on their experiences and views about a particular brand they have encountered before. WOM is an informal communication where consumers discuss about the brands usage, performance, characteristics or ownership of the particular brand (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). There are several past studies that indicate WOM acts as an important component in enhancing the brand's reliability and integrity (Anderson, 1998; Money et al., 1998).

WOM is an important source for consumers to know more information of a particular brand and the experience the consumers had after purchasing the brand. WOM for consumers' decision making as it is perceived to have perceived purchase risk to be reduced. Consumers often believe in WOM as it is delivered by pioneers and recommendations from friends and family. WOM is often perceived as a more reliable source because WOM is often delivered by someone that they know or the pioneers who consumers look up to.

In addition, positive WOM increases consumers' likability of the brand. Hence, consumers perceived risk would be reduced during decision making. Positive WOM

helps in developing positive brand image and credibility of the product. Consumers often believe in WOM and take them into consideration when purchasing a particular brand. With positive brand image and credibility of the product created by WOM, consumers feel secured when they make a decision to purchase the product. In short, WOM is able to increase consumers' trust and confidence to a certain brand.

Gremler and Gwinner (2000) proposed that WOM practices can help to increase the consumers' trust towards the product. With trust, consumers perceive that the brand would be able to satisfy the wants and needs. Pioneers of the brand who spread WOM is perceived as the truth of the brand which in turn gives security to consumers towards the particular brand. As mentioned earlier, consumers' trust on the brand creates an expectation towards the quality of the product. Hence, when the brand performed as it was expected by the consumers, they tend to believe that the brand quality is up to the standard where they can fully have confidence and trust on the brand. Satisfied consumers will then share their experiences to other possible consumers.

Consumers often perceive unforeseen risks during purchase, hence, WOM is highly weighted when they make their respective evaluation of choices and decisions. When WOM is highly dependent, the reduction of purchase risks for consumers might differ from time to time (Kim & Song, 2010). Therefore, WOM and brand trust have a significant relationship (Wu & Wang, 2011). This is further strengthened by the study of Lin and Lu (2010), where the brand trust has a significant influence resulted a positive impact on the consumer's purchase intention with the moderating effect of WOM.

Company of a particular brand develops positive WOM by increasing their market share to maintain consumers' satisfaction. This is important because as it can

benefit both the company's objective and the consumers satisfaction. WOM plays a vital role in fulfilling the companies expectation in improving their marketing activities (Lin & lu, 2010; Casalo et al, 2008). In addition, Kim and Song (2010) has proven that positive WOM has a significant impact on online businesses as it is able to increase the confidence and trust of consumers towards online purchasing and increases purchase intention. With sufficient trust and confidence on the brand with the moderating effect of WOM, consumers' perceived purchase risks are reduced.

WOM also plays a crucial role in influencing the judgment of consumers towards the brand image and brand trust (Anwar et al., 2011). The image of the parent brand affects the image of the new brand extensions due to trust and brand image. Brand image and trust of the brand is also developed by the WOM source as after the consumers encounter with the parent brand, they will evaluate the brand and their experiences are shared. Positive WOM would be spread when consumers are satisfied with the overall expectations from the brand. Therefore, the new brand extensions would be easily adopted in the market due to brand image and trust developed by WOM sources.

As mentioned earlier, WOM plays an vital role in creating awareness of the brand to consumers. This is where consumers would be able to interpret the brand with the image that is created through the WOM after they are fully aware of the brand. Furthermore, WOM plays a crucial role as a medium of communication between the consumers and the organization of a particular brand by delivering clear and sound message. Hence, WOM would encourage more consumers to be active and to find out more information of the brand through the availability of media.

This study intends to analyze the relationship of the moderation impact of WOM towards brand knowledge and brand trust. On top of that, consumer's purchasing intention is easily influenced by traditional and technological factors of WOM communication. Therefore, this research's hypotheses is proposed based on the review of past studies' findings.

The advancement of technology has influenced the consumers with the WOM activities (Brown et al, 2005). The internet has enabled consumers to share their feedbacks and opinions online on their purchase experience and knowledge towards a particular brand. Social media plays a big role in influencing the decision making of the younger generations of this digital world. The social media such as the Blogs, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Facebook has become a platform for younger generations to interact and share information and experiences (Keller & Fay, 2012). Hence, many organizations has been using the social media to connect with the younger audience through many marketing strategies such as creating WOM by sponsoring the pioneers or trend setters of the social media users, generating viral marketing through social media, and also marketing their campaigns in order to gain awareness from the younger audiences. WOM by social media has significantly affect the relationship on students' brand knowledge as students who are interested in those marketing advertisements created by WOM in social media, they would search more information of a particular brand by asking around in the social media and connecting to the brand's social media. After thorough research, students would normally try out that particular brand and their experience would be shared through the social media. This type of sharing is known as social media WOM where consumers shares their knowledge and experiences through social media to other potential consumers. Most higher education institutions use social media to create awareness of their service (Becerra &

Badrinarayanan, 2013; Sawhney, 2011). Hence, WOM by social media has a significant relationship between students' brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

H3a: WOM by social media significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

WOM is also delivered by family members to the potential consumers. Family members are known as part of the primary source of WOM other than social media. According to Lam and Mizerski (2005), consumers tend to believe WOM that is shared by family due to strong formal relationships. Hence, during the sharing of WOM among family members, consumers became aware on a particular brand and the information that is delivered by family members would be taken into serious consideration (Goldenberg et al, 2001). Therefore, the brand trust could be easily developed as family members would help students with their decision making and clear their doubts on the decision making. Family members would voice out their opinions on the suitable PHEIs that is perceived to be good in the interest of the students. Family members are perceived to be reliable source of WOM as they understand the needs of the students. Hence, students will take deep consideration on the decision made by family members on the choice of PHEIs. Furthermore, family members are perceived to be more knowledgeable as they understand the students more. Hence, their opinions are perceived to be better source of knowledge. The trust can be developed by family members towards PHEIs when family members claim to have more knowledge on the PHEIs. Therefore, students will have more confidence in decision making when they trust the opinions of their family members. In addition, when they trust their family members, students slowly trust the brand as well. In short, WOM from family members significantly affects the relationship between students' brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

H3b: WOM by family members significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

Social relationship is also part of the WOM source where it refers to connection between students and their circle of friends who are their family friends, neighbours, and acquaintances (LeBaron & Jones, 2002). Information shared by friends are perceived to be valuable due to the strong ties that exist between students and their friends (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) which is able to influence their purchasing decision on PHEIs (Dahl et al, 2001). Friends normally share their knowledge and information of their experience of purchasing a particular brand and students tend to believe friends as it is perceived that it is an unbiased piece of information (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Furthermore, students tend to look up on friends who are trend setters in school and try to imitate them. Hence, peers recommend a particular brand, students tend to be more interested on the brand and results in more brand research. Shared information by friends is easily trusted. Therefore, WOM by friends significantly influences the relationship between students' brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

H3c: WOM by friends significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

Academic advisor is also part of the WOM source. They are people who are classified employees who are placed as institutions payroll (Spoon, 2006). Academic advisors are reliable sources of WOM as they are knowledgeable personnel who work for the particular PHEI (Schreiner, 2009). Hence, they are able to give good opinions and rational advice to students. Since they are knowledgeable on the particular PHEI where they work for, they are able to clear doubts of students. In this way, students are able to

know more on the PHEIs. With sufficient information, they are able to evaluate the particular PHEIs and the amount of confidence to choose a PHEI increases as the information and knowledge shared by the academic advisor is perceived reliable. Hence, brand trust of PHEI is able to be developed.

H3d: WOM by academic advisor significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

School teachers are often role models and opinion leaders to students and parents (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Opinion leaders are known as knowledgeable individuals who likes to share and exchange knowledge and information with consumers. Hence, their opinion towards a particular brand would influence the decision and perception of students (Steffes & Burgee, 2009; Edwards et al, 2007). Furthermore, students often perceive that teachers understand them more and act for the best interest of the students. Therefore, WOM from school teachers are easily adopted by parents and students as it is viewed as an unbiased source and their opinion concerns the students (Kempe et al 2003). The school teachers are perceived as expertise in the education area. Therefore, students and parents would listen to their opinion and place a heavier consideration on their opinions. School teachers who know more about PHEI would help students and parents to be aware of the current PHEIs in the society. Furthermore, the knowledge shared by teachers would encourage students to search more information about the PHEIs mentioned by school teachers. Thus, it will increase the brand knowledge of the students towards the PHEIs. The recommendation by school teachers increases the confidence of students towards particular PHEIs.

H3e: WOM by school teacher significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

College website is another source where students used to search for more information (Litvin et al, 2008). College websites are essential to create touch points for students (Park & Lee, 2009) and to gain knowledge on the service provided by the PHEIs. Furthermore, it is a place where students will learn more on the achievements of the PHEIs and would be able to know other testimonials of the PHEIs. With this, students' choice of PHEIs would be easier and with the achievements shown in the college website, students have more confidence towards particular PHEIs.

H3f: WOM by college website significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

2.7 Construction of Research Framework

This section describes about the research framework proposed in this study (refer to Figure 2.3). As illustrated in the framework, brand image and brand awareness of students on a particular PHEI would affect the level of brand trust built on the PHEI. Besides, this framework assumes that the impact of the key components of brand knowledge (i.e. brand image and brand awareness) on the brand trust relies and relates closely on the types of WOM sources that were used to disseminate the information pertaining to the PHEI. In this study, the traditional WOM sources comprised of family members, friends, school teachers and academic advisor as variables. Meanwhile, college website and social media are the technological WOM sources in this study. The

sources of WOM vary and therefore there will generate their own respective differences and views to the main title. These WOM sources are measured based on their perceived credibility, relative influence and usage frequency.

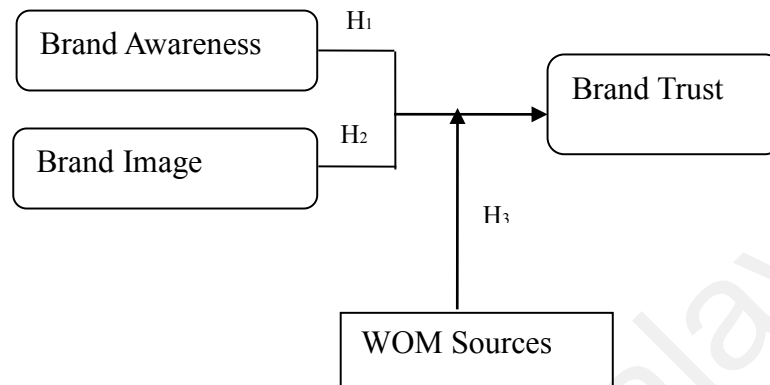


Figure 2.3: Proposed Research Framework

This study conceptualizes the brand knowledge as any sort of brand-related information which holds consumers' memory. From there, the information retrieved can be measured via the associated brand image and brand awareness. This study perceives that brand image is a scope, as consumer's have the ability to recognize certain goods and simultaneously distinguish them from others besides associating connotative meanings to them. Besides, brand awareness is viewed as the ability of consumers to recognize and recall brand based on their respective experience and or exposure about brands out there.

In this study, WOM sources are considered as both technological and traditional sources in disseminating positive recommendations regarding the brand itself. The ability of these sources in disseminating such information is measured based on the perceived credibility, relative influence and usage frequency. Perceived credibility is viewed as the reliability and trustworthiness of the source of information in building

brand trust. Relative influences are described as the degree of understanding and similarity between the consumer and the sources of WOM. The usage frequency is characterized as the underlying motivation and relative frequency that a consumer uses the sources of WOM in building brand trust towards the existing PHEIs.

This study evaluates the brand trust based on the three dimensions. They are namely as brand credibility, brand integrity and brand benevolence. From this study, it is formed that brand credibility is seen as students' believe on the particular PHEI as it provides adequate expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness in order to be his/ her study destination. Meanwhile, brand integrity is about the students' perceptions regarding about the particular PHEIs that offer appropriate services at right time to its entire target market throughout a prolonged period. On the other hand, brand benevolence is seen as the initiative taken by staff of PHEI in order to avoid any discomfort situations to students.

2.8 Summary

This chapter elaborates the past studies relating to the key areas of this study. It begins with discussion on the history of education in Malaysia followed by underlying theories related to the study's key areas. The past studies of brand trust, brand knowledge and WOM sources are discussed in detail in this chapter too. Finally, it focuses on development of research hypotheses and construction of research framework. The next chapter will discuss the overall conclusion and implication for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the actual execution of this study. It begins with the description on the research design followed by the explanation on the sampling procedures, data collection approaches used and the data analysis techniques employed

3.2 Research Design

According to Malhotra (2010), research design is the process of assembling and analysing the data for the information required for the current problem concerned. In this study, a mixed method research design is employed where it comprises of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2009).

The quantitative and qualitative approaches had been acknowledged by numerous scholars for studies that employ mixed method research design (MMRD) to avoid and reduce weaknesses of a particular research approach (Driscoll et al, 2007; Holliday, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). MMRD has been employed in this study in order to assimilate the responses of two key stakeholders of PHEIs towards the issue investigated.

Table 3.1: Summary of Research Questions by Research Approach

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Research Approach
RO1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs	RQ1: How does brand awareness of PHEIs affect brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by students?	Survey Questionnaire
	RQ2: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand awareness of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?	Interview
	RQ3: How does brand image of PHEI affect brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by students?	Survey Questionnaire
	RQ4: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand image of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?	Interview
RO2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.	RQ5: How does each type of WOM sources affect the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by the students?	Survey Questionnaire
	RQ6: Do PHEI administrators perceive similarly on the impact of WOM sources on the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs?	Interview

Briefly, this study explores students and administrators of PHEIs in a subsequent manner. Figure 3.1 illustrates the overview of MMRD employed in this study. Quantitative approach has been used on the first phase of this study on PHEIs' students. The huge number of PHEIs' students located in Klang Valley has made a convenience for random and informal approach. On the other hand, administrators of PHEIs are difficult to reach and smaller population size as compared to students. Hence, quantitative approach would be most appropriate for the first stage of this study.

In the second stage of study, 3 PHEIs were selected. The PHEIs with highest number of students participated in the first stage were interviewed in the second stage of this study. Qualitative approach was chosen for the second stage of this study as the selection of target respondents was heavily relied on the initial stage of study. The following section depicts the type of MMRD employed in this study in detailed.

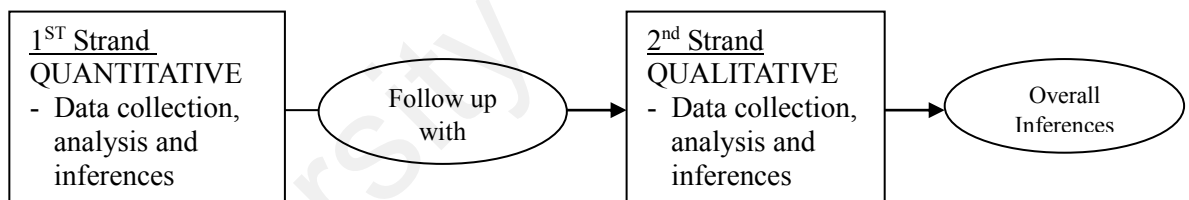


Figure 3.1: Mixed Method Research Design of Study

Source: Adapted from Creswell and Clerk (2011, pg: 69)

3.2.1 Mixed Method Research Design of Study

There are four types of mixed method research which is known as triangulation, explanatory, exploratory and embedded (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Creswell, 2009). Triangulation MMRD requires both quantitative and qualitative data in a single and

simultaneous phase. On the other hand, both explanatory and exploratory MMRDs require sequential conduct of dual data collection phases. Meanwhile, embedded MMRD which refers to the insertion of one type of data within another type of data can be conducted in a concurrent or sequential manner and encompasses either single or double-phase data collection.

According to Creswell and Clark (2011), MMRD are selected based on the key dimensions such as the level of interactions, priority, timing, and procedures of mixing strands like quantitative and qualitative strands. In terms of sampling, data collection and data analysis of the study, the interaction's level is referred as the analysis of two strands either separately (i.e. independent) or interactively (i.e. connected). Meanwhile, priority (i.e. equal, quantitative and qualitative) can be seen as the influence given to the strands of this study.

Timing is attributed as the time order involved in collecting data. The timing can be either concurrent (where both strands are implemented during a single phase), sequential (where both strands are subsequently implemented in two different phases) or multiphase (where the study employs more than two different phases or concurrent timing). As for mixing, it is referred to the process of mixing two strands (i.e. quantitative and qualitative) during the conduct of this study. It can be acquired from beginning until the end of study namely during sampling, data collection, data analysis and data interpretation. Table 3.2 shows a summary of the MMRD according to the above mentioned key dimensions.

Table 3.2: Summary of Mixed Method Research Design
Source: Adopted from Creswell and Clark (2011, pg: 73-76)

MMR DESIGN	Interaction	Priority	Timing	Mixing
Triangulation	Independent	Equal	Concurrent	After data analysis
Explanatory	Interactive	Quantitative	Sequential (Quantitative first)	From quantitative data analysis to qualitative data collection; Use quantitative data to design qualitative instrument , sampling and data collection
Explanatory	Interactive	Qualitative	Sequential (Qualitative first)	From qualitative data analysis to quantitative data collection; Use qualitative data to design quantitative instrument , sampling and data collection
Embedded	Interactive	Either quantitative or qualitative	Either concurrent or sequential	Before, during or after a major component
Transformative	Interactive	Equal, quantitative or qualitative	Either concurrent or sequential	Merging , connecting or embedding the strands within a transformative theoretical lens
Multiphase	Interactive	Equal	Multiphase	Connecting and possibly merging and/or embedding within a programmatic objective

Table 3.2 portrays that this study has basically employed sequential explanatory mixed method research design. The researcher employed sequential explanatory MMRD in this study so as to complement and elaborate more on the initial quantitative results by utilizing the qualitative data obtained from the second phase of this study (Creswell, 2009). The actual steps taken to conduct this study are illustrated in Figure 3.2

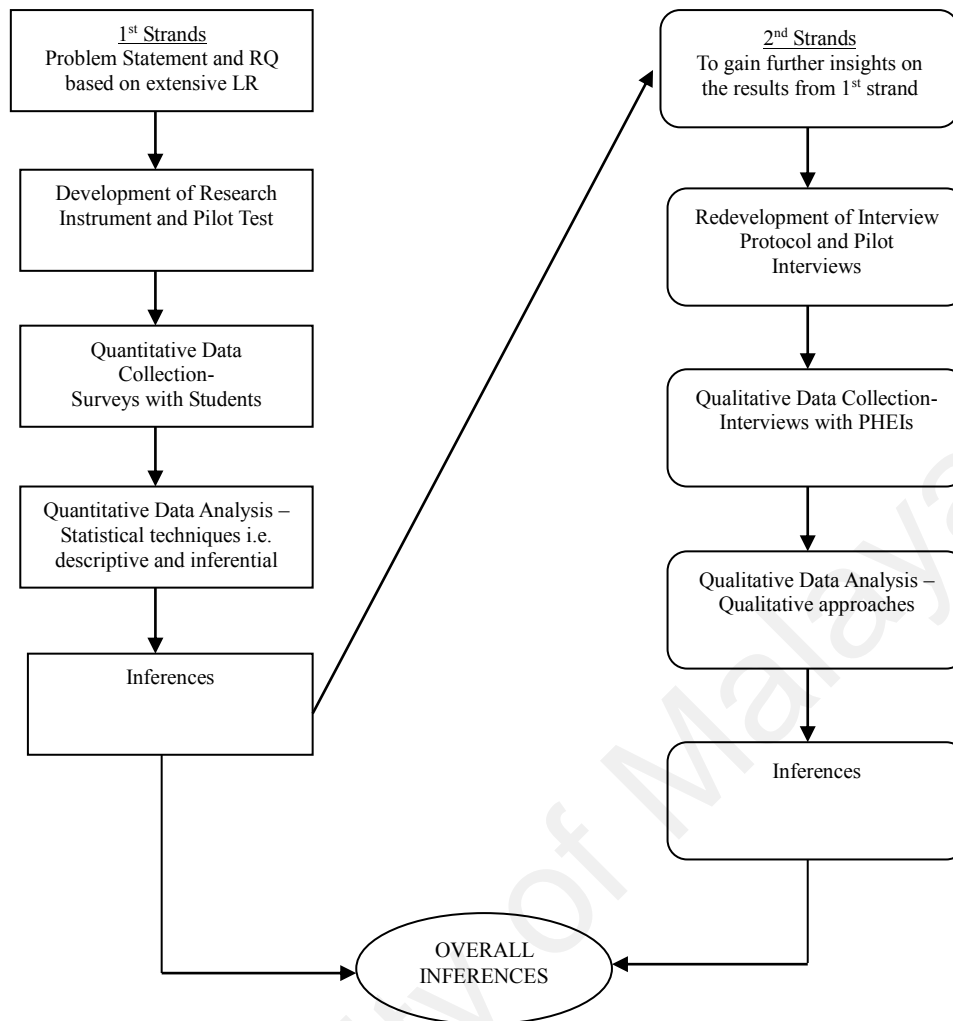


Figure 3.2: Sequential Explanatory Mixed Method Research Design of Study

Legend: RQ – research questions; LR – literature reviews; PHEIs – Private Higher Education Institutions

Briefly, this study begins where structured responses surveys were obtained from students via quantitative approach. Data collected was then examined through appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The quantitative strand of this study was the only source to recognize the potential respondents i.e. administrators of PHEIs have proven beneficial for the second strand of study. From the findings of the initial phase of the study, a research instrument was developed for the second phase of the study. In short, qualitative phase was dependent on the quantitative phase of this

study. Hence, the mix of both qualitative and quantitative strands was indeed happened in this initial phase.

Moving on to the second phase of this study, the administrators of selected PHEIs were interviewed in the in-depth interviews. The key determinant to recruit the PHEIs was the participation of students by respective PHEIs. The gathered data was then examined using generic qualitative analysis techniques. Results gained from both qualitative and quantitative strands were then concluded by the researcher. The sampling design of these two types of strands (i.e. qualitative and quantitative) in this study shall then be justified in the following section.

3.3 Sampling Design

By understanding a selected number of domains from a population - the sampling process, the researcher is able to draw a conclusion which could reflect the whole population (Zikmund et al, 2009). Sampling is essential to collect data from the entire population otherwise it will be almost unattainable due to resource constraints (i.e. time, cost, manpower). Target population, sampling techniques and sample size regardless of the nature of research strand i.e. quantitative or qualitative are the key components of sampling design. The following sub-sections explain these key components of the study's sampling design. The summary of study's sampling design is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Method Sampling of Study

Research Strand	Sampling Design		
	Respondents	Sampling Technique	Size
Quantitative	Students	Judgemental sampling	200
Qualitative	PICs of PHEIs	Convenience sampling	3

Legend: PIC – person in charge; PHEIs – private higher education institutions

3.3.1 Target Population

Information about population is obtained via sampling, hence, it is essential to determine the intended target population precisely in order to avoid inconsistent results pertaining the research problems concerned (Malhotra, 2010). This study mainly attempts to examine the impact of brand knowledge comprising of brand awareness and brand image towards the brand trust of PHEIs by controlling the impact of several types of word-of-mouth sources. Relatively, responses from key stakeholders are essential to determine the variables concerned by validating the responses obtained via the insights of both internal (i.e. employees) and key external stakeholders (i.e. students). Accordingly, the target population of this study will be students and employees of selected PHEIs located in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Due to its popularity in residential housing more than 250 PHEIs (MOHE, 2012), Klang Valley became the primary spot for the research as the number of PHEIs represents more than 60 percent of entire PHEIs in Malaysia and most of the students in Klang Valley are from entire country too. Hence, investigation carried within this

vicinity would be very representative and inclusive. In the first phase of study, students of PHEIs have been randomly approached at casual places i.e. cafe, shopping complexes, parks, bus stand nearby to their institutions. This is to ensure that there's no disturbance and noise between the management and students' routine. Only student with candidature of at least six months with his/ her present institution was allowed to participate in this survey.

The current students would have actual involvement experience with their present institutions whereas the prospective students would not. Thus, the current students might be expected to make better judgements on the impact of WOM sources on the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust which is the subject matter of this research. It means, in order to answer the relationship between the three dimensions, the respondents must have certain knowledge on brand knowledge and brand trust of their present institutions.

Upon this completion of "which PHEI the students are attached to" was counted where the top 5 PHEIs (based on the high frequency) were selectively picked according to order for the survey. Only the person-in-charge (PIC) of these PHEIs particularly in the area of marketing, branding, public relations, student recruitment are considered in qualitative phase for they would have qualified capabilities in participating this investigation. All these 5 PHEIs were contacted via telecommunication to brief about the study's intention. 3 PHEIs had willingly agreed to be interviewed.

3.3.2 Sampling Technique

Sampling design is an intricate aspect in mixed method studies because it is used to formulate appropriate sampling design for both quantitative and qualitative strands of the study (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). For mixed method studies, the verdict on sampling technique greatly relies on the link between samples of qualitative and quantitative strands (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). These two groups of samples can be either similar or different (where they are chosen from the same target population) members for both phases of study; nested (where the sampling elements are a subset of the elements drawn for the other phase of the study) or multilevel (where more than one set of samples are chosen from the different populations). This study requires different sample interactions as it is to investigate the responses of different key stakeholders of PHEIs i.e. internal (employees) and external (students). All traditional probabilities and non-probability sampling techniques can be implied separately or as one (Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

There are four types of mixed method sampling technique i.e. basic, concurrent, sequential and multilevel sampling technique (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Most of the past mixed method study have employed sequential sampling techniques (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This technique is important for the selection of target respondents through both sampling techniques stated above (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Simultaneously, a sequential mixed method sampling technique is used for this study (as summarized in Table 3.3). A judgemental sampling technique has been used to draw a sample of students for the first (quantitative) phase of this study where selected

potential respondents are students with at least six month candidature involved in the first phase of this study were evaluated by the researchers themselves. Convenience sampling technique is used in the second phase of study where, only selected PHEI representatives were approached to obtain their decisions and thoughts to be investigated.

3.3.3 Sample Size

The sample size of first phase of this study was fairly determined based on the nature of research. According to Voorhis and Morgan (2007), the following guide shall be observed in deciding on the sample size: i) 50 – very poor; ii) 100 – poor; iii) 200 – fair; iv) 300 – good; v) 500 – very good; vi) 1000 – excellent. According to Malhotra (2007), a larger sample size represents a more precise result. Nevertheless, the determination of sample size in the past years was based on the number of research variables that follows the appropriate pattern. According to Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), 50 respondents per research variable would be conceptual. Accordingly, the sample size for the first phase of this study will be 200 elements (students) whereby, 4 key research variables are present in this study i.e. brand awareness, brand image, WOM sources and brand trust.

Meanwhile, the sample size for the second phase (qualitative) of this study was subjectively determined based on the findings of first phase of the study. Though, it was initially planned to interview the representatives of five PHEIs, only three PHEIs had apparently participated in the second phase of this study. This is due to refusal by two PHEIs. Sample size for this strand is actually in line with claim of Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) and Yin (2009). The difference between a tiny small sample namely 1

element and an overly large sample like 10 elements would be the taxing of the qualitative cross-case analysis due to the inadequate insights of the matter.

The subsequent section emphasised on the procedures of collecting and analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data. The central focuses of this section are the procedures of the data collection and data analysis and also its respective instruments.

3.4 Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The beginning stage of this study employs quantitative approach which is used to ascertain the characteristics of phenomenon in the form of numbers. This approach is able to furnish accurate measurement or sensible information about the issues investigated (Aaker et al, 2007). Through this stage, quantitative (descriptive) approach is used to obtain responses from students of PHEIs. The primary purpose of this descriptive design is to provide an accurate snapshot of a huge sample and statistical techniques are usually implemented during data collection (Malhotra, 2010). The following sub-sections discuss the data collection and analysis procedures involved in this strand of this study.

3.4.1 Data Collection Procedures

Simultaneously, the two methods of quantitative data such as survey and observation can be processed (Malhotra, 2010). The survey method is more beneficial compared to

latter method. Survey is a more reliable form of evaluation for the process of data coding, analysis and interpretation. Survey is usually conducted in person, through electronic means mail or telephone (Aaker *et al.* 2007). In this current study, survey forms (i.e questionnaires) were administered in person among the target respondents (i.e. students).

Prior to this, the management of PHEIs located in Klang Valley area was contacted to obtain their consent on the investigation. Accordingly, the survey was carried outside the campus to avoid any interruption. Casual places such as food outlets, parks, shopping complexes and others near to the campuses were the main sampling location.

Filtered questions were used to accommodate participants' requirements before the survey was carried out to ensure that it fits the participants' comprehension about the present institutions. More than 30 participants were politely declined as they were in their first trimester at the institution back then. This is to clarify misconceptions, uncertainties and to obtain more accurate response.

A brief summary of pilot study and description on the questionnaire are furnished in the following subsections.

3.4.1.1 Pilot Test

In the first phase of the study, pilot study was conducted to ensure the research instrument built has appropriate content validity. In order to further enhance the intended validity of questionnaire, a rule of thumb proposed by Peat *et al.* (2002) IN

Teijlingen and Hundley (2002) was incorporated in carrying out this preliminary investigation. The pilot study is a pre-actual fieldwork for the recruited respondents. It is important to reduce the possible unsuccessful responses which are inappropriate for further processing of the participation (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

The pilot study of this strand was conducted among 30 students in Petaling Jaya, the central education hub in Klang Valley. These students were randomly approached and had willingly agreed to participate in the survey. Respondents were filtered out based on their candidature with the present institution which are similar to actual the fieldwork. Respondents were given time to view the questionnaires before completing the survey forms. They were required to explain the questions and voice out their opinions which is a method known as debriefing (Malhotra, 2010).

Accordingly, vague and overlying questions were discovered and revised based on the feedbacks of respondents. Most of the questions in the questionnaire were essentially remarked as relevant to the current investigation. Besides, this preliminary investigation was also advantageous in refining the usage of language, plainness of the technical terms utilized, as well as the flow of questions.

The feedbacks gathered were incorporated in finalizing the questionnaire before the actual fieldwork. The finalized questionnaire was then issued to 8 random selected Doctoral candidates. The aim was to retrieve constructive feedback from the questionnaire's credibility. There were a few relatable concerns that were highlighted by the Doctoral candidates were reviewed and appropriate amendment was subsequently done.

Finally, reliability test was conducted by the measurement of the Cronbach's alpha value. As shown in the Table 3.4, except the constructs of Brand Knowledge, the remaining constructs have adequate reliability with their alpha values about 0.89. Though the alpha value of Brand Knowledge was poor, the overall alpha value is close to 0.8. Therefore, the conclusion is that the questionnaire designed in this quantitative strand has adequate content validity.

Table 3.4: Reliability Analysis of the Pilot Study

Variable	No. of Items	Alpha of Pilot test
Overall	43	0.791
Brand Knowledge	12	0.263
Brand Trust	11	0.896
WOM sources	20	0.891

3.4.1.2 Research Instrument

According to the reviews of past literatures, the questionnaire can be constructed and finalized based on feedbacks gathered from the pilot study before proceeding to actual fieldwork. The sub-section presents the components of constructs of questionnaire employed in this phase of study. Table 3.5 summarizes the details of the constructs which has been employed in the questionnaire.

Part A of this questionnaire intends to get generic data of the respondents including the demographic profile and their overall view on WOM and its impact on

their selection towards current PHEI. There are six questions in this Part A where all the questions were categorical data in nature and measured using nominal and ordinal scale.

Part B of this questionnaire requires respondents to rate their (dis) agreement towards statements on the brand knowledge of PHEIs. As discussed in Chapter 2, the brand knowledge is measured in terms of brand awareness and brand image. There are 12 questions altogether in this Part B in which the items were measured using 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). This is designed so that the respondents could indicate their agreement with statements given.

Part C of this questionnaire comprises questions on brand trust of PHEIs. There are 11 questions and all the items were measured using 5-point Likert scale. Part D includes the measures on the 6 types of WOM sources containing 20 items where all the items were measured using 5-point Likert scale.

Table 3.5: Constructs of Questionnaire

Part	No	Description	Scale
A	1	Gender	Nominal
	2	Ethnicity	Nominal
	3	Education qualification	Ordinal
	4	Overall view on the impact of WOM sources on decision to select PHEI	Nominal
	5	Impact of specific WOM sources on decision to select PHEI	Nominal
	6	Intention to disseminate the information to others	Nominal
B	7	Brand Knowledge (brand awareness and brand image)	Interval
C	8	Brand Trust	Interval
D	9	WOM Sources	Interval

3.4.2 Data Analysis Techniques

Basically, the quantitative data collected was then analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). To produce a more comprehensive view on the quantitative data, both descriptive and inferential techniques were applied through this software. The former technique was used to examine the status of subjects, objects or events. In fact, the data will be more reader-friendly by using this technique as it could be comprehended and interpreted easily. As for the latter technique, it was employed to identify the differences or to examine the relationship between the two variables (Sekaran, 2003). The following sub-sections discuss in detail the techniques employed to analyse the data which had been collected through the questionnaire (refer Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Summary of Statistical Techniques Used

No.	Description	Statistical Technique
1	Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
2	Construct Validity	Factor Analysis
3	Respondents' Profile Analysis	Mode
		Cross-tabulation Analysis
4	Objective 1	Multiple Linear Regression Analysis
5	Objective 2	Hierarchical Regression Analysis
6	Additional Insights	One way ANOVA

3.4.2.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Quantitative studies are properly constructed with administrated instruments and predetermined research procedures (Malhotra, 2010; Saunders et al, 2003). In relation to that, ensuring consistent result is a vital task in a quantitative research.

On account of that, at the beginning of this study, the researcher has conducted both reliability and validity analysis on the employed instrument (questionnaire). To obtain the internal consistency of this instrument, the Cronbach's Alpha value of this instrument was measured. Specifically, the indicators of the Cronbach's Alpha value which are applicable in most situations are as follows: (i) alpha value $>.9$ – excellent; (ii) alpha value $>.8$ – good; (iii) alpha value $>.7$ – acceptable; (iv) alpha value $>.6$ – questionable; (v) alpha value $>.5$ – poor; and (vi) alpha value $<.5$ – unacceptable (Sekaran, 2003; George & Mallery, 2001). Pertaining to that, since the Cronbach's Alpha value obtained after testing the items of the questionnaire was at a minimum level of 0.7, this strand is considered as adequately reliable

Nonetheless, the questionnaire was also tested for its validity though two stages. Firstly, the content validity of the research instrument (i.e. questionnaire) has been assessed according to the insights of the respondents which are obtained from the pilot study. It is known as the face validity (Malhotra, 2010; Golafshani, 2003; Sekaran, 2003; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1997). Particularly, a small group of respondents which was the students were asked to evaluate the extent of the questionnaire. As mentioned in Section 3.4.1.1, this pilot study was able to provide some useful feedbacks (Sekaran, 2003) to improvise the research instrument prior to commence the actual fieldwork.

Furthermore, after collecting the quantitative data, the researcher tested the construct validity of the questionnaire. This step was taken so as to measure the extent to which the instrument items are always consistent with the relevant theories (Sekaran, 2003; Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1997). To complete this step, factor analysis which is used in evaluating the construct validity is applied (Burton and Mazerolle, 2011; Tafreshi & Yagmaie 2006; George & Mallery, 2001).

In fact, factorial validity can be assessed by attributes of research variables in accordance with existing theories and concept. The researcher utilizes this type of analysis greatly in testing the construct validity of the research instrument. The consistency between existing notions and generated results could be ensured by this analysis. In spite of that, variables of brand knowledge (i.e. brand awareness and brand image), brand trust, and WOM sources were also evaluated through factor analysis. The number of factors in the analysis was decided by Eigen value greater than 1.0 (Green & Salkind, 2003). Meanwhile, the strength of relationship between a variable and factor was decided by the factor loading value (George & Mallery, 2001). In fact, when the percentage of variance is high, it shows relative importance of a particular factor. In addition, when an item gained a factor loading value less than 0.5, it was ignored for further analysis on the confirmation of the construct validity (Green & Salkind, 2003).

3.4.2.2 Respondents' Profile Analysis

Looking from the respondents' demographic profile, it was analysed by using frequency analysis. Also, this method of analysis was used to analyse their generic view on the WOM sources and intentions to deliver information. This was because all of the

variables were coded as categorical data (i.e. nominal and ordinal). After completing the analysis, the findings were ranked in descending order so as to get the top significant variable for every category of the respondents' profile. Moreover, the impact of demographic aspects towards the respondents' generic views on the WOM sources and intention to disseminate information were evaluated through cross-tabulation analysis. This type of analysis was chosen due to the categorical nature of all the said variables (George and Mallery, 2001). The presence of a statistically significant relationship would be determined by utilizing cross-tabulation analysis, chi-square and significance values (Malhotra, 2010).

3.4.2.3 Objective 1

Objective 1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs

Multiple regression analysis is usually employed to determine the relationship and strength of relationship between one dependent variable and two or more independent variables. Both variables should be measured by interval or ratio scale (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1997). Furthermore, multiple regression analysis also provides a prediction of the dependent variable and an assessment of the relative impact of each independent variable (Saunders *et al.* 2003).

This study employs multiple regression analysis to examine the influential components of brand knowledge (i.e. brand awareness and brand image) towards the brand trust of PHEIs. The ties between these variables were bonded because of the determination on high F-ratio and low p-value where the strength of relationship was

measured based on R-square value. Beta coefficient value was used to identify the most significant contributor of brand trust of PHEIs.

3.4.2.4 Objective 2

Objective 2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between the components of brand knowledge (i.e. brand awareness and brand image) and brand trust of PHEIs firm's with the control from types of WOM sources. This analysis is useful to assess the contribution of brand knowledge of PHEIs (i.e. independent/explanatory variables) and types of WOM sources (i.e. moderator) one at a time by controlling each variable (moderator) to test their association with the focus of study i.e. brand trust of PHEIs (Lewis, 2007). Besides, the typical probability value, adjusted R-square and Beta value, the value of Significant F change indicates the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs through the inclusion of types of WOM sources.

3.4.2.5 Additional Insights

This study employs one way analysis of variance (one way ANOVA) to explain some additional discoveries especially impact of WOM on the brand knowledge and brand trust independently. This technique i.e. one way ANOVA is deemed appropriate to use in comparing sample means in order to provide evidence for inferring the difference in

means of the corresponding population. It can be used when there is one categorical independent variable with more than two levels and one scaled dependent variable (Sekaran, 2003; Aaker et al., 2001). As for the independent variable, influences of WOM sources were recoded into three levels namely 1=disagreement, 2=unbiased and 3=acknowledgement. “Disagreement” represents strongly disagree and disagree whereas “unbiased” is neutral. The “acknowledgement” will be strongly agree and agree. Meanwhile, both the effect (dependent) variables are indeed in interval scale.

The main criterions for determining the significance difference are low p-value (1-tail) and higher F-ratio. In addition, post hoc test i.e. Scheffe is used to determine the exact cause for the differences incurred in the dependent variable.

3.5 Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

As aforementioned, a qualitative approach was incorporated in this study to provide more comprehensive discussions on the data collected. It was done by complementing the quantitative findings in order to further comprehend the quantitative findings obtained from the initial phase. More importantly, it also offered present insights on the issue investigated. In fact, qualitative approach is a process of data collection which usually more complicated but not so significant (Malhotra, 2010). There are only a small number of respondents in this type of data collecting method and they are only partially representing the selected population. In addition, qualitative research has three common methods (Zikmund *et al.* 2009) namely, exploratory (define and clarify in detail the nature of the research problems), orientation (educate the researcher to a totally unfamiliar environment like the satisfaction of users) and clinical method

(provide insight into topics which might be impossible to capture with structured research methods).

Among those methods, exploratory method is deemed appropriate for this current study. This was due to the fact that it has the ability to ease the comprehension of the problems and issues that are addressed in the earlier stage of this study besides providing a better grasp of the phenomenon of interest especially brand knowledge, brand trust and WOM sources within education sector. In fact, according to Zikmund et al (2009), exploratory research methods have four general categories. They are case study method, pilot studies, secondary data analysis and experience surveys. Case study method is applied by most of the existing qualitative brand management's studies as compared to the other three methods. Accordingly, the researcher decided to adopt exploratory case study method as it is perceived as the most suitable method for this qualitative strand, to further the investigation responses.

3.5.1 Data Collection Procedures

Looking further into qualitative exploratory research, its data collection procedures can be classified as direct or indirect which based on respondents' knowledge (Malhotra, 2010). In this study, direct qualitative data collection procedure was introduced so that precise information relating to the research problem can be obtained. Also, it enabled the researcher to interact with the respondents. Focus group interviews and in-depth interviews are the two direct data collection procedures (Aaker *et al.* 2007). According to Yin (2009), for data collection of exploratory case study method, in-depth interview is the most important source. This type of interview allows respondents to express their

respective feedbacks and comments towards the research questionnaires. With these detailed information which reflects the real life situations related to this research, the possible conflicts and events can be evaluated. Therefore, in-depth interviews were adopted in case studies.

In addition, the researcher had applied proper interview protocol during the conduct of in-depth interviews. This protocol covered all necessary topics pertaining to the research problem statements and hence, improving the findings and past researchers from quantitative strand. In the following Section 3.5.1.1 and Section 3.5.1.2, the details about the interview protocol and findings of qualitative pilot study are well-elaborated.

The respondents of this strand were administrated by the persons in charge (PICs) from the shortlisted three PHEIs based on their number of students who had earlier participated in the questionnaire during the first phase of this study. An electronic mail was sent to them to explain the intention of this study and to solicit their consent to be interviewed. Only three PHEIs agreed to be interviewed out of five selected PHEIs. The research was carried out smoothly as target respondents were well informed on the in-depth interviews.

To be more specific, upon receiving their consent, a brief introduction of the study as well as the purpose of the interview were stated in a cover letter and emailed to the respondents along with a verification letter to be signed by them. This was to ensure that they will keep their promise to attend the interviews. Also, they were asked to provide a date and time at their own convenient to conduct the interviews. This provided freedom for the respondents to manage their time as they need ample time to

complete the given questionnaires with valid comments. As a result, the respondents showed more preparation for the interviews after the brief information was given.

During the interviews, only one respondent from each PHEI was interviewed. All the interviews were conducted about 30 minutes to 90 minutes, inclusive of the interview's length, all the information needed was obtained. Consequently, Zikmund *et al.* (2009) argued that the output of the research does not rely on the duration of interview.

To obtain more insights, the respondents were encouraged to exchange testimonials to express their views on any research problems during the interview. The interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the respondents and some of the vital ideas were added into consideration. It was found that generous participants tended to give more information.

3.5.1.1 Pilot Interviews

Since this study adopted a sequential explanatory MMR, the findings from the quantitative strand were fully utilized to generate a data collection instrument which was the interview protocol so that the second phase or in other words, the qualitative phase which involved interviews, could use this protocol as a guideline. In fact, as mentioned in earlier sections, sequential research was chosen due to the ability to complement the initial findings (in this study refers to the quantitative findings) with detailed explanation through the subsequent findings (in this study refers to the quantitative findings) (Creswell, 2009; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). More

importantly, open-ended questions such as “why” and “how” were asked in the interview in order to elicit deeper explanations and elaborations from the respondents towards topics discussed.

Besides that, pilot interview which was almost similar to the actual fieldwork were conducted too. Specifically, the procedures of the pilot study were executed similarly to the actual surveys. As for the pilot interview, one representative from PHEI in Klang Valley was interviewed. When it came to assessing the feasibility of research procedures in this qualitative strand of this study, the conduct of pilot interviews was indeed a great tool which is recognized as one of the methods employed to assess the content validity of the instrument (Peat et al. 2002 IN Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).

Nevertheless, there were no changes made to any documents of the interview. This shows that the interview protocol had functioned as a perfect emulation of quantitative research instrument. These findings obtained will be evaluated and inserted as part of an actual qualitative fieldwork.

3.5.1.2 Interview Protocol

As aforementioned, the interview protocol was designed based on the findings obtained from the quantitative data which was then used for the qualitative interview. Most importantly, it was purely extended from the quantitative research instrument. Besides that, open-ended questions were constructed and therefore, the respondents were encouraged to voice out as much as it was relevant.

3.5.2 Data Analysis Approaches

As a matter of fact, the qualitative data requires a strict process which involves a series of processes to analyse it and hence, it should not be overlooked (Saunders et al. 2003). In relation to that, cross case syntheses was employed in this research where individual interviews were conducted as the pre-designation part of the whole study (Yin, 2009) and references to existing theories were done so as to shape the research approaches used (Saunders et al. 2003). Hence, the existing three theories are used so as to compare with the results obtained.

Data reduction, data display, followed by drawing up and verifying conclusions are the three ways suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) so as to analyse the qualitative data. In the context of this current study, data reduction process was not conducted separately and individually in the phase of data analysis. In fact, it was rather taken place throughout the whole study. This step sorted the data collected from interviews, followed by focusing, discarding and organizing the data so as to ease the data analysis process.

As for data display, it was also applied in this study to ensure validity exists in qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, this phase had been carefully analysed. The researcher had applied widely table technique displays to display data (Saunders et al.2003). At the last stage of data analysis, all information gathered from the two previous stages were used to make the conclusions. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a good researcher should be able to retain the authentic meaning of information even after concluding a research. The valid findings obtained from the stage of qualitative data analysis were be used as a complement to the findings

of the quantitative data analysis. In short, the findings of the entire research could be proven valid.

Nevertheless, the collected data was compared across all three cases which involved three respondents based on each group of variables (brand knowledge, brand trust, WOM sources). The information on the variables was adopted from the quantitative findings. The opinions of the respondents were presented in an abbreviated and coded manner to ensure precise data display (Parida, 2005). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), through summarizing and coding the segment of data into a smaller analytic unit, readers could comprehend better on the issues concerned. This in turn, leads to the application of cross-case analysis in which directional processes and common themes are surfaced in case studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.5.3 Data Reliability and Validity

Creswell (2009) stated that the significance of validity greatly varies in both quantitative and qualitative research. More importantly, the quality of the qualitative study is greatly influenced by the validity and reliability and hence, they should be prioritized in the initiation stage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2001 IN Golafashani, 2003).

Furthermore, regardless of the nature of the study, either quantitative or qualitative, the quality of a study should be based on its own term (Bashir et al, 2008; Golafashani, 2003). Other than that, to determine the quality of the study, the concepts of dependability, consistency, credibility and applicability are also important (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Bashir et al. 2008; Golafashani, 2003; Lincoln and Gulba, 1985 IN

Morse et al, 2002). Term's dependability and consistency are indeed commonly used in qualitative studies to represent reliability (Creswell, 2009; Gibbs, 2007; Seale, 1999 IN Golafashani, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985 IN Morse et al, 2002; Clont, 1992). To get the consistency of qualitative data, the entire qualitative data collection and analysis process need to be examined in this study.

In addition, this study applied two reliability strategies proposed by Gibbs (2007) to ensure the consistency of qualitative data. Specifically, the researcher did careful and repeated checking on the in-depth interview transcripts so that the information recorded was accurate without obvious mistakes. The consistency of the research is ensured by using standardized coding strategy throughout this qualitative data analysis.

Reliability analysis focus on the consistency of statistical measurements (i.e. survey instrument items) was debated on its appropriateness in qualitative studies (Bashir et al. 2008; Golafashani, 2003; Stenbacka, 2001 IN Morse et al. 2002). Besides that, there were past literatures that has demonstrated that validity is adequate to prove reliability in qualitative studies (Patton, 2001 IN Golafashani, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985 IN Morse et al, 2002) as there is an interdependence of reliability and validity (Malhotra, 2010). However, validity would be voided without the presence of reliability measurement. Therefore, as compared to reliability analysis, validity analysis is essential in qualitative studies. Creswell and Miller (2000) IN Creswell (2009) elaborated that validity analysis is the procedures which determine the consistency of the qualitative findings according to the perception of the researcher. Other than that, a few studies have used quality, rigor and trustworthiness as terms to refer as validity of qualitative data (Bashir et al. 2008; Golafashani, 2003).

According to Creswell (2009), multiple validation strategies have been proposed to obtain more accurate qualitative findings. Furthermore, qualitative strand, triangulation strategy was primarily used for the validation of the findings of this qualitative strand. As discussed earlier, the primary respondents of this strand were students whose participation had taken into consideration in identifying the subsequent respondents (i.e. PHEIs). Therefore, insights on the brand knowledge, brand trust and WOM sources within education sector were gained from the key players of this sector. With triangulation of perceptions from other groups of respondents, the findings of this study had become more valid.

At the end of qualitative data analysis, members checking strategy was used for the second validation. It was done through the examination of the interviewees after the researcher had contacted them through phone calls. Specifically, the interviewees were asked for their consent to confirm the accuracy of the content of the transcripts which solely based on their responses. They were given a week's time to assess the accuracy of the information. To redeem the final word, the researcher prepared also a summary of qualitative report and sent via e-mail to the agreed interviewees. In return, the interviewees leave neither requests nor comments to amend any content of the qualitative write-up as consistency (reliability). Thus, it enhanced the validity of the findings of this strand.

In spite of that, it is worth to note that the reality often differs with the existing theories. This is shown by the qualitative discussions in this study in which the discrepant information were presented to pinpoint the contradiction with past literatures as well as the quantitative findings gathered from the first strand of this study. With the contradictory evidence, the qualitative findings became more credible.

3.6 Summary

This chapter mainly elaborates all the vital information required to carry out the current study in an appropriate way. This chapter begins with the description of the integrated ways to conduct a research, followed by separated and thorough discussions regarding the steps and procedures. This chapter shall be able to offer a fundamental understanding on how the current study was conducted from the beginning until its completion due. The following chapter elaborates the quantitative findings of this study.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the data obtained from quantitative data collection procedures. As explained in Chapter 3, several statistical techniques are used in order to analyze and interpret the data in an appropriate manner. This chapter essentially consists of two major components. Firstly, it discusses on the accuracy of measurement tool used in terms of its validity and reliability alongside the description on the response rate and respondents' demographic profile. Secondly, it discusses and interprets data analyzed based on the research objectives of this study. As a sequential explanatory mixed method study, this study uses qualitative findings to further explain and supplement the quantitative findings in order to enrich the overall discussions and hence findings.

4.2 Measurement of Accuracy

This section discusses the statistical techniques used to measure the accuracy of the instrument used in this study. Reliability and validity are two vital dimensions to check against the accuracy of measurement utilized. A detailed description on the principles used to check the validity and reliability of instrument used in quantitative strand is furnished in Chapter 3, Section 3.4.

4.2.1 Validity

Validity test is important to measure the soundness of instrument used. In addition to the content validity (as described in Section 3.4, Chapter 3), Principal Component Factor Analysis technique was performed for assessing the construct validity of the instrument used. Factor analysis was used on the variables of Brand Knowledge, Brand Trust and WOM Sources. Briefly, items with more than 0.5 factor loading value only were considered for further analysis. The purpose is to ensure its soundness (Seyal & Rahim, 2006; Green & Salkind, 2003). This section comprises of the discussion on the factor analyses conducted for the three key variables of this study i.e. Brand Knowledge, Brand Trust and WOM Sources.

4.2.1.1 Factor Analysis on Brand Knowledge

Of 12 items of Brand Knowledge, only two items named “My current HEI will come to my mind first when I think about further studies” and “My current HEI is an unique study destination for students to enjoy distinguished experiences” were withdrawn from further analysis due to their lower factor loading value (below 0.5). As shown in Table 4.1, the remaining 10 items were categorized into two factors and named as (i) Factor 1: Brand Image; and (ii) Factor 2: Brand Superiority. Percentage of variance indicates that Brand Image (51.9 percent) is the most important dimension of Brand Knowledge as compared to Brand Superiority (8.81 percent).

Both factors consist of 5 items each where the range of factor loading value is 0.539 – 0.736 and 0.564 - 0.714, respectively. Brand Image factor essentially centers on

the items related the identification on and experience with the brand of current HEI. Meanwhile, Brand Superiority factor has revolved around the distinguishing nature of the current HEI's overall aspect. Therefore, the original components of brand knowledge (as discussed in Section 2.6 and Section 2.7) namely brand awareness and brand image have been restructured as brand superiority and brand image, respectively. This new classification will be used in the further analysis.

Table 4.1: Factor Analysis - Brand Knowledge

Descriptors	Factor 1	Factor 2
Brand Image		
Easily recognize current HEI	0.736	
Understand brand of current HEI	0.692	
Recognize HEI because of its symbols	0.630	
Familiar with current HEI	0.543	
Associate current HEI as a great study destination	0.539	
Brand Superiority		
Distinguish the advantages to study at current HEI		0.714
My confidence on HEI reduce perceived risks		0.760
Brand image of current HEI is superior to others		0.623
Current HEI has impressed me		0.621
Aware all the programmes and services offered by current HEI		0.564
Eigen Value	8.032	1.068
Percentage (%) of Variance	51.90	8.81

4.2.1.2 Factor Analysis on Brand Trust

Table 4.2 illustrates output of factor analysis conducted on the variable of Brand Trust. As all the 11 items had greater factor loading value (more than 0.5), all were retained for further analysis. It implies the soundness of the items measured. Briefly, all these 11 items were categorized into three factors and retained their original label as the following: (i) Factor 1 – Credibility; (ii) Factor 2 – Integrity; (iii) Factor 3 – Benevolence. Though the grouping had similar label as in the original research

framework context, there is a minor reshuffle among the items that originally belong to dimension of Credibility and Benevolence. The change involves two items namely “Information on my current HEI is always consistent over the many years” and “Admin staffs of my current HEI are well trained on the tasks assigned to them” which are originally from the dimension of Credibility and currently placed in the dimension of Benevolence and vice versa.

Table 4.2: Factor Analysis - Brand Trust

Descriptors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Credibility			
Current HEI assesses and meets students' expectation	0.875		
Current HEI enhances my expectation	0.852		
Current HEI acts in a way as promised	0.736		
Well trained admin staff	0.714		
Integrity			
I perceive current HEI offers programmes at a reasonable fee		0.892	
I notice current HEI offers programmes at a reasonable fee		0.831	
I am loyal to current HEI as it constantly deliver its promises		0.763	
I believe current HEI has sufficient knowledge on current trend		0.653	
Benevolence			
Consistent information about HEI			0.710
Well trained academic staff			0.660
Trustworthy academic programmes			0.597
Eigen Value	5.268	1.315	1.139
Percentage (%) of Variance	47.88	11.95	10.33

Briefly, all the generated factors explain about 70.16 percent of the overall variance where the most important factor is Credibility (47.88 %), followed by Integrity (11.95%) and Benevolence (10.33%). Both Factor of Credibility and Integrity have 4 items each while Factor of Benevolence has 3 items.

4.2.1.3 Factor Analysis on WOM Sources

Factor analysis conducted on the WOM sources had withdrawn 4 items (due to the lower factor loading value) and restructured the remaining 16 items into six factors. Such categorization is similar to the original context as in the construction of research variables of this study. The four withdrawn items are “I believe the information shared by my school teachers on the selection of HEI”, “Information displayed on the website of HEI does not affect my decision to study at current HEI”, “I consider personal experiences shared in social media e.g. Facebook and Twitter about HEIs are reliable” and “opinion of my friends on HEI is considered reliable as they have adequate knowledge on the HEIs in Malaysia”.

Table 4.3: Factor Analysis – WOM Sources

Descriptors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
School teachers (ST) Frequently referred to ST before enrolling at current HEI ST greatly influenced decision to study at current HEI	0.899 0.895					
Social media (SM) Frequently referred to SM before enrolling at current HEI Positive experiences shared over SM greatly influenced decision to study at current HEI		0.841 0.591				
Academic Advisor (AA) Trust information provided by AA Believe information given by AA would be HEI-favoured Persuasion by AA does not influence selection of current HEI Frequently referred to AA during pre-enrolment stage at current HEI			0.871 0.832 0.813 0.575			

Table 4.3, continued

Descriptors	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
Friends Friends greatly influenced decision to study at current HEI My friends always share information about current HEI				0.804 0.752		
College Website (CW) HEI provides vital information on its website HEI places visitor's comments on its website Referred to website during initial stage of HEI selection					0.808 0.739 0.674	
Family Members (FM) FM frequently furnished about current HEI I gave greater information to information spread by FM Information spread by FM reduced perceived risks						0.831 0.758 0.685
Eigen Value Percentage (%) of Variance	5.326 26.631	2.262 11.308	1.729 10.645	1.447 8.234	1.348 7.741	1.175 6.021

Briefly, all the 6 generated factors explain about 70.88 percent of the overall variance. As illustrated in Table 4.3, Factor of School Teacher is considered most important followed by the Factor of Social Media, Academic Advisor, Friends, Website and Family Members. Factor of Academic Advisor has 4 items while Factor of Family and Factor of Website have 3 items each. The remaining 3 factors have 2 items each.

To sum, there are 2 factors in Brand Knowledge (i.e. Brand Image and Brand Superiority), 3 factors in Brand Trust (i.e. Credibility, Integrity and Benevolence) and 6 factors in WOM sources (i.e. School Teacher, Social Media, Academic Advisor, Friends, College Website and Family Members). On one hand, the findings resulted from these factor analyses are considerably used to facilitate the remaining data analysis and discussions. On the other hand, it has also validated the constructs performed on

this quantitative strand of this study. It is highly justified with the withdrawal of items with low factor loading value which is below than 0.5 from further analysis, sameness of the items to the factors generated and consistency of the factors generated with the original construction of research variables of this study.

4.2.2 Reliability

Besides demonstrating validity of the instrument used, reliability analysis is vital to ensure the instrument used is free from measurement errors in yielding consistent results over the repeated measurement. As such, it essentially centers on the internal consistency of measurement tool used which can be measured through the examination of correlation between items and their corresponding subsets. Table 4.4 tabulates the Cronbach's Alpha value for each key variable in the instrument used.

Table 4.4: Reliability Analysis of Research Instrument Used

Variable	No.of Items	Alpha
Overall	43	.884
Brand image	6	.878
Brand superiority	6	.873
Brand Knowledge	12	.874
Credibility	4	.872
Integrity	4	.874
Benevolence	3	.867
Brand Trust	11	.872
School teachers	3	.875
Social media	3	.884
Academic advisor	4	.880
Friends	3	.882
College website	4	.873
Family members	3	.889
WOM sources	20	.867

As shown in Table 4.4, the quantitative instrument used in this study is deemed to be substantially reliable with the Cronbach's Alpha value for each of its dimensions exceeding 0.8. This is in line with the typology of George & Mallery (2001) which

claims that Alpha value which is closer to 1.00 signifies a great amount of consistency in the variables measured. This table also furnishes the Alpha value obtained for the instrument used in the pilot study. It should be noted that though the Alpha value for both pilot study and actual fieldworks differ slightly, their values are still within the desirable range and hence it demonstrates the good consistency of the instrument used in this strand.

4.3 Analysis on Respondents

This section describes the response rate for both the qualitative and quantitative strand of this study. It is followed by a detailed description of the analyses conducted on the respondents' demographic profile.

4.3.1 Response Rate

As explained in Section 3.3, the sample size for the quantitative strand of this study is 200 elements. In order to maximize the response rate, an additional of 30 questionnaires was distributed among the target respondents. The backing was rather a smaller volume in order to capitalize on the nature of person-administered data collection method used. This method usually yields higher response rate. Nevertheless, a thorough checking on the collected 230 questionnaires showed that there were 21 incomplete questionnaires and 35 questionnaires with obvious ambiguous and/ or inconsistent pattern of responses. Therefore, 56 questionnaires were discarded and the remaining 174 were used for the entire quantitative analysis.

4.3.2 Demographic Profile

This section will provide the general insights of the respondents investigated for the quantitative strand of this study. Table 4.5 provides a summary of the demographic profile of the respondents based on their gender, ethnicity and education level. Briefly, there were more female (63.2%) and Chinese (56.3%) respondents. Majority of the respondents (36.8%) had *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* as their present highest education qualification level.

In order to have preliminary insights on the respondents' responses towards topic investigated in this study, 3 questions were posed (refer to Table 4.6). Only 45.4 percent of respondents had acknowledged that their decision to study at the current HEI is due to the information disseminated by others. Information spread by friends (78.5%) was highlighted as the most influential WOM source followed by family members (60.8%) and social network (41.8%). Meanwhile, information and advices given by the HEI's academic advisors (3.8%) were perceived least important by the respondents.

Table 4.5: Demographic Profile

Descriptors	Frequency	%=100
Gender		
Male	64	36.8
Female	110	63.2
Ethnic		
Malay	15	8.6
Chinese	98	56.3
Indian	55	31.6
Others	6	3.4
Education Level		
Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/ O-level	12	6.9
Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia	64	36.8
A-Level	7	4
Pre-university programme/ Matriculation	3	1.7
Foundation courses	53	30.5
Diploma	19	10.9
Others	16	9.2

Table 4.6: Preliminary Responses of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	%=100
Dissemination of information on the HEI has influenced his/her decision to study at current HEI		
Yes	79	45.4
No/ Not applicable	95	54.6
Information spread through the following sources has influenced his/her decision to study at current HEI		
Family members	48	60.8
Friends	62	78.5
School teachers	12	15.2
Academic advisor	3	3.8
College website	22	27.8
Social media	32	41.8
His/ her willingness to disseminate information about current HEI to others		
Yes	65	37.4
No/not sure/ not applicable	109	62.6

This is justifiable as students and their parents always perceive academic advisor as the representative of the HEI and the information or advices given are usually favourable to the HEI instead of to the students. In addition, despite knowing the effectiveness of information spread about HEI towards the enrolment decision, only 37.4% of surveyed respondents had stated that they would be willing to disseminate about their HEI to other potential students.

4.3.2.1 Additional Analyses on Demographic Profile

This subsection provides additional information on the surveyed respondents. Therefore, it attempts to demonstrate a possible link between their demographic profile and preliminary responses towards topic investigated in this study. The discussion in this section is expected to provide some insights before proceeding to the analysis based on the research objective of this study.

As tabulated in Table 4.7, a series of cross-tabulation analysis was conducted on the key demographic dimensions (i.e. gender, ethnicity and education level) of respondents and their preliminary research related responses (i.e. influence of information disseminated on the decision to study at current HEI, particular type of WOM source which has influenced their decision to study at current HEI and respondents' willingness to spread information to others).

Apart from Family Members and Friends, the other WOM sources i.e. School Teachers, College Website, Social Media and Academic Advisor have significant association with demographic background of respondents specifically with their gender and education qualification. Besides, it is also noteworthy to learn that the information spread about HEI does not significantly affect the surveyed respondents' decision to study at current HEI, despite their varied demographic profile i.e. gender, ethnicity and education level. Similarly, their diversified demographic profile does not also significantly affect their willingness to spread information about current HEI to others.

Table 4.7: Summary of Cross-tabulation Analysis

Descriptor	Chi-square	Phi	Cramer V	Sign.
Influence of information spread * Gender	5.352	0.102	0.102	0.494
Influence of information spread * Education	17.601	0.318	0.278	0.128
Influence of information spread * Ethnic	5.352	0.175	0.124	0.599
<hr/>				
Family * Gender	0.872	0.071	0.071	0.35
Friends * Gender	2.909	0.129	0.129	0.088
<i>School teachers * Gender</i>	<i>4.951</i>	<i>0.169</i>	<i>0.169</i>	<i>0.026*</i>
Academic advisor * Gender	0.016	0.09	0.09	0.901
<i>College Website * Gender</i>	<i>5.396</i>	<i>0.176</i>	<i>0.176</i>	<i>0.02*</i>
<i>Social media * Gender</i>	<i>11.154</i>	<i>0.253</i>	<i>0.253</i>	<i>0.001*</i>
Family * Education	4.349	0.158	0.158	0.636
Friends * Education	12.057	0.263	0.263	0.061
<i>School teachers * Education</i>	<i>23.575</i>	<i>0.368</i>	<i>0.368</i>	<i>0.01*</i>

Table 4.7, continued.

Descriptor	Chi-square	Phi	Cramer V	Sign.
<i>Academic advisor * Education</i>	14.808	0.292	0.292	0.022*
College Website * Education	9.9613	0.239	0.239	0.126
Social media * Education	6.804	0.198	0.198	0.339
Family * Ethnic	3.169	0.135	0.135	0.366
Friends * Ethnic	6.096	0.187	0.187	0.107
School teachers * Ethnic	2.532	0.121	0.121	0.47
Academic advisor * Ethnic	1.842	0.103	0.103	0.606
College Website * Ethnic	1.743	0.1	0.1	0.621
Social media * Ethnic	4.626	0.163	0.163	0.201
Willingness to spread information * Gender	1.218	0.084	0.084	0.749
Willingness to spread information * Education	14.631	0.219	0.167	0.102
Willingness to spread information * Ethnic	34.208	0.443	0.256	0.012

The role of word of mouth in influencing consumer purchase decision is widely acknowledged; it evidences that the impact of the cost-free word of mouth is greater than impact of the most paid promotion tools particularly in influencing the brand choice of consumer (Ahmad et al, 2014; Lamba and Agarwal, 2014). This is very factual among youth nowadays who are fond of the technologies gadget in exchanging the information among peers. Smink (2012) claimed that youth prefer to engage in spreading information online as it is perceived to be distinctive and to help others by sharing the vital information. Nevertheless, the preliminary findings of this study shows that the surveyed students (irrespective of the gender, ethnicity and education level) were reluctant in spreading information about his/ her HEI to others and had zeroed the importance of information spread on their choice of study destination.

In order to further comprehend the signification associations discovered (as tabulated in Table 4.7), the corresponding detailed analyses are presented in Table 4.8 and Table 4.9. As shown in Table 4.8, more male respondents had greatly

acknowledged the influence of these three WOM sources as compared to female respondents. Similarly, more female respondents had denied the influence of these WOM sources on their decision to study at current HEI.

Findings also indicate that the relationships between gender and these specific WOM sources are rather weak though there is the presence of statistically significant association. The weak association between gender and WOM influence is indeed in line with the study of East & Lomax (2010) which discovered that both male and female customers have very similar pattern in receiving and/ or spreading word of mouth among their peers. Nevertheless, past studies reported that male customers' tendency in spreading negative word of mouth is slightly greater than their opposites as males are seen more sensitive (Zhang et al, 2014; East & Lomax, 2010).

Furthering discussion on the output illustrated in Table 4.8, Social Media is found to be the most popular information source of current HEI among the surveyed male respondents while School Teacher is found to be the least popular WOM source. This reinforces the engagement of youth (for instant, students of HEIs) in quickly spreading information via numerous social media (Ahmad et al. 2014; Smink, 2012). It has subsequently caused youth to be more technology (Internet) reliance besides detaching gradually from their societies. School teachers are always seen to be last resort in discussing about their further studies particularly for students from good social economic background (Wilkins, 2013). This is because their parents and other social contacts who tend to be well-educated are preferred over their school teachers in consulting about their future. Nevertheless, such scenario is believed to be contradicting to the students from lower social economic background that still favour and require the guidance of teachers.

Table 4.8: Gender * Social Media, College Website and School Teacher

Descriptors	School Teachers		College Website		Social Media	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Male	56	8	51	13	44	20
Female	106	4	101	9	98	12
Total	162	12	152	22	142	32
Chi-square	4.951		5.39		11.154	
Phi/ Cramer V	0.169		0.176		0.253	
Sign.	0.026		0.02		0.01	

Table 4.9 illustrates the importance of two specific WOM sources (namely School Teacher and Academic Advisor) which have significant influences on the study decision by the surveyed respondents with varied education qualification. It is worth to note that there were more students with STPM qualification who had acknowledged the importance of their school teachers on their tertiary study choices. In addition, the influence of both School Teachers and Academic Advisor is found to be similar among respondents with qualification of Diploma and Others. Of these 2 WOM sources, School Teacher has greater influence than Academic Advisor among surveyed respondents based on their varied education level.

Table 4.9: Education * School Teacher and Academic Advisor

Descriptors	School Teachers		Academic Advisor	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
SPM/ O-level	12	0	12	0
STPM	58	6	64	0
A-level	6	1	7	0
Pre-university	1	2	3	0
Foundation	53	0	53	0
Diploma	18	1	18	1
Others	14	2	14	2
Total	162	12	171	3
Chi-square	23.575		14.808	
Phi/ Cramer V	0.368		0.292	
Sign.	0.01		0.022	

The role of a school teacher is undisputable specifically among children from lower socio economic group as their parents and/ or others within social circle are perceived to have limited information about further studies and study destinations. This is in line with the findings of past studies e.g. Haur (2009) and Wilkins (2013) which concluded that teachers are one of the key social influences in affecting the tertiary study decision of pre-university and school students. Similarly, the finding of this study (as in Table 4.9) has further enhanced the importance of teacher's influence on the student's study choice though the association is seen to be weaker.

To sum, this section (Section 4.3) explains in details on the demographic profile of the respondents. Data obtained from 174 usable questionnaires showed that the majority of respondents were females, Chinese and with Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia as the current highest education qualification. Only 45.4 percent of respondents had acknowledged that their enrolment decision was influenced by word-of-mouth information spread by others while about 62.6 percent of respondents had denied on the possibility of spreading information about their HEI to others. It is also noteworthy to learn that respondents' enrolment decision resultant from word-of-mouth and intention to spread information to others were not due to their demographic (e.g. ethnicity, education level and gender) influences. Tertiary study decision made by male respondents was essentially prone to the influences from typical WOM sources. Social media was found to be the most typical WOM source in affecting students' study decision. Meanwhile, role of school teachers is believed to be varying among students with different social economic background.

4.4 Analysis by Research Objectives

This section analyzes quantitative data gathered and subsequently interprets the findings based on research objectives and corresponding research questions of this study. Prior to that, two key descriptive statistics i.e. mean (Average) and Standard Deviation (STD) values are computed for all the research variables of this study i.e. Brand Knowledge, Brand Trust and WOM Sources in order to furnish a preliminary overview on these variables.

The computation of Mean and STD value is based on the factors generated from factor analysis (Table 4.1, Table 4.2 and Table 4.3). This is to recognize the key dimension of each variable. As shown in Table 4.10, Brand Image is the greater dimension of Brand Knowledge than Brand Superiority due to its higher Mean value. Meanwhile, Integrity is discovered to be the greatest dimension of Brand Trust, followed by Credibility and Benevolence. On the other hand, of six WOM sources, College Website is found to be the greatest WOM source followed by Family Members, Academic Advisor, Social Media, Friends and School Teacher.

Table 4.10: Computation of Mean and STD Value

Descriptors	Mean	STD
Brand Image	3.5793	0.5844
Brand Superiority	3.4494	0.5233
Brand Knowledge	3.5144	0.5207
Credibility	3.3549	0.6677
Integrity	3.5086	0.6778
Benevolence	3.3544	0.7381
Brand Trust	3.4060	0.6039
Family Members	3.3879	0.6606
Friends	3.0029	0.8457
School Teachers	2.6724	1.0557
Academic Advisor	3.3471	0.6648
College Website	3.5077	0.7093
Social Media	3.3247	0.9056
WOM Source	3.2071	0.5017

It is also worth to note that the responses towards these dimensions are somewhat scattered and departed from the average responses. This could be seen from the quite huge standard deviation value with the range of 0.5233 to 1.0557. In addition, except for the disagreement with the influence of “School Teachers” source, generally respondents had unbiased (neutral) and/ or agreed with the importance of the remaining WOM sources, dimensions of Brand Trust and Brand Knowledge.

4.4.1 Research Objective 1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs

As discussed in Section 2.6, following are the hypotheses naught related to the research objective 1 of this study:

- *Ho1: There is no significant relationship between students’ brand superiority and brand trust of the particular PHEI.*
- *Ho2: There is no significant relationship between students’ brand image and brand trust of the particular PHEI*

This subsection initially describes the data obtained from simple linear regression (SLR) analysis conducted in examining the overall impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust. It will be subsequently followed by data description on the multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis conducted to further scrutinize the impact of individual subsets of brand knowledge i.e. brand image and brand superiority towards the brand trust of PHEIs. Table 4.11 depicts the summary of regression analyses conducted.

Table 4.11: Summary of Regression Analysis

Summary		ANOVA			Coefficient			
Model	Adj. R Square	F-value	Sign	Unstandardized	Standardized	t	Sign	
SLR BK	0.423	53.99	0.000	0.422	0.489	7.348	0.000	
MLR BI Sup.	0.448	27.34	0.000	0.182	0.158	1.495	0.137	
				0.373	0.359	3.398	0.001	

Dependent variable: Brand trust

SLR Predictor: Brand knowledge (BK)

MLR Predictor: BK, Brand Image (BI), Brand superiority (BS)

As shown in Table 4.11, adjusted R-square of 0.423 indicates that about 42.3 percent of variances in the brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by the respondents is contributed by the respondents' knowledge on the brand of his respective PHEI. This marginal moderate association between brand trust and brand knowledge is statistically significant ($F=53.99$, $p=0.000$). It implies that the extent of brand trust a student has towards his or her current PHEI subjects to his or her existing knowledge with regards to the PHEI's brand. This is in line with the typology of Keller et al. (2008) which claimed that brand knowledge is a must to create brand trust of any firms.

In order to further understand the impact of individual subsets of brand knowledge towards brand trust, the output of MLR analysis was referred (as in the bottom of Table 4.11). The 44.8 percent of MLR's adjusted R-square indicates a marginal moderate overall association between the subsets of brand knowledge (i.e. brand image and brand superiority) and brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by the respondents. F-value of 27.34 and p-value of 0.000 indicate that the said association is statistically significant despite its marginal strength.

Findings also indicate that brand superiority is comparatively a better predictor for the brand trust than the brand image. It literally means students who discern the competitive advantages or superiority of his or her PHEIs would have a greater amount trust towards the current institutions than students who could just recognize and/ or aware of the image of PHEI. As reported in Table 4.11, the statistically significant link ($t=3.398$, $p=0.001$) between brand superiority and brand trust has further supported the significant role of brand superiority in building trust of students towards PHEIs.

This is because brand recognition and/ or awareness are mere initial steps in building trust towards a firm (Schmitt, 2012; Hsu & Cai, 2009). Firms need to ensure and transform customers who merely recognize the brand/ firm into customers who could distinguish preeminence of the brand over others. Though this will be a daunting task for the management, but the firm's success in converting all the customers to understand its superiority will enable the brand to yield a great extent of trust as perceived by its customers (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991).

To sum, brand superiority ($t=3.398$, $p=0.001$) has a significant association with the brand trust of PHEIs while brand image ($t=1.495$ $p=0.137$) has insignificant association with the same. Therefore, the hypothesis naught 1 (H_01) is rejected and hypothesis naught 2 (H_02) is not rejected.

4.4.2 Research Objective 2: To examine the moderation impact of word-of-mouth sources on the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs

As discussed in Section 2.6, following are the hypotheses naught related to the research objective 2 of this study:

- *Ho3a: WOM by social media does not significantly affect the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.*
- *Ho3b: WOM by family members does not significantly affect the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.*
- *Ho3c: WOM by friends does not significantly affect the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.*
- *Ho3d: WOM by academic advisor does not significantly affect the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.*
- *Ho3e: WOM by school teacher does not significantly affect the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.*
- *Ho3f: WOM by college website does not significantly affect the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.*

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis (HRA) was conducted to examine the relationship between PHEI's brand knowledge and brand trust with the control from the influences of WOM sources. 2 series of HRAs were subsequently conducted to understand the overall and individual association (Table 4.12 and Table 4.13). As shown in Table 4.12, both models were found to have a significant value of 0.000 which implies that there is a significant association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEI with and without the control from the influences of WOM sources. The adjusted R-square for the association between brand knowledge and brand trust is 42.3 percent while the adjusted R-square for the same link with the control is 56.2 percent. This evidences that the inclusion of influences from WOM sources has heightened the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs.

Table 4.12: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis – Overall Association

Model	Adjusted R Square	Change Statistics		ANOVA	
		R Square Change	Sig. F Change	F	Sign
1	.423	.439	.000	53.998	0.000
2	.562	.125	.000	37.485	0.000
Model		Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
1	BK	.567	.489	7.348	.000
2	BK	.449	.387	5.648	.000
	WOM	.332	.276	4.025	.000

Dependent Variable: Brand trust

Model 1 Predictors: Brand Knowledge

Model 2 Predictors: Brand Knowledge, WOM Sources

Subsequently, the significant F change signifies that the said inclusion is quite noticeable (about 12.5%). Despite the presence of WOM influences, the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs is spotted to be greater than the impact of controlled WOM influences. This is in line with the golden typology of branding which ascertains that customers' knowledge on the brand is indeed very vital in building a great amount of trust towards the brand (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991). This also highlights that influences of WOM sources are workable only when brand knowledge of customers significantly affects their trust towards a particular brand. Otherwise, the role of WOM sources is deemed futile.

In order to further evaluate the moderation impact of individual WOM sources towards the association between brand knowledge and trust, Table 4.13 was referred. Similar to the output of Table 4.12, it also demonstrates a significant association between the individual subsets of brand knowledge (i.e. brand image and superiority) and brand trust with or without the presence of individual WOM sources. The inclusion

of individual WOM sources (24.7%) has fairly enhanced the impact of individual subsets brand knowledge towards the brand trust of PHEIs.

Table 4.13: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis – Individual Association

Model	Adjusted R Square	Change Statistics		ANOVA	
		R Square Change	Sig. F Change	F	Sign
1	.448	.451	.000	27.342	0.0001
2	.667	.247	.000	15.367	0.0001
Model		Unstandardized coefficient	Standardized coefficient	T	Sig.
1	BS	.373	.359	3.398	.001
	BI	.182	.158	1.495	.137
2	BS	.247	.238	2.345	.020
	BI	.166	.144	1.491	.138
	SM	.221	.243	3.649	.000
	AA	-.106	-.186	-2.705	.008
	FR	.131	.196	3.038	.013
	ST	-.012	-.016	-.241	.811
	CW	.058	.060	.966	.336
FM	.214	.234	3.265	.001	

Dependent Variable: Brand trust

Model 1 Predictors: Brand superiority (BS), brand image (BI)

Model 2 Predictors: BS, BI, social media (SM), academic advisor (AA), friends (FR), school teachers (ST), college websites (CW) and family members (FM)

Model 1 (Table 4.13) reveals that brand superiority is a greater predictor of the brand trust than brand image without the presence of individual WOM sources. Nevertheless, the presence of individual WOM sources has somehow restructured the order of entire associations (as shown in Model 2, Table 4.13). Influences of social media (0.243) were found to be the greatest predictor for building brand trust, followed by PHEI's brand superiority (0.238), influences of family members (0.234), influences of friends (0.196) and influences of academic advisor (-.186). All these predictors were found to have significant influence in building brand trust of PHEIs. It is worthwhile to note that the influences of academic advisor would negatively affect the association between brand knowledge and brand trust.

On the other hand, PHEI's brand image, influences of college's website and influences of school teachers were found to be the least predictor for building trust of the PHEIs. Besides, these three least predictors were also spotted with insignificant influences towards building the brand trust of PHEIs. Therefore, the following hypotheses naught namely *Ho3a* (social media), *Ho3b* (family members), *Ho3c* (friends) and *Ho3d* (Academic advisor) are rejected due to their significant individual influences towards brand trust of PHEIs while hypotheses naught namely *Ho3e* (college website) and *Ho3f* (school teachers) are not rejected due to their insignificant individual influences on the same.

As tabulated in Table 4.13, social media indeed plays vital role in creating brand trust about PHEIs among students in this modern age. It further reveals that the influences of social media's has outweighed the impact of students' knowledge on the PHEI's brand and its superiority in building the brand trust towards PHEIs (Model 2, Table 4.13). This signals that PHEIs with superior brand probably will fail to enhance its brand trust if they are not having a reasonable presence over the social networking sites (Ahmad et al. 2014; Smink, 2012).

This is in line with the validation of Parr (2015) which highlighted that about 35 percent of the surveyed tertiary students had acknowledged the importance of social media technologies on their choice of study destination. Parr (2015) had further added nearly all the tertiary students had been using some kind social media to communicate among their peers and lecturers. Similarly, recent empirical studies also cited that "communicating with peers and family members" has been the main drive for university students in utilizing the social media (Helen et al, 2014; Hamade, 2013). Hence, social media is seen as a mostly used tool among students to freely exchange about their

insights, experiences and feedbacks towards or about anything including their decision to pursue further studies.

As shown in Model 2 (Table 4.13), the influences of family members are the subsequent fair contributors for building trust on the PHEI's brand. The influence of family members in building trust towards PHEIs could be more relevant among students from good social economic background (Wilkins, 2013). Trust can be easily instilled among students by their parents or other family members who are deemed to be more knowledgeable and trustworthy (Pimpa, 2004). As the decision on pursuing further studies is an important milestone of life, students are expected to be influenced by close family members instead of relying information from friends, teachers, academic advisor or other external social contacts ("in China, father and mother knows best: 65% of study abroad decisions made by parents", 2012).

It is also worthwhile to note that influences of academic advisors have negative impact towards the brand knowledge of PHEIs and the resulting brand trust. It is justifiable as academic advisors are technically representing the institution where it is typical for them to propagate about credential of the institution among the potential students. Though academic advisors are spreading information about the institution at no cost but they are essentially paid by the institution. It results into a negative impact ($t = -2.705$; $p = 0.008$) towards the association between brand knowledge of the PHEIs and hence the brand trust. It implies the greater the positive information of PHEIs spread by the academic advisor, the weaker will be the association between brand knowledge and its resulting brand trust. This is plausible as the credibility of information originated from the firm itself will be lower as compared to the information from the external environment.

Similar to the role of academic advisor, college website is usually seen as the firm's platform used for the external communication. As such, the website would not be a significant stimulus in creating the brand knowledge of PHEI and the resulting brand trust. On the contrary, college website is seen as the greatest tool used during the initial stage of searching information on the choices of study destinations that students are keen with.

4.4.3 Additional Insights

This subsection intends to furnish additional insights on the three key focus areas of this study namely influences of WOM sources, students' knowledge on the brand of PHEIs and brand trust of PHEIs. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to examine the following: 1) differences in the brand knowledge due to varied influences from the WOM sources (Table 4.14); and 2) differences in the brand trust due to varied influences from the WOM sources (Table 4.15).

Influences of WOM sources were recoded into three level namely 1=disagreement, 2=unbiased and 3=acknowledgement. As shown in Table 4.14a and Table 4.15a, both brand knowledge ($F=12.594$, $p=0.000$) and brand trust ($F=13.494$, $p=0.000$) were found to significantly differ by the varied level of WOM sources. Descriptive statistics of Table 4.14a and Table 4.15a show that all the respondents had unbiased views on the impact of WOM influences towards the brand knowledge (mean=3.5144, STD=0.5208) or the brand trust (mean=3.4060, STD=0.6039) of their PHEIs, respectively.

Table 4.14a: One-way ANOVA – Brand Knowledge vs. WOM Influences

BK vs. WOM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Homogeneity of Variances		ANOVA	
				Levene Statistic	Sig.	F	Sig.
1.00	46	3.3130	.5023	1.822	.165	12.594	0.000
2.00	116	3.5336	.491				
3.00	12	4.1000	.3358				
Total	174	3.5144	.5208				

Table 4.14b: One-way ANOVA – Brand Knowledge vs. WOM Influences (Multiple comparisons – Scheffe)

WOM Influence		Mean Difference	Sig.	N	Sign at 0.05	
					1	2
1.00	2.00	-.2206*	.037	46	3.313	
	3.00	-.7869*	.000			
2.00	1.00	.2206*	.037	116	3.534	
	3.00	-.5664*	.001			
3.00	1.00	.7869*	.000	12		4.101
	2.00	.5664*	.001			

Table 4.14b and Table 4.15b had further distinguished the impact of WOM influences towards brand knowledge and brand trust, correspondingly. The Scheffe post-hoc test highlight that respondents who disagreed or had unbiased views on the impact of WOM sources were found to have lesser amount of brand knowledge of PHEIs as compared to the respondents who had acknowledged the importance of WOM sources towards their knowledge on the PHEI's brand. Likewise, respondents who reported to disagree or had unbiased view on the WOM influences were found to have reduced amount of trust towards the PHEI's brand as compared to respondents who had nodded with the WOM influences towards the building of PHEI's brand trust.

Table 4.15a: One-way ANOVA – Brand Trust vs. WOM Influences

BK vs. WOM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Homogeneity of Variances		ANOVA	
				Levene Statistic	Sig.	F	Sig
1.00	46	3.1165	.5871	.354	.702	13.494	0.000
2.00	116	3.4579	.5591				
3.00	12	4.0139	.5162				
Total	174	3.4060	.6039				

Table 4.15b: One-way ANOVA – Brand Trust vs. WOM Influences (Multiple comparisons – Scheffe)

WOM Influence	Mean Difference	Sig.	N	Sign at 0.05	
				1	2
1.00 2.00	-.3413*	.003	46	3.1165	
1.00 3.00	-.8973*	.000			
2.00 1.00	.3413*	.003	116	3.4579	
2.00 3.00	-.5560*	.006			
3.00 1.00	.8973*	.000	12		4.0139
3.00 2.00	.5560*	.006			

4.5 Summary

As discussed earlier, there is a significant association between brand knowledge and brand trust despite the presence of WOM sources (Table 4.12). Nevertheless, as tabulated in Table 4.13, the inclusion of individual WOM sources has outweighed the individual components of brand knowledge, where influence of social media was found to be greater than impact of brand superiority or brand image towards the brand trust of PHEIs. The additional analyses conducted (Table 4.14 and Table 4.15) had also further enhanced the significant influences of WOM sources towards the brand trust and brand knowledge, separately.

Therefore, the said findings of this study imply that influences of WOM sources, brand knowledge and brand trust are inter-reliant dimensions where failure of PHEIs in capitalizing any one of these dimensions would negatively affect the students' enrolment at their institution. The subsequent chapter describes the qualitative data obtained from the interviews conducted with the administrators of selected PHEIs.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 5

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides and analyzes qualitative data which was obtained from the depth interviews conducted with 3 private higher education institutions (PHEI) in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. This analysis would enhance the quantitative findings (Chapter 4) in general and to answer the questions of qualitative research questions in particular. The discussion will be divided based on the individual PHEI whereby each institution will be analyzed from the demographic point of view and then according to the research questions as listed in the Table5.1

Table 5.1: Summary of Research Questions for Qualitative Strand of Study

Research Objectives/ Hypothesis	Research Questions
RO1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs	RQ2: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand awareness of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?
	RQ4: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand image of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?
RO2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.	RQ6: Do PHEI administrators perceive similarly on the impact of WOM sources on the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs?

5.2 Background of Respondents

This section presents the detailed information of the interviewed PHEIs and their representative for the interview session. It begins with the analysis of institution's profile and followed by analysis of interviewees' responses towards the key research variables of this study namely brand knowledge, brand trust and WOM sources.

5.2.1 Profile Analysis of Interviewed PHEIs

A series of in-depth interviews was conducted with three prominent PHEIs to complement the findings of from the quantitative strand obtained from this study. Briefly, PHEIs representatives from senior management were interviewed in this phase of study. Table 5.2 provides a summary of the details of the interviewed PHEIs. Further details of each PHEIs are presented as the following.

Table 5.2: Summary of PHEIs Interviewed

Private Higher Institutions	Participant			PHEI's Years of Operation	PHEIs approx. student
	Name	Designation	Tenure (in years)		
PHEI A	Interviewee A	Assistant Marketing Manager	4	9	4000
PHEI B	Interviewee B	Administration Senior Executive	3	28	10000
PHEI C	Interviewee C	Marketing Senior Executive	7	24	9000

5.2.1.1 PHEI A

PHEI A was established in year 2006 as part of their PHEI Group. The location of the college is in the prominent location in Subang Jaya beside other higher educational institutions. This college specializes in the early childhood education as well as in postgraduate studies. The interview was conducted with a senior management staff Interviewee A from the Marketing Department. The interviewee has a Bachelor degree in Marketing Management and has been with PHEI A for the past four years. Currently, the interviewee is in the prominent role as the assistant manager in the department.

PHEI A is the first branch of interviewed PHEI and hence there is a blend between the experienced and senior staff which leads to the academic excellence. It was told that PHEI A has a higher number of retained senior as compared to other branches of interviewed PHEI. Interviewee A explained that:

Our college is prominently placed on the mind of our students because of our strong commitment to them. Our strong academic and marketing team is also our backbone.

Apart from this too, PHEI A also has a smaller classroom size comprising of students around 25 to 30 in a class. This enables lecturers to provide close personal attention to each and every student in the class as compared to a huge lecture session. The typical huge lecture class which accommodates about 200 to 300 students is always seen to be lacking of a personal bond between lecturers and students (Ge & Forsythe, 2011). As such, smaller class size has become one of the pulling factors of PHEI A in retaining its students to continue studies.

In addition, high employment rate among PHEI A's graduates was also highlighted by the Interviewee A as the institution's major strength. It was stressed that employability rate is about 90 percent among the institution's graduates within the first months of their graduation. The high employment rate is high noticeable particularly among graduates of early education programme. It was demonstrated as the following:

Each of the early education centres in Klang Valley area has at least one graduate from PHEI A.

To sum, the PHEI A is seen to be privileged in terms of its good pool of academic and marketing team who are creditable for the institution's present success. High employment rate among its graduates within a short span of time after the graduation is the key pulling factor of this institution.

5.2.1.2 PHEI B

PHEI B was established in 1987 and was awarded the status of University on 2004 is built in 9 hectare of land in heart of Subang Jaya. PHEI B offers a wide range of courses in Business, Arts and Science. The representative who was interviewed, Interviewee B has a degree in psychology and has been in the administrative position for the past 3 years. The interviewee is currently undertaking the role of Administration Executive in the institution.

Interviewee B has been very quick in highlighting the key strength of the institution over the close competitors. It was stressed that PHEI B:

Is very well known for its accounting programme. We have affiliation with few top universities from United Kingdom such as Lancaster University, Oxford University and Harvard University.

Similar to PHEI A, PHEI B also concerns on the courses offered to the students. According to the Interviewee B, the institution places top priority in giving the most appropriate programme to the students rather than working on something meaningless for the mere additional financial benefits. Provision of appropriate courses alongside other typical benefits is expected to improve the satisfaction of students (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013).

PHEI B also emphasizes on the quality of teaching force. Quality of the teaching force which is the focal point of the students' expectation (Kandiko & Mawer, 2013) should not be overlooked otherwise it would generate dissatisfied students. PHEI B places its teaching force i.e. lecturers according to their educational level; for instant, students of pre university or foundation programme will be handled by staff with Bachelor's Degree qualification while students from Bachelor Degree's programmes will be taught by staff with minimum qualification of Master's Degree or Doctoral qualification. Interviewee B has further added as the following:

In other words, the lecturers need to be at least one level above than what they are lecturing.

Apart from that, the selection process for lecturers are very stringent where the job interview will be followed by mock teaching. This is to ensure that the institution hire the most capable and qualified person for the teaching

position. Nevertheless, the institution hires staff without any teaching experiences. This junior staffs are expected to learn from their senior where the sharing of knowledge between senior lecturers and junior lecturers makes the lecturing committee in PHEI B a much compact and cohesive unit.

The above illustrates that PHEI B has taken a great care not in meeting students' expectation but also in obeying the educational regulations in Malaysia. Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) has clearly stated that the minimum education qualification that should be possessed by every academic staff in both private and public institutions. This is because academic staff are the salient feature of an institution as the quality of higher education highly relies on the knowledge, skills and abilities of the staff ("MQA's Guideline of Good Practices for Academic Staff", 2014).

To sum, PHEI B is known for its accounting programme and its affiliation with famous foreign universities. In fact, such collaboration is believed to be the key pulling factor of the enrolment.

5.2.1.3 PHEI C

PHEI C is a private international university with campuses around the world. The main campus in Malaysia was established in year 1991 where they have also 12 campuses around the world. In Malaysia, the courses offered are for the IT courses, Business and Engineering. The institution is known for his ability in recruiting and retaining most

number of the foreign students in the country. There are about 130000 students from 160 countries currently pursuing their studies in PHEI C.

The interviewee, Interviewee C is an IT professional currently in the role as a Marketing Executive in the institution. He has a collective experience in the technical marketing for close to 7 years, where he had a humble beginning as the student service in the institution's library. Currently, the interviewee is pursuing his masters in marketing management to enhance his capability for a much senior role in the future.

The Interviewee C explained that the main uniqueness of the PHEI C is its dominance on the IT related courses. Initially, PHEI C was offering limited choices of IT courses under the shade of a design college. Over the time, as it achieved the full-fledge university status, it has been transformed to a wholesome IT Faculty. Such expansion indicates the success of PHEI C especially in the provision IT design courses.

It was also told that there are 9 faculties in the University but the main attraction is the IT design courses and the communication courses. Handling courses of such a nature would demand a very specialized work force. Accordingly, the minimum requirement for academic staff is gradually increasing from Master's Degree to the Doctoral qualifications. In addition, the institution is also blessed with a good pool of academic staff which have a ratio of 70:30 favouring local lecturers than foreigners. Interviewee C has further explained that:

Having a good number of foreign academic staff is indeed an advantage for us to build our name around the globe.

Besides, such pool employees would add more value to the students where students would be exposed to the international setting through their lecturers from different parts of the world. This is necessary particularly for the students of IT and engineering related courses where understanding of the various technological aspects would be definitely an advantage for their future career path (Jones et al, 2002). To sum, PHEI C is known for its pool of foreign academic staff and students. The institution is also very popular for its IT and design courses.

Following table lists the key competitive advantage of each interviewed PHEI:

Table: 5.3: Competitive Advantage of PHEIs

PHEI	Competitive Advantage
PHEI A	Good pool academic and marketing team Employability of students
PHEI B	Renowned accounting programme Affiliation with famous foreign universities
PHEI C	Foreign academic staff High enrolment of foreign students Famous IT and design courses

5.2.2 Analysis of Interviewees' Responses

This sub-section analyses the responses of interviewee towards the key research variables of this study namely brand knowledge, brand trust and WOM sources. The responses of all the interviewees were critically analyzed and attempts are made to draw possible inferences.

5.2.2.1 Brand Knowledge

(i) PHEI A

Interviewee A admitted that the first thing that comes to mind pertaining to the brand knowledge of the institution is the institution's logo. Interviewee A has related the easy recognition of logo due to the effectiveness of institution's publicity works. This is in line with the claim of Thanh (2012) which believes that the extensive public relation activities, inclusive of publicity works, carried out by the firm would be definitely beneficial for the firm as it will result into the enhancement of brand recognition. Interviewee A has also added that the institution's simple and memorable design of the logo is another reason for the easy recognition not only among the employees but also among the students. Sturgis (2014), in the Guest Post of Alt-creative.com, has clearly described six most successful logos together with their salient characteristics. Memorable, simple, timeless and appropriateness of the logo are always seen as the most successful logo (Sturgis, 2014).

The branding of PHEI A has answered many queries by the students on the employability after the course completion and students perceive this would be the best thing that they could enjoy by enrolling into PHEI A. Interviewee A also was quick to highlight that the affordable fees have supplemented immensely to the institution's recognition. Interviewee A has mentioned that:

The fees are structured in such a way that it caters for varied income group who are not affordable to go for much expensive and globally recognized institutions. But not to worry, we still provide equally good or even better quality education to our students.

Today's firms have acknowledged that significant influence of pricing in yielding instant recognition for the firm and its brand as consumers are very sophisticated by having several alternatives at a time (Duffy, 2003). Campo & Yague (2007) has further emphasized the importance of pricing especially to the service oriented firms which uses price as a promotional to induce the sales of their offerings. Nevertheless, Dunne & Lusch (2008) has cautioned that firms can utilize price as the promotional tool only if the firm's pricing is set fairly and reliably instead of being unreasonable. Likewise, setting affordable tuition fees would be a definite advantage for the institution to lure their potential and existing students.

Interviewee A further elaborated that most of the students and parents concern in selecting the education institution would be on the monetary matters. Of such, PHEI A:

Offer scholarship awards for outstanding students and other loan arrangement for ordinary students mainly to ease the burden of the students and their families. The other loan arrangements such as tuition fee can be made in the installment form but it is to the terms and conditions.

The marketing team of PHEI A creates awareness about the institution in the grass root level. This refers to their efforts in appealing to school students during their school days itself instead of waiting for the school students to complete their schooling. According to the interviewee, their team goes to all potential schools in the Klang Valley areas to perform the school outreach programme. Invitation is sent to schools students particularly for Form 5 students for career workshops where talks, briefing on

the courses, campus tours as well as direct excess to academic staffs are among actions taken for promoting and creating awareness among school students.

Apart from that too, present and graduated students are also invited for a sharing session in order to create confidence in both prospective students as well as existing students. Participation of former students in the institution's current marketing activities is considered to be an effective promotional method particularly in enhancing the perceived image of the institution (Moogan, 2011).

Interviewee A has further explained that potential students who make initial visit to the institution is normally well prepared with all the necessary information about the institution and the courses that interest them. Most of the times, they would have done a thorough analysis by comparing all the similar courses offered in the market. This information is basically obtained from their immediate contacts mainly parents, siblings, relatives, school friends and online friends in the social circles. Interviewee A also highlighted the institution's concerns on the informal information obtained by these potential candidates would be sometimes misleading. Nevertheless, the institution has its good marketing team who can align the possible misconception of the candidates.

Interviewee A highlighted that PHEI A has taken the extra miles to enhance its reputation by tying up with professional body like Oracle. This is to add in more value to the courses that are currently offering. Furthermore, the institution is claimed to be very receptive towards creation of a new course. With this, the institution is hoped to intensify and specialize on the courses offered. The collaboration between university and businesses especially professional bodies is very vital in order to have a win-win situation for all the stakeholders of an institution (Wilson, 2012). It benefits the

institution to have improved brand image besides facilitates the certification and employability of the students.

Interviewee A has also concluded that the good customer service with approachable staff, strong relationship between students and academics, high employability rate, specific specializations as well as low staff turnover are the main pillar of success for PHEI A in creating good brand knowledge.

(ii) PHEI B

The name PHEI B has been in the market for some time and it has become typical household name within various industries namely residential, commercial, retail, leisure and healthcare. Hence, such familiarity greatly contributes towards the brand recognition of PHEI B. The interviewee further added that:

The brand of the PHEI B, even though stand alone does not much inform about the courses but as a group shows a strong relationship with the customers in this case the students and their families.

Interviewee B has also added that the institution's strategic alliance with world renowned institutions has further enhanced the institution's brand name in general and brand recognition, in specific. Apart from that, PHEI B has also managed to obtain accreditation towards its programmes from the professional bodies. This is highly visible in terms of enhanced marketability of PHEI B's graduates of accounting as compared to graduates from other institutions.

The recent success of accounting graduate, Johnny Ho Chan, from PHEI B (“Malaysian accounting student tops world ACCA exam, wins silver medal”, 2015) has greatly evidenced the institution’s expertise in the accounting courses. Ho had managed to get second ranking in the world for his superior performance in the ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants) exams and he won Silver Medal Award. He was also honored as the Top ACCA Affiliate in Malaysia as he scored the highest accumulative marks in a single exam sitting.

Expectantly, Ho has credited his appreciation on his achievement to his college (“Malaysian accounting student tops world ACCA exam, wins silver medal”, 2015). Follow is the excerpt of his appreciation to the college: “Receiving the Silver Medal is surreal, especially since I had initially only aimed for the Top ACCA Affiliate Award in Malaysia. This really makes all my efforts worthwhile; I am truly grateful to my lecturers at PHEI B for their constant encouragement and dedication to ensure we graduate with a wholesome knowledge of accountancy.”

Similar to PHEI A, this institution is also seen to emphasize on the collaboration with others particularly with foreign counterparts and professional bodies. With this, it is believed that students of PHEI B would be highly beneficial in terms of the accreditation of the programme they enrolled, employability and global exposure (Wilson, 2012; Elmuti et al, 2005). Interview B has also added the benefits of collaboration with other institutions as the following:

Most of our students know that they can easily secure a place for further studies in other universities if they are from PHEI B.

Interviewee B also highlighted that PHEI B does its in-house promotional activities though the intensity is not very great. The institution probably focuses more on in-house promotional activities rather than engaging external agencies in order to achieve savings and hence to deploy those resources into other more value added activities. This is in line with the claim of past studies such as Kirmani (1990) which claimed that only infamous brand or new comer are needed to invest more on the promotional activities; meanwhile, the established ones should deploy those allocation for other value added activities particularly on the product development. As such, PHEI B, the well renowned household brand in Malaysia, does not really invest more on the promotional activities.

Interviewee B described that the influences of family and friends makes up for the majority of intake in the university. Most of the students used to share their good experiences with their social circle where this trend creates a positive aura to the brand knowledge of PHEI B. This is justifiable as positive WOM especially from the reliable person such as friends and family would upwardly affect the person's impression towards the firm. This is in line with the study of Duana et al (2008) which believed that word of mouth is one of the powerful options of sharing information among the social circle. It is usually associated with the person's personal encounters and assessments on the firm's products and services (Zhang et al, 2010).

Word of mouth is known for its influence on the consumer's purchasing decisions as it provides a channel for consumers to exchange their insights about their experiences with the firm (Severi et al, 2014). Severi et al. (2014) had further supported the importance of WOM especially with the presence of technologies by pointing at the research done by Nielsen Global Survey in 2007 which discovered that 78% of the

customers have been relying on the recommendation from word of mouth sources in making their buying decision.

The influences of WOM prevails the marketing of services such as education, tourism, healthcare and others (Naik et al, 2013). It has been reported that consumers favour more on the information from WOM in order to lessen their perceived risks and uncertainties that are associated with services (Murray, 1991 IN Naik et al. 2013). Consumers of intangible products or services have greater confidence on the information from WOM sources especially family and friends as compared to the consumers of tangible products. This is certainly applied to the students and parents who are consuming the services provided by the institution.

On the other hand, it was described that the typical prospective students are coming to the institution with most knowledge about PHEI B; they only need certain information like recommendation for the appropriate courses that they should enrol. This is more to a one on one advice. Apart from that, Interviewee B also informed that they do indulge in advertisement public exhibition and sometime multimedia while social media interfaces are available but not in a big scale. For the existing students, Interviewee B informed that they will ensure each and every student has a pleasant and good experience both in quality teaching academically and also the healthy environment in study place.

Interviewee B wrapped out that the PHEI B's association with the Group's other subsidiaries as well as strategic alliances with businesses and other institutions are the main reasons for the institution's decent brand knowledge among its stakeholders.

(iii) PHEI C

Interviewee C highlighted an important fact that 70% of the students are from overseas and only 30% are from local. This is in line with our Government's vision to be the regional educational hub (Wan, 2013; Therin, 2012). PHEI C has been greatly supporting the Government's vision by accommodating the major population of foreign students in Malaysia. This has enabled PHEI C to fetch numerous prestigious awards and recognition such as winner of the "Highest Enrolment of Foreign Students Award", "Special Award for Globalizing Malaysian Education" and "Export Excellence Awards" (<http://www.limkokwing.net/malaysia/about/campus>). To date, about 30,000 foreign students from nearly 165 countries had registered and studied at PHEI C. Interviewee C informed that currently the highest amount of intake in PHEI C yield from the Faculty of Business followed by the Faculty of Design.

Nevertheless, it was admitted that enrolment of local students as compared to foreign students is still lagging far behind as compared to its close competitors. Querying about this, Interview B explained as the following:

The reach to the local public is still in the infancy stage as most of the locals perceive that PHEI C only offers design courses and not others. They are also kind of not so comfy with foreigners.

Interviewee C also expressed the scenario is quite an opportunity and his department is earnestly looking to improve the current condition. Locals' discomfort with the crowd of foreign students in the campus is not unusual scenario. Most of the past studies discovered that though local students have fairly good impression on the foreign students but majority of the local students are greatly not keen in initiating interaction with their foreign peers (Ward, 2001).

Similarly, foreign students had also confessed that they prefer to be surrounded by their countryman or by students from other parts of the world in the host country rather than being in close contact with the locals (Aston, 1996 as cited in Ward, 2001; Bochner et al, 1985; Kleinberg and Hull's, 1979). Both foreign local students have pointed that perceived cultural distance and language proficiency have been key inhibitors for their interaction among each other (Ward, 2001).

Interviewee C also added that on the current students both local and international which amounts to 6000 students, are given accommodation and also medical insurances. It was also further highlighted for the foreign students, the University sets up visa services and this creates much more appeal to PHEI C. Further adding to the point, the quality of education and the recognition of the University pleases the students to enrol into PHEI C.

Essentially, students would expect to have adequate facilities to enable them to pursue their studies in a conducive environment (Cokgezen, 2012; Boylston & Jackson, 2008; Corrazzini et al, 1972). This is factual for students

from abroad who are at distant from their homes. They certainly need accommodation facilities besides arrangement for their visit and stay at host country. As such, PHEI C is deemed to furnish necessary and related services to appeal the students especially those who are from abroad.

It was also noted that unlike the other two interviewed PHEIs, PHEI C does not really focus on the local promotional activities targeting specifically at high school students nearing completion of their school studies. Nevertheless, Interviewee C was proud to state that the PHEI C's Facebook is one of the top ten sites in the world. He further highlighted that this might be because of the presence of students from 162 countries throughout the world and it was claimed to be the driving factor for the institution's massive overseas enrolment.

Commenting on the differences between other private higher education institutions, Interviewee C said that PHEI C has a very different approach similar to overseas life style compared to cultures in the conventional local government universities. As mentioned earlier, the cultural differences could be the key reason for the low enrolment rate among local students at PHEI C. In addition to dearth of local students' presence, diversified foreign cultures are prevailing in the campus. Hence, one could witness that the campus is with full of celebration throughout the year following the students' home country celebration.

In addition to the world popular PHEI C's Facebook page, the institution is also working closely with educational agents from many countries in order to continuously promote PHEI C worldwide. Apart from that too, existing students

are encouraged to bring in others where they would be paid some reward in the form of introduction fee. There is also blood relationship offer to family members up to 20% discount of the course fees. Such monetary incentives are expected to induce the enrolment rate of PHEI C.

To brief, the institution has gained popularity worldwide with its unique strategy in attracting and retaining more foreign students. Such scenario has indirectly assisted the development of brand knowledge even among locals despite their low enrolment rate. Following table (Table 5.3) summarizes key factors that contribute to the successful development of the institution's brand knowledge.

Table: 5.4: Key Success Factor of Brand Knowledge

PHEI	Factor
PHEI A	Affordable tuition fee Memorable logo
PHEI B	Popular household brand in other segments Affiliation with other institutions and professional bodies
PHEI C	High enrolment of foreign students

5.2.2.2 Brand Trust

(i) PHEI A

Interviewee A has emphasized that PHEI A is serious in meeting the expectation of the students. It was noted that the institution has a long term promise and a short term promise in order to ensure and preserve the trust of students towards the institution. Meeting the students' expectation at least on the promises made to them is vital as this stimulate the loyalty among them towards the institution (Leonnard et al, 2013). Failure to deliver the promises made will result into the disappointment among the students

which in turn will affect the brand trust and image of the institution. Besides, the highly satisfied and dissatisfied students will be spreading their positive or negative experiences to others in the social circle. This will amplify the effect towards the brand image of the institution.

The long term promise for PHEI A is about students' positive experiences throughout their candidature with the institution. This includes the relationship between the academics and students, the quality education and their overall satisfaction to the service and facilities provided by PHEI A. PHEI A's long term promises on ensuring long term good relationship among students and lecturers are indeed in line with the claim of many past studies. Many past studies noted that good relationship with the academic staff is one of the important dimensions for retaining the existing students.

Focus of these past studies of the student retention is academic and social integration (Peterson et al, 1997). Both academic integration and social integration refer to the students' perception towards to their interaction with lecturers in the classroom and informal interaction with peers and lecturers outside the classroom, respectively (Peterson et al, 1997 IN Chepchieng et al, 2006). Moreover, several past studies have clearly evidenced that the interpersonal environment of students comprising the interactions with their peers and lectures are significantly affecting students' behavior during their tertiary education (Chepchieng, 2004 IN Chepchieng et al. 2006; Whitt et al, 2001). PHEI A's continuous efforts in delivering such long term promises are hence expected to boost the retention rate not only the students' satisfaction but also the resulting loyalty.

In addition, it was also noted on the special efforts taken by the principal in ensuring all the staff delivers the promises made to the students. This includes improving the knowledge of the staff through specific training on handling student's customer service. Emphasis on the provision of training for the employees is vital in the current market where it should be treated as the initial encounter in serving the nowadays sophisticated customers (Chong, 2007). This is highly relevant when the trainings attended are in line with the firm's corporate values. The trained staff would accordingly deliver to the intended corporate value to the final customers and hence, it will be the key touch points in accomplishing the promises made by firm's brand (Chong, 2007). In addition to this, equipping teaching staff's knowledge through trainings and workshops would be definitely a good investment where the knowledgeable staff would be a definite pulling factor for the student's enrolment (Chepchieng et al. 2006; Peterson et al. 1997).

Apart from that, to cater for the students, the students affair department have created a help desk complain channel on any matters in the campus to be directly to the management. This is apart from the discussion between individual academic counselors which are there all the time to help the students in need. Some of the feedbacks obtained are also useful for the college in formulating new strategies for courses which suit the current market.

Interviewee A also explained that the management would periodically revise the course structure of the academic programme. The review and revision of the academic programme will involve feedback and insights from all the key stakeholders ranging from students, parents, academic staff, industrial advisers and government officials. This is to ensure their programme standard is in line with the current market and

regulations. Interviewee A has further added that the visit and resultant feedback from the industry adviser who visits the institution twice a year is indeed very beneficial for the institution's practice in reviewing the programme.

Meanwhile, the short term promise of the institution is met through the provision of the rebates and discounts based on the specific scenarios appreciating the students and the seasonal surroundings. Such provision would definitely ease the financial burden of the students and their families. Wee and Thinavan (2013) has stressed that easing the financial burden is one of the expected benefits from higher education institutions by the students. Tackling of such issues would definitely grant an immediate satisfaction to the students.

To sum, PHEI A always strive to deliver its long and short term promises to preserve its brand trust among its current and potential customers. Its long term promises are provision of conducive environment and enabling good relationship among students and academic staff while its short term promises are delivering monetary incentives and tuition fee's rebates as promised to the students especially during their enrolment.

(ii) PHEI B

On the other hand, Interviewee B agreed that the biggest challenge for an organization is holding up its customers and also creating new market. The retention of students has become seemingly vital chore for most of the PHEIs in preserving the existing students to further studies at the institution especially in the current competitive higher education sector (Gengswari et al, 2013). Such necessity is due to the ability of decent student retention in improving the institution's financial performance (Atkinson, 2008). Besides

the impact on the institution's financial performance, such decent retention would also imply a good reputation of the institution in the eyes of public (Simpson, 2005).

Failing to retain more existing students would signal the institution's inability in appealing even to the existing students. This is in line with the general business philosophy which claims that the acquiring cost of a new customer is five times more than retaining the current customers and hence, it is vital for firms to formulate efforts in retaining the current profitable customers (Halagera, 2009).

Interviewee B insisted that the brand trust built by the organization is vital for the success more than just having brand awareness. On this part, Interviewee B emphasized that PHEI B is performing admirable as new prospective students are referred by the previous students and their families. Such referral implies that the existing students are greatly pleased with the institution hence they are moving forward to spread positive WOM about the institution in order to induce the contacts from their social circle to enrol in the institution. Enrolment decision made due to the generation of WOM is perceived to be more lasting as the feedback from the WOM has somehow reduced the perceived risks and uncertainties besides instilling the confidence on the institution's brand (Naik et al. 2013). Interviewee B has further added pertaining to the enrolment via the referral as the following:

This not only about the relationship but also on the high standard of rules set by our management. Whatever we advertise, we deliver. So much so, the past students who have started working after graduation have provided raving feedback on our famous accounting programme.

This has become a benchmark for many who seek for pursuing their studies in PHEI B. Interviewee B has proudly mentioned that:

Even employers are keen to hire our Graduates...

The above claim by Interviewee B can be also evidenced with the success story of PHEI B's graduate, Johnny Ho, who won prestigious award for his excellent performance in the ACCA examination and is currently being employed in one of the world famous accounting firm i.e. Earnst and Young in New York (“Malaysian accounting student tops world ACCA exam, wins silver medal”, 2015).

Interviewee B also informed that PHEI B is very receptive to the changes in the market as they have a panel of advisers from industrial are continuously improving the courses to suit the practical needs of the market, thus equipping students with the exact knowledge they need for the market. On the point of the prospective students, Interviewee B also explained that they have some scholarships and different financial aids as they are under the PHEI B Foundation which is provided for specific talents. At this juncture, the approach of PHEI B is very much similar to the PHEI A.

Interviewee B has further added that all the teaching staff is training with the latest trend and courses to ensure them are up to speed with the current students and market. The training are divided to Human resources training, management training and knowledge based training. Interviewee B also stressed that to create a continuous trust among existing students; complaints from students are dealt with extreme importance. Some of the cases are dealt with a special committee and immediate solutions are taken.

(iii) PHEI C

On the part of brand trust, Interviewee C informed that the affiliations with international governments are one of the driving factors in creating long term trust in the university.

It was further elaborated as the following:

For example, not all courses are recognized by the Chinese government, thankfully with the collaboration, courses offered in the PHEI C are recognized by the Chinese government.

PHEI C to further explained that these kinds of strategies are being replicated to many other countries which gives a competitive advantage to the organization. As part of the employability the interviewee further highlighted that the management of the PHEI C has stressed to have Bachelors honors degree programme, which directly opens up the possibility and need to have an internship in the period not less than 3 months before awarding the degree. The interviewee further added that this kind of strategic plan not only creates an opportunity for students in getting first-hand experience in working life, but also establishes the brand name of the organization on the industrial perspective. It was also noted that there were many students in the internship programme were absorbed into permanent employment after the internship. Interviewee C also highlighted that most of their industrial partners in the internship programme have given raving comments of the quality that the PHEI C produces and this is perceived also by the organization as a positive impact to the marketability of the organization. In inquiring further on how the credits by the industries are given to the organization, the interviewee C explained that PHEI C often follows the market trend in introducing new modern subjects to the courses taught. Even though sometimes this

increases the cost of the organization but this was perceived as good initiative in increasing the appeal of the organization directly and improving brand trust on the whole.

On the point of financial, Interviewee C informed that the pricing is positioned on the middle of the scale and its neither cheap or expensive. However it was clearly noted by the organization that some students depend on the criteria to make their purchase decision. In handling this, the organization has given allowance for the students to make installment payment on the course fees. This facility is available for all students in the organization however according to the interviewee, some very good students will receive scholarship from the organization itself but this comes with terms and condition whereby the students have to maintain a good scoring for the continuous support. On the other hand for other students which are local, the availability of “Perbadanan Tabung Pendidikan Tinggi Nasional” (PTPTN) would be a blessing. It eases the financial burden of the students and their families. The organization also helps the students in the application of the PTPTN.

In the point of delivering a quality education, Interviewee C informed that all staff will be trained for 3 months before start of employment however for managers it would be 6 months training. This is because the managers tend to hold much more people orientated works than of the teaching man force. On the matter of partnership, PHEI C has a wide based of partnership with both corporations and foreign based universities.

He further added that they have campuses in Malacca and Kuching with different offered programme. There is a small campus in Pavilion KL informed specifically for postgraduate students. This is to facilitate their mobility.

On the part of student affairs and complains, PHEI C takes seriously for the overall satisfaction of the students. Interviewee C also informed that they have a department for student services with an in house lawyer available for consultation. Apart from that, it was informed that in the student services department there are two counselors working to handle student query and qualms. By doing this, the organization is assuring the trust ability of the brand name which directly results in the establishment of brand trust.

5.2.2.3 WOM Sources

(i) PHEI A

Interviewee A has acknowledged the influences resulting from current trend of word of mouth with the collaboration of technology in creating a massive shift in the institution's marketing strategy. The current boom of social network and the use of the Internet have created a digital word of mouth to the prospective students. This has been a norm among the millennial generation whom are very fond of the technological gadgets. The technological gadgets have led a way for exchange of information within their social circles. Accordingly, many recent studies have begun to pay attention on the digitalized word of mouth among students and their enrolment decision at tertiary level (Lehmann, 2015). Interviewee A has admitted that PHEI A indeed heavily relies on these gadgets to spread the information. Interviewee A described that:

So much so, sending mass information about PHEI A using Facebook, WeChat, Whatsapp and Twitter have become the method of spreading information to the public.

Interviewee A added that, this would be a very efficient follow up after the visit to the schools or even talks and seminar, where participants are encouraged to be linked with PHEI A link, of such instant information are shared. Apart from that too, it was added some of the students are given the possibility of remote registration in case they could not enrol physically during the registration date. This also in another way shows that PHEI is well adapted into the changes in the world of information technology (IT).

Nevertheless, Interviewee A has noted that the website of the PHEI A is generic in nature and need utilize this kind of IT gadgets to enhance its approachability with students. Some of the experienced and senior staff is able to answer the questions posted in the social media, of such students get correct and precise information to their queries. Interviewee A further elaborated that building rapport is the main objective of the marketing department. Internally also, PHEI A practices the more conventional method of mentor mentee programme to enhance sharing of developments between new students and the lecturer or senior students.

Of the various WOM sources available, the WOM source of family is seen to be used most frequently by the PHEI A's students while WOM sources of institution's website is the least frequently used one. On the subject of influence, the most influencing segment was perceived to be of WOM source of family due to the financial obligation and the least influencing was also the institution's website. Finally, on the

subject of creditability of the source, the most credible WOM source was the counselor and the least credible was the school teachers.

(ii) PHEI B

The use of WOM sources is highly important in PHEI B as most of the promotion are using word of mouth and with the help of social media. Information by the friends and relatives are influencing the decision for enrolment of the students to PHEI B. The Interviewee B was asked to rank all the sources and it appears that the highest frequencies for the word of mouth are from family and the least frequency is from the website. On the point of influence, the highest influences are from the student's family and the least influence is also website. This is clear as the influence is directly resulted in the financial consideration. While on the part of creditability, the most creditable source are teachers and the least are from friends.

(iii) PHEI C

Interviewee C has acknowledged that WOM sources as one of the promotional method for PHEI C. According to Interviewee C, the highest frequencies of WOM were the family and the least frequency was the website. On the part of influence, the highest influencing factors were also the family but the least influencing factor was the website. On the part of creditability of the information, the most credible source was the website and the least credible source was the social media.

5.3 Discussion on the Research Objective 1

RO1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs

As aligned at the beginning of the chapter, the main purpose of commencing this qualitative research was to investigate the significance of the relationship between students' brand superiority and brand image as well as relationship between students' brand knowledge and brand trust in the selected PHEI. Under Research Objective 1 (RO1), there are specifically 2 research questions that would be discussed thoroughly in consideration from the interview which was conducted.

5.3.1 Research Question 2

RQ2: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand awareness of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?

From the series of interviews, we noted that all 3 PHEI administrators agreed that the superiority of the institution specific in nature have created brand trust among students. PHEI A informed that their superiority are on the early child education where their employability rate is at 90% within the first 3 months, apart from that they were proud to inform all early childhood development centers in the Klang Valley houses at least one of their graduates. So much so this has become an upper hand for them on the early child education field. Even though they admit that there are much more renowned institution that deliver the similar course but on the financial obligation side their course are much more affordable. Indeed their strategy of affordable quality courses and high employability ratio creates superiority for the institution thus directly creating brand trust.

Similarly, though PHEI B also pride on a particular course which have their name singing among prospective students. The accounting course creates must attention as the graduates from the University are of high caliber in the working market. This is coupled with their affiliation with top UK university like Oxford University and Harvard University creates a superiority on the accounting field in particular and PHEI B in general.

By enrolling into PHEI B, students are not only assured of a quality education but also will be highly marketable on the accounting field. On the other hand PHEI C was informed that the percentage of students from overseas in the university is amounting 70% of the total students. Even though we can accept that this would be a fantastic marketing efforts from overseas but the interviewee express that the declining number of locals enrolling is worrying for the university. Analyzing further, the interviewee expressed that the main attraction point of the PHEI C was its foreign culture adaptation to the Malaysian environment. So much so, it was highlighted that this is an ultra-modern university which do not follow old fashion universities, thus creating open minded concept and ability for the students stand up and to be counted. This can be categorized as one of the distinguished superiority of the organization, creating brand trust among students. According to Dr. Sam Thomas from the Cochin University of Science and technology (2011), the reputation of an institution has a positive impact on the students' loyalty.

5.3.2 Research Question 4

RQ4: Do PHEI administrotors also consider that brand image of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?

On the part of brand image, the interview outcome yield different perspective in all 3 organizations. For the PHEI A, it was all about the affordable quality education. The interviewee shared insides that all the courses are provided at a control pricing strategy to cater as a service for the students and not as a money making organization. Even this is aligned to their motto of “The best in you, Made possible”, where they are more focused on the students, so that they would do the best with what they have.

On PHEI B though, it’s more about the confidence in the PHEI B group organization where they are a huge conglomerate diversifying in many field. Of such student perceive this as stability and the affiliation is a proof of the stable existence in the education industry. This is further enhancing with their motto which is written in French translated sounds “Fortune favours the prepared mind”.

On the other hand, brand image of PHEI C are still in the infancy stage in Malaysia as explained by the interviewee C. This is because most Malaysians still perceive the PHEI C as a college for IT design. However from the overseas point of view, their outreach for international is at the highest level as their overseas students are 70% of their population. This might be due to the extra mile taken by PHEI C to prepare visa and accommodation to the overseas students as well as the collaboration with overseas governments to ensure that the courses are recognized in the home country.

5.4 Discussion on the Research Objective 2

RO2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

The purpose of conducting this qualitative study was also to investigate the influence of WOM towards the possible relationship between students' brand knowledge of the PHEI and the resulting trust. Besides, the impact of various types of information sources on the said association is also examined based on the measurement of WOM communication such as usage frequency, relative influence and perceived credibility.

5.4.1 Research Question 6

RQ6: Do PHEI administrators perceive similarly on the impact of WOM sources on the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs?

All 3 PHEIs respondents perceive that WOM sources have directly impacted the brand knowledge as well as the brand trust. PHEI A was quick to highlight that most of their walk in candidates are referral from either existing students or graduate students. Apart from that the use of digital mail and social media plays a part in updating the events of the college as well as sharing new development. On the part of PHEI B, they do not much cater on traditional word of mouth but more into exhibitions and multimedia intervention however they are also aware of the social media interfaces, of such they are also following up this trend with social media via Facebook.

On the other hand, PHEI C prides on that they are the top ten educational institutions in Facebook. The interviewee further claimed that this might be the reason for the high intake of foreign students in PHEI C. Apart from that, PHEI C also practices 20% discount on the course fee for students whom are referred by the blood relative. Further than that, they too encourage current students to promote their University to others and by doing so they will be entitled for an incentive referred to as

introducing fee. This evidently shows the impact of word of mouth in their practices. All 3 PHEIs representatives were asked to rate the influences of WOM to their organization and the results are in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: Summary of Analysis on the Attributes of WOM Sources

PHEI	Type Of WOM	Frequency	Influence	Creditability
PHEI A	Family Members	4	1	5
	Friends	1	2	4
	School Teachers	5	3	6
	Academic Advisors	2	5	1
	College Website	6	6	2
	Social Media	3	4	3
PHEI B	Family Members	1	1	4
	Friends	2	3	6
	School Teachers	4	2	1
	Academic Advisors	5	5	2
	College Website	6	6	3
	Social Media	3	4	5
PHEI C	Family Members	1	1	4
	Friends	2	2	2
	School Teachers	4	5	5
	Academic Advisors	5	4	1
	College Website	6	6	3
	Social Media	3	3	6

5.4.1.1 Frequency Analysis

By analysis the frequency sources of the WOM, it was noted that the top three contributors for PHEI A were Friends, Academic Advisors and Social Media. For PHEI B, on the other hand, it was Family Members, Friends and Social Media. The top 3 ranking for PHEI C shows, Family Members, Friends and Social Media similar to of PHEI B. This clearly shows a pattern from the interview that most of the driving factors for PHEI A are existing students and the reach in the grass root level through the Academic Advisors.

Social media is merely used as a follow up and sharing new updates. On the other hand, both PHEI B and PHEI C rank in the same manner. This would clearly show that due to the family are the influencing factor as the outreach of the organization is very prominent both locally and internationally. Next source of friends and social media would only enhance their knowledge of the PHEIs. On the contrary, the lowest ranking for all three PHEIs are college website as the details presented are in a generic manner and do not have an interactive capability. Of such the information there are outdated and not fully useful.

5.4.1.2 Influences Analysis

On the part of influences all 3 PHEI have rated family members as the first priority. This would be justified as one of the main consideration for students would be financial consideration as they are still under the wings of their parents. On the second rank, though PHEI A and PHEI C have stated the friends as the influencing factor while PHEI B has said about school teacher's intervention. For PHEI A, friends share the good experiences of the teacher student relationship as well as the small class room size consideration, where this points attract students who are concerned about studies whereas, for PHEI C it's all about adaptation to the overseas culture so that it can ease them into study abroad or broaden their horizons. However, PHEI B have stated that the school teachers have given the good influence to the students as the outreach to the school and exhibition has captured the teachers who are also prospective parents. On the part of least influencing, all 3 have agreed that college website does not influence their decision as it is merely a direct informative document.

5.4.1.3 Credible Analysis

On the point of credibility, both PHEI A and PHEI C suggest that the most credible source is the academic advisors as they are adapt to the market scenario and advice according to the market trend. Only PHEI B stated that teachers are the most creditable source. This is expected as sometimes teachers do play a role as a guide for prospective students. On the least credible factor, we have a 3 way split as PHEI A nominated teachers, PHEI B on friends and PHEI C on social media. This scenario might have taken place as individual PHEI have encountered different challenges to preserve legitimate information to the students.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter analyzed interview data gathered from the 3 PHEIs in the Klang Valley area. The data analyzed would be a welcome supplement to the quantitative study which was done in the previous chapter in this research. Based on both the finding in quantitative and qualitative would help conclude the research objective and research questions of this research. This qualitative analysis is expected to give an overall understanding to the research questions which would not be able to conclude with only the calculative quantitative approach. Table 5.6 summarizes the key findings from this chapter.

Table 5.6: Summary of Qualitative Findings

Research Objectives (RO)	Research Questions (RQ)	Findings
<p>RO1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs</p> <p><i>H1: There is a significant relationship between students' brand superiority and brand trust of the particular PHEI.</i></p> <p><i>H2: There is a significant relationship between students' brand image and brand trust of the particular PHEI</i></p>	<p>RQ2: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand superiority of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?</p> <p>RQ4: Do PHEI administrators also consider that brand image of their institution affect students' brand trust of PHEIs?</p>	<p>The qualitative findings agree that the brand superiority of the institutions affects the brand trust of PHEIs among students.</p> <p>The qualitative findings agree that the brand image of the institutions affects the brand trust of PHEIs among students.</p>
<p>RO2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</p> <p><i>H3a: WOM by social media significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</i></p> <p><i>H3b: WOM by family members significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</i></p> <p><i>H3c: WOM by friends significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</i></p> <p><i>H3d: WOM by academic advisor significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</i></p> <p><i>H3e: WOM by school teacher significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</i></p> <p><i>H3f: WOM by college website significantly affects the relationship between student's brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.</i></p>	<p>RQ6: Do PHEI administrators perceive similarly on the impact of WOM sources on the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs?</p>	<p>The qualitative findings perceive that the impact of WOM sources directly influence the brand knowledge thus impacting brand trust among PHEIs.</p>

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter acts as a summary for the entire study whereby it is divided into four segments. The first segment discusses the overall conclusion of the study with discussion on key results which are shared with explanations. It then moves to the next segment which highlights the implication perceived for the theoretical and practical practitioners. At the final segment, limitation of the current study and future recommendations for researchers are discussed.

6.2 Research Conclusion

This segment provides the overall conclusion on the findings of this study. It begins with overall summary of the study followed by summary of findings by research objectives.

6.2.1 Overall Summary

The overall objective of this study was to check the moderation impact of WOM sources towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEI. A sequential explanatory method was used to execute this study. Therefore, the study imposed the quantitative approach on the beginning and continued to the qualitative

approach to further enhance the findings. A total of 230 randomly selected PHEI students in Klang Valley were approached for the quantitative approach and for the qualitative strand of the study a total of 3 prominent PHEIs were chosen. Strict procedures in measuring the reliability and validity of the items used and the resultant data in both qualitative and quantitative phases of this study will be imposed.

Questionnaires were distributed among the students in the Klang Valley during no major holidays in assumption that the students are studying in Klang Valley. The outcome of the quantitative approach signifies that there is a significant association between the brand knowledge and brand trust despite the presence of WOM sources. Apart from that, it is also highlighted that the inclusion of the WOM resources has outweighed the individual components of the brand knowledge. Simultaneously it was also noted that the social media was found to have a greater impact among the WOM sources. On the part of influences of the WOM resources, it clearly demonstrated that brand knowledge and brand trust are inter-reliant dimension.

This was further enhanced with the qualitative approach at prominent PHEIs, where appointments were obtained and a face to face interview was conducted at the premises of the PHEIs. The in depth interview findings further agrees that the brand knowledge affects the brand trust of the PHEIs. Furthermore, the impact of the WOM sources directly influence the brand knowledge as discussed on the previous chapter on the inter dependency and impacts of the brand trust among PHEIs.

6.2.2 Research Objective 1

RO1: To examine the impact of brand knowledge on brand trust of PHEIs

The first objective is to investigate the impact of the brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs. A total of four questions for both students and administrators were derived to answer the research objective and both quantitative approach and qualitative approach were used to obtain the results.

A simple linear regression (SLR) analysis was used and to examine the impact of brand knowledge and brand trust of the students. Results of SLR show that 42.3 percentage of variance in the brand trust of PHEIs as perceived by the respondents is contributed by the respondents' knowledge on the brand of respective PHEI. The association between brand knowledge and brand trust is significantly high. Of such the association between brand trust and knowledge is significantly high which is in line with Keller et al. (2008) who claimed that brand knowledge is indeed required to create brand trust.

This was followed by multiple linear regression (MLR) analysis to evaluate the impact of components of brand knowledge (brand image and brand superiority) towards brand trust of PHEIs. The MLR showed that there was a marginal strength of 44.8 percentage association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

In-depth interview were conducted with the administrators on the questions on brand superiority. All of them agreed that the brand superiority has a direct impact to the students trust on the institution. This also shows that the brand superiority is a better predictor than the brand image for evaluation of the brand trust in line with Schmitt (2012) and Hsu & Cai (2009). This was further evident that the administrators agree that their brand image have an influence to the brand trust and also agree that the existence of the WOM resources impacts the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

Due to this, the administrators have put in efforts ranging from external activities such as outreach programme to enhance their institution superiority. By these kinds of enrichment programmes, students tend to register in their mind on the administrators PHEIs thus increasing brand trust of the students. This is in line with the finding of Ye & Raaji (2004) and Hoeffler & Keller (2003) that high brand awareness helps PHEIs to generate more students.

On the part of the PHEIs brand image effect on the brand trust in the point of the students, analysis showed that the brand image has an insignificant association with the brand trust ($t=1.495$, $p=0.137$). This is true as the students would not be able distinguishing the brand image unless the brand image is clear. This is in line with the Keller's pyramid of brand knowledge which clearly shows that brand recognition is a vital element in purchase decision.

On the part of the administrators opinion on brand image effect to the brand trust, all 3 administrators agreed to the fact that brand image is an important element in purchase decision by the students. In the part to increase the brand image, most of the administrators agree that the PHEIs tend to specialize the courses so that it can create an image to their institution and this has yield good results in the intake to the institution. This is evidently proven as one of the interviewed PHEIs presence is not completely felt by local Malaysian but their influx in enrolment are based from overseas. One of the attracting factors is the image of the PHEIs. This shows that PHEIs must take extra mile in building international brand image to ensure the courses are recognized by the home country (Park et al. 1986).

As a conclusion, it can be evidently concluded that the impact of brand knowledge on the brand trust of the PHEIs is significant.

6.2.3 Research Objective 2

RO2: To investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources on the association of brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

The second objective as stated above seeks to investigate the moderation impact of WOM sources towards the association of the brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs. As discussed in RO1, there is a direct relationship between the brand knowledge and brand trust, this objective examined the impact of the moderating variable of WOM on the strength of the association. A total of two research questions were derived for both administrators and students alike and both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis were used to obtain the results

On the students' perspective, Hierarchical Regression Analysis (HRA) was conducted to exam the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEI with the control of WOM sources. Two series of HRAs were conducted to know the overall and individual association. Both series had a significant association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEI with and without the control of WOM sources. The adjusted R-Square for the association between brand knowledge and brand trust is 42.3 percent while for the same link with the control of WOM sources is 56.2 percent. This finding show that the inclusion of influences from WOM sources either traditional or technological sources has heightened the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs.

Despite the presence of WOM influences, the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs is noticed to be greater than the impact of controlled WOM sources influences. This finding also highlights that influences of WOM sources are workable only when brand knowledge of PHEIs significantly affects their trust towards a particular brand. Otherwise, the role of WOM sources is deemed futile.

Finding also reveals that brand superiority is a greater predictor of the brand trust than brand image without the presence of individual WOM sources. Nevertheless, presence of individual WOM sources either traditional or technological sources has restructured the order of entire associations (Refer Table 4.13). It was evidently noted that the social media was found to be the greatest predictor as information generated in social media spreads like wild fire which is in line with the finding of Parr (2015) that tertiary students acknowledged the importance of social media on their decision making. Apart from that traditional WOM particularly from the family members contributes fairly to the association as they would be financial influence in the purchase decision

Apart from that, it was found that the influences of academic advisors from PHEIs would negatively affect the association between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEI. On the other hand, it was also found that college website and school teachers were perceived to be least contributor for the enhancement of brand trust due to the fact that these are used on the initial surveys (Lin, 2007).

On the part of the administrators' interview, it was noted that all respondents acknowledged that the WOM sources plays a significant role in the association between the brand knowledge and the brand trust. For them, efforts are taken to constantly follow with the tides of technology to enhance the brand knowledge of the PHEIs. This is evidently noted that the most of the PHEIs actively engage in social media. One of the respondent also informed that lecturers who are subject matters are required by the institution to directly cater the needs of prospective students in the social media.

As a conclusion, it is proven that WOM sources play a significant moderating impact on the relationship between the brand knowledge and brand trust.

6.3 Implications for Theory

This research has provided some theoretical implication for the body of knowledge. One of the main contributions is the establishment of the WOM as a moderator in the influences between the brand knowledge and brand trust. Previous literatures concentrated WOM as one of the segment inside the brand awareness, however, this study has helped to establish the importance of the WOM as a moderating impact to the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust. Apart from that, there is very minimal study made on the WOM in particular and this research will open up a new horizon in investigating the moderation impact of the WOM in relationship between the brand knowledge and brand trust. This research also helped to realize the nature and importance of the moderating effects of WOM which can be a starting block for future study in the similar matter.

It was also noticed that the influence of internet as the modern and electronic WOM are vastly less investigated which in return complicated the moderating impact of the WOM compared to the traditional sources. This has opened a new horizon for fellow scholars to investigate the newly established area in the marketing communication field. As investigated in this research, there are no researches using the traditional and technological sources as WOM sources in the measurement between brand knowledge and brand trust in higher education sector. As this is novel, the research can also be adopted into other service sectors such as tourism, restaurants and housing development to whichever sector which would be deemed necessary

On the part of the detailing of the WOM, the existing study are only generic in nature which examines the determinants of brand equity and brand loyalty in the higher institution by examining the challenges and issues, however this study has managed to

categorize the WOM resources into traditional and technological resources. Apart from that there are new insights on the measurement of WOM communication such as usage frequency, relative influence and perceived credibility which gives the WOM a reliable value in reliability. On detailing of the technological resources, social media has out weighted the individual components of brand knowledge showing the importance of technological resources in improving knowledge. This is according to media richness theory too. Apparently, a social interaction has increased its richness.

6.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

This section would discuss the implication from the major findings that impact the Private and Governmental practitioners. Table 6.1 below summarizes the implications that are perceived from the major findings for the practitioners from the private and public as discussed in the earlier section. The impact of the policy and practice makers carries the similar impact as the impact to the body of knowledge which was discussed in the section 6.3. Finding that was derived from the study will enable both the private which in this case PHEI as well as the public, which are the government to make necessary plan for the proposed suggestion in Table 6.1. The detail of the implication would be discussed in detail.

Table 6.1: Summary of Implications

Major Findings	Implication	Impacts for Practitioners	
		Private (PHEI)	Public (Government/MOHE)
<u>Brand Image</u> Brand superiority	Establishment of PHEI centralized information portal.	Huge initial cost. Establishment of courses in area specific expertise. Possible loss of business.	Encouragement of mergers and acquisition strategy. Improve in education quality. Possibility of student exchange programmes.
<u>Brand Awareness</u> Own information and knowledge	Establish outreach programmes for knowledge sharing.	Improvement in marketability of the courses.	Low reliance on government quota for higher education studies. Funding allocation to improvement on PHEIs.
<u>WOM Sources</u> Social media an important element	Control of social media negative and not trustworthy information.	Improve in business performance and constant marker on quality.	Huge initial cost. Increase in country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
<u>Brand Trust</u> – Negative Impact Of Academic Advisors	Creation of career counselors in school is a requirement.	Direct access to all counselors for evaluation on services provided.	A control on correct and legitimate information for students from grass root level. Constant improvement and updated trainings.

Brand image is known as the crucial determinant of decision making among the consumers (Gurhan Canli et al, 2004; Keller, 1993). The study has discovered that

brand image is driven by brand superiority which positively impacts the brand trust. Existing superiority brand imaging has shown to have better outreach in PHEIs compared to have less superiority brand. This clearly shows that the tilt in the balance based on marketability rather than just quality.

In the defense of this, this study proposes that there should be a centralized information portal for all PHEIs to publish their services and this to be governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The centralized information portal will serve as a legitimate information portal which are constantly monitored and approved for the best quality education in the country. This creates a sort of a confidence portal and allows a healthy competition, which can only benefit the Malaysian education standards in view of quality education.

Establishment of such a portal will impact PHEI as they would be the main entity that would be funding this initiative. Of such it would have a huge cost in establishing such a portal. Apart from that, as there would be not any possibility of fraud based on marketing, sometimes the PHEI might lose out on the marketability of their services. On the other hand, due to this also, PHEIs can concentrate on improving their area specialty by focusing on how to improve their courses. This can create a positive atmosphere in the field of private institution

Based on the same point, on the view of government, measures can be taken to address this expected change. The highly competitive environment of PHEI has resulted into decline in the enrolment particularly among small-sized institutions (Zalina, 2003 in Faridah and Nooraini, 2006). The decline in the enrolment shows the weakness of PHEIs in recruiting new students and a new challenge for them to ensure their

sustainability in the marketplace. This would be further enhanced with the creation of the above suggested portal. Here, the government should encourage small-sized PHEIs to use Mergers and Acquisitions strategy.

Nowadays, Mergers and Acquisitions strategy has been used by some institutions with an inferior brand image to build the superior brand image. Lee et al (2009) showed that by using a brand with a good image, the company with inferior brand image will have great potential to make improvements to its consumer-based brand equity. This is in line with the research finding that the brand superiority creates brand trust towards PHEIs. Some actions as below can be proposed by the government for the above mentioned Mergers and Acquisitions strategy.

- Encourage selected PHEIs to terminate their inferior programme and focus on demanding programme affiliated with accreditable exam board with reasonable fees to transit the PHEI become a theme institution.
- Encourage employment of some well-known teaching resources to strengthen the students' loyalty and create sense of trust in the area of expertise.
- Encourage simplification of the bureaucracy process to show the efficiency of management team.
- Encourage creation of better after sales services followed by viral marketing to increase brand awareness.

By performing all the above said action plan, the government can play its part in ensuring that the education standard in Malaysia can be constantly preserved and monitored. These implications as discussed would impact greatly on the quality of education in Malaysia and improve in world ranking on the education system. Concurrently this improvement will also create a ripple effect to the public institution

and possible students exchange and improvement programme can be developed in the future.

On the part of brand awareness, the study illustrated that the awareness was created based on the own perceived knowledge by the customers which are in this case the students and the people associated with the students. Normally, in higher education market, the students can be considered as actual consumers while the parents are the buyers. All of them have influence towards the brand trust. However, the parents exercise indirect influence on brand trust as they play an indirect role in the effects of decision making on college selection (Banyai & Dudas 2013).

When students faced with new choice of services, they would be motivated to consult WOM sources frequently in order to reduce the uncertainty (Johnson et al, 2008). By analysis the frequency sources of the WOM, it was noted that the top three contributors for PHEIs were friends, family and social media. Normally, WOM reaches its climax on first day and will fall in the following days. It is an ephemeral phenomenon, thus the PHEIs need to create new stimulus to increase the WOM communication which had a moderation impact towards the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust of PHEIs.

At the beginning, the material incentives will create some awareness among the students and allure them to further their students in particular PHEI. It will have a positive effect on brand image. However, when most of the PHEI follow the material incentives strategies, the effect will be crossed out. In the end, only invisible stuff such as sense of trust will be left. Thus, every process must go back to the basic in building the brand trust. Normally, the brand of PHEI is built over time; the students need

repeated experiences with the brand in order to build the trust on its predictability and dependability.

The communication process takes a long time to achieve its goal. Therefore, in brand strategy, consistency in all aspects of the brand is vital to create additional value in three dimensions i.e. brand credibility, brand integrity and brand benevolence of brand trust. According to Reflective- formative model of brand trust, if one of the dimensions of brand trust is increasing, it will increase the overall of trust towards the brand as the result of the enhanced trust in one of the specific dimension (Li et al, 2007). Thus, consistency plays an important role to strengthen the level of trust associates with the brand.

When the level of involvement among the students with the brand increase, the functional and symbolic risk will rise. Due to the increment of risk, the PHEIs need to build a relationship of credibility with the brand. According to Sweeney & Swait (2008), if a consumer can be retained for a longer duration, the company will be able to stand on the competitive market environment, or else untruthful information may ruin up the customer's satisfaction. Reassurance is a key element to sustain the brand trust which is a long term investment. It was proved that reassurance will be possible between the trustworthy PHEIs in an equilibrium state if the trustworthy PHEIs are more willing to take risk to solve the students' difficulties compare to untrustworthy PHEIs.

Symbolic brand especially in service sector such as higher education sector is hard for PHEIs to build sense of trust in consumer brand relationship. They must increase their visibility as the development of brand relationship is based on the

experience with the brand. A great pool of brand loyalists will create an intimacy relationship after they involve themselves in the brand. Thus, it is important for a brand to show the caring about the experience of the students with the brand. The communication must be two ways by relating the whole story of PHEI to the students. For instance, the PHEI can shoot a drama regarding the history, background, vision and programme by using funny entertainment style to attract young generation. Get closer to the young learners' life style in order to build the intimacy relationship with them.

Based on the above discussed it is suggested that an outreach programme are to be in place to create the awareness directly and improve the brand trust in directly. The outreach programme can be from the grass root level as well as to the general public. Events and promotional entities can be considered to improve the marketability of the programmes by the PHEI. Forums and seminars are a good way of improving the knowledge of public in the part of the PHEIs.

The PHEIs are encouraged to involve in adopting new programme strategy and follow by advertising. The new programme strategy will gain on building awareness and further increase the frequency of WOM communication. Traditionally, most of the PHEIs will focus on advertising to introduce new programme to market before launching the programme. However the best way is to launch new programme first and let the advertising communication to increase the frequency of WOM. In addition, the outdated or not popular programme should be discontinued in order to build new image in educational sector.

In this case, the extending period to make these issues keep going to be the main issue is a challenging task for PHEIs. It is impossible for a PHEI to keep launching new

programme or discontinue a programme all the way. It is suggested that the PHEIs must in collaboration with alumni and let the alumni to disseminate positive WOM about the brand trust. After graduation and gaining experience, the alumni can be retained as a source of teaching in the college. As practiced by a lot of PHEI, they retained the alumni after graduation immediately, they didn't have real working experience.

Without experience, the lecturers will not have real story to share with students. It will make the new programme become bored and the students will not have interest on it. Except qualification, the PHEI must set a minimal requirement including real working experience and not only teaching experience in recruiting lecturers. For instance, a lecturer without real working experience will follow the theory and they will not able to produce students with creative thinking. In future, the students can't meet the requirement of the marketplace.

The lecturers are also the key persons in deciding the successful of the course as they are the persons who directly contacted with the students when the lessons are on. The lecturers are the person who is able to produce verbal conversation among the students. In addition, as an employee of the PHEI, he or she will not tarnish the brand name of the company. The lecturer acts as an opinion leader in spreading positive WOM here. Therefore, the potential students will get involve actively in seeking information to make their decision. It will moderate the relationship between brand knowledge and brand trust. Interestingly, traditional sources such as friends and family which are considered as face to face mediums have played its role in constructing brand trust. As explained in Media Richness Theory, face to face mediums are considered very rich and effective medium. However, the theory was constructed before the widespread use of technological oriented communication mediums.

This kind of efforts reflects on the intake improvement by the individual PHEIs. This can be a measure to look about the awareness of the public towards the PHEIs. The PHEIs can also perform time to time survey on the satisfactory level of the students as well as to determine the demographic of the students. This survey can be used to channel the marketing outreach programmes to specifically hit places which are either high in awareness or lowest in awareness based on the population count. All this strategies can be implemented by the PHEIs to improve their stronghold in the segment.

Statistic shows that PHEIs have failed to rule the higher education sector and was not able to secure the most possible number of students (Ismail, 2007). Besides, due to the highly competitive environment, it would probably result into incline in the enrolment particularly among small-sized institutions (Zalina, 2003). Therefore, the PHEIs must be able to engage with the students. The engagement involves having a great relationship that is deeper than just making the final decision. Engagement can be defined as the combination of emotional context with behavioral responses. Commitment, confidence and trust are the elements of emotional context.

For instance, the PHEI can organize a trip for their students in order to build the mutual trust among them. Close relationship through activities is a way for both parties to extend their relationship to a higher stage. Furthermore, it also creates a chance for the students to disseminate positive WOM among them.

The PHEI can use hybrid opinion column or recommendation based heuristics through college website to get the students' opinion. The hybrid opinion column can be divided into positive and negative column. When a student poses negative opinion in negative column, it will be expected by other students that he or she is an unhappy

customer who is under the other students' expectation. Thus, the bad effect towards brand trust will be reduced. If the unhappy customer still posing at recommendation-based heuristics, it means she or he is still willing to accept the PHEI, otherwise, he or she will spread bad words to others through social media which will tarnish the brand trust of PHEI.

The PHEI must deal with the complaints from students with extreme importance. The PHEIs must tell others that they are more focus on negative issue. They should listen attentively and look into the issue from students' or parents' perspective. They must also show respect and willingness to produce satisfaction customer. Empathetic listening is a useful management tool to create brand image among the parents. The top management team involved should including the principal and every faculty's manager. They should be contacted easily and actively involved in viral communication to let the public know them well.

On the part of the government, with the high increase in outreach programmes, it is expected that the reliance to the government quota will be reduced by the public as it goes through a competitive environment both in quality and costing. Government policy should focus on society's demands. Ideally, PHEI will complement rather than compete with the public sector. Thus, the structure of government subsidies should encourage PHEI to create awareness among the students in order to build brand trust of PHEI. Governments than can channel their funding better to cater the development of the PHEIs rather than just on the local institution so that the improvement both in private and local higher education system can be established.

On the part of WOM sources, findings showed that social media plays vital role in building brand trust about PHEIs among the students in modern age. Compare to family members, the influences of social media are the subsequent high contributors for building trust on the PHEI's brand. It was also noted that the use of social media is recognized by all the college administrators as one of the promotional method. This is further enhanced in the quantitative findings that showed the social media is the most influential source.

As shown by the findings, family members such as parents are not the only key opinion leader in college selection process. The influence of the social media to increase brand awareness among the parents who involved in making decision for their child are undeniable as it creates a platform for parents to exchange their opinions as most of the parents actually know nothing about PHEI. For instance, they didn't update by the latest information regarding the new programmes, career opportunity, cost and others. Now, when they get closer to their child's life style, they will make more empathy decision for their child.

On a positive ground however there are some organizations build their image but do not make any effort to improve its essence or quality. For this kind of scenario the students as well as their family can use this social media to express their grievances. If the students find anything that doesn't meet their expectation they will spread negative WOM through social media which will affect the brand trust in the long term. It is perceived that social media with extensive use of multimedia applications would have a good richness too.

However, “there are two sides to a coin”, the influences of the social media can also create a negative impact to the PHEI as well as the government. There is some possibility that irresponsible PHEIs may make use of the finding of social media to dominate the market. They may use social media as a tool to disseminate unrealistic facts which will favour their own institution. It is unethical if PHEI only makes a move at using this avenue however this can a distinct possibility.

Knowing the influences of the social media the PHEI should correspond accordingly to negate these situations. PHEIs should take additional measures to ensure the level of quality as well as satisfaction among students is constantly monitored. Apart from that they can also be involved in the social media responding critics and dissipating positive information in case there are some information gaps that can be present from time to time. It not only can encourage dissemination of positive WOM through social media which is more preferred by students, but also can pacify parents who are buyers but not real user. In this case, the PHEIs should announce the top management team’s email number to public.

As a policy maker, the government should aware of the influence of WOM communication via social media which will tarnish country’s image as a regional educational hub. Here, the government has the responsibility to control the dissemination of unrealistic facts and impose the fact-based regulation towards the irresponsible PHEIs. The government should make the information regarding PHEI accessible to public through social media which influences has outweighed the impact of students’ knowledge on the PHEI’s brand and its superiority in building brand trust towards PHEIs. It will enhance the brand image of PHEIs among the students.

Moving on to the brand trust, it is noted from this research that the brand trust are created lowest by the academic advisors either in school or colleges. It is also quite interestingly, that the result also showed that the influences of academic advisors have negative impact towards the brand knowledge of PHEI and the resulting brand trust. The findings showed an opposite view of two parties. The findings from quantitative survey showed that school teachers were found to be the least predictor for building trust of the PHEIs. But, some of the administrators still expected the school teachers as credible source. They believed school teachers act as a gatekeeper of PHEI information from preventing spreading of negative WOM. This shows clearly a gap in the early development knowledge thus lack in creation of brand trust.

Currently there are some PHEIs still approach some school teachers with information but they merely act as their agent in recruiting students. Normally, the school teachers will not be that aware about the brand of the PHEIs but they have experience in consultation. Some school teachers have but they are not aware of the current market trend as they will find information which is generic and only for their general knowledge. They are able to give advice according to students' needs, interest, financial background, school results and suture career based on what they know. It means the school teachers know the students well and can help the students to make decision but not always the right ones.

To bridge this gap, a creation of a career counselor in school would solve this. The career counselor would be a learned professional with the complete information of the current updates on the requirements for the career. They would have the complete understanding on what are the requirements for a career, where to study as well as the

options for how to reach excellence. This creation would help align students for their proper focus in their path for a successful career.

The role of PHEI is very important in this manner. PHEI are supposed to accommodate this said counselors as a mandatory requirement on a yearly basis to help enhance their knowledge on the institution. The PHEIs can also get information about the students' needs and wants so that they can position their courses to suit the need of the continuously improving education industry. This creates brand trust with the organization thus improving their marketability.

On the part of government, they can ensure that the qualities of the institution are kept constant as the demand by the school. The government should announce this role an auditory position which is in higher category of class. The counselors' opinions shall be taken seriously in deciding the direction of the PHEIs in the country. Government shall also allocate resources to constantly train these counselors with overseas exposure so that they can bring in new ideas and proven work ideologies to the local and private institutions.

6.5 Research Limitations

In spite of the relevance and potential of this study, few aspects of this study should be considered in considering and adopting the findings of this study. These aspects are deemed to be the limitation of this study. The stress of these limitations is considered important in order to overcome similar issues in the future researches within the similar field of the investigation.

This study utilized cross sectional design for the both quantitative and qualitative phase in gathering data. This means that responses of both group of respondents i.e. students and PHEI operators were investigated and gathered once only. Therefore, this study would not be able to trace any variability in the respondents' responses towards PHEI's branding and management of WOM sources that would incur after respondents were made aware on the topic of investigation.

The next possible limitation is use of single respondent from each interviewed PHEI during the qualitative strand of this study. The use of single respondent always associates with the possible biasness in the information furnished by a single respondent. However, it is worthwhile to mention that a great care was taken in ensuring the interviewed respondents relay unbiased information to the questions posed. This is highly possible through good interviewing skills. Besides, the interviewed respondents were also carefully selected in order to make certain about their knowledge and familiarity about the topic of investigation.

Finally, sampling location of both phases of study is afraid to possess a possible limitation. Focus of the investigation merely on the students and PHEIs located at Klang Valley could definitely raise concern on the generality of the findings to other related field or topic of investigation. Nevertheless, the selection of Klang Valley as a sole sampling location is justifiable due to the saturation of PHEIs in Klang Valley, Malaysia which indirectly represent the location's ability in representing the entire PHEIs in Malaysia.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Researches

The current study is expected to spur the future investigation on the related field of investigation. Though branding, WOM sources and higher education are commonly researched areas, there are still more scope for investigation due to the extensiveness of their research areas. Accordingly, this section highlights several directions for future researches within the similar of field investigation.

This study has utilized mixed method approach and this design is deemed to be greatly beneficial in comprehending the research issues. Likewise, future researches are highly encouraged to adopt the similar design. With this, the study which utilizes mixed method would be benefitted from the strength of each of approaches used.

Besides, future researches should gather data from various locations in order to enhance generalization of the resultant findings. Data collection from both Peninsular and East Malaysia would be an added advantage. In addition to the coverage of broader geographical location, investigation on the impact of multicultural would be also possible with such coverage. The impact of multicultural is expected to further enrich the current findings on the branding and management of WOM sources.

It is also greatly recommended to adopt the research framework of this study into researches conducted within other related service sectors such as tourism, healthcare and telecommunication. The adoption of the framework would further enhance and validate the potential generalization of findings of current study.

6.7 Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the inclusion of influences from WOM sources has heightened the impact of brand knowledge towards brand trust of PHEIs. Nevertheless, that influences of WOM sources are workable only when brand knowledge of customers significantly affects their trust towards a particular brand. Otherwise, the role of WOM sources is deemed futile. Therefore, this study implies that influences of WOM sources, brand knowledge and brand trust are inter-reliant dimensions where failure of PHEIs in capitalizing any one of these dimensions would negatively affect the students' enrolment at their institution.

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University of Malaya

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE - STUDENT

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am a postgraduate student at University Of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur and currently undertaking a research entitled as “**The Impact of Word-of-Mouth Sources on the Relationship between Brand Knowledge and Brand Trust**”. This research is required as the fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Marketing Communication).

Your assistance is greatly required to complete this survey form. Your feedbacks will be used solely for the academic purposes and will be treated with strictest confidentiality. Your cooperation and sincerity are greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Student : Ang Chuan Lock
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“The Impact of Word-of-Mouth Sources on the Relationship between Brand Knowledge and Brand Trust”

PART A: BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENT

Instructions: Please circle the appropriate answer

1. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

2. Ethnicity:
 - a. Malay
 - b. Chinese
 - c. Indian
 - d. Others

3. Highest education qualification:
 - a. Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia
 - b. Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia
 - c. O-Level
 - d. Matriculation
 - e. A-Level
 - f. Pre-university program
 - g. Foundation
 - h. Diploma
 - i. Others

4. Dissemination of favourable information about my current institution by others or via the institution’s website and social networks (e.g Facebook, Twitter) is one of the contributors for my decision to study at this institution.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No (Please skip to question no.6)
 - c. Not applicable (Please skip to question no.6)

5. Information spread through the following options is one of the contributors for my decision to study at my current institution (Can choose more than ONE option).
 - a. Family members
 - b. Friends
 - c. School teachers
 - d. Academic advisor
 - e. College website
 - f. Social networks
 - g. Others (Please specify : _____)

6. I would disseminate information about my institution to others or via social networks in order to facilitate other students’ decision to enrol in this institution.
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not sure
 - d. Not applicable

PART B: Brand Knowledge

7. Following is the list of statements pertaining to the brand image and brand awareness of higher education institution (HEI) that you are currently studying at. Considering the accuracy of each statement, circle the best answer based on the scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

• I can specifically highlight the advantages to study at my current HEI	1	2	3	4	5
• My confidence on current HEI greatly reduces my perceived risks towards its new programmes.	1	2	3	4	5
• I can easily recognize my current HEI from other HEIs.	1	2	3	4	5
• I truly understand the brand of my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• The symbols of my current HEI can build recognition to me.	1	2	3	4	5
• The brand image of my current HEI is outstanding and superior compares to other HEIs.	1	2	3	4	5
• My current HEI will come to my mind first when I think about further studies.	1	2	3	4	5
• I am very familiar with my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I always associate my current HEI as a great place to further tertiary education.	1	2	3	4	5
• My current HEI has positively impressed me with its good profile.	1	2	3	4	5
• I aware the entire academic programmes and services offered by my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• My current HEI is an unique study destination for students to enjoy distinguished experiences	1	2	3	4	5

PART C: Brand Trust

8. Following is the list of statements pertaining to the brand trust towards your current HEI. Considering the accuracy of each statement, circle the best answer based on the scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

• Information on my current HEI is always consistent over the many years.	1	2	3	4	5
• My current HEI always acts in a way as promised to the students.	1	2	3	4	5
• My current HEI is able to assess and meet the expectation of students.	1	2	3	4	5
• My current HEI always enhances my expectation towards its quality services.	1	2	3	4	5
• I believe that my current HEI has sufficient knowledge on the current market trend.	1	2	3	4	5

• I perceive that my current HEI offers appropriate and quality academic programmes with reasonable fee.	1	2	3	4	5
• I notice that my current HEI offers appropriate and quality academic programmes with reasonable fee to its entire students.	1	2	3	4	5
• I tend to be loyal to my current HEI as it constantly delivers its promises.	1	2	3	4	5
• Academic staffs of my current HEI are well trained on the tasks assigned to them.	1	2	3	4	5
• Admin staffs of my current HEI are well trained on the tasks assigned to them.	1	2	3	4	5
• Academic programmes of my current HEI are trustworthy in the market.	1	2	3	4	5

PART D: Source of Word-of-Mouth

9. Following is the list of statements pertaining to the sources of word-of-mouth which have disseminated information about your current HEI during your college selection process. Considering the accuracy of each statement, circle the best answer based on the scale of 1 to 5 (1=strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree).

• Family members have frequently furnished information about my current institution.	1	2	3	4	5
• I give greater importance to the information spread by family members on the selection of HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• Information spread by family members had reduced my perceived risks towards my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• My friends always share information about my current institution.	1	2	3	4	5
• My friends have greatly influenced my decision to select my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• Opinion of my friends on HEI is considered reliable as they have adequate knowledge on the HEIs in Malaysia.	1	2	3	4	5
• I had quite frequently referred to information furnished by academic advisor during the stage of pre-enrolment at my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I trust the information delivered by academic advisor as they are well-equipped information on HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I do believe that the advices given by academic advisor usually favour the HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• Persuasion of academic advisor does not at all influence my decision to enrol at current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I believe the information shared by my school teachers on the selection of HEI.	1	2	3	4	5

• I had frequently referred to my school teachers before I decided to enrol at current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• School teachers have greatly influenced my decision to study at current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I consider HEI which provides vital information .e.g. tuition fee, accreditation etc on its website as a trustworthy HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• HEI's website which places the visitor's comment would enhance credibility of the HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I had always referred to the website of HEI during my initial stage of college selection process.	1	2	3	4	5
• Information displayed on the website of HEI does not affect my decision to study at current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• I consider personal experiences shared in social media e.g. Facebook and Twitter about HEIs are reliable	1	2	3	4	5
• I always referred to information obtained from social media before choosing my current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5
• Positive experiences shared in social media had greatly influenced my selection towards current HEI.	1	2	3	4	5

THANK YOU

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE – ADMINISTRATOR

Dear Sir/ Madam,

I am a postgraduate student at University Of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur and currently undertaking a research entitled as “**The Impact of Word-of-Mouth Sources on the Relationship between Brand Knowledge and Brand Trust**”. This research is required as the fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Marketing Communication).

Your assistance is greatly required to complete this survey form. Your feedbacks will be used solely for the academic purposes and will be treated with strictest confidential. Your cooperation and sincerity are greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Student : Ang Chuan Lock
Student ID : AHA 070022
Email : pti_tuitioncentre@yahoo.com

Supervisor : Prof. Dr. Md. Sidin Ahmad Ishak
Email : mdsidin@um.edu.my

PART A: BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENT

Instructions: Please circle the appropriate answer

1. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

2. Ethnicity:
 - a. Malay
 - b. Chinese
 - c. Indian
 - d. Others

3. Education background:
 - a. School Certificate
 - b. Diploma
 - c. Bachelor Degree
 - d. Postgraduate Qualification
 - e. Professional Qualification

4. Tenure at this institution:
 - a. Less than 2 years
 - b. More than 2 years
 - c. More than 4 years
 - d. More than 6 years

5. Position at this institution:
 - a. Entry level
 - b. Junior
 - c. Senior
 - d. Middle management
 - e. Top management

PART B: Brand Knowledge

6. Based on your observation and experience, do you think the students could easily aware and recognize your Institution (e.g. academic programmes and services) and its brand marks (e.g. logo, symbol, colour) particularly during the early stage of enrolment?
 - a) If NO, please explain why and how such scenario could happen; please also suggest how to improve the students' awareness and recognition towards your institution in the future.
 - b) If YES, please further elaborate your experiences with several incidents as examples; also explain on why they could easily recognize and aware the Institution?

7. Do you think the students could easily identify the comparative advantages of your Institution over the competitors?

PART C: Brand Trust

8. For the following questions, please explain how and why with relevant scenarios (based on your experience and observation) as examples:
- a) My institution always provides consistent information about our Institution, management, philosophy and academic programmes over the years.
 - b) My management always delivers the promises made to students and other stakeholders.
 - c) My management always meets the expectation of students.
 - d) My institution closely observes and follows the current market trend within higher education sector.
 - e) My institution offers appropriate and quality academic programmes with reasonable fee to all students.
 - f) All our staffs are well trained with the tasks given.
 - g) All our academic programmes are accredited with the regulatory bodies nationwide and worldwide.
 - h) All our staffs are trained to take extra efforts just to meet students' expectation.

PART D: Source of Word-of-Mouth

9. Existing records indicate that student's decision on the college enrolment is greatly influenced by the information spread by the sources of word-of-mouth. Following table tabulates the sources of word-of-mouth based on the 3 dimensions namely its usage frequency, relative influence and perceived credibility.
- a) You are required to rank these sources (any one or more than one sources that your institution is currently using) based on these 3 dimensions. The ranking should be based on the range of 1 to 6 (1 is the greatest source and 6 is the weakest source). Should the sources are not used by your institution, you may state "Not Applicable or NA".
 - b) Please explain your each response as illustrated in the following table to with relevant scenarios as examples.

Sources of Word-of-Mouth	Usage Frequency	Relative Influence	Perceived Credibility
Family			
Friends			
School Teachers			
Academic Advisors			
College Website			
Social Media			

THANK YOU

University of Malaya