

## *Suratthani Rajabhat University Branding*

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### **Abstract**

The objective of the research is to study the image of Suratthani Rajabhat University (SRU) and to develop a strategic plan to manage the image of the university through collecting data from stakeholders and people who have relations with SRU. The research tools are questionnaires, in-depth interviews and documentary research. The reliability of questionnaires is equal to 95 percent. The results showed that when considering the characteristics of SRU it was found that the university has the highest rating for provision of educational support. The characteristics of SRU have the highest rating compared to other universities for the atmosphere and environment. The characteristics of the students of SRU are that they have the highest analytical thinking skills compared to other universities. Students are the most happy and study in the highest rated environment. Therefore, its characteristics could be use as primary data to create the Strategic Brand Management of the University such as creating a unique identity depicting its vision, goals and strengths and trying to define its position in the public eye as a university with a green and clean campus. Also, specifying the characteristics of the students of SRU such as hardworking, up-to-date, language and IT capacity, diligent, economic, persistent and public spirited. Moreover, it should adjust and aim for enriching the image of each dimension by rebranding and launching the corporate culture “SRU Spirit” though a SRU Rebranding Process that contains “SRU Brand Positioning”, “SRU Brand Character” and “SRU Brand Identity”.

Keywords: image, brand, strategic management plan, Suratthani Rajabhat University

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## **Introduction**

The liberalization of education, rapid expansion of academies, and changes in the number of students due to the changing structure of the population affects institutions. The institutions must adjust their strategy development in various fields, whether curriculum, teaching, teacher's quality, using technology in management services or educational services, increasing the amount of research that affects society and is recognized, and it must remain in their own unique way to build a reputation and the quality of institutions. Most universities require entering the competition which have the curriculums as a "product" that is diverse. It is a competition to create new courses to meet the needs of the market that has also increased considerably. Universities strive to create uniqueness and distinctiveness for their universities to differentiate. They attempt to build the expertise and reputation of the university to meet the needs of customers. In order to have more students to study in their institutions, they need to "create an image or brand" into the heart of the University as inevitable. The institutions have to have a strategy to build brand image, brand development, and to enhance the quality of the brand, and the development continues by using a variety of tools to add power and create a clear identity. To create an identity for the brand quality, as a result, the brand is fresh, and has brand revitalization, and contributes to raise the quality so that it can be made into a stable positioning for higher competition in the future.

Suratthani Rajabhat University is a higher education institution that has created the value of education for the local upper south of Thailand and Suratthani province for a long time. Suratthani Rajabhat University was the Suratthani Teacher College in 1973 and was upgraded to Suratthani Institute in 1992 and developed into Suratthani Rajabhat University in 2004 until the present. However, from the past to present Suratthani Rajabhat University has been trying to make a difference in teaching by focusing on the development of graduate practitioners with expertise in various fields. It has made an effort to integrate local knowledge and high levels of innovation in order to meet a demand both nationally and internationally, and increase the competitiveness of research, establish a center of art and culture, including empowerment to manage the cooperate network to develop academic research, as well as educational services and cultural activities of the university in society to be recognized in the ASEAN region.

For this reason, the researcher is interested in studying the current image of Suratthani Rajabhat University from the perspective of the target audience as stakeholders or those affiliated with the university in order to understand the situation and ways to maintain a good image, including planning for developing the Suratthani Rajabhat University branding, to prepare the university to be ready to face the new challenges of Higher Education Thailand in the ASEAN community. This is by analyzing information about Suratthani Rajabhat University; history, organization structure, philosophy, vision, mission, the core values of the organization, 4 year plan (2012-2015), policy, strategic plan following the 5 years (2012-2015) strategic development plan of Suratthani Rajabhat University including the concept of brand analysis and related research.

## **Research Objective**

The objectives of the research on branding of Suratthani Rajabhat University are as follows:

1. To study the current image of Suratthani Rajabhat University with regard to the characters in the view of individuals within and outside the organization.
2. To develop a strategic plan to manage brand of Suratthani Rajabhat University through the study of the strategic brand management by type of institutions.

## **Research Methodology**

The population and sample used in this study is the population who live in Suratthani province, about 465,529 people (Suratthani Community Development Provincial Office, 2013) by calculating the appropriate sample size using the formula of Yamane (Yamane, 1973), and set the level of confidence at 95% of the samples used in the study, which was approximately 400 people. The researcher used random sampling by selecting a Purposive Sampling and Simple Random Sampling until completion of the sampling units. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire which consists of two parts: the basic information of the respondents and the information about the characters of the University and students at Suratthani Rajabhat University. The data was collected by questionnaires, using 5 point rating scales (Ketsingh, 2000). In addition, to collect data about the current brand of Suratthani Rajabhat University, the researchers used a semi-structured interview by conducting in-depth interviews with a sample of stakeholders who are associated with Suratthani Rajabhat University, and included a documentary research analysis from various sources. The statistics used through SPSS are frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

## **Results**

The results of this study found that

### **1. The current image of Suratthani Rajabhat University**

1.1 Background information of the respondents indicated that the majority of respondents were female, with ages between 20-30 years old, having an undergrad degree, income between 20,001 - 30,000 baht, and being a government officer / state enterprise officer. The respondents are mainly associated with the university through a personnel officer.

1.2 Information about the characters of the university and students at Suratthani Rajabhat University found that the eight characteristics of this university were rated at a high level. The distinctive characters of the University in the opinion of the majority is being the institution which has the support of educational facilities, while the less distinctive characters of the University is that the course is always up to date. When compared with other universities, the eight characters of Suratthani Rajabhat University were moderate. The distinctive character of the University in the opinion of the majority of students is a good environment, while a minimal distinctive character is a collaborative network for education.

However, the information about the characteristics of students at Suratthani Rajabhat University found that the students have ten different characters at a high level. The distinctive character of the students at Suratthani Rajabhat University in the opinion of the respondents are mainly two issues which are those that are happy and in a good environment, and students with the skills of statistical analysis, communications and Information Technology, while a minimal distinctive character: the students who support community and cultural. When compared with other universities, the students at Suratthani Rajabhat University have ten characters at moderate level. The distinctive character of Suratthani Rajabhat University in the majority of respondents' opinions is the students who are happy and in a good environment. While a minimal distinctive character is the students have been recognized nationally and internationally.

1.3 Information about the current image of Suratthani Rajabhat University found that the SRU Brand Character in the view of the international community have a characteristic of an old woman, unfashionable, with a stick for beating with, using brand name products, living in a big house with a high fence, a dog in the house barking fiercely, never trying hard to finish things'. It can be interpreted in terms of marketing that the Suratthani community thinks that Suratthani Rajabhat University has the characteristics of an old, outdated university, with a high performance in teaching, wealthy, easy going in spending money, can be difficult to reach, including students who have an impatient personality, and do not know how to do the work, or lack discipline in working.

## 2. Development of a strategic plan to manage image of Suratthani Rajabhat University

2.1 The main idea in creating the identity and the unity of public and private higher education institutions. In summary, the main idea is that public universities have focused on being creators of wisdom, to produce graduates with morals, to be creative, and support the community. However private education institutions have the distinguished key idea in being a leader in the field of science.

### 2.2 Strategy Plan for Management Reputation of Suratthani Rajabhat University

The Strategic SRU Brand Management Plan of Suratthani Rajabhat University must be consistent with the Strategic Plan, "5 Builds, 3 Developments" which consist of building people, building graduates, building excellence, building a good management system, building the capacity for ASEAN , and developing a better environment, developing local and universal wisdom, and developing the university internationally. The detail of each plan is as follows:

2.2.1 The strategic management plan of "image of staff" which is consistent with the strategic plan of "building people" is to strengthen support for all staff at the university to become a great power that will propel the organization creatively and sustainably.

2.2.2 The strategic management plan of "image of graduates" which is consistent with the strategic plan of "building graduates" is to measure the actual quality of the university. It focuses on the attributes of graduates, to produce graduates that are appropriate for a multicultural society, have a broad knowledge of various science disciplines in order to analyze and solve problems at a good level, have appropriate

work skills , have a good attitude, and have characteristics of lifelong learning, especially for independent-learning.

2.2.3 The strategic management plan of “image of excellence” is consistent with the strategic plan of “building excellence”. It focuses on the core missions of the University, to enhance the quality of research in curriculum development, academic services, and preservation of art and culture.

2.2.4 The strategic management plan of “image of a good governance” is consistent with the strategic plan of “building a good management system”. It focuses on having a flexible management system, fast, financial stability, good governance, open to being examined, and a warm home to live in for great and talented people.

2.2.5 The strategic management plan of “image of looking towards ASEAN” is consistent with the strategic plan of “building the capacity for ASEAN”. It focuses on building the capacity to prepare in the competition in the ASEAN community, and increase their ability to adapt for future changes in order to raise the quality of work to international standards.

2.2.6 The strategic management plan of “image of environment” is consistent with the strategic plan of “developing a better environment”. It focuses on developing a good atmosphere, a good learning environment, especially for staff, students and guests to feel happy and inspired to learn by themselves.

2.2.7 The strategic management plan of “image of developing local” is consistent with the strategic plan of “developing local and universal wisdom”. It focuses on the development of the University which will be significant for locals in terms of doing research to solve common problems, creation of new knowledge for local integration and universal wisdom, and a support of the teaching curriculum of the university in order to produce graduates who love local sustainable social development.

2.2.8 The strategic management plan of “image of the university internationally” is consistent with the strategic plan of “developing the university internationally”. It focuses on the development of the environment, the standard global infrastructure which the University emphasizes in the definition of the region (Asian) in order to prepare the University to move to a universally agreed, improvement in the quality of universities nationally and to be accepted internationally.

## **Discussion**

The findings can be discussed in the following issues:

### **1. Studying the current image of Suratthani Rajabhat University**

The results showed that the characteristics of the university and students of Suratthani Rajabhat University are important elements that represent the overall image of SRU brand. When considering the characteristics of the University and students of Suratthani Rajabhat University, it can be seen that the image is not only a matter of fact but it is also about recognizing that humans have feelings with facts mixed in with it. In addition, the perception of the image of the University when comparing the University to such a person, showed an awareness of the community in Suratthani

province about the image of Suratthani Rajabhat University, which is related to perceptual fixation, expectations and past experience.

2. Developing a strategic plan to manage the brand of Suratthani Rajabhat University  
The studying of the main concepts of creating identity and unity of public and private higher education institutions can conclude that private universities have a strong focus on the core concepts as a source of intelligence, learning resources, and to produce graduates with morals in order to be creative and support the community. However private universities have key concepts in being leaders in the field of science based on their being distinguished. It shows that to define the core concept of universities has different goals or purposes, and focuses on the excellence of identity of the organization. Therefore, The Strategic SRU Brand Management Plan of Suratthani Rajabhat University must be consistent with the Strategic Plan, "5 Builds, 3 Developments" which consists of building people, building graduates, building excellence, building a good management system, building the capacity for ASEAN, and developing a better environment, developing local and universal wisdom, and developing the university internationally by adjusting the 8 strategic plans to focus on the Reputation Management of image of graduates, image of excellence, image of a good governance, image of looking towards ASEAN, image of environment, image of developing locally, and image of the university internationally.

### **Conclusion**

The Strategic SRU Brand Management Plan of Suratthani Rajabhat University must be consistent with the Strategic Plan, "5 Builds, 3 Developments" of the University through the process of creating a new image of Suratthani Rajabhat University which consists of determining the image of the position or SRU Brand Positioning, SRU Brand Character, and SRU Brand Identity.

### **Research utilization**

These findings can be utilized as a concrete policy of Suratthani Rajabhat University by applying the approach in developing the strategic management plan to manage the SRU brand.

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