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An empirical study on apt alumni association in higher education institutions to enhance brand name of the institution

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Abstract

Higher Education has become highly competitive and challenging. The goal of apt alumni association is to build affinity with the institution alumni and pride in its community, and to inform the public that prominent local business and civic leaders are institution's alumnous. Posters, direct mail, radio spots, and the web are the communication methods to build a strong aluminous group. Through quality professional alumni and their innovative ideas institution can provide quality education and services to the society in general and students in particular. The significance of apt alumni association is discussed by considering three factors namely (1) best practices used in the formation of the apt alumni association or in improvement of the existing one, (2) Active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association from apt alumni members and (3) Alumni Related Activities that are beneficial to the social cause. An empirical study on factors affecting in the enhancement of the brand name of the Institution through an apt alumni association is carried out by developing some hypothesis. The hypotheses are tested using primary data collected through questionnaire method, are analyzed and the results are discussed.

Keywords: Apt Alumni Association, Posters, Direct mail

1. Introduction

In the context of higher education, the quality of the institution is a determinant for the institution vision, student development and in building brand name of the institution. It is therefore very essential that the institution maintain high quality education and services to students. Total Quality Management (TOQ) is a management process that helps to improve the critical performance and institution's educational excellence and overall development in multiple fields ^[1]. It not only matters how much the higher educational institutions grows in terms of quantity but how good in terms of quality and providing services to society. Innovations and practices in higher educational institutions enhance quality, enhance the brand name of institutions and add values to their services ^[2].

Apt alumni are the assets of the institution and help to build strong connection with the institution and its student and there by bringing institution more heights and to compete successfully with its communities ^[3]. The alumni association should promote the interests, welfare and educational aims of institution and its alumni, establish and maintain a mutually beneficial relationship between institution and its alumni, and encourage lifelong engagement of institution alumni with their fellow alumni and institution community. The Alumni Association has to cooperate in instituting and furthering policies and programs of institution and may recommend other policies and programs designed to promote the welfare of institution and its alumni ^[4, 5]. Alumni association promotes and provides services for institution and its alumni in all areas, which will encourage continuous growth, personally and professionally, along with a spirit of fraternity among alumni. A good alumni association exist for to promote the best interests of institution and to improve brand name in the society. The paper is arranged as follows. Section II provided the background and related study of an apt alumni association in higher education institutions. Section III described the Objectives and Methods employed to conduct empirical survey. Section IV described the conceptual model of apt alumni association used in this study. Section V presented the results obtained and the discussions on the results. Section VI presented Limitations and Future Scope of Research. Section VII concluded the paper.

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2. Background study and related research

Advancement of science and technology and knowledge base of all disciplines develop challenges and competitions in higher education. Feed back from the alumni revealed that drastic improvement is required in creating alumni association, getting strong connection with alumni and existing students and management, organizing, follow-ups, and financing to build effective and efficient alumni association. Alumni form a special stakeholder for an institute as their only interest is to see the institute flourish and grow in stature. The association builds a strong connection between alumni and current students through current student association to identify and recruit future students in good firms. Alumni association in higher education institution inform the public about the impact of college on alumni, preparation of the students for workforce and alumni experience as student [6].

An apt alumni association would be able to nurture relationship with current students and engage them in the growth of the institution and coordinate and promote programs that improve the pride and institution name and fame. An apt alumni association in higher educational institution should find best alumni with enthusiasm and willingness of several individuals and they are willing to take on the organizational initiative and sustain it. Innovations and best practices to build an apt alumni association or to improve association, Active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association and alumni related activities that are beneficial to the social cause can lead to improve the brand name of the institution. Developing active alumni begins prior to graduation; we have to educate students on the role, benefits and services of alumni association [7]. Even though several factors are identifiable, there is not enough research in higher education in order to improve brand name of the institution through an alumni association.

3. Objectives and methodology of the study

This study plans to identify factors affecting an apt alumni association in the enhancement of the brand name of the Institution. The primary objective of this study is to:

- To study the effects of Apt Alumni Association in higher education institutions to enhance the brand name of the Institution.
- To identify and test factors- best practices used to improve or build good alumni association, the active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association, Alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause of apt alumni association in higher education institutions influencing in the enhancement of the brand name of the Institution

Initially the background study of the apt alumni association in higher education institutions and then related works on apt alumni association and its role in improving brand name of the institution are carried out through review of literature. This study is based on primary and secondary data sources. The primary data have been collected through an exploratory research questionnaire with alumni association members, students and alumni association in charge staff and principal of Srinivas Institute of Management Studies, Mangalore City in Karnataka State of India. The qualitative data collection instrument chosen is the secondary data and focus group interactions. Secondary data sources are newspaper, journals, magazines, web links and related research papers. The focus group interactions consisting of alumni association members,

outgoing students, faculty members, principal and some non alumni members also. A conceptual model of Apt Alumni Association is developed based on focus group interaction method. To support the model certain hypotheses are developed and to test the hypotheses and the model, Alumni's survey is conducted using the Questionnaires.

The sample size of the survey is 100 are collected from Mangalore city in Karnataka state of India. Respondents are asked to complete a five point Likert scale on each question or proposition [8]. Response indicating Strongly Agree carries score 5 and strongly disagree carries score 1. The same thing is done in respect of each and every statement in the questionnaire. The response of 100 respondents is converted into percentage and the mean for each statement under 5 categories are calculated. Mean is calculated by dividing score by sample size (100). Hypotheses are tested based t-test. Finally results are discussed.

4. Conceptual model of Apt Alumni Association

Conceptual model is built based on focused group interaction as an instrument of qualitative data collection method. Four focus groups, each comprising of six young members, are conducted. Group 1 comprised of 3 males/3 females, Group 2 consists of 2 males/4 females, and Group 3 consists of 4 males/2 females, Group 4 consists of 5males/1 female. These groups include, alumni members, alumni association committee members, current students and few non alumni members also. Participants are chosen from the population of students at Srinivas Institute of Management Studies, Mangalore. Apart from this group 5 includes 3 staff members and principal of the same institution. Some journals also referred in order to develop this model [9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16].

This new model consists of mainly three factors as Best practices used to improve or build good alumni association, the active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association and Alumni related activities beneficial to the social cause. Best practices used to improve or build good alumni association factor consists of Interest group formation unit, Leadership unit, Initial communication unit, Getting organized unit, Follow-up unit, Fund raising unit, Dynamic website unit, innovative unit and review unit.

Interest group formation unit purpose is to obtain initial apt alumni members. In order to obtain initial members, meet alumni's informally, use existing alumni association, and obtain geographic list of members, telephone the members, personally meet, use website, use social networks or use emails. Leadership unit purpose is to get leadership or leader group. Leader or leader group should consist of some characteristics like willingness to work, willing to contribute time, ability to motivate and engage alumni, best communicator and honest or faithful member or member group. Initial communication unit purpose is to obtain all alumni leader and members in single roof. Initial communication unit include functions like mailing a letter with Leader/leader group information to all members, Requesting to update member information, Asking with members to become volunteers of association and writing a detailed letter to alumni who make up interested group.

Getting organized unit purpose is to organized alumni association with proper goals and vision. This unit can conduct a meeting and can do different activities like framing association objectives, reviewing general concepts and goals of alumni association, finding communication methods (news letter, mailing directories and social networks),

nomination and election of alumni officers, establishing projected dues and structures, identifying long and short term needs, Soliciting areas of interest and capabilities, discussing about giving scholarship and fellowship to alumni or existing students or needy people, Appointing of different committee and delegation of responsibilities, Appointing committee to draw organization outline and setting date, time and location

for follow-up meeting. Follow-up unit purpose is to make the alumni member more active and to see progress of their work. Its functions are, to see alumni association results and outcomes, try to get new contacts, who could not attend initial meeting, to serve to orientate first time alumni attendees and to discuss and handle the problem which is not discussed in initial meeting.

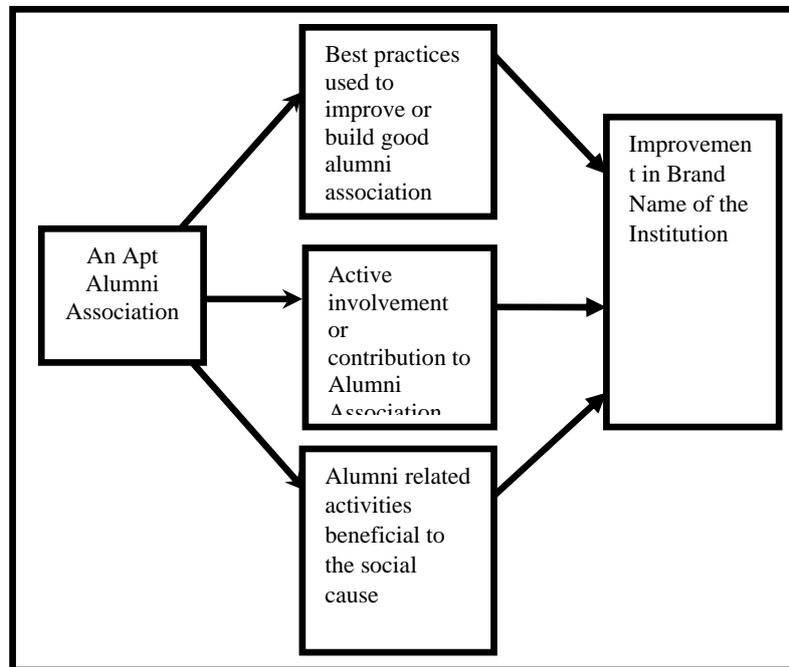


Fig 1: Factors affecting in the improvement of brand name of the institution through apt alumni association: Conceptual Model of Apt Alumni Association used in this study

Fundraising unit objective is to get enough funds for all the activities of the association. According to research emotional attachment and quality of relationship between alumni and their alma mater is one of the factor which influences alumni to contribute financially to their alma mater [9, 10, 11]. In order to get more funds association can follows some methods as give more preference to well settled alumni in their profession, give more publicity for the alumni association through mail, public networks and posters, give publicity for the scholarship/social services activities conducted by the association and showcase all the expenses incurred for the association for its leader and all members. Dynamic website unit goal is to bridge the gap between different stakeholders of institution and to build effective communication channel. This unit should include updated regular information, some carrier development tips, encouraging the donors by giving details in website and user friendly features.

Innovation unit purpose is to get new active member for association and to increase overall performance through innovative strategies. Some innovative strategies includes arranging some entertainment events or games by the association, easy access to live support, seamless logistic at events, as a part of feedback mechanism collect all information of existing final year students and prepare a checklist of some innovative ideas. Review unit goal are reviewing the objectives, checking regular committees duties and functions of committees, reviewing major activity and work projects, controlling and operation of scholarship and fellowship funds, regular communications and setting content and timing of newsletters.

Strong relationship between alma mater and alumni positively impact alumni involvement and contributions that

are helpful to the growth of the association [12, 13]. The active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association factor consists of Alumni Steering Committee, General administration or back office functions, Alumni help line, Student Mentorship, Guest Speaking, Fundraising Activities, Newsletter, Alumni Ambassadors and Placement Activities. Alumni steering committee role is to develop strategies and provide leadership. General administration or back office functions purposes are general clerical duties, photocopying, mailing etc. Alumni help line role is to help the association in keeping in contact with existing alumni on a regular basis and providing support to them as requires. Student Mentorship purposes are to support students and provide skills mentoring in group level or on a one-to-one basis. Guest Speaking role is to conducting special topic related classes at alumni meet and other college events both on and off campus. Fundraising Activities objective is to help the college in a number of major initiatives to upgrade facilities and services, develop Scholarship programmes and provide other supports. Newsletter role is to help the association in writing articles relevant to alumni activities. Alumni Ambassadors roles are to attend College events, represent the college as appropriate and develop relationships with other alumni. Placement Activities objectives is to help the college in assisting and getting job for existing students.

Two factors associated with student involvement is satisfaction with college experience and student development [14, 15, 16]. Alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause factor consisting of active attending or conducting different activities like Conferences, Seminars, Continuous Professional Development Initiatives, Short Courses, Skills Mentoring Programme, career development programme,

Special Networking events with voluntary/private organisations, Sports Events, Social Occasions, College Societies, Fundraising Events and Retreating activities.

From the above model Null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis are developed. To test the hypothesis survey is conducted using the Questionnaire ^[17].

H0: Best practices used to improve or build good alumni association, active involvements/contributions to alumni association and alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause have no affect on enhancement of the brand name of the Institution.

H1: Best practices used to improve or build good alumni association, active involvements/contributions to alumni association and alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause have significant affect on enhancement of the brand name of the Institution.

5. Research findings and discussion

The descriptive statistics of the 100 respondent is analyzed using scores and results in all the three focused factors - best

practices used to improve or build good alumni association, active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association and Alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause, in an Apt Alumni Association. The percentage of scores and mean of - best practices used to improve or build good alumni association are listed out using Table 1. The percentage of scores and mean of active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association are listed out using Table 2. Similarly the percentage of scores and mean of Alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause are listed out using Table 3. In all the three tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 represents percentage and mean of Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree respectively. 6 represents total of mean value. Responses indicating strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree and strongly disagree carries score 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Average mean is calculated with an assumption that all 3 focused factor’s units are equally important in enhancing the brand name of the institution.

Table 1: Scores and mean of best practices used to improve or build good alumni association-focused factor

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. Obtaining initial apt (right) alumni members through “Interest group formation unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	48 2.4	26 1.04	10 .3	10 .2	06 .06	4
b. Obtaining all members and leader under single roof through “Leadership unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	36 1.8	30 1.2	10 .3	08 .16	16 .16	3.62
c. Getting leader or leader group through “Initial communication unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	38 1.9	32 1.28	12 .36	08 .16	10 .09	3.72
d. Organized alumni association with proper goals and vision through “Getting organized unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	30 1.5	26 1.04	20 .6	12 .24	12 .12	3.50
e. To make alumni member more active and to see the progress of their work through “Follow up” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	50 2.5	30 1.2	08 .24	08 .16	04 .04	4.14
f. Getting enough funds for all the activities of the association through “Fundraising unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	60 3	20 .80	10 .3	05 .1	05 .05	4.25
g. To bridge the gap between different stakeholders of institution and to build effective communication channel through “Dynamic website” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	50 2.5	20 .8	10 .3	12 .24	08 .08	3.92
h. Getting new active member and getting innovative ideas to increase overall performance through “Innovative unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	42 2.1	26 1.04	18 .54	10 .2	04 .04	3.92
i. Review the objectives, reviewing regularly committee’s duties and a function, reviewing the major activities and work projects through “Review unit” is important in order to build/improve alumni association.	40 2	24 .96	20 .6	08 .16	08 .08	3.8
Average Mean						3.874
j. All the above best practices used in improving/building good alumni association have positive affect on improving brand name of the institution.	32 1.6	30 1.2	20 .6	12 .24	06 .06	3.70

Table 2: Scores and sample means of active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association- focused factor

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. I will involve with the “Alumni Steering Committee” to develop strategies and provide leadership for Alumni Association	36 1.8	20 .8	30 .9	10 .2	04 .04	3.74
b. I will involve with “General administration or back office functions” as general clerical duties, photocopying, mailing etc for Alumni Association	20 1	34 1.36	26 .78	12 .24	08 .08	3.46
c. I will involve in keeping contact with existing alumni on a regular basis and providing support to them as requires through “Alumni help line” for Alumni Association.	38 1.9	24 .96	20 .6	10 .2	08 .08	3.74
d. I will involve in supporting students and provide skills mentoring in group level or on a one-to-one basis through “Student Mentorship” for Alumni Association.	24 1.2	30 1.2	26 .78	14 .28	06 .12	3.58
e. I will involve in Alumni meet and other college events both on and off campus for “Guest Speaking” conducted by Alumni Association.	28 1.4	16 .64	20 .6	26 .52	10 .1	3.26
f. I will involve in upgrading facilities and services, develop Scholarship programmes and provide other supports through “Fundraising Activities” for Alumni Association.	20 1	36 1.44	20 .6	16 .32	08 .08	3.44
g. I will involve in writing articles relevant to alumni activities through “Newsletter” for Alumni Association.	20 1	24 .96	26 .78	14 .28	16 .16	3.18
h. I will involve in representing the college as appropriate and develop relationships with other alumni through “Alumni Ambassadors”.	18 .90	40 1.6	22 .66	16 .32	04 .04	3.52

i. I will involve in Alumni Association by assisting job for existing students through “Placement Activities”.	26 1.30	30 1.2	20 .6	14 .28	10 .1	3.48
Average Mean						3.489
j. All the above active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association from apt alumni members has significant effect on improving brand name of the institution.	20 1	28 1.12	22 .66	16 .32	14 .14	3.24

Table 3: Scores and Mean of Alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause- focused factor

Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6
a. I will attend/conduct conferences.	38 1.9	24 .96	22 .66	12 .24	04 .04	3.8
b. I will attend/conduct seminars.	22 1.1	40 1.6	18 .54	10 .20	10 .1	3.54
c. I will attend/conduct Continuous Professional Development Initiatives.	34 1.70	18 .72	20 .60	16 .32	12 .12	3.46
d. I will attend/conduct short courses.	16 .8	38 1.52	22 .66	14 .28	10 .2	3.46
e. I will attend/conduct Skills Mentoring Programme.	16 .8	38 1.52	18 .54	10 .2	18 .1	3.16
f. I will attend/conduct career development programme.	26 1.3	28 1.12	14 .42	18 .36	14 .14	3.34
g. I will attend/conduct Special Networking events with voluntary/private organisations.	20 1	20 .8	28 .84	22 .44	10 .2	3.28
h. I will attend/conduct Sports Events.	26 1.3	20 .8	24 .72	16 .32	14 .14	3.28
i. I will attend/conduct different Social Occasions.	24 1.2	24 .96	26 .78	14 .28	12 .12	3.34
j. I will attend/conduct college societies.	28 1.4	22 .88	24 .72	18 .36	08 .08	3.44
k. I will attend/conduct Fundraising Events.	20 1	24 .96	18 .54	20 .4	18 .18	3.08
l. I will attend/conduct Retreating activities.	18 .9	28 1.12	30 .9	18 .36	10 .06	3.34
Average Mean						3.377
m. All the above active involvement or attending Alumni Related Activities that are beneficial to the social cause have significant effect on improving brand name of the institution.	26 1.3	32 1.28	20 .6	12 .24	10 .1	3.52

Null hypothesis (H0) and Alternative hypothesis (H1) are tested using t-test with significance factor 0.05. Null hypothesis rejected due to two sample mean are different. The t-test for H1 gives value 0.667168. Hence H1 is accepted. This shows that that best practices used to improve or build good alumni association factor, the active involvement or contribution to alumni association factor and alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause factor in an apt alumni association have significant affect in improving brand name of the institution.

6. Limitations and Future Scope of Research

This study is limited by the following factors:

- The sample was distributed randomly over apt alumni and non-alumni from single institution. It did not include sample from multiple institution. The future study requires more institution alumni members for higher accuracy.
- The sample size is very much limited comprised with only 100 people. The future study requires more samples for higher accuracy.
- This study is focused on improving brand name of the institution through an apt alumni association in only three factors best practices used to improve or build good alumni association, active involvement or contribution to Alumni Association and Alumni related activities that are beneficial to social cause, in an Apt Alumni Association. The further study requires investigating issues related to alumni association in deeper manner with more factors influencing in the

brand name of the institution and what strategies should adopt by institution by which they can improve the quality of education service.

7. Conclusion

Alumni Association or group offer a chance to develop a career path, to build relationships, networks and opportunities, to bring a favorite project to fruition, and to have a good time to alumni and existing/current students of the institution. Alumni Association is a flat form for alumni's to give back to their institution. An Apt alumni Association in higher education institutions provides considerable improvements in (1) Providing valuable resources and experiences to alumni, (2) Existing students confidence and skills, (3) Student's academic performance through practical exposure and industrial experience, (4) Student's knowledge about present trends and challenges they have to face while working, (5) Institution name and fame (6) Obtaining additional consideration in securing job, (7) Decreased dependencies on external recruiting or job placement agencies, (8) Acquiring institutional publicity, (9) Enhancing the values of institution degrees, (10) Opportunity to give back to the institution in terms of financially, knowledge and services. (11) Opportunity to improve communication skill and human relationship. By this way Alumni Association is serving outside society especially student community.

This paper proved through empirical study all the three factors- best practices required for good alumni association or an improvement of the existing one, involvement/contribution to alumni association from Apt Alumni members and Alumni related activities that are

beneficial to social cause, have significance impact in improving the brand name of the institution. This paper also expounded a good alumni association bring the institution forward and to heights in terms of career development of students and in giving services to society.

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