



From Local Voices to Institutional Value: Assessing Community Perceptions of Private Institutions in Malaysia

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Abstract. This study aims to explore how community perceptions shape the institutional reputation of University Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) and Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) within the urban contexts of Cheras and Bangi. The purpose is to assess the extent to which local awareness, recognition, and communication channels influence public opinion regarding institutional impact. The research addresses a critical issue highlighted by the Ministry of Higher Education, which reports declining public trust in private universities, attributed largely to weak community engagement and limited visibility. Despite national policies encouraging university-society integration, many institutions struggle to build strong local connections. Anchored in Stakeholder Theory and the Corporate Image Model, this study used a structured survey distributed to 100 urban residents. Key variables included familiarity, information sources, and length of residency. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression via SPSS. Findings revealed that only 15% of respondents perceived the institutions' impact as highly significant. However, community recognition demonstrated a strong and significant correlation with perceived institutional, while awareness channels and residency duration showed weaker but positive associations. Regression analysis confirmed community familiarity as the most influential predictor. This study contributes to the discourse on higher education branding by emphasizing the importance of localized engagement over mere presence or media exposure. Institutions must prioritize sustained community visibility and authentic outreach to improve public trust, institutional relevance, and long-term reputation within their local ecosystems.

Keywords: Community Recognition, Public Awareness Channels, Perceived Institutional Impact.

1 INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia's dynamic higher education landscape, institutional reputation has become a critical determinant of public trust, student enrollment decisions, alumni engagement, and the broader societal role of universities. Increasingly, private higher education in-

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stitutions (HEIs) are under pressure to demonstrate their relevance, community presence, and trustworthiness. According to the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE, 2023), the erosion of public confidence in private HEIs is primarily driven by limited outreach and weak engagement with external stakeholders.

At the global level, institutional reputation has emerged as a key indicator in university performance metrics. The QS Asia University Rankings 2024 reflect this shift by highlighting employer perception and community involvement—domains in which Malaysian private HEIs often lag behind their publicly funded counterparts (QS Quacquarelli Symonds, 2024). In response to these developments, the MOHE's 2023 Higher Education Strategic Plan advocates for the transformation of universities into socially embedded institutions that are respected by stakeholders and actively engaged with their communities. This aligns closely with the Twelfth Malaysia Plan (Economic Planning Unit, 2021), which emphasizes people-centered development and the need to bridge the gap between higher education institutions and the communities they serve.

Despite these policy directions, many institutions continue to face challenges in operationalizing localized engagement. Resource constraints, misaligned objectives with community stakeholders, and internal institutional barriers often inhibit meaningful collaboration (Bock, de Waldt, & du Plessis, 2025; Harris, Johnson, & Lee, 2023). This issue is particularly pronounced in urban areas such as Cheras and Bangi, where universities are situated within densely populated and diverse communities but remain largely absent from public discourse. The shift from traditional media to digital platforms and informal networks such as social media and word-of-mouth has further complicated public engagement, especially for institutions with limited branding capacity (Shehzadi, Madni, & Hassan, 2023; Salman Salleh et al., 2024).

University Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) and Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) serve as illustrative cases. Located in prominent urban centers, both institutions are well-positioned to support regional development. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that public understanding of their roles, academic offerings, and societal impact remains limited. This underscores that geographic proximity alone does not guarantee community recognition or institutional legitimacy.

Institutional image is a multidimensional construct shaped not only by academic outcomes but also by stakeholder perceptions, engagement levels, and organizational transparency. Guided by Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984), which positions community members as crucial external stakeholders, and the Corporate Image Model (Gray & Balmer, 2018), which emphasizes visibility, trust, and interaction as key identity components, this study aims to investigate the relationship between community perception and institutional reputation. Specifically, it explores how community acknowledgment, public awareness channels, and length of residency affect perceived institutional impact. Focusing on Cheras and Bangi, the study offers practical and empirical insights into how private HEIs in Malaysia can redefine their societal relevance

through more strategic community engagement, in alignment with national policy objectives and global higher education trends.

2 LITERATURE REVIEWS

2.1 Institutional Image and Public Perception in Higher Education

Institutional image is not a static construct but rather a dynamic and evolving representation shaped by the interplay between internal performance and the perceptions held by diverse external stakeholders. Within the context of higher education, these perceptions significantly influence key outcomes such as student enrollment, retention rates, alumni engagement, community support, and policymaker endorsement (Sotiriadou & Brouwers, 2021; Ivy, 2021). The growing global competitiveness of higher education, accentuated by rankings like the QS Asia University Rankings, intensifies the pressure on universities—particularly private institutions in Malaysia—to cultivate a strong and positive image. This involves not only demonstrating academic quality but also projecting relevance, inclusivity, and trustworthiness (Khan, Hasan, & Amin, 2023).

Public perception operates as an interpretive framework through which stakeholders assess institutional behavior, often determining their willingness to engage with or invest in a university. Importantly, these perceptions extend beyond measurable achievements to encompass intangible attributes such as a university's reputation for ethical conduct, innovation, and community service. For Malaysian private universities, managing and enhancing institutional image has become a strategic imperative, especially as public sentiment increasingly influences areas such as government funding, student recruitment, and corporate partnerships (Ali et al., 2021; Tan & Lim, 2022).

In essence, an institution's image is a multifaceted concept, combining tangible accomplishments with subjective stakeholder interpretations—both of which shape competitive positioning and public credibility. Given the growing importance of public perception in Malaysia's private higher education sector, it becomes essential to understand the factors that construct this image. This leads to a deeper examination of community engagement and the communication channels through which institutional awareness is fostered, which forms the focus of the next section.

2.2 Community Engagement and Awareness Channels

Community engagement is widely recognized as a strategic mechanism through which higher education institutions can enhance their public image. According to Whelan and Wohlfeil (2020), effective engagement transcends traditional one-directional communication, instead emphasizing collaborative efforts that involve co-creating narratives and initiatives alongside community members. Such participatory practices foster deeper cultural and emotional bonds, humanizing the institution and promoting more meaningful and lasting relationships. Contemporary research indicates that universities adopting reciprocal engagement methods—such as joint initiatives, open dialogues, and

community storytelling—are more likely to develop a favorable institutional image by embedding themselves within the fabric of local society (Zhang et al., 2021).

In parallel, the evolution of the media landscape has accelerated this process. Informal communication channels, particularly social media and word-of-mouth, now play a dominant role in shaping public perception, especially in digitally active urban centers like Cheras and Bangi (Shehzadi, Madni, & Hassan, 2023; Salman Salleh et al., 2024). This media shift necessitates a reorientation of institutional communication strategies, requiring universities to engage more authentically and responsively within these decentralized digital spaces.

Together, the literature underscores that meaningful, two-way community interaction—strengthened by adaptive use of digital and informal media—significantly contributes to institutional visibility, relevance, and reputation. As a result, community acknowledgment emerges as a vital outcome of these engagement practices, serving as a key marker of institutional credibility and emotional resonance. The following section will further examine the role of community acknowledgment in reinforcing trust and institutional connection.

2.3 Community Recognition as a Predictor of Institutional Image

Empirical evidence consistently supports the notion that community recognition serves as a fundamental precursor to institutional legitimacy and emotional affiliation. According to Chang and Arambewela (2020), familiarity plays a central role in fostering trust, which is essential for establishing institutional credibility. As familiarity increases, uncertainty and skepticism tend to diminish, allowing communities to perceive institutions as trustworthy, relevant, and socially integrated entities. Building upon this, McAlexander et al. (2019) highlight that consistent local visibility—achieved through public events, collaborative efforts, and place-based initiatives—contributes to the formation of emotional bonds and perceived institutional value. These affective ties play a critical role in maintaining a durable and positive institutional image over time.

For private universities, which frequently operate without the benefit of extensive national or global visibility, recognition within their immediate communities becomes a vital strategic asset. Local acknowledgment not only enhances stakeholder loyalty but also strengthens the institution's ability to secure community-based support and mobilize resources—factors essential for sustaining competitive positioning and long-term viability. Collectively, these studies illustrate how community familiarity and recognition contribute to building trust and emotional resonance, which, in turn, reinforce an institution's legitimacy and public reputation.

To deepen our understanding of how these relational factors shape institutional image, it is essential to explore a theoretical framework that centers on stakeholder dynamics and the construction of external perceptions. This leads to the subsequent discussion on

Stakeholder Theory, which provides a robust lens for examining the interplay between institutional actions and community expectations.

2.4 Stakeholder Theory and the Role of External Perceptions

A growing body of empirical research supports the notion that recognition from the surrounding community is a critical driver of institutional legitimacy and emotional attachment. According to Chang and Arambewela (2020), when communities are familiar with an institution, it fosters a sense of trust—an essential element in shaping institutional credibility and acceptance. This trust emerges because familiarity reduces ambiguity and skepticism, allowing stakeholders to perceive the institution as both reliable and socially relevant. Similarly, McAlexander, Koenig, and DuFault (2019) argue that continuous engagement through localized efforts—such as collaborative programs, campus-community events, and visible partnerships—strengthens emotional bonds and enhances perceived institutional value. These efforts not only build a positive institutional image but also contribute to identity reinforcement over time.

For private higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly those operating without significant national or international prominence, cultivating strong relationships at the community level is not just beneficial—it is essential. Local recognition serves as a strategic lever to build stakeholder loyalty and mobilize critical resources such as volunteerism, funding, and advocacy. These elements are fundamental to enhancing institutional adaptability, especially in competitive and resource-constrained environments. This concept is directly relevant to the current study, which examines how community acknowledgment, awareness channels, and residency patterns affect public perceptions of institutional impact in urban areas such as Cheras and Bangi. Understanding how familiarity contributes to perceived legitimacy provides a crucial lens through which to evaluate the strategic positioning of institutions like UPTM and KPTM. To ground this relationship within a broader conceptual context, the next section explores Stakeholder Theory as a guiding framework.

2.5 Corporate Image Model and the Importance of Trust and Interaction

The Corporate Image Model developed by Gray and Balmer (2018) conceptualizes institutional reputation as a multifaceted construct grounded in trust, visibility, and meaningful stakeholder involvement. This framework asserts that a university's image is not solely shaped by external messaging but is largely built through authentic, continuous engagement that reflects the institution's core values and long-term commitments. In the context of higher education, this perspective urges institutions to move beyond superficial branding efforts and prioritize the development of transparent communication and active collaboration with community stakeholders (Helgesen & Nettet, 2021).

Research by Tran and Nguyen (2023) further supports this view, highlighting that well-managed community interactions—such as public events, partnerships, and social initiatives—enhance institutional credibility and foster stakeholder loyalty. These efforts

contribute to the formation of a strong and resilient institutional image, which is essential in navigating challenges and maintaining a competitive edge. Although such engagement requires deliberate planning and resource allocation, the long-term reputational benefits often outweigh the initial investment.

The Corporate Image Model, therefore, reinforces the significance of ongoing, value-driven engagement in building and sustaining institutional reputation, particularly within highly competitive or resource-limited environments. However, despite the theoretical consensus, there remains a lack of empirical research examining the predictive influence of community recognition, awareness mechanisms, and residential duration in shaping institutional image within the Malaysian higher education sector. This knowledge gap underscores the importance of localized, data-driven investigations—a direction further explored in the subsequent section.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature and Rationale for the Current Study

While extensive research exists on university branding and stakeholder engagement, a notable gap remains in empirical studies that examine the predictive relationships between community recognition, communication channels, and institutional image—particularly within the Malaysian higher education context. Much of the existing literature tends to adopt internal organizational perspectives or rely on broad models of reputation management, often overlooking the nuanced influence of community-level variables such as familiarity, media consumption habits, and duration of residence on public perception.

This study addresses these limitations by employing a data-driven approach to assess how these specific community-related factors shape perceived institutional impact within the urban environments of Cheras and Bangi. By focusing on localized urban dynamics, the research aims to provide context-specific insights that can support Malaysian higher education institutions (HEIs) in crafting more targeted and evidence-based strategies for branding and community engagement.

Such localized analysis is vital in supporting national education policy goals, particularly those tied to the internationalization and global competitiveness of the Malaysian higher education sector. Recognizing the scarcity of empirical studies that consider community-level influences on institutional image, this research proposes a quantitative investigation centered on urban populations. In doing so, it aims to generate actionable knowledge that can assist HEIs in enhancing their public image, building stronger stakeholder relationships, and aligning institutional practices with broader national and global objectives.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to explore the relationship between community perceptions and the institutional reputation of University Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) and Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM). The quantitative approach was selected due to its effectiveness in generating statistically valid, generalizable findings and its ability to analyze correlations among key variables. This research design allows for a structured investigation into how independent factors—namely community recognition, information channels, and length of residency influence the dependent variable, defined as perceived institutional impact.

The use of a cross-sectional survey aligns with established methodologies in studies of university branding and stakeholder perception (Ali et al., 2021; Chang & Arambewela, 2020). This approach facilitates the systematic collection of standardized data from a targeted urban population, enabling the evaluation of patterns and predictive relationships within the specified context. Through this method, the study aims to derive insights that are both empirically grounded and applicable to higher education institutions seeking to enhance community engagement and institutional image.

3.2 Sampling

The target population for this study comprised adult residents from two urban regions in Malaysia—Cheras and Bangi—where the campuses of University Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) and Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) are located. A non-probability purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit individuals residing in close proximity to these institutions. Participants were selected based on their accessibility, willingness to participate, and their potential familiarity or prior interaction with either university, ensuring the relevance of their perspectives to the research objectives.

A total of 100 respondents were included in the sample. This sample size aligns with both prior studies on community perception and established statistical guidelines for conducting multiple regression analysis. Specifically, Green (1991) recommends a minimum of $50 + 8 * m$ (where m represents the number of independent variables), which was used as a benchmark for determining adequacy. The sample was deemed sufficient to support the application of chi-square tests, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-tests, and multiple regression analysis, thereby allowing for robust statistical evaluation of the proposed relationships.

3.3 Instrumentation

As shown in Table 1, data were gathered using a structured, self-administered questionnaire adapted from previously validated instruments frequently used in studies examining institutional reputation, stakeholder engagement, and community perceptions (Ali et al., 2021; Chang & Arambewela, 2020; McAlexander et al., 2019; Ivy, 2021; Helgesen & Nettet, 2021; Tran & Nguyen, 2023). The questionnaire was tailored to reflect the study's specific context, incorporating components that measured community recognition, awareness channels, and perceived institutional impact.

Table 1 Components and Sources of the Research Questionnaire

Component	Description	Source
Demographics	The respondent's current location (Cheras or Bangi)	Custom-developed section
Community Recognition (IV)	Self-reported gender of respondent. Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. For analysis, familiarity responses were categorized into levels such as "Very Familiar" and "Somewhat Familiar" to reflect gradations in recognition.	Chang & Arambewela (2020)
Awareness Channel (IV)	Types of exposure reported included social media, word of mouth and events	Adapted from Shehzadi, Madni, & Hassan (2023) and Salman Salleh et al. (2024)
Years of Residency (IV)	Respondents indicated their total number of years living in the area (continuous variable).	Custom direct question
Perceived Institutional Impact (DV)	Respondents assessed the extent to which UPTM/KPTM contribute to local development using a 4-point Likert scale (Strongly agree to Strongly disagree)	McAlexander et al. (2019)

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was conducted digitally using Google Forms, with the survey link distributed through various platforms such as social media networks, local WhatsApp community groups, and targeted email invitations directed at residents living in Cheras and Bangi. Trained research assistants facilitated the process by clearly explaining the study's purpose and ensuring participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Respondents were assured that their involvement was completely voluntary, and strict confidentiality measures were upheld to protect their identity and encourage candid responses.

3.5 Data Analysis

As presented in Table 2, the dataset was processed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. The selection of statistical techniques was guided by the nature of the variables and

the study's specific research objectives. All inferential analyses were conducted using a conventional significance threshold of $p < 0.05$. The analytical procedures included the following steps:

Table 2 Components and Sources of the Research Questionnaire

Statistical Test	Purpose
Descriptive Statistics	Summarize demographic characteristics and key variable distributions
Chi-Square Test of Independence	Assess associations between categorical variables
Independent Samples T-Test	Compare mean differences between independent groups (e.g., Cheras vs Bangi)
Spearman Correlation	Evaluate relationships between ordinal or continuous variables
Multiple Regression Analysis	Predict perceived institutional impact from independent variables (community recognition, awareness channels, years of residency)

4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

This section presents a descriptive summary of the participants' demographic characteristics and key study variables. A total of 100 individuals participated in the survey, comprising residents from two urban locations near the UPTM and KPTM campuses. Of these, 40% were from Cheras and 60% from Bangi, providing a balanced representation of the university's surrounding communities.

Participants had lived in their respective areas for an average of 2.57 years, suggesting a mix of both new arrivals and long-term residents, which supports the diversity of community perspectives in the dataset.

Regarding institutional familiarity, half of the respondents (50%) identified as "Very Familiar" with UPTM or KPTM, while the other half (50%) reported being "Somewhat Familiar." This indicates moderate to high recognition of the institutions within the local population.

In terms of exposure channels, word of mouth emerged as the most influential source of awareness, cited by 61% of respondents. This was followed by social media platforms (18%), and traditional media sources such as television, radio, and newspapers (12%). These findings highlight the prominence of informal and digital communication in shaping public knowledge about the institutions.

When asked about the perceived contribution of UPTM and KPTM to local development, 71% of participants believed the institutions played a role "To a large extent" or "To some extent." This reflects a generally positive public perception of the universities' impact on their surrounding communities.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Respondent Characteristics and Key Variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean	Median
Area of Residence	Cheras	40	40.0	2.57	3.0
	Bangi	60	60.0		
Years of Residency	-	-	-		
Community Recognition	Very Familiar	50	50.0		
	Somewhat Familiar	50	50.0		
Awareness Channel	Word of Mouth	61	61.0		
	Social Media	18	18.0		
	Traditional Media (TV, Radio)	12	12.0		
	Events/Public Outreach	9	9.0		
	Perceived Institutional Impact	To a Large Extent	15	15.0	
To Some Extent		56	56.0		
To a Small Extent		21	21.0		
Not at All		8	8.0		

The demographic profile aligns well with the population characteristics of the areas surrounding the two institutions. The even spread of community recognition, combined with a noticeable reliance on interpersonal communication methods such as word-of-mouth, highlights key elements influencing local engagement. Furthermore, the generally positive perceptions of institutional contribution provide a strong basis for conducting more in-depth inferential statistical analysis.

4.2 Chi-Square Test of Independence

Chi-square tests analyzed the relationships between categorical independent variables and perceived institutional impact, which was classified into “positive” (To a large/some extent) vs. “less positive” (To a small/not at all) for evaluation. Residency years were categorized into groups (<2 years, 2–4 years, >4 years) as needed.

Table 4 Chi-Square Test Results

Variables	χ^2	df	p-value	Interpretation
Community Recognition vs. Perceived Institutional Impact	18.68	3	<0.001	Significant association (higher familiarity linked to stronger perceived impact.)
Awareness Channel vs. Perceived Institutional Impact	13.58	9	0.139	No significant association found.
Years of Residency vs. Perceived Institutional Impact	5.21	3	0.157	No significant association found.

The results highlight community acknowledgment as a significant predictor of perceived institutional impact. Participants with higher levels of familiarity tended to evaluate the contributions of UPTM and KPTM more positively, emphasizing the critical role of local awareness in shaping public perception. In contrast, neither the source of awareness—such as social media, personal recommendations, or other channels—nor the length of residency demonstrated statistically significant correlations with perceived impact. This suggests that the medium through which individuals learn about the institutions, as well as the duration of their residence in the area, does not independently influence their assessment of the universities’ roles in community development..

4.3 Independent Samples T-Test

Additional analysis utilizing independent samples t-tests assessed average perceived institutional impact scores among different categories of independent variables.

Table 5 Independent Samples T-Test Results

Independent Variable	Group	n	Mean (SD)	t	df	p-value	Interpretation
Community	Very Familiar	50	2.58 (0.61)	4.62	98	<0.001	Significantly

Recognition	Some-what Familiar	50	1.86 (0.71)				higher perceived impact among very familiar respondents.
Awareness Channel	Word of Mouth Social Media	61 18	2.20 2.00 (0.68) (0.71)	1.11	77	0.270	No significant difference between awareness channels
Years of Residency	<3 years ≥3 years	56 44	2.23 2.22 (0.70) (0.68)	0.08	98	0.935	No significant difference based on length of residency

The observed variation in perceived institutional impact based on community recognition reinforces earlier findings, affirming that familiarity plays a pivotal role in shaping positive attitudes toward UPTM and KPTM. This underscores the importance of visibility and recognition in enhancing institutional reputation within local communities. On the other hand, the absence of statistically significant differences linked to awareness channels and length of residency suggests that these factors, when considered independently, do not substantially influence perceptions of institutional contribution within the studied population.

4.4 Spearman Correlation

Spearman’s rank-order correlation evaluated the strength and direction of associations between continuous or ordinal variables.

Table 6 Spearman Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4
Community Recognition	1			
Years of Residency	0.32**	1		
Awareness Channel	0.27*	0.15	1	
Perceived Institutional Impact	0.45**	0.35**	0.29*	1

p < 0.05 (), p < 0.01 (**)

Community recognition demonstrated a moderate, statistically significant positive correlation with perceived institutional impact (r = 0.45), indicating that higher levels of

familiarity are associated with more favorable perceptions of the institutions. Although the correlations for years of residency and type of awareness channel were weaker, they still reached statistical significance. This suggests the presence of more subtle influences on perception that may not be fully captured through categorical comparisons, pointing to the complexity of community-institution relationships.

4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was created to forecast perceived institutional influence based on community acknowledgment, awareness mediums and length of residency.

Table 7 Multiple Regression Predicting Perceived Institutional Impact

Predictor	B (Unstandardized)	SE B	β (Standardized)	t	p-value
Community Recognition	0.48	0.09	0.42	5.33	<0.001
Awareness Channel	0.22	0.08	0.21	2.75	0.007
Years of Residency	0.15	0.06	0.18	2.50	0.014
Model Summary					
R			0.59		
R ²			0.35		
Adjusted R ²			0.32		
F (3, 96)				17.10	<0.001

The regression model accounted for 35% of the variance in perceived institutional impact, indicating a meaningful and statistically significant combined effect of the examined predictors. Among these, community recognition emerged as the strongest and most consistent predictor, reaffirming its central role in shaping positive perceptions of institutional contribution. Although awareness channels and length of residency also demonstrated statistical significance, their effect sizes were comparatively smaller. This suggests that while the source of information and duration of residence contribute to perception, they function as secondary factors relative to overall familiarity.

Across both correlation and regression analyses, community recognition interpreted as familiarity with UPTM and KPTM consistently stood out as the most influential variable affecting residents' views on the institutions' developmental roles. While awareness channels and residency duration were positively associated with impact perception, they did not yield significant differences when analyzed categorically. This pattern suggests their influence may be more nuanced or potentially mediated by recognition itself.

These findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to prioritize sustained local outreach and visibility efforts as part of their reputation-building strategies. Rather than relying solely on the mode of information dissemination or assuming that longer-term residents naturally develop positive views, institutions should invest in meaningful engagement activities that strengthen recognition within the community. Enhancing familiarity through targeted, participatory outreach may be the most effective route to improving stakeholder trust and perceived institutional value.

5 CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the factors shaping local community perceptions of the institutional impact of University Poly-Tech Malaysia (UPTM) and Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) within the urban contexts of Cheras and Bangi. Among the variables examined, community recognition—defined as residents' familiarity with the institutions—emerged as the most influential determinant of favorable perceptions regarding the universities' contributions to local development. Respondents with higher levels of familiarity consistently expressed stronger views about the institutions' positive impact, highlighting the essential role of awareness and engagement in cultivating institutional reputation.

Although information channels such as word-of-mouth and social media contributed to overall awareness, their direct effect on perceived impact was less pronounced. Similarly, the length of residency showed limited influence, suggesting that prolonged residence does not necessarily equate to greater institutional appreciation in the absence of meaningful engagement or awareness.

Findings from the multiple regression analysis reinforced these conclusions, with community recognition proving to be the most significant predictor. While awareness channels and years of residency also contributed positively, their effects were comparatively minor. These outcomes emphasize the need for UPTM and KPTM to prioritize strategies that foster authentic, community-based engagement and promote diverse yet impactful communication efforts.

Practically, this includes organizing community-centric events, establishing collaborative initiatives, and maintaining open and consistent communication platforms. Empowering residents to act as institutional ambassadors through interpersonal networks could further amplify positive narratives—particularly in light of the strong influence of informal communication.

Future research should aim to broaden and deepen this field of inquiry. Expanding the geographic and cultural scope, applying longitudinal designs to capture shifts in perception over time, and integrating qualitative methods would allow for a richer understanding of community-institution dynamics. Additionally, exploring the roles of digital media platforms, socioeconomic background, and a wider range of stakeholders could enhance the contextual relevance of future studies. Intervention-based research

evaluating specific outreach strategies would also offer practical guidance for institutions seeking to elevate their public image and community presence.

In conclusion, this study affirms that community perceptions of institutional influence are closely tied to levels of awareness and engagement. Strengthening these relationships presents a strategic opportunity for UPTM and KPTM to enhance their reputation, foster deeper stakeholder trust, and contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic development of their surrounding communities.

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