International students' course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention in higher education setting: an empirical assessment in Malaysia

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Asia Pacific
Education
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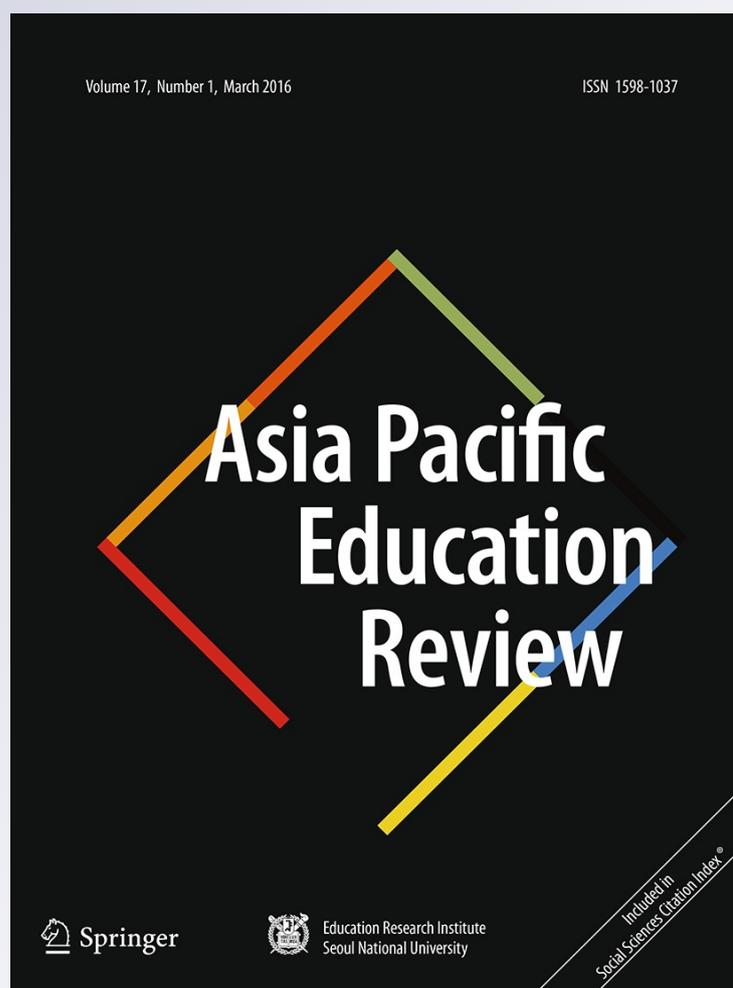Included in Social Sciences Citation Index®

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International students' course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention in higher education setting: an empirical assessment in Malaysia

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Abstract The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of perceived brand orientation, intercultural friendship, and university reputation on international students' course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention towards the higher education in Malaysia. A total of 348 questionnaires, administered on international students, were collected to empirically test the research model using partial least squares path modeling approach, a structural equation modeling technique for the assessment of measurement and structural model. The empirical results imply that perceived brand orientation and university reputation positively influence course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention, while intercultural friendships influences course continuance intention but not course satisfaction. The implications and limitations of research are discussed in the following sections.

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Introduction

Higher education (HE) can be defined as education at the postsecondary or tertiary level (Clarke 1971). There has been remarkable growth of HE around the globe over the past century (Schofer and Meyer 2005; Ilon 2011). In fact, countries' knowledge resources can be developed and built at the tertiary education level which is definitely a significant index (Li and Roberts 2012). Similarly, the role and advantage of HE is articulated in its contribution to social and economic expansion that will provide a competitive edge to nations around the world, specifically in the global marketplace (Lee 2004). Moreover, HE as a whole is so successful and respected due to its own effort and ability to prepare its students for knowledge sharing, and therefore, is a significant economic segment (Li and Roberts 2012). Incredibly, higher education institutions (HEIs) are not merely formed by national institutions or cultural framing, but are characterized by certain cultural features from the past that form the way they react to the present adjustments and also challenges (Vaira 2004).

Although the majority of HE students carry on to be educated within their national education systems, a growing number are crossing national borders today in pursuing higher education, where supposedly in 2001 there were 1.58 million foreign students in OECD nations, constituting just over more than 5 % connected with OECD enrolments in the USA along with the UK, New Zealand, Canada and Australia (Marginson 2006). Furthermore, international

activities have been extended by universities, earnestly. These kinds of international activities are composed of customary overseas programs, obtaining knowledge about different cultures, getting access to countries' HE where local universities are unable to meet the demand and also enhancing international point of view and proficiency of students, augmenting foreign language programs, in addition to giving cross-cultural comprehension (Altbach and Knight 2007).

Scholars and instructors often consider international experience as critical in leading to boost intercultural competence and engagement (Jackson 2015). Intercultural exchange is firmly related to developing friendships towards inter-national understanding; therefore, changing internationally means engaging and mingling with people from various cultural backgrounds (Kudo 2015). Similarly, it is significant to create these intercultural friendships in order to adjust to university life mainly because foreign students who experience higher restrictions in engaging in leisure activities may possibly acquire less friends among the host national and international peers, therefore, making them have lower sense of belonging at their host universities or colleges (Glass et al. 2014). The main barrier of intercultural relationship formation is language; therefore, students need to have a strong desire to improve and enhance their English skills so that they could easily make friends with the local students (Gomes 2015). According to Harrison (2015), the types of friendship are significantly varied among mixed classrooms, for example: students from the UK and Confucian Asian were more willing to form friendships with their co-national peers while other international students have higher levels of intention to retain their intercultural friendships. Rienties et al. (2015) asserted that group collaboration could be useful in order to establish intercultural friendships, which can reduce intercultural stress and the feeling of isolation.

Knight (2008) stressed that the international dimension is a key factor in challenging and forming the HE sector in countries across the world; thus, among the factors, for modifying the main feather of HE, would be to put more emphasis on expanding intercultural and global qualifications. The branding is highly disputed in the higher education area, and perhaps, has been given considerably less attention by scholars and academics (Sultan and Wong 2014; Casidy 2013). Therefore, empirical articles in the context of higher education branding are rare (Khanna et al. 2014). Scholars claimed that in higher education, developing a brand is not with the aim to sell products or services but to communicate the organization's (university's) values and identity in order to attract the target market and create loyalty (Bulotaite 2003; Wardley et al. 2013). The university can encourage students to be actively involved with the course content and faculty staff.

Particularly, once the students are satisfied with the course, they can be persuaded to promote the courses to other potential students at the university. Universities have applied the branding and marketing principals in order to survive in the market due to the high degrees of competition (Khatri and Sharma 2011). Besides, branding can help and assist students by providing an extensive decision making process in choosing a specific university, worldwide (Casidy 2014b). Likewise, the brand of the university must portray its distinguished status in a way that attracts prospective international students (Khanna et al. 2014). Therefore, studies declare that there are requirements for the further development of the discipline of branding management and future modeling of branding notions, for example, brand orientation in universities (Casidy 2014a; Chapleo 2007), mainly for targeting international students.

On the whole, reputation is related to the organization's credibility, specifically, the university (Merchant et al. 2015). The quality of the university can be judged via an important component which is reputation (Drydakis 2015). The most important tool in order to gauge a university's standing in the league table, as well as its ranking, is the reputation of the university, which therefore plays a vital role in order to attract prospective international students (O'Loughlin et al. 2013). Similarly, Alraimi et al. (2015) stated that the reputation of a university has a significant effect on the international students' decision making in order to attend the university and pursue their studies for higher education. Moreover, the reputation of the university has more effect on students whose parents attended the university, previously (Walsh et al. 2015). Likewise, according to Casidy (2013), the two most significant criteria for international students when selecting a university are reputation and academics. Reputation also plays a considerably significant role, mainly because the idea of reputation is usually shaped by numerous constituencies regarding many different entities comprising brands, products, universities or colleges; therefore, university reputation and study programs/courses are also vital for attracting and maintaining both international and local students (Helgesen and Nesset 2007). All these factors could improve the international students' satisfaction level thus making them feel satisfied with the university or, specifically, with the courses offered by the university. For example, a study has shown that students who perceived the overall course satisfaction positively, did very well in their exams and obtained very good grades (Lee et al. 2011).

If students, especially international students, have high level of satisfaction, the rate of student dropout would be reduced and instead, they will put in greater commitment to the course and program, and also demonstrate a higher degree of persistence (Kuo et al. 2014). Chen et al. (2015)

stressed that course satisfaction will reflect the positive perception of international students regarding learning experience. On another note, international students tend to earn higher grades (Wang et al. 2013). Thus, course satisfaction is considered significant for the long-term sustainability of a university (Rivera and Rice 2002; Baek and Shin 2008). Individual's continuance behavioral intention has gained considerable attention from scholars and academia for more than one decade (Wang and Du 2014). Furthermore, a study has found that students' perception of the learning process and course design substantially affect their satisfaction level and continuance intention (Chow and Shi 2014). Similarly, another study that was conducted at the National Pingtung University in Taiwan, involving 12 classes that were utilizing e-learning services in their ongoing education program, found that satisfaction significantly impacts the continuance intention of users (Lee 2010). The positive relationship between satisfaction and continuance intention has been established (Chen and Chengalur-Smith 2015; Stone and Baker-Eveleth 2013). Likewise, according to Basak and Calisir (2015), satisfaction has an effect on continuance intention in different contexts such as e-learning or social media (Facebook); therefore, this study will also consider course satisfaction as the antecedent of course continuance behavioral intention.

In essence, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of perceived brand orientation, intercultural friendship, university reputation on international student's course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention towards pursuing higher education in Malaysia. This paper is organized in the following sections. Firstly, a background of the HE industry in Malaysia is discussed. Secondly, the research model is proposed along with related hypothesis based on literature. Thirdly, research methodology and design are proposed to empirically test the research model (Fig. 1). Fourthly, the results of the empirical assessment are presented. Lastly, a conclusion is drawn according to the empirical results of this study and several managerial and industrial implications in HE are proposed.

HE industry in Malaysia

The higher education market has grown rapidly in the region of Asia-Pacific due to its speedy economic growth, therefore drawing considerable attention, globally (Shin and Harman 2009). Asian countries, mainly China, Singapore and Malaysia are generally moving upwards and have also considered strategic measures in order to obtain greater share of the international student market. These countries are generally regarded as the 'emerging contenders' targeting about 11 % of international students globally, with China having 7 % of the market share, whilst Singapore and Malaysia having 2 % of the global market share, each. Furthermore, the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) aims to attract 200,000 international students to study in Malaysia by the year 2020 (Cheng et al. 2013; Lewis 2015). Allocating sufficient fund for the universities in Asian countries, especially for Malaysia, is really essential in order to compete with other well established universities in western countries (Mok 2013). The government of Malaysia devoted significant financial and human resources in order to establish world-class higher education sector that are lower in costs as compared to its counterparts within the Western countries (Ahmad and Buchanan 2015). Malaysia is trying to develop its role as a HE provider, protector and regulator in order to move against the global trend; also, the Malaysian government invests heavily in HE for sociable equality and economic growth as well as national unity (Lee 2004). Considerably, Malaysia, among several other countries, portrays remarkable and distinctive scenario in that its government has explicitly declared its attempt to turn the country into a regional education hub, which generated a rather remarkable growth of transnational HE (Mok 2011).

Ordinarily, universities in the public sector have the responsibility to provide undergraduate and graduate studies, whilst the private universities that have been in Malaysia for the past 30 years, with the state supporting all of them actively since 1995, have to build their own innovative and unique educational path (Sohail and Saeed 2003). As a matter of fact, private HE is the fastest-growing segment of tertiary or post-secondary education, globally (Altbach 2009), and particularly in Malaysia, because the private sector has shown that it is in high demand for HE, which is not met, locally (Wilkinson and Yussof 2005; Kenayathulla 2013). Furthermore, the rise in the number of private education providers in the country also projects the growth in international student's enrollment; the private sector contributes, on average, 70 % of the annual international student enrolment. Table 1 shows the growth of the international student population from 2002 to 2013 (Aziz and Abdullah 2014).

In current years, in Malaysia, the number of international students who comes from the Middle East and the African countries are already growing; supposedly, Malaysia has attracted numerous international students from several countries including the Arab and African countries, Iran, and Pakistan (Pandian et al. 2014). International students can be defined as those who are ready to go to a different nation for the purpose of obtaining tertiary education (Manjula and Slethaug 2011). The reasons connected with international students studying overseas could possibly be to escape the politics or some kind of repression at home or to experience academic freedom.
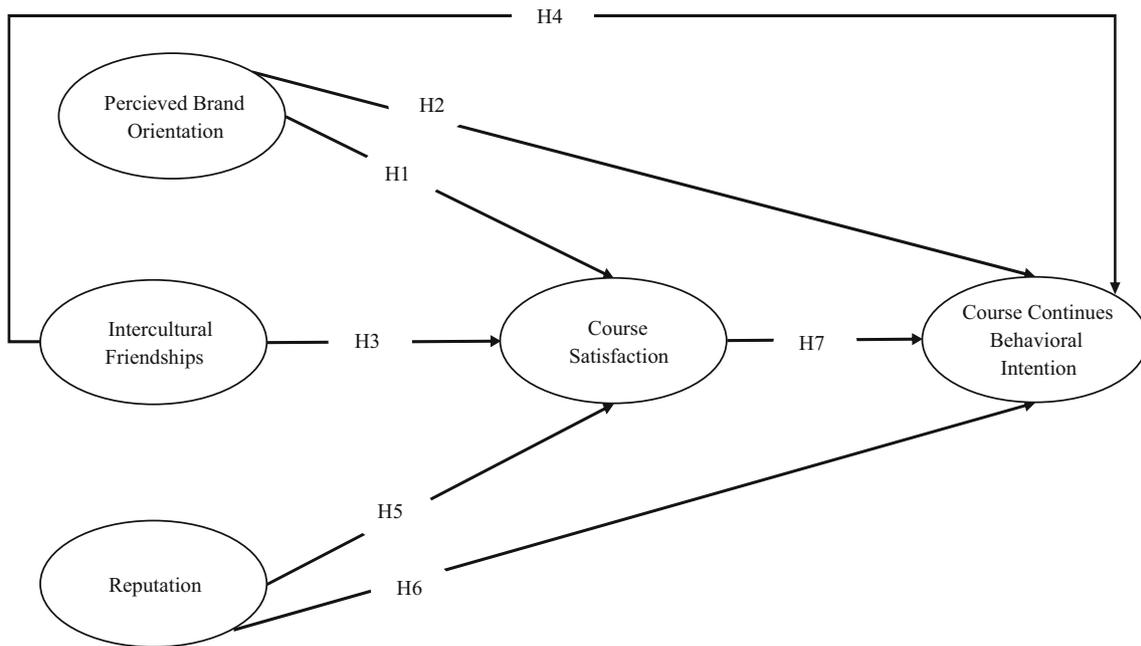
Fig. 1 Theoretical research model

Table 1 International student enrolment in Malaysia 2002–2013

Year	Public HEIs	Private HEIs
2002	5045	22,827
2003	5239	25,158
2004	5735	25,939
2005	6622	33,903
2006	7941	39,449
2007	14,324	33,604
2008	18,495	50,679
2009	22,456	58,294
2010	24,214	62,705
2011	25,855	45,246
2012	26,232	57,306
2013	29,662	53,971
Total	191,820	509,081
%	(27.37 %)	(72.63 %)

Source: Aziz and Abdullah (2014)

Occasionally, these are students who seek to escape from academic systems that are burdened by disruptions due to student unrest, faculty strikes, closures by government authorities, or other different issues (Altbach 2004). However, international students play a major role in the universities. For example, for HEIs to become truly international or global, international students should be trying really hard to perform and also be meaningfully involved in the universities' internationalization (Urban and Palmer 2013). This is because, internationalization has become a significant trend in higher education (Chen and Lo 2013).

A good global recruitment is seen as the way to develop brand and also reputation. Likewise, recruiting geniuses and highly talented international students can be one alternative route for improving the university's reputation (Hatakenaka 2004). For example, Malaysia targets to have 200,000 international students studying in its universities or colleges by 2020 (Shahijan et al. 2016). In essence, this can improve the country's as well as the university's reputation. Similarly, Abdullah (2005), who did a study on the higher education sector in Malaysia, indicated that in order to improve the university's academic reputation, especially its capacity to deliver exclusive and ranging programs with the structure which is flexible, they have to offer degrees that are acknowledged and accepted internationally as well as locally and lastly, engage highly dedicated and educated academic staff. Education hubs are important new developments (Knight 2011). Therefore, some countries are using the higher education hub as a branding label to attract more international students, which is much unlike countries like Malaysia which is genuinely trying to become a serious and well respected education hub (Knight 2013). More importantly, marketing and branding are seen as being closely bound to research such as the university's research strategy (Temple 2006). Therefore, Malaysian HEIs' need to focus more on research activities in order to increase its ranking globally and also to improve the branding of its universities.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Bhattacherjee (2001) has proposed the IT continuance theory based on expectation disconfirmation theory (EDT) by Oliver (1980). The IT continuance model provides an excellent starting point for further exploration of the IT continuance phenomenon (Bhattacherjee et al. 2008). The researchers did not pay considerable attention to the context of IS continuance relatively due to the small number of publications and lack of systematic effort; thus, this context is in the early stage of development (Larsen et al. 2009), particularly in the higher education context. By involving the concept of IS continuance use in examining the behavior of users in IS adoption, it is shown that the true success elements depend on continued use instead of first time use (Lin 2012). Accordingly, this study intends to investigate the international student's course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention, as shown in Fig. 1.

A number of studies have used the theory of continuance model in the higher education context. For example, a study focusing on students' use of webcasts in Belgium used variables such as perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, attitudes and continued usage behavior as the dependent constructs (Lust et al. 2012). Likewise, a study done about the e-learning usage among undergraduate students from a public university in Penang, Malaysia, used variables comprising information quality, system quality, service quality, user satisfaction and also intention to use (Ramayah and Lee 2012).

Considerably, Hung et al. (2011) explored academic teachers' continuance intention toward the web-based learning system in Taiwan; the study used perceived usefulness, dis (confirmation), satisfaction, causal attributions as well as continued intention on the WLS usage as variables. Similarly, another study carried out in Taiwan has predicted the users' continuance intention toward e-learning, but this particular study has extended the model by adding more variables such as confirmation, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, concentration, satisfaction, attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavior control and finally, continued intention (Lee 2010). Further, Stone and Baker-Eveleth (2013) conducted a study regarding electronic textbook users' continuance intention among students in the USA; the variables of this study comprise perceived usefulness of e-texts, confirmation, satisfaction with e-texts and e-text continuance intention.

Course continuance behavioral intention

Bhattacherjee (2001) was one of the earliest scholars to offer IS continuance theoretical model, which considers the differences between continuance behavior and acceptance (Hsu et al. 2006; He and Wei 2006; Roca et al. 2006). IS continuance behavior can be interpreted as the usage of IS consecutively by adopters, certainly where the primary acceptance decision is followed by continuance decision (Kim et al. 2007; Lin 2012). IT continuance intention is predominantly determined by satisfaction (Limayem and Cheung 2008; Tesch et al. 2005). A study exploring the determinants of undergraduate students' webcast use in Belgium asserted that during usage, a student develops perceptions about the tool (all the possible information technology applications), which will influence their continued behavior (Lust et al. 2012).

Ramayah and Lee (2012) studied about e-learning usage at a Malaysian public university and pointed out that, due to the low user satisfaction, the continuance usage intention will be low as well; the performance of e-learning system is considered to be unsuccessful in the public university in view of the high investment fees linked to acquiring and keeping the e-learning systems. Another study has identified the characteristics of individuals and work settings that influence the intentions of Asian international faculty members' in science, technology, engineering and mathematical fields to continue their employment in US research universities and found that their continuance intentions were, more likely than undecided, to remain with the faculty, and to stay on campus longer. Although the Asian international faculty members expressed dissatisfaction with selected aspects of their jobs, they believe strongly that they would still choose to work where they were (Lawrence et al. 2014).

An empirical study on continuance intentions toward e-learning found that the continuance intention of employees can be increased by improving their beliefs in the effectiveness of the e-learning 2.0 system (Wu and Zhang 2014). Another study used the model to examine a limited set of antecedents which were expected to influence an individual' intention to continue using massive open online courses (MOOCs) and figure out that openness and reputation are ways that MOOC providers can both differentiate themselves from competitors and enhance an individual's intention for continued MOOC's enrollment (Alraimi et al. 2015). A study regarding the continuous use of digital technologies in classrooms asserted that, to a greater extent, continuance usage is about the teacher's satisfaction with the evidence of a positive learning outcome, comprising incentive, focus, job completion, good quality learning products, learning satisfaction and attainable learning (Wright 2014). Additionally, another study found that, for short-term users, users' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the e-learning system turns out to be the key determinant of intention to continuous use (Liao et al. 2009).

Perceived brand orientation

Brands are not only the focal point of products, but also of companies and other organizations such as universities, people, cities, regions, nations, religions and political parties as well; noticeably, brands have an important role to play beyond markets, customers and competitors (Gromark and Melin 2013). Consequently, brand orientation is gaining increasing support among the academics (Rigopoulou and Kehagias 2008). It is defined as "an approach where the processes of the organization revolve around the creation, development, and protection of brand identity in an ongoing interaction with target customers with the aim of achieving lasting competitive advantages in the form of brands" (Urde 1999, p. 117). Brand orientation is so significant because, as stated by Hankinson (2012), companies with high brand orientation are able to achieve a higher percentage of their strategic objectives, which perhaps can be applicable to the HEI's.

The perceived brand orientation theory originates from Mulyanegara (2011a, b), which deals with the investigation of brand orientation from the customers' point of view (Casidy 2014a). Although, the brand orientation notion has been connected with organizational efficiency in the contexts of marketing and commercial, less attention has been paid to the investigation of brand orientation, especially in the higher education field (Casidy 2014b), and specifically from the perspective of international students. Casidy (2014b) surveyed 220 local and 38 international students, which could hardly generate a clear conclusion on the effect of the university's brand from the international students' perspective and, most importantly, whether the international students are satisfied with the courses that are offered by the university and ultimately have course continuance behavioral intention. Therefore, this study intends to highlight these points from the view point of international students in the Malaysian public and private higher education sectors.

Perceived brand orientation is classified into three dimensions, namely interaction, orchestration and affect. Interaction pertains to situations when the university initiates conversation with students and reacts to the modification in its environment (Ewing and Napoli 2005; Casidy 2014b). The interaction between faculties of the university and the students could promote educational attainment, and is significantly and positively related to college grade point average, degree attainment, graduating with honors, and enrollment in graduate schools (Bjorklund et al. 2004). This implies that a particular student can be satisfied with the university courses as well as the environment and ultimately, the course continuance behavioral intention can be generated. Nevertheless, student feedback/comment is one of the most powerful tools in the ongoing improvement

of higher education (Alderman et al. 2012). For instance, a study in understanding the undergraduate student's experience, pointed out that students need to provide comments to their university for improvement which would enable them to have a more enhanced university life experience (Chambers and Chiang 2012). Perhaps, it would be very significant if the university, getting close to the recent market condition, for example in a country like China, was explicitly designed to gain international recognition for China's HEI's and, thereby, improving its position in the international higher education market (Pan 2013). Likewise, Malaysia is also becoming an education hub in the region due to having large number of international students; besides, due to the current higher education condition, universities are attempting to have overseas campuses in order to be well-known and recognized, globally. As an example, the Limkokwing University of Creative Technology has branch campuses in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lesotho and Swaziland (Inayatullah and Milojevic 2014).

The second dimension is orchestration, which pertains to the portfolio of the university's brand that is dramatically communicated to internal stakeholders such as students as well as external stakeholders like the public (Ewing and Napoli 2005; Casidy 2014b). One of the strategic issues relating to the management of universities is branding, which indicates that the higher the harmony among the students' values, goals and also attitudes as well as those of the institutions', the lower the student dropout rate (Jevons 2006). The staff of the university can also play a significant role in order to boost the number of students by promoting the available courses at the particular university. In the same way, the university would also be getting direct applications from prospective students. The objective of the university in motivating students directly should not be to boost its ranking but rather to bring out the best in the students and assist them, and so, throughout dealing with the fresher students, the university should put in more effort to absorb the top students, intellectually (Osiemo 2012).

Finally, the affect is another dimension of perceived brand orientation which determines whether the university brand was liked/disliked by its primary stakeholders (Ewing and Napoli 2005; Casidy 2014b). In fact, it is important that organizations ascertain the level of brand likability and identify which aspects are the most or least preferred amongst their stakeholders (Napoli 2006). In doing so, the university needs to provide accurate and comprehensive knowledge regarding the students' preference of the brand or in other words, whether the students have a positive or negative view about the brand. Furthermore, universities are likely to be too complex to be encapsulated by one brand or identity definition as they do

not speak with a single voice and thus the branding of universities is likely to involve an ongoing negotiation of representations where both the "what" and "who" that are being branded will constantly be under scrutiny (Aspara et al. 2014).

Williams and Omar (2014) stated that the brand of the higher education experience bestows a certain level of social status affording graduates a sense of identification and a way to define themselves, not merely as customers but as life-long organizational members of a corporate brand community. This brand status matters not just to the students and alumni, but simultaneously to multiple internal and external HEI stakeholders. Within the university setting, a brand is a name, an image, a compelling description of an organization that captures the essence of the value that the university provides (Judson et al. 2008). Therefore, the university can develop a strong and positive brand image in the mind of the students. As a consequent, the universities' brands' successes and failures would have projected positive realization prior to creating any changes. Judson et al. (2006) have stated that, by focusing larger portions of an internal branding communication budget on more effective media, universities can substantially increase their chances of success and achieve a cohesive, well-understood, brand position. A study focusing on cognitive and affective brand attributes in the context of business schools suggested that both affective brand attributes and satisfaction of students are vital to ensure favorable responses and that investing resources in building the appropriate image and reputation for business schools is worthwhile (Alwi and Kitchen 2014). Additionally, Clemes et al. (2013) claimed that satisfaction is a strong driver of behavioral intentions.

H1 There is a positive relationship between perceived brand orientation and course satisfaction.

H2 There is a positive relationship between perceived brand orientation and course continuance behavioral intention.

Intercultural friendships

Intercultural friendships provide us with the opportunity to compare cultural influences on the perceptions of self and others, especially the different cultural conceptions of private and public identities. They also allow us to examine a range of influences, contexts, perceptions, personalities, skills and behaviors at the beginning and flowering of intimate networks (Kudo and Simkin 2003). Intercultural friendships are categorized by distinctions among individuals' cultures that bring about distinctive incentives and also challenges, thereby allowing individuals to gain unique cultural knowledge, broaden their perspectives, and

break stereotypes (Sias et al. 2008). Gareis (1999) mentioned in her study that International students in the United States have pinpointed eleven variables that impact the development of their intercultural friendships, comprising personality, culture, self-esteem, friendship factors, expectations, adjustment level, communicative competence, demographic variables, US elements, contact frequency as well as chemistry.

Gareis et al. (2011) stressed that students' overall sojourn satisfaction, academic achievements and also intercultural as well as advancement of foreign languages have been impacted positively by intercultural friendships with host nationals. Moreover, she also emphasized that these international students must be given specific language instruction teaching. This sort of teaching could be provided in orientation sessions, workshops as well as language and software programs. Also, language skill and communicative compatibility play tremendous roles in the friendship satisfaction level of international students (Gareis et al. 2011). Similarly, Glass et al. (2014) asserted that the dynamic and significant relationships between international students with co-nationals, their international counterparts, and those in the host nation play a role in staving off depression, improving academic performance, and also increasing student satisfaction, especially regarding the course of study and in creating course behavioral intention. Students can come together to support each other's needs. Considerably, support groups have several advantages over personal guidance mainly because groups can instill hope, change of loneliness, share information, help students feel needed and helpful, help them to develop socializing approaches, enhance their interpersonal skills, and give them a sense of community and team cohesion (Dipeolu et al. 2007; Carr et al. 2003). Therefore, the intercultural friendships are categorized into three dimensions of socializing with co-national peers, and socializing with international peers as well as socializing with host national peers.

A qualitative study conducted by interviewing faculty members who believe that the local and international students are segregated in their departments, ascribed this scenario to international students' inclination to spend time with their co-national peers, their confined capability to communicate in English, thus lessening the opportunities to interact with host national peers, and their obligation to focus on their studies which often precludes any intercultural friendships (Trice 2007). Conversely, Li and Gasser (2005) stated that sojourners may benefit from the close ties with their co-nationals who may provide social and emotional support during the adjustment process, and the students can have benefit by socializing with their co-national peers who can protect and support each other during courses or any academic activities. In the same vein,

Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) claimed that international students have a keen interest to mingle with local students in order to help them with the language and academic hardship, but on the other hand, stick closely with their co-national peers for emotional support.

Similarly, another study about Asian international students stated that the purpose of networks, which are called mono-cultural networks and are shaped by co-national friends, was to prepare and acknowledge the individual's cultural identity and national loyalties as a result of activities including shopping and cooking; besides, co-national friends are preferably chosen when international students want to express their personal difficulties (Toyokawa and Toyokawa 2002). Again, during study sessions or examination time, the students get together with their co-national peers to prepare and help one another. Inadvertently, the students like to mingle with their co-national peers to participate in cultural, educational, recreational and social events both on and off campus such as going to fitness centers, dance classes, trips and clubs. The students also like to socialize with other international students. For example, most Asian students would interact with international students because they need the opportunities to enhance their English language skills, to reinforce their social understanding via intercultural relations, to widen the understanding of the study course and to expand their negotiating, teamwork, sociable interaction skills and perhaps to make friends (Campbell and Li 2007). Therefore, international students can get themselves involved with recreational activities such as by enrolling in fitness centers, play golf or, if they are interested, learn about the sport facilities available and classes conducted on campus such as table tennis, soccer, basketball and yoga, etc.

A study done by Ward and Kennedy (1993) established that having high amount of interaction and close ties with host nationals would result in the students having to face less social hardships, develop communication skills and make the general adaption to life abroad easier (Ward and Kennedy 1993; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong 2006). Therefore, the students can be pleased with the host country, which ultimately could generate positive behavioral intention toward the continuation of courses. International students would anticipate their universities to assist them in order to deal with the immigration, societal activities to mingle with the host students as well as regular advice and suggestions regarding their courses (Abubakar et al. 2010). Therefore, to improve the host and international student's interaction, university lecturers need to have distinct knowledge and skills. They should fully understand the cultural foundations of knowledge within their discipline along with the capability to control students of varied backgrounds within the class (Leask 2009). Alternatively, the students can participate in recreational activities with

host students such as basketball, tennis, futsal, football and squash or play badminton or go to a gymnasium.

H3 There is a positive relationship between Intercultural friendships and course satisfaction.

H4 There is a positive relationship between Intercultural friendships and course continuance behavioral intention.

University reputation

Reputation can be understood as the total perception of the university, as to what it actually stands for. What is associated with it? What are we supposed to obtain when purchasing the services or the products of the university (Helgesen and Nesset 2007)? Likewise, reputation plays a key role in the effort to understand why some organizations outperform others (Boyd et al. 2010). Yang et al. (2008) claimed that, to acquire a reputation that is positive, enduring, and resilient, managers are required to invest heavily in building and maintaining good relationships with their company's constituents. Furthermore, management scholars have recognized reputation as an organization's critical asset that influences the organization's constituency relationships (Sung and Yang 2009). Reputation can be interpreted in the institutional perspective, as the result of exchanging information as well as societal impact amid several stakeholders' corporation in the organization (Aula and Tienari 2011). Similarly, reputation has an impact on how universities work with its internal counterparts and also the government, research financing institutions and labor market, all representing important stakeholders that have an impact on a university's identity and survival (Steiner et al. 2013). However, reputation is not solely the perception of one stakeholder, but rather the sum of all the stakeholders such as academics, recruiters and etc. (Safón 2012).

A study conducted among students from public and non-public universities in Poland showed that the reputation of the university and professional progress were so significant to those students who have chosen to study at private universities; on the other hand, those who have decided to study at public universities are more concerned about study fees and the availability of scholarships or grants (Sojkin et al. 2012). Another study has asserted that there is a strong relationship between the reputations of an institution's academic programs and the institutional size (Grunig 1997). Similarly, Porter and Toutkoushian (2006) figured out that a positive relationship exists between the number of publications produced by a faculty in a program and the program's reputation. Moreover, Athanassopoulos (2000) claimed that there is a relationship between brand reputation, satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, reputation could have a positive association with course satisfaction in their

university. Positive relationships and active communication help maintain a good reputation, which motivates students' supportive behavioral intentions (Sung and Yang 2009). Thus, the students will continuously pursue their courses at the university.

H5   There is a positive relationship between university reputation and course satisfaction.

H6   There is a positive relationship between university reputation and course continuance behavioral intention.

Course satisfaction

The notion of satisfaction has been widely researched, particularly in the higher education context, and the most broadly used measure is the expectancy disconfirmation theory by Oliver (1977, 1980). Therefore, student course satisfaction can be defined as the student's perceived value of his or her educational courses at an educational institution (Bolliger and Wasilik 2009). In other words, the quality of the courses which relates to the students' perception of all aspects related specifically to the courses/programs (Grace et al. 2012). Student satisfaction is an important factor in the business of higher education (Overbaugh and Nickel 2011). This is because, when the students are satisfied with the university's services, they could encourage the university to upgrade and improve its credibility and prestige, which can then lead to the increase in the number of students (Marzo-Navarro et al. 2005). Paechter et al. (2010) claimed that mutual support and the feeling of group cohesion are related to students' engagement in team work, motivation to participate in a learning environment, and course satisfaction. A study has found that by providing timely and constructive feedback, the student's perceptions of the course can be changed, and the course satisfaction level will increase (Lee et al. 2011).

Swan (2001) looked at the elements impacting student satisfaction and learning perception via asynchronous online learning and found that if the students' interaction level with classmates is high then he/she has significantly higher level of course satisfaction as well as learning. Similarly, Chang and Smith (2008) stated that, personal interaction between teachers and students, students and students, and students and course content directly relate to student course satisfaction. Moreover, another study found that students' satisfaction with the university depends on the degree of the students' loyalty, which can be recognized as the students' likelihood to pursue their courses and to have positive interpersonal relations, which is so significant in order to guarantee the university's survival in the competitive environment (Navarro et al. 2005). Guo (2010) asserted that the effect of student course satisfaction continues even if the students are enrolled successfully at

the university or the students are dissatisfied with the courses offered at the university, as they can easily move from one university to another. In the same vein, the very nature of the curriculum and the course design directly relate to learner satisfaction (Moore 2002). Student satisfaction has a direct impact on student recommendation (Childers et al. 2014; Baek and Shin 2008), which means that if the students are satisfied with the courses offered at the university then they would recommend this course to others.

A study was conducted to examine the integrated influence of fairness and quality on learners' satisfaction and Web-based learning continuance intention by collecting data from 289 learners of a Web-based learning service. It was established that satisfaction play a significant role in shaping learners' intention to continue using Web-based learning (Chiu et al. 2007). Similarly, another study by Chiu et al. (2005) regarding e-learning suggested that users' continuance intention is specified by satisfaction. Further, another study regarding blog learning has found that satisfaction level either increases or decreases continuance intention of blog learning; therefore, the scholars pointed out that satisfaction is an important factor influencing continuance blog learning intention (Tang et al. 2014).

H7   There is a positive relationship between course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention.

Research method

To empirically test the proposed research model (Fig. 1), quantitative research methods were deployed and the questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was designed in two main sections. The first section is designed to capture information regarding students' demographic background and their course profile. Table 2 depicts the demographic profile of the respondents. To measure the research constructs, the measurement items were adopted from previous studies. To measure perceived brand orientation, the measurement items were also taken from previous study (Casidy 2014b). Similarly, intercultural friendships (Glass et al. 2014), university reputation (Foroudi et al. 2014), course satisfaction (Wilkins and Balakrishnan 2013; Lee et al. 2011), and course continuance behavior (Bhattacherjee et al. 2008) were adopted to measure the research constructs. "Appendix" shows the measurement items and their sources. Before conducting the actual study, pre-test ($N = 21$) and pilot study ($N = 142$) were run. Further, we address the common method bias (common method variance) concerning its potential threat according to the guideline proposed by

Table 2 Demographic profile of respondents

		Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	161	46.3
		Female	187	53.7
2	Age	20 and below	41	11.8
		21–30	114	32.8
		31–40	109	31.3
		41–50	56	16.1
		50 and above	28	8.0
3	Marital Status	Single	161	46.3
		Married	164	47.1
		Not stated	23	6.6
4	Education level	Diploma degree	30	8.6
		Bachelor degree	99	28.4
		Master degree	123	35.3
		Doctoral degree	83	23.9
		Others	13	3.7
7	Type of institute	Public	174	50.0
		Private	174	50.0

Podsakoff et al. (2003). Accordingly, for the actual study, 500 questionnaires were distributed among international university students in Malaysia. Five private and five public universities were chosen as the target sample and 354 questionnaires were collected, out of which, six questionnaires were returned incomplete. Thus, the total usable questionnaires were 348 indicating 69.6 % response rate. Table 2 depicts the demographic profile of respondents.

Structural equation modeling (SEM)

Performing structural equation modeling (SEM) technique for parameter assessment and hypothesis testing for casual model is an advantage (Fornell and Larcker 1981; Esposito Vinzi et al. 2008; Cenfetelli and Bassellier 2009; Henseler et al. 2009; Hair et al. 2011; Shahijan et al. 2015) over the first generation technique (factor analysis, principle component analysis and regression analysis) (Chin 1998). SEM integrates various research process as a "holistic fashion" (Chin 2000). Furthermore, the partial least squares (PLS) path modeling approach, which is known as variance-based SEM, has gained recognition for its tremendous advantages in behavioral studies (Reinartz et al. 2009; Sarstedt 2008; Henseler 2010; Hair et al. 2011), as it helps researchers to understand the relationship among sets of observed variables (Rigdon et al. 2010; Hair et al. 2012). PLS is an approach which does not require strong assumptions such

as distributions, sample size and the measurement scale (Vinzi et al. 2010; Rezaei and Ghodsi 2014; Shahijan et al. 2014; Rezaei 2015). Thus, this study deployed the PLS path modeling approach, a SEM technique, to perform the assessment of the measurement and structural model using SmartPLS software (Ringle et al. 2005).

According to Chin (2010) and Henseler and Chin (2010), the first step in evaluating SEM is the measurement model's and secondly, the structural model's results (the two-stage approach). The PLS path modeling algorithm presents the outer and the inner estimation stages (Vinzi et al. 2010; Hair et al. 2013). According to Ringle et al. (2010), non-parametric assessment criteria such as construct reliability (>0.6), outer loadings (>0.7), indicator reliability (>0.5), and average variance extracted (>0.5) must satisfy the minimum requirements. Of measurement assessment, construct validity is defined as "the extent to which an operationalization measures the concept it is supposed to measure" (Bagozzi et al. 1991, p. 421). Furthermore, the structural model's assessment includes R^2 measures and the level and significance of the path coefficients by performing bootstrapping procedure with 5000 resamples (Hair et al. 2011).

Results

Measurement model

To evaluate reflective measurement models outer loadings (item loadings), composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE = convergent validity) and discriminant validity are assessed. The PLS-SEM algorithm is performed in this step. Table 3 presents the construct validity. The results show that the construct validity is established. All outer loadings of the reflective constructs are well above the minimum threshold value of 0.70. In addition, all constructs have high levels of internal consistency reliability as demonstrated by the CR values. The AVE values (convergent validity) are also well above the minimum required level of 0.50, thus demonstrating convergent validity for all research constructs.

Table 4 shows that the discriminant validity which was determined based on the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. The off-diagonal values in the matrix in Table 4 represent the correlations between the latent constructs. Comparing the loadings across the columns in the Table 5, it is apparent that an indicator's loadings on its own construct are in all cases higher than all of its cross loadings with other constructs. Thus, the results indicate that there is discriminant validity between all the constructs based on the cross loadings criterion.

Table 3 Construct validity

Second-order construct	First-order construct	Item	Item loading	AVE[a]	CR[b]	Cronbach's α
Intercultural friendships	Socializing with co-national peers	IFCI1	0.849	0.688	0.869	0.775
		IFCI2	0.804			
		IFCI3	0.836			
	Socializing with host national peers	IFH1	0.913	0.777	0.913	0.856
		IFH2	0.871			
		IFH3	0.860			
	Socializing with international peers	IFI1	0.864	0.721	0.886	0.806
		IFI2	0.834			
		IFI3	0.849			
Perceived brand orientation	Affect	PBOA1	0.802	0.651	0.882	0.821
		BPOA2	0.766			
		PBOA3	0.811			
		PBOA4	0.846			
	Interaction	PBOI1	0.811	0.716	0.883	0.801
		PBOI2	0.884			
		PBOI3	0.841			
	Orchestration	PBOO1	0.803	0.685	0.813	0.541
		PBOO2	0.851			
University reputation	NA	UR1	0.778	0.675	0.943	0.931
		UR2	0.878			
		UR3	0.822			
		UR4	0.789			
		UR5	0.841			
		UR6	0.805			
		UR7	0.805			
		UR8	0.851			
Course continuance behavior	NA	CCB1	0.881	0.766	0.908	0.848
		CCB2	0.860			
		CCB3	0.885			
Course satisfaction	NA	CSAT1	0.806	0.648	0.917	0.893
		CSAT2	0.831			
		CSAT3	0.811			
		CSAT4	0.795			
		CSAT5	0.772			
		CSAT6	0.813			

[a] Average variance extracted (AVE) = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}

[b] Composite reliability (CR) = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}

Structural model

After the construct measurements have been confirmed as reliable and valid, we will assess the structural model including examining the model's predictive capabilities and the relationships between the research constructs. Firstly, we checked the structural model for collinearity issues and the results indicate that there is no multi-collinearity issue as the tolerance level is found to be below the VIF value of 5.0. By using the PLS-SEM algorithm, estimates are obtained for the structural model relationships (the beta/path coefficient), which represent the hypothesized relationships between the constructs. Table 6 depicts the hypothesis testing. In addition to examining the sizes of the path coefficients, their significance levels were examined by performing the Bootstrapping option. Figure 2 also depicts items loading, path coefficient and R^2.

Table 4 Discriminant validity according to Fornell–Larcker criterion

Construct	CCB	CSAT	IFCI	IFH	IFI	PBOA	PBOI	PBOO	UR
CCB	**0.766**								
CSAT	0.578	**0.648**							
IFCI	0.421	0.405	**0.688**						
IFH	0.487	0.343	0.494	**0.777**					
IFI	0.425	0.354	0.588	0.564	**0.721**				
PBOA	0.558	0.555	0.537	0.416	0.561	**0.651**			
PBOI	0.400	0.433	0.440	0.549	0.558	0.599	**0.716**		
PBOO	0.503	0.393	0.511	0.574	0.719	0.562	0.446	**0.685**	
UR	0.418	0.584	0.399	0.419	0.630	0.638	0.442	0.548	**0.675**

Bold values are loadings for each item that are above the recommended value of 0.5; and an item's loadings on its own variable are higher than all of its cross-loadings with other variable

The off-diagonal values in the above matrix are the square correlations between the latent constructs and diagonal are AVEs

PBOI interaction, *PBOO* orchestration, *PBOA* affect, *IFC* socializing with co-national peers, *IFI* socializing with international peers, *IFCH* socializing with host national peers, *UR* university reputation, *CCB* course continuance behavior, *CSAT* course satisfaction

Hypothesis 1, which proposes the positive relationship between perceived brand orientation and course satisfaction, is supported (path coefficient = 0.584, standard error = 0.060 and t-statistics = 9.705) Hypothesis 2, which proposes that there is positive relationship between perceived brand orientation and course continuance behavior, is supported as the path coefficient = 0.163, standard error = 0.061 and t-statistics = 2.686. Meanwhile, Hypothesis 3 (the positive relationship between intercultural friendships and course satisfaction), with path coefficient of 0.013, standard error of 0.046 and t-statistics of 0.274, is not supported, but Hypothesis 4 (the positive relationship between intercultural friendships and course continuance behavior), with path coefficient of 0.179, standard error of 0.055 and t-statistics of 3.264, is supported. Further, Hypothesis 5, which proposes the positive relationship between university's reputation and course satisfaction, with path coefficient of 0.343, standard error of 0.060 and t-statistics of 5.744 is supported. Hypothesis 6, which proposes there is a positive relationship between university reputation and course continuance behavior, is supported (path coefficient = 0.505, standard error = 0.061 and t-statistics = 8.240). Finally, Hypothesis 7, in proposing the positive relationship between course satisfaction and course continuance behavior, is supported (path coefficient = 0.137, standard error = 0.049 and t-statistics = 2.816).

Next, we examined the significance of the path coefficients, the level of the R^2 values, and the f^2 effect size (see Tables 7, 8). Lastly, the predictive relevance including Q^2 and the q^2 effect size were assessed. In addition to evaluating the magnitude of the R^2 values as a criterion of predictive accuracy, Q^2 value which is an indicator of the model's predictive relevance (obtained from Blindfolding procedures) is shown in Table 7. Moreover, the f^2 effect size is a measure of the impact of a specific predictor construct on an endogenous construct. The f^2 effect size measures the change in the R^2 value when a specified exogenous construct is omitted from the model. It is used to evaluate whether the omitted predictor construct has a substantive impact on the R^2 values of the endogenous construct. Table 8 depicts the path coefficients, f^2 and q^2 effect size values.

Discussion

This study is considered to be among the few attempts to investigate the impact of perceived brand orientation, intercultural friendship, and university reputation on international student's course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention. This study was conducted in Malaysia, which is classified as a regional student hub. As the universities in Asia have attempted to attract more international students, Malaysia, for instance, has increased its number of international students and is still attracting greater number of international students (Tollefson and Tsui 2014). This study proposes several factors including perceived brand orientation, intercultural friendship, and university reputation as the driver of international student course satisfaction and continuance behavior. Literature on the higher education branding context is limited (Khanna et al. 2014; Casidy 2013); however, branding can assist the higher education providers in order to establish their own identity and, more importantly, the image amid their key stakeholders such as the international and local students, parents, university partners and the society. Branding has become a strategic case as well as focus for the educational

Table 5 Discriminant validity according to loading and cross-loading criterion

Construct	CCB	CSAT	IFCI	IFH	IFI	PBOA	PBOI	PBOO	UR
CCB1	**0.781**	0.572	0.503	0.562	0.522	0.511	0.450	0.552	0.505
CCB2	**0.760**	0.498	0.431	0.451	0.420	0.491	0.419	0.460	0.556
CCB3	**0.785**	0.513	0.474	0.473	0.470	0.553	0.611	0.491	0.551
CSAT1	0.380	**0.606**	0.372	0.306	0.521	0.473	0.402	0.418	0.427
CSAT2	0.386	**0.631**	0.374	0.329	0.548	0.467	0.492	0.450	0.422
CSAT3	0.362	**0.711**	0.370	0.288	0.513	0.566	0.401	0.541	0.405
CSAT4	0.361	**0.695**	0.376	0.309	0.445	0.457	0.387	0.357	0.399
CSAT5	0.681	**0.672**	0.603	0.662	0.522	0.511	0.450	0.452	0.505
CSAT6	0.685	**0.613**	0.474	0.473	0.470	0.553	0.611	0.491	0.551
IFCI1	0.344	0.400	**0.649**	0.410	0.433	0.462	0.499	0.478	0.372
IFCI2	0.681	0.572	**0.604**	0.662	0.622	0.510	0.452	0.451	0.506
IFCI3	0.530	0.585	**0.636**	0.375	0.498	0.432	0.477	0.441	0.364
IFH1	0.466	0.432	0.531	**0.713**	0.526	0.470	0.431	0.488	0.459
IFH2	0.461	0.421	0.487	**0.671**	0.542	0.446	0.387	0.453	0.465
IFH3	0.576	0.566	0.595	**0.660**	0.515	0.503	0.447	0.547	0.499
IFI1	0.365	0.483	0.523	0.499	**0.664**	0.422	0.446	0.455	0.379
IFI2	0.677	0.575	0.503	0.560	**0.634**	0.518	0.456	0.448	0.511
IFI3	0.491	0.391	0.496	0.528	**0.649**	0.415	0.396	0.441	0.415
PBOA1	0.474	0.448	0.520	0.371	0.421	**0.602**	0.584	0.506	0.426
BPOA2	0.462	0.511	0.370	0.288	0.313	**0.666**	0.401	0.341	0.405
PBOA3	0.581	0.572	0.503	0.662	0.522	**0.611**	0.450	0.552	0.405
PBOA4	0.570	0.593	0.456	0.454	0.452	**0.646**	0.593	0.477	0.435
PBOI1	0.585	0.513	0.474	0.473	0.470	0.553	**0.611**	0.491	0.451
PBOI2	0.474	0.448	0.520	0.371	0.421	0.502	**0.684**	0.506	0.426
PBOI3	0.441	0.385	0.471	0.340	0.401	0.451	**0.641**	0.474	0.378
PBOO1	0.392	0.327	0.457	0.291	0.368	0.415	0.510	**0.603**	0.333
PBOO2	0.679	0.570	0.599	0.661	0.521	0.508	0.448	**0.651**	0.604
UR1	0.541	0.508	0.510	0.540	0.531	0.514	0.406	0.503	**0.778**
UR2	0.570	0.529	0.449	0.471	0.464	0.529	0.469	0.470	**0.678**
UR3	0.495	0.481	0.407	0.401	0.390	0.494	0.465	0.426	**0.622**
UR4	0.454	0.435	0.319	0.295	0.293	0.435	0.416	0.330	**0.789**
UR5	0.520	0.504	0.414	0.420	0.408	0.538	0.490	0.423	**0.641**
UR6	0.444	0.468	0.402	0.368	0.390	0.455	0.426	0.427	**0.605**
UR7	0.581	0.572	0.603	0.562	0.522	0.511	0.450	0.452	**0.605**
UR8	0.585	0.513	0.474	0.473	0.470	0.553	0.511	0.491	**0.651**

Bold values are loadings for each item that are above the recommended value of 0.5; and an item's loadings on its own variable are higher than all of its cross-loadings with other variable

PBOI interaction, *PBOO* orchestration, *PBOA* affect, *IFC* socializing with co-national peers, *IFI* socializing with international peers, *IFCH* socializing with host national peers, *UR* university reputation, *CCB* course continuance behavior, *CSAT* course satisfaction

institutions in establishing brand distinction, in order to convey and communicate their strengths (Pinar et al. 2011, 2014).

Moreover, this study statistically supports the notion that perceived brand orientation is classified into three dimensions comprising interaction, orchestration and affect. The term perceived brand orientation refers to the consideration of brand orientation from the view of the stockholders. Mourad et al. (2011) stated that the brand is not solely a name but is established in order to add value to a particular product and also bestow an identity. Although higher education is a service-sector, owning a powerful brand is very significant because the students are not dealing with tangible products (Watkins and Gonzenbach 2013). Therefore, companies/HEI with a high brand orientation are able to achieve a higher percentage of their strategic objectives. Likewise, brand orientation is gaining increasing support among the academics.

Table 6 Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient	Standard error	t-statistics	Decision
H1	Perceived brand orientation → CSAT	0.584	0.060	9.705*	Supported
H2	Perceived brand orientation → CCB	0.163	0.061	2.686*	Supported
H3	Intercultural friendships → CSAT	0.013	0.046	0.274	Not Supported
H4	Intercultural friendships → CCB	0.179	0.055	3.264*	Supported
H5	University reputation → CSAT	0.343	0.060	5.744*	Supported
H6	University reputation → CCB	0.505	0.061	8.240*	Supported
H7	CSAT → CCB	0.137	0.049	2.816*	Supported

Critical *t* values for one-tailed test: * 2.326

CSAT course satisfaction, *CCB* course continuance behavior
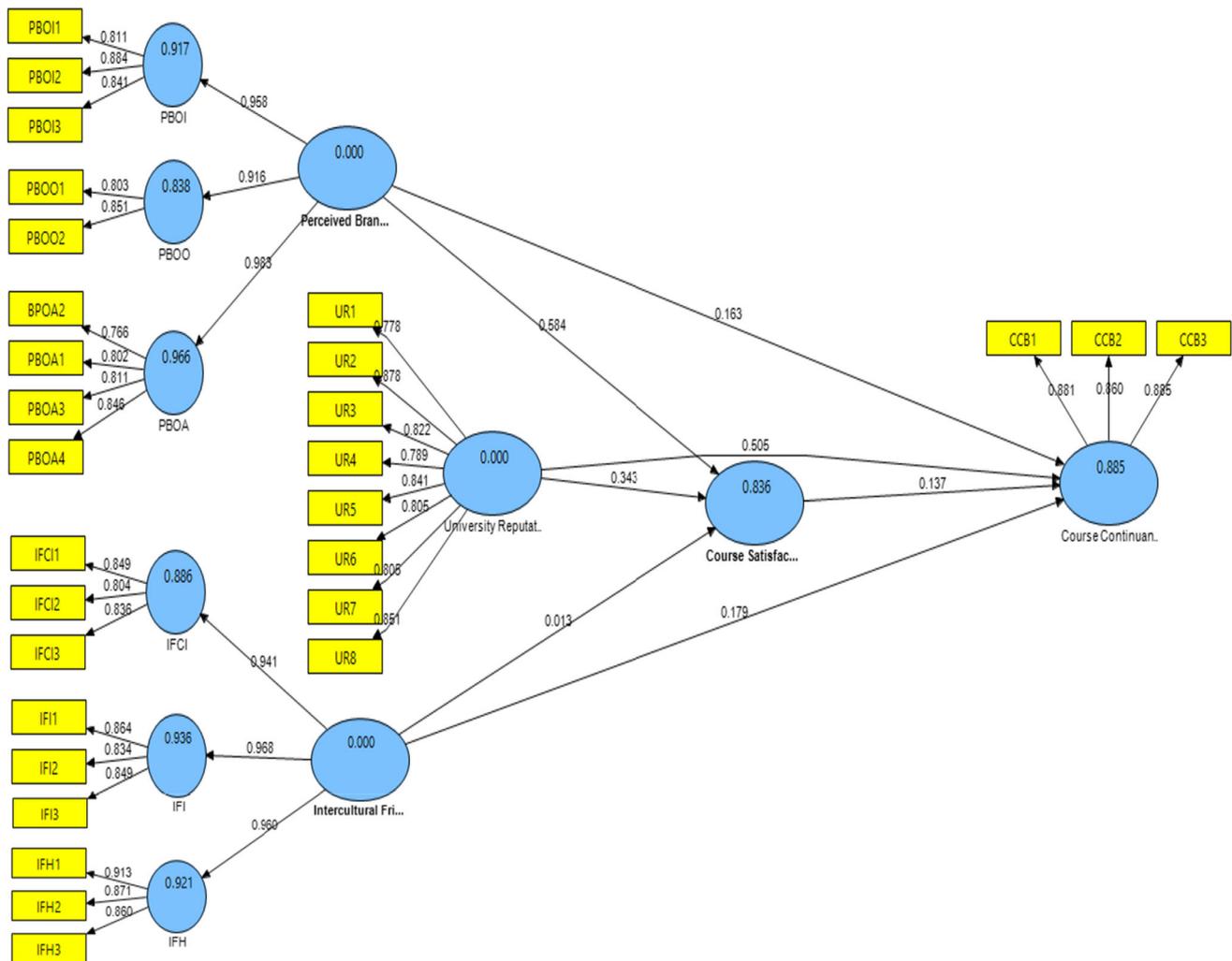
Fig. 2 Items loading, path coefficient and R^2

In addition, based on the various literature focusing on intercultural friendship, the point that is shared and repeatedly highlighted is the very significant factor in order to form a relationship (Bakel et al. 2015). Intercultural friendship is a feature of a wider glance at the experience

of international students (Gareis 2012), which would make the students feel closer to their intercultural friends as they could share their knowledge about the past and perhaps about their unique cultural experiences (Hotta and Ting-Toomey 2013; Lee 2006). Accordingly, intercultural

Table 7 Results of R^2 and Q^2 values

Endogenous latent variables	R^2	Q^2
Course continuance behavior	0.885	0.672
Course satisfaction	0.836	0.515

Assessing q^2 and f^2 effect size: 0.02 = small; 0.15 = medium; 0.35 = large

friendships play a significant role because the international and local students can mingle with each other and then the international students could share their culture and carry out joint activities with members of the campus and local students, so that they can assist one another in terms of learning the programs or courses which are offered at the university and generate greater course satisfaction. Likewise, according to Chen and Nakazawa (2012), having repeated contact and making close intercultural friendships with the host culture members can lead to considerably assisted individuals' adaption to the particular international country. Additionally, it can affect the course continuance behavioral intention, by which the particular student would not withdraw from the course/s, and instead, keep studying the course/s at the HEI's.

Intercultural friendships are characterized by the distinctions between individuals' cultures that bring about distinctive incentives and also challenges; in exchange, the individuals also gain unique cultural knowledge, broaden their perspectives, and break stereotypes. Scholars have suggested that some sort of teaching could be provided during orientation sessions, workshops as well as language and software programs. In addition, language skills and communicative compatibility play a tremendous role in the friendship satisfaction level of international students. Moreover, intercultural friendships are categorized into three dimensions of socializing with co-national peers, and socializing with international peers as well as socializing with host national peers.

Notably, reputation is a social identity and it is a significant and intangible resource which could remarkably contribute to the performance of the organization. The university's reputation is indeed, a considerably disputed scope (Dill and Soo 2005). In order to acquire a reputation

that is positive, enduring, and resilient, managers are required to invest heavily in building and maintaining good relationships with their company's constituents. Besides, reputation can be interpreted from the institutional perspective, as the result of exchanging information as well as societal impact amid several stakeholders' communication in the organization. Therefore, reputation is not solely the perception of one stakeholder, but rather the sum of all the stakeholders.

The satisfaction notion originates from the expectancy disconfirmation theory by Oliver (1977, 1980). Satisfaction is an important factor in the business of higher education because, when the students are satisfied with the university's services, they could then encourage the university to upgrade and improve its credibility and prestige, which could raise the number of students as well. Moreover, scholars pointed out the effect of student course satisfaction continuance to be either the students would be enrolled successfully in the university or the students are dissatisfied with the courses offered at the university, and that they could easily move from one university to another. Bhattacherjee (2001) was one of the earliest scholars to offer IS continuance theoretical model, which considers the differences between continuance behavior and acceptance. By involving the concept of IS continuance use in examining the behavior of users in IS adoption, it is shown that the true success elements depend on continued use instead of first time use. Moreover, IT continuance intention was predominantly determined by satisfaction. Therefore, this study investigates the international student's course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention in the Malaysian higher education institutions.

Managerial implication

The finding of this study has several practical and managerial implications. The empirical result reveals that perceived brand orientation and university reputation positively influence course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention while intercultural friendships only influence course continuance behavior but not course satisfaction. Higher education policymakers and

Table 8 Results – Path coefficients, f^2 and q^2 effect size

Endogenous latent constructs	CCB			CSAT		
Exogenous latent constructs	Path coefficients	f^2 effect size	q^2 effect size	Path coefficients	f^2 effect size	q^2 effect size
CSAT	0.137	0.052	0.000	NA	NA	NA
Intercultural friendships	0.179	0.083	0.000	0.013	0.000	0.000
Perceived brand orientation	0.163	0.108	0.000	0.584	0.279	0.128
University reputation	0.5054	0.2390	0.1120	0.3433	0.1660	0.073

Assessing q^2 and f^2 effect size: 0.02 = small; 0.15 = medium; 0.35 = large

management should realize that perceived brand orientation and university reputation would enhance international student's course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention while intercultural friendships would enhance the student's course continuance behavioral intention. These findings have several implications as only a few empirical studies have considered perceived brand orientation, intercultural friendship, and university reputation as the driver of international student's course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention.

To improve perceived brand orientation, HEI policy should emphasize on interaction, orchestration and affect as the several aspects of brand orientation within institutions, in order to attract international and local students. Accordingly, to improve the interaction aspect of perceived brand orientation, HEI and the university should keep in touch with the students' needs and provide a system for getting students' comments to the people who can initiate changes. The university should be ahead of the game with the current universities' market conditions in order to survive, compared to other institutions. Similarly, to improve the interaction aspect of perceived brand orientation, HEI and the university should focus on the orchestration aspect of brand orientation. The orchestration aspect of brand orientation could be improved in several ways. The university should design its integrated marketing activities to encourage students and staff to promote the university courses to others, such as prospective students, and to encourage direct applications from prospective students. As the results of this study show (see Fig. 2), affect is a stronger dimension of perceived brand orientation. To improve the affect, HEI and the university should develop detailed knowledge of what the students like about its brand and develop detailed knowledge of what the students dislike about its brand. The university should develop a good understanding of the images/associations that the students make with university brand and finally, the university should develop a good understanding of the successes and failures of university brand's marketing program before implementing any changes. Therefore, by emphasizing on interaction, orchestration and affect, HEI policymakers would be able to attract international and local students.

HEI and universities at all levels should understand the importance of intercultural friendships within a university. To improve intercultural friendships as a driver of international student's course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention in the higher education institutions, HEI and universities should emphasize on socializing with co-national peers, socializing with international peers, and socializing with host national peers among its students. Socializing with co-national peers would be improved if students feel that in their free time, they could socialize with students who share their own cultural background. Socializing with co-national peers as a delightful experience could also be improved if students feel that in their study sessions they will study with students with similar cultural background and that they are able to participate in recreation activities with students sharing their own cultural background. Furthermore, socializing with international peers could be achieved by students if the students feel that in their free time, they are able to socialize with other international students and participate in recreational activities, and in study sessions they would be able to study with other international students. Moreover, socializing with host national peers would be improved if students in their free time and study sessions have the ability to socialize with other students and could participate in recreational activities with Malaysian (in this case) students.

Further, university's reputation would enhance international student's course satisfaction and course continuance behavioral intention and this reputation could be achieved in several manners. Students should have a good feeling about their university, admire and respect their university and importantly, have confidence in the university that they are attending. Managers and HEIs should offer educational services that are good value for money, offer high quality services and education, and ensure that the university is an environmentally responsible institute. The university should also have excellent leadership and be a well-managed university. Finally, course satisfaction as a main driver of international student's course continuance behavioral intention should be emphasized. The courses should meet all of the student's expectations and designed to increase their interests in the undertaken subjects. Students should like the course format, feel comfortable in the courses, and feel that they have achieved the objectives in the courses, which as a consequence, they would recommend the courses to other students.

Limitation and future research directions

Like other empirical study, this research encountered some limitations and has some suggestions for further investigations. Firstly, the study sample was limited to international students in Malaysia. Future studies should apply the proposed model in other context such as developed countries to generalize the findings. Secondly, this study performed a cross sectional data collection approach. Future researches should perhaps obtain the relevant data using longitudinal approach. Lastly, this study targeted international students in campuses to examine course satisfaction and continuance behavioral intention. Future researches should apply the proposed model on online learners and other types of learning methods to validate the proposed model.

Appendix

See Table 9.

Table 9 Measurement items

	Construct	Measurement items	References
1	Perceived brand orientation[a]	Interaction *PBOI1* The university keeps "in touch" with the students' needs *PBOI2* The university has a system in place for getting students' comments to the people who can initiate change *PBOI3* The university keeps "in touch" with the current universities market conditions Orchestration *PBOO1* The university designs its integrated marketing activities to encourage students and staff to promote the university courses to others (e.g., prospective students) *PBOO2* The university designs its integrated marketing activities to encourage direct applications from prospective students Affect *PBOA1* The university develops detailed knowledge of what the students like about its brand *PBOA2* The university develops detailed knowledge of what the students dislike about its brand *PBOA3* The university develops a good understanding of the images/associations that the students make with its brand *PBOA4* The university develops a good understanding of the successes and failures of its brand's marketing program before implementing changes	Casidy (2014b)
2	Intercultural friendships[a]	Socializing with co-national peers *IFC1* In my free time, I tend to socialize with students from my own culture *IFC2* In study sessions, I tend to study with students from my own culture *IFC3* I tend to participate in recreation activities with students from my own culture Socializing with international peers *IFI1* In my free time, I tend to socialize with other international students *IFI2* In study sessions, I tend to study with other international students *IFI3* I tend to participate in recreation activities with other international students Socializing with host national peers *IFH1* In my free time, I tend to socialize with Malaysian students *IFH2* In study sessions, I tend to study with Malaysian students *IFH3* I tend to participate in recreation activities with Malaysian students	Glass (et al. 2014)
3	University reputation[a]	*UR1* I have a good feeling about this university *UR2* I admire and respect this university *UR3* I trust this university *UR4* This university offers education services that are good value for money *UR5* This university has excellent leadership *UR6* This university is a well-managed *UR7* This university is an environmentally responsible company *UR8* I believe this university offers high quality services and education	Foroudi et al. (2014)
4	Course satisfaction[a]	*CSAT1* So far, my course has met all of my expectations *CSAT2* This course increased my interests in the subject *CSAT3* I felt I achieved the objectives in this course *CSAT4* I liked the course format *CSAT5* I felt comfortable in this course *CSAT6* I would recommend this course to others	Lee et al. (2011) and Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013)

Table 9 continued

	Construct	Measurement items	References
5	Course continuance behavior	*CCB1* Number of hours you currently studying the course per week 0|1–3|4–6|7–9|10–12|12–14|more than 14 h| *CCB2* Number of university courses that you currently study 0|1|2|3|4|5|6|more than 6 h| *CCB3* Percentage of university courses that you currently use during your study 0|1–10|11–20|21–30|31–40|4–50|more than 50 %|	Bhattacherjee et al. (2008)

[a] Seven scale Likert Scale: "strongly disagree, disagree, somehow disagree, neutral, somehow agree, agree, and strongly agree"

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