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MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS AMONG MARKETING PUBLIC RELATIONS, SERVICE QUALITY AND ATTITUDE TOWARD BRAND

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ABSTRACT

Manuscript type: *Full research paper.*
Research Aims: *Exploratory.*
Design/methodology/approach: *This research is based on quantitative data collected from 317 respondents who took part in various MPR programs of RMIT International University Vietnam (RMIT Vietnam) in 2016.*
Research Findings: *Through multiple regression analysis, it was concluded that MPR has a positive relationship with ATB and the tangibles dimension of SERVQUAL; MPR also indirectly affects ATB through this service quality dimension. This research concluded with a model of the relationships among MPR, service quality and ATB.*
Theoretical Contribution/Originality: *This research is based on the perspective that public relations may have significant value in terms of marketing, and MPR could benefit corporates by enhancing their services as well as long-term relationships with and trust of customers by generating a positive attitude toward their brand.*
Research limitation/Implications: *For the implementations, managers of RMIT Vietnam are highly recommend to make the MPR programs more tangible to gain positive ATB. Other service providers will enhance their service quality and adjust the budget accordingly by implementing this model for innovative solutions to ongoing marketing programs.*

Keywords: Marketing public relations; Service Quality; Attitude toward brand; Effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

As opposed to many scholars who agreed with the initial viewpoint that marketing and public relations are separate functions, other scholars argued that the two disciplines are integrated (Kitchen & Moss, 1995; Kitchen, 1996), which led to the emergence of a new term called marketing public relations (MPR). The term was introduced in the 1980s as the result of an effort to differentiate between general public relations and public relations for marketing purposes (Papasolomou et al., 2014). After three decades, MPR still receives little discussion and investigation; only a few papers consider it as a key concept to be explored. There is a lack of understanding about how the concept should be explained in relation to other promotional and communications tools. In their research, Sinatra and Krismiyati (2013) proposed an MPR model for increasing student enrollment at private universities in Central Java, Indonesia. The result of the study showed that

the PR department in each private university carried out its functions quite successfully. However, their research only provided the implemented strategies that led to the increase of student intake and did not show the impact of MPR aspects on attitudes toward university brands. The nature of the study was experimental, which laid the foundations for further research by introducing a model of the relationships among MPR, service quality and ATB in detail with one case in RMIT University Vietnam. Consequently, it tried to measure the impact of MPR programs used by RMIT Vietnam (independent variable) on attitude toward the RMIT brand (dependent variable) with service quality (mediator). The variables investigated in this research were the number of respondents and the intensity of their positive or negative feeling toward a specific brand. The research used quantitative data collected from the analytical surveys of students in Ho Chi Minh City with a sampling error of 5% (confidence level of 95%), and the chosen sample size was 320. Details of the sampling and data collection will be discussed in the methodology section. Future studies can reference this model to quantify the effect of MPR programs on ATB, with service quality as a mediator. In addition, measuring the effect of MPR campaigns on human interactions such as their attitudes is a challenging task. That led to the research objective, which is to measure the effectiveness of MPR on attitude toward brand (ATB) to identify insights that can inform strategies in practice. The results can benefit RMIT Vietnam and other service providers by teaching about the effectiveness of MPR and its impact on customers' attitudes toward a brand. They also provide some direction for managers in making decisions related to improving quality and investment, especially adjusting the budget accordingly, in implementing the MPR strategy in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As marketing and public relations circumstances have changed, scholars have debated about whether the two disciplines are distinguished or integrated. Opposed to other scholars who agreed with the initial viewpoint of separate functions, scholars argued that the two disciplines are integrated (Kitchen & Moss, 1995; Kitchen, 1996), which led to the emergence of MPR. With a focus in the IMC, the theory underlying this research is based on the descriptive model of Kitchen and Papasolomou (1997); they offered the perceived and emergent MPR concepts in the communication overlap between marketing and public relations.

Firstly, beginning with the MPR concept, Giannini (2010) defined MPR as the practice of traditional mass media, electronic media or even individuals to encourage their agents to willingly communicate about their firm or product to their audience in order to improve, maintain or protect sales or the image of a product for example. Harris and Whalen (2006) proposed that MPR refers to the strategies and tactics used to accomplish marketing objectives of the procedure of public relations. These ideas can be integrated to form a new definition for MPR: "MPR is a promotional tool that directly or indirectly contributes to the achievement of marketing and sales objectives by promoting brands and causes in a trustworthy manner, creating media and public interest in them, preparing the public for news, creating favorable perceptions and stimulating positive word-of-mouth communications" (Papasolomou et al., 2014).

Because of the development from public relations (PR) as a corporate communication tool to PR for marketing purposes (MPR), there are differences in terms of tool, techniques and concepts (Trinh & Nguyen, 2017). Recently, the role of PR is changing with the implementation of MPR. Although it still captures only a small portion of the overall marketing budgets of many firms, it can be a powerful brand-building tool (Kotler & Armstrong, 2016). Previously, PR was mostly focused on the internal such as offices and employees. MPR is focused on not only

internal but also external, since customers, suppliers and distributors are all included. At the same time, PR previously used old techniques including bulletins, newsletters and annual reports. Although MPR still takes advantage of these tools, it also has many up-to-date and stylish ones such as events, road shows, social media and brand ambassadors. As for the concept of marketing strategy, MPR responds to physical and social needs, which are beneficial to the adjustment and maintenance of the social system (Goldman, 1984).

This study aims to investigate a successful case of RMIT Vietnam. The university has already put on many MPR aspects in its IMC programs. Wilmoth (2004) stated that RMIT Vietnam aims to contribute to the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of Vietnam. According to the 2014 RMIT Annual Report, RMIT Vietnam was established in 2001, and it has been involved in many social programs, sponsored many events and scholarships (cumulative total of more than 800 scholarships worth more than VND170 billion given for free tuition and other support) and announced many press releases aimed at gaining positive attitudes toward the RMIT brand. These activities are MPR's most effective tools, and they clearly contribute to building good relationships with consumers, investors, the media and RMIT's communities. Based on the research by Sinatra and Krismiyati (2013), it is stated that most private universities in Indonesia have applied MPR strategies to their marketing communication programs to achieve higher student enrollment as well as maintain and enhance their universities' brands. Reflecting on the current situation, we measured the effectiveness of these MPR activities on customers' attitudes toward the RMIT brand.

Conceptual Framework

MPR refers to public relations activities designed to support marketing objectives (Harris, 1993) such as raising awareness, informing and educating target audiences, gaining understanding, building trust, giving consumers a reason to buy and motivating consumer acceptance. In general, these activities might evoke the audience to form attitudes toward the brand based on their emotional responses to the brand. Keller (2003) emphasizes that there are a host of attitudes that customers might hold toward brands. Individuals form attitudes toward brands after they see a marketing incentive of a specific brand, whether they have a favorable or unfavorable approach to that brand (Phelps & Hoy, 1996). Moreover, past research of Sinatra and Krismiyati (2013) examined the relationships between the MPR program, student enrollment and the enhancement of the university brand. Papasolomou et al. (2014) emphasized that MPR enables organizations to promote their services in a trustworthy way, and MPR makes the media and the public interested in their services. They provided both theoretical and practical backgrounds to support the relationships between MPR, service quality and ATB. Therefore, this research developed the following hypotheses and established a research model grounded in applicable theories and empirical works.

The relationship between MPR and service quality

Service quality is the evaluation of customers formed on the differences between their expectations about service and their observations of the way the service has been executed (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1994). A frequently used and highly debated measure of service quality is the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The 5 dimensions are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. While MPR is a customer-oriented tool, it depends on two-way communications to understand customers' needs and find ways to meet those needs (Marken, 1995). Papasolomou et al. (2014) stated that MPR enables companies to promote their

services in a trustworthy way. Gradually, it evolved into a holistic and comprehensive communication program targeting mass or well-defined specialty audiences, with the aim of creating awareness and giving information about services to boost sales. The authors also asserted that MPR makes the media and the public interested in services. Moreover, in 21st-century media, the rise of social media and viral marketing will require even more effective MPR practices. Specifically, with many current and updated tools such as events and brand ambassadors, MPR objectives would be able to influence public opinion and generate trust and aspiration (Papasolomou et al., 2014). Those abilities are matched with the dimensions of the SERVQUAL scale. Refer to the above discussion; this research put MPR as one of the enhancing supplementary services in RMIT Vietnam and proposed the below hypothesis.

H$_1$: MPR programs have a positive relationship with service quality.

The relationship between service quality and attitude toward a brand

Cronin and Taylor (1994) have shown that SERVQUAL does a better job in measuring service quality. This paper takes the view that the conceptualization of service quality as a gap is correct, but adopts the position by Hwang and Ok (2013) who discussed the effects of service quality on consumer attitudes toward a brand in their research. Previous studies have demonstrated positive relationships between the SERVQUAL dimensions and outcome variables. For example, Fu and Parks (2001) showed that the SERVQUAL dimensions were found to be important predictors of the intention to return and recommend. Zhou et al. (2002) revealed positive relationships between the SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction. In addition, Kayaman and Arasli (2007) found that the SERVQUAL dimensions were strongly related to brand loyalty and brand image. It

can be seen that brand preference depends heavily on previous customer experiences (Keiningham et al., 2005). In other words, a positive customer experience leads a customer to form a preference for a brand (Hellier et al., 2003; Kim & Ko, 2012). Consumer attitudes come from evaluating brands after consuming products or services (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Holbrook & Corfman, 1985). Thus, positive attitudes toward a brand are the results of satisfaction with a particular brand of products or services, and customers are likely to prefer that particular brand of products or services to others. Refer to the above discussion; this research proposed the below hypothesis.

H$_2$: Service quality positively affects attitude toward brand.

MPR and attitude toward a brand

According to Keller (2003), consumers form attitudes toward brands based on whether the brands' products or services provide the functionality they seek. In this way, they might like and use certain brands because they satisfy their needs, allow themselves to express their personality, bolster a perceived weakness they have or simplify decision making. Papasolomou et al. (2014) stated that MPR is especially effective in building brand awareness and brand knowledge, and MPR has the ability to create favorable perceptions toward brands. MPR's growing popularity is due to its ability to create media and market receptivity. This popularity is also due to the fact that MPR allows practitioners to integrate marketing and PR tools in innovative and creative ways to foster interactions between organizations, brands, the media and the public. MPR displays itself as a recommendation from a friend or an enthusiastic claim about a brand from a happy and satisfied customer. This results in higher credibility than other promotional messages or tools, like advertising and direct selling, and makes the message more trustworthy and believable. In many instances, MPR

messages are spread voluntarily, and consumers perceive them differently than other types of promotion. Both the media and consumers become "partners" in the firm's efforts to create a buzz about brands. Refer to the above discussion; this research proposed the below hypothesis.

H₃: There is a positive relationship between MPR programs and attitude toward brand.

RESEARCH METHOD

After reviewing the literature, developing hypotheses and establishing a research model reflecting the current marketing issues in Vietnam, the methodology utilized in the study will be discussed in detail. This section not only explains the nature of the study but also discusses how many respondents were needed to participate in it, which sampling method was applied, how the questionnaire was made, which measurement scale was used and how the data were collected and analyzed. In fact, measuring the impact of an MPR campaign is very challenging, especially for the advanced level which includes the measurement of changes in attitudes, opinions and behaviors. The basic level of measurement merely involves counting how many news releases, feature stories, photos, letters, etc. are produced or measuring the amount of website traffic received before and after launching the campaign.

Data Collection
The research used quantitative data collected from the questionnaire surveys of respondents in Ho Chi Minh City. The following table summarizes the demographical data of respondents for each of the following characteristics: age group, gender, education level and family annual income level.

High school students, high school graduates and first-year university students in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam were considered the target population for this research. Since the target population is large, only those who had actual experiences in perceived MPR programs of RMIT International University Vietnam in the recent 3 months of 2016 were selected as samples. They were participants of the event Experience Day on April 3rd, 2016 at RMIT Vietnam and contestants of the RMIT Vietnam Open Badminton Tournament 2016. Adopting convenience sampling with an error of 5% (confidence level of 95%), the chosen sample size was 320. Data screening and cleansing were done to ensure that the collected data could be used. After modification, 317 valid respondents were collected and analyzed for further research results. The data collection showed that female university students who were between the ages of 19 and 21 were most likely to perceive MPR programs of RMIT University Vietnam in the recent 3 months of 2016. However, this is just a board view, and the research methods continue further below.

Measurements
For this study, the MPR programs were considered as independent variables to be the causal factors in identified functional relationships between MPR programs and attitude toward brand, which is a dependent variable. The SERVQUAL dimensions adapted from Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1991) were used. Measurement was based on a five-point Likert scale, which ranged from "1-Strongly Disagree" to "5-Strongly Agree" and with "good/bad," "favorable/unfavorable" and "satisfactory/unsatisfactory" (Bruner, 2009).

Data analysis
For this study, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0 was used to analyze the research data. In the early stage of the research, a reliability test accompanied to guarantee the reliability of different scales. Then an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to gather information about

Table 1. Coding and explanation

CODE	Explanations of variables
MPR1	MPR programs - empathy dimension
MPR2	MPR programs - reliability dimension
MPR3	MPR programs - tangibles dimension
MPR4	MPR programs - assurance dimension
SQ1	Service quality - empathy dimension
SQ2	Service quality - reliability dimension
SQ3	Service quality - tangibles dimension
ATB	attitude toward brand

Table 2. Summary of independent variables and reliability coefficients

Factor	Items	No. Items loadings	Cronbach's Alpha value (N=317)
MPR1	T_ASS4, T_EMP1, T_EMP2, T_EMP3, T_EMP4, T_EMP5	6	0.854
MPR2	T_REL3, T_REL4, T_REL5, T_RES2, T_RES3, T_RES4	6	0.876
MPR3	T_TAN1, T_TAN2, T_TAN3, T_TAN4	4	0.774
MPR4	T_ASS1, T_ASS2, T_ASS3	3	0.719
		19	

the interrelationships among variables. Afterward, a hierarchical multiple regression was used to measure the impact of MPR programs on attitude toward brand, with the influence of a mediating variable, service quality.

Factor analysis and reliability

For this study, two EFA were conducted, with Cronbach's alpha and KMO values to make the formation and refinement of the conceptual model. Since the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is typically equated with internal consistency, it is commonly used as an indicator to test for the reliability of a measurement scale (De Vellis, 1991). The Cronbach's alpha values (N=317) in Table 2 estimated the internal consistency among items in each factor; they were 0.854, 0.876, 0.774 and 0.719. According to Pallant (2013), Cronbach's alpha values above 0.60 are considered acceptable. Similarly, as shown in Table 3, all factors loadings of the remaining

25 items of dependent variables ranging from 0.856 to 0.564 were grouped into 4 components (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3 and ATB). The Cronbach's alpha values (N=317) among items in each factor were 0.919, 0.904, 0.897 and 0.857.

The KMO measures for both groups of independent variables (KMO = 0.935) and dependent variables (KMO = 0.957) were greater than 0.60, which is the minimum value for a good EFA (Tabachnick et al., 2001). Moreover, the Sig. of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity had the result of 0 (<0.05) indicating a sufficient correlation between variables. Table 2 shows a summary of calculations of independent variables with all factors loadings ranging from 0.561 to 0.773, which meet the minimum requirement of 0.40 (Hair et al., 1998). These independent variables were grouped into 4 components (MPR1, MPR2, MPR3 and MPR4), which are described in the table above.

Table 3. Summary of dependent variables and reliability coefficients

Factor	Items	No. Items loadings	Cronbach's Alpha value (N=317)
SQ1	SQRES3, SQRES4, SQASS3, SQASS4, SQEMP1, SQEMP2, SQEMP3, SQEMP4, SQEMP5	9	0.919
SQ2	SQREL1, SQREL2, SQREL3, SQREL4, SQREL5, SQRES1, SQRES2	7	0.904
ATB	ATB1, ATB2, ATB3, ATB4, ATB5	5	0.879
SQ3	SQTAN1, SQTAN2, SQTAN3, SQTAN4	4	0.857
		25	

Table 4. Correlation among variables

	MPR1	MPR2	MPR3	MPR4	SQ1	SQ2	SQ3	ATB
MPR1	1							
MPR2	.000	1						
MPR3	.000	.000	1					
MPR4	.000	.000	.000	1				
SQ1	.034	-.081	-.001	.002	1			
SQ2	.052	.046	.089	-.014	.000	1		
SQ3	-.017	-0.36	-.013	.095	.000	.000	1	
ATB	**.010**	**-0.41**	**.020**	**.101**	**.427****	**.335****	**.475****	**1**

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Coefficients of H1, H2 and H3

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1/889E-017	.039		.000	1.000
MPR1	-.014	.039	-.014	-.365	.715
MPR2	-.006	.039	-.006	-.147	.883
MPR3	-.003	.039	-.003	-.082	.935
MPR4	.061	.039	.061	1.536	.000
SQ1	.427	.039	.427	10.824	.000
SQ2	.337	.040	.337	8.532	.000
SQ3	.468	.039	.468	11.866	.000

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the research model as well as the hypotheses, Pallant (2013) indicated the Pearson correlation analysis and regression analysis in which (1) the Pearson correlation analysis is employed to test the adequacy of the components; in other words, it aims to test whether the independent variables are correlated with each other; and (2) the regression analysis is employed to test the hypotheses; in other words, it aims to test the connection between the independent and dependent variables.

Correlations and regression

There is an indication that all factors were correlated and all represented the direction and strength of the interrelationship . Table 4 shows that all the factors used in this study had an average to high correlation.

Table 4 shows that the R values of four pairs of independent variables (MPR1, MPR2, MPR3 and MPR4) are at .000, indicating that they had no relationship with each other. The results showed both positive and negative correlations among ATB, four independent variables (MPR1, MPR2, MPR3 and MPR4) and the mediator variables (SQ1, SQ2 and SQ3).

In the Sig. column in the coefficients table, only one independent variable (MPR4) made a unique and statistically

Table 6. New model summary of H1, H2 and H3

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-1.817E-017	.039		.000	1.000
MPR4	.061	.039	.061	1.541	.000
SQ1	.427	.039	.427	10.915	.000
SQ2	.336	.039	.336	8593	.000
SQ3	.469	.039	.469	11.944	.000

Table 7. New Coefficients of H1, H2 and H3

Model Summary [b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.723[a]	.523	.517	.69479491	.523	85.649	4	312	.000	1.675

a. Predictors: (Constant), SQ3, SQ2, SQ1, MPR4

b. Dependent Variable: ATB

significant contribution (less than 0.05) to the dependen variable (ATB). MPR1, MPR2 and MPR3 had Sig.>0.05; therefore, those items had to be eliminated, and the regression analysis had to be run again with the remaining variables.

In the new model summary (Table 7), the R-squared value is .523. This value indicates that the model explains 52.3% of the variance in the dependent variable (ATB). The remaining percentage (47.7%) was interpreted by other factors. This is quite a respectable result. This model also reaches statistical significance (Sig. = .000). The regression equation was proposed based on the new coefficients (Table 8): ***ATB = 0.061MPR4 + 0.427SQ1 + 0.336SQ2 + 0.469SQ3***

The results from the equation indicated that service quality – tangibles dimension (SQ3) – had the greatest beta coefficient: .469. As a result, SQ3 had a significant impact on ATB. It affected ATB more than the other dimensions. The second factor which had a beta coefficient of 0.427

was service quality – empathy dimension (SQ1). Service quality – reliability dimension (SQ2) – also impacted ATB with a beta coefficient of 0.336. MPR programs – assurance dimension (MPR4) – also influenced ATB but less than service quality (SQ1, SQ2 and SQ3) did; this was shown by a beta coefficient of 0.061. In sum, the equation indicated that MPR4 and service quality (SQ1, SQ2 and SQ3) had positive impacts on ATB. Therefore, the hypotheses below were accepted.

Hypothesis testing
Based on the above discussion, the regression equation has statistical meaning. We found that all of the independent variables had β > 0 and p-values < 0.05, so they showed positive relationships with the dependent variable. The results gathered in the regression analysis are reliable and appear to be very useful for making predictions about the impact of MPR programs and service quality on ATB. Therefore, all hypotheses below are supported at a 95% level of confidence.

H1: MPR programs have a positive relationship with service quality.

The results showed positive relationships between the independent variable MPR4 and the mediator variable SQ1 (r =.002, p < .05) and between MPR4 and SQ3 (r =.095, p < .05). However, there was a negative relationship between the independent variable MPR4 and the mediator variable SQ2 (r = -.014, p < .05). The regression coefficients were SQ1 (β =.002, p = .000), SQ2 (β = -.014, p = .000), SQ3 (β =.095, p = .000). Therefore, we can conclude that MPR programs – assurance dimension – had a positive relationship with service quality – empathy and tangibles dimensions – and not service quality – reliability dimension.

H2: Service quality positively affects attitude toward brand

The results revealed positive relationships between the mediator variable (service quality) and the dependent variable (ATB) with SQ1 (r = .427, p < .001), SQ2 (r = .335, p < .001) and SQ3 (r = .475, p < .001). The coefficients of determination were SQ1 (β = .427, p = .000), SQ2 (β = .336, p = .000) and SQ3 (β = .469, p = .000), which all positively affected ATB with a 95% confidence level. The value of R-squared was .520, which means SQ1, SQ2 and SQ3 explain 52% of the variance of ATB. Therefore, H2 was accepted.

H3: There is a positive relationship between MPR programs and attitude toward brand

The finding showed a positive correlation between the independent variable (MPR4) and the dependent variable (ATB), with r = .101 and p < .05, respectively. The regression coefficient was MPR4 (β = 0.101, p = 0.000), which indicates a positive influence of MPR programs on ATB with a 95% confidence level. The value of R-squared is .010, which means MPR4 explains only 1% of the variance of ATB.

While constructing the model of relationships among MPR, service quality and ATB have successfully proved that MPR programs have a positive relationship with service quality (H1). Service quality positively affects ATB (H2) and mediates the positive relationship between MPR programs and ATB (H3). This research made contributions by examining the indirect relationship between MPR and ATB through service quality. To test the significance of the mediations or indirect effects, bootstrapping methods by Preacher and Hayes (2008) were applied.

MPR programs indirectly affect attitude toward brand through service quality

According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable equals the total effect of that independent variable on the mediator variable plus the effect of the mediator variable on the dependent variable. MPR programs positively affected service quality (β =0.061, p = 0.000) and directly influenced service quality (H1). Service quality directly affected ATB; SQ1 (β = .427, p = .000), SQ2 (β = .336, p = .000) and SQ3 (β = .469, p = .000) (H2). The regression coefficient was MPR4 (β = .101, p = .000) which indicates a positive influence of MPR programs on ATB with a 95% confidence level (H3). Consequently, through service quality as a mediator, MPR programs created indirect effects on ATB (H4). To test the significance of the mediations or indirect effects, bootstrapping methods by Preacher and Hayes (2008) were applied. In detail, the indirect effect is concluded to be significant with a 95% confidence if ZERO does not occur between the LL and the UL.

Table 8. Indirect effects of MPR4 on ATB

	Effect	Boot SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Total:	.0410	.0346	-.0245	.1113
Ind1:	.0009	.0232	-.0459	.0466
Ind2:	.0000	.0015	-.0031	.0032
Ind3:	.0000	.0018	-.0039	.0040
Ind4:	.0000	.0002	-.0004	.0004
Ind5:	-.0046	.0171	-.0396	.0289
Ind6:	.0000	.0022	-.0043	.0052
Ind7:	.0447	.0199	.0041	.0838

Figure 1. Path coefficient

Table 8 shows the indirect effect(s) of MPR4 on ATB. Only the seventh indirect effect (Ind7) which was estimated to lie between .0041 (LL) and .0838 (UL) does not have zero in the 95% confidence interval. This indirect effect of MPR on ATB was indeed significantly different from zero at $p < .05$ (two-tailed), and the mediation of SQ3 in this study was true.

Results summary

The figure below illustrates the total effects including the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable (MPR4) and mediating variables (SQ1, SQ2 and SQ3) on the dependent variable (ATB). It indicates that service quality – tangibles dimension (SQ3) – had the greatest beta coefficient: 0.469. As a result, SQ3 had a significant impact on ATB. It affected ATB more than the other dimensions. The second factor, which had a beta coefficient of 0.427, was service quality – empathy dimension (SQ1). Service quality – reliability dimension (SQ2) – also impacted ATB with a beta coefficient of 0.336. MPR programs – assurance dimension (MPR4) – also influenced ATB but less than service quality (SQ1, SQ2 and SQ3) did; this was shown by a beta coefficient of 0.101. Finally, MPR – assurance dimension – indirectly affected ATB through SQ3 with a beta coefficient of 0.044.
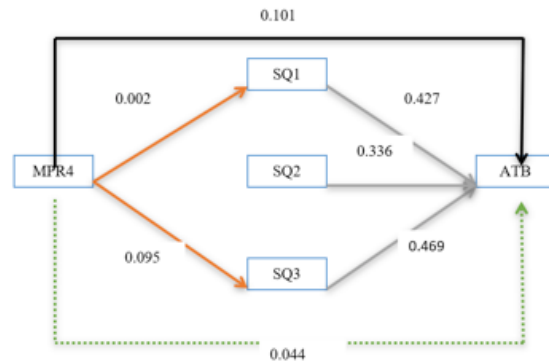
Discussion

This research lays the foundation by using SERVQUAL framework to measure the impact of MPR programs on attitudes toward a brand to identify insights that can inform strategy. In fact, measuring changes in attitudes is very challenging and considered one of the current marketing issues. However, it can help agencies show how a program goes beyond "how many people are talking about a brand" to finding out "what behavior change are agencies driving to their advantage." Since smart investments in sharper insight development upfront, measuring the critical behavior change impact throughout a campaign can save thousands in beautifully executed but irrelevant messaging. As a result, the emergence of MPR that features public relations as a contributor to marketing objectives, not just as a corporate communication tool, is essential. Moreover, this research successfully proves the positive relationships between MPR programs and attitudes toward a brand. It also proposes that MPR programs indirectly affect attitudes toward a brand through service quality.

MPR programs and service quality

A comparison of the multiple regression analysis and the descriptive analysis shows that the majority of respondents

Table 10. Research Hypotheses and Results

Hypotheses	Description	β	Sig.	Results
MPR4 → SQ1	MPR - assurance dimension have positive relationship with service quality - empathy dimension	.002	.000	Accepted
MPR4 → SQ2	MPR - assurance dimension have positive relationship with service quality - reliability dimension	-.014	.000	Eliminated
MPR4 → SQ3	MPR - assurance dimension have positive relationship with service quality - tangibles dimension	.095	.000	Accepted
SQ1 → ATB	Service quality - empathy dimension positively affects attitude toward brand	.427	.000	Accepted
SQ2 → ATB	Service quality - reliability dimension positively affects attitude toward brand	.336	.000	Accepted
SQ3 → ATB	Service quality - tengibles dimension positively affects attitude toward brand	.469	.000	Accepted
MPR4 → ATB	There is a positive relationship between MPR - assurance dimension and attitude toward brand	.101	.000	Accepted
MPR4 → SQ3 → ATB	MPR - assurance dimension indirectly affect attitude toward brand through service quality - tangible dimension	.044	.000	Accepted

agreed that they perceive MPR programs mostly through service quality – tangibles dimension (SQ3) and assurance dimensions. No previous study has examined these relationships. When the frequency of the specific MPR program used was analyzed, the results correspondingly indicated that, among the MPR programs of RMIT Vietnam (press releases, events, exhibitions, seminars, competitions and brand ambassadors), press releases and brand ambassadors were perceived mostly through service quality – tangibles and assurance dimensions.

MPR programs and attitude toward brand

Although MPR programs have a positive relationship with the empathy and tangibility dimensions of service quality, but only with the support of the assurance dimension in SERVQUAL, they will be able to make a significant contribution to attitudes toward a brand. As mentioned above, brand ambassadors are one of the most effective tools of MPR programs; past research of Shin and Kim (2010) already proved that customers who experienced practical marketing through public relations brand ambassadors recognized brand equity.

Moreover, the research results already proved that respondents mostly perceived MPR programs through the assurance dimensions of service quality through brand ambassadors. As a result, MPR programs only impact attitudes toward a brand by their assurance dimension.

The indirect effect of MPR programs on attitude toward brand through service quality – tangibility dimension

According to Hoffman and Bateson (2006), the tangibles component in SERVQUAL is two-dimensional; one dimension focuses on equipment and facilities, and the other focuses on personnel and communications materials. In addition, the above discussion shows that the tangibles dimensions of RMIT Vietnam are perceived mostly via the university's press releases, which are one of the most powerful tools of MPR and communications in general. The figure below provides an overview of the approaches which service companies can use to manage service quality through communication. As a result, the indirect effect of MPR programs on attitudes toward a brand through service quality – tangibles dimension – is reasonable.

The table below presents the supported and accepted research hypotheses.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of MPR or the development of combined promotional elements is considered an important change for companies in an unpredictable business context. The effect of MPR programs on attitudes toward a brand was mediated by service quality – tangibles dimension –, and the regression equation indicated that the service quality – tangibles dimension – had the greatest beta coefficient (0.469) on attitude toward brand. this research highly recommends that marketing and PR managers should make their MPR programs more tangible in order to gain positive attitudes toward a brand. They can first encourage favorable word-of-mouth communication by featuring the comments of satisfied customers in MPR programs. Secondly, they can highlight the realness of the service quality via MPR programs by guaranteeing that services are provided. Next, they can creatively use tangible evidence in marketing, utilize tangible symbols to represent the service themselves or use numbers in the messages of MPR programs. It is recommended to concentrate on the use of physical cues and tangible evidence of MPR programs, especially world-standard facilities.

Future studies can reference the model of this research to quantify the effect of MPR on attitudes toward a brand, with service quality as the mediator. However, since this research is still in the early stages of foundation, further experimental research is required to confirm the model and improve it. In order to track the effect of MPR on attitudes toward a brand, future research must construct a survey before starting the campaign and measure whether the public heard of the brand and its offerings. The public should be surveyed again afterward to check whether awareness statistics are trending up. This forward-looking approach helps bridge the gap between MPR and its outcomes, which have been widely considered as a big obstacle.

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